

Amish Own Significant Number of Wisconsin Dairy Farms

Over the last two decades, the number of Amish dairy farms in Wisconsin has doubled even as the total number of dairy farms has declined. In 2009, there were close to 1,000 licensed Amish dairy farms and nearly 300 Old Order Mennonite farms.¹ Together, these groups operate nearly one in 10 dairy farms in the state.

Expansion of Amish dairies has occurred in regions where good farmland is available but land values have remained relatively stable.² Amish dairies are most heavily concentrated in the vicinity of Clark County in central Wisconsin, and Vernon and Monroe counties in southwest Wisconsin. Although the Amish population is expected to continue to grow in coming years, the total number of Amish dairy farms will likely remain relatively constant. As shown in Figure 1, various factors have caused declines in some parts of the state including: changes in Amish leadership; a transition away from agriculture to woodworking and other professions; and the state's livestock premises registration law.²

From a land management perspective, Amish farmers tend to have smaller herd sizes and rely less heavily on labor-saving machinery than other farmers. Some are also subdividing farms purchased from non-Amish owners into smaller, more manageable units.¹ This stands in contrast to recent growth in large mega-dairy operations.

The continued economic viability of Amish dairies is dependent on the presence of adequate infrastructure such as cheese factories that accept milk in cans. As of 2009, the Amish had purchased or built six cheese factories in the state.² These types of investments ensure the long-term presence of Amish dairies in Wisconsin.

Compiled by Rebecca Roberts, Center for Land Use Education, 2010.

¹ Cross, John A. Expansion of Amish Settlement and Wisconsin's Dairy Industry. *FOCUS on Geography*, Vol. 50, No. 3. Winter 2007.

² Cross, John A. The Expanding Role of the Amish in America's Dairy Industry. Paper presented at the Wisconsin Geographical Society Annual Meeting, October 23-24, 2009, Stevens Point, WI.

³ Cross, John A. "Twenty Years of Change in Wisconsin's Dairy Industry". Paper presented at the 61st Annual Meeting of the West Lakes Division of the Association of American Geographers, October 29-31, 2009, St. Paul, MN.

Figure 1
Change in Number of Amish Dairy Farms
This map shows the change in number of Amish dairy farms in Wisconsin towns between 1989 and 2009.³

