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Milk Producer

CANADA'S BEST READ DAIRY MAGAZINE

20
YEARS

104,000
PRESENTATIONS

2,300,000
STUDENTS



COLLECTING DATA

The first national dairy health and management study Canada is currently underway

The Canadian dairy sector tends to function regionally. Having a national study is necessary to get an all-encompassing picture of the industry. A Canadian study is aiming to capture a national snapshot of the dairy industry from a health and management perspective for the first time.

Modelled after the National Animal Health Monitoring Study (NAHMS) in the United States, the National Dairy Study 2015 (NDS2015) is a dairy health and herd management research project, a breakthrough for Canada.

Professor David Kelton, department of population medicine at the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC), is collaborating with provincial dairy boards, university colleagues and stakeholders across Canada to conduct this research.

He considers this the largest project of his 25-year career at the University of Guelph.

“We’ve done a lot of research over the years in Canada, but we’ve never done anything quite like this,” says Kelton.

This study will examine the changes to the industry over time and serve as a benchmark to compare the Canadian dairy industry to its international counterparts.

Kelton’s research consists of three major components:

- a needs assessment survey, which was completed in 2014;
- a 40-page online questionnaire, which was open to dairy producers across Canada in the spring of 2015;
- a series of farm visits, occurring this summer. The farm visits are being carried out by a team of 13 undergraduate students from across the country.

To start, Kelton’s team asked key stakeholders in the Canadian dairy industry—including producers, veterinarians, scientists, and government staff—to rank a list of issues in the dairy industry from most pressing to the least. Animal welfare ranked the top issue based on the survey results.



Photo by Dr. Cathy Bauman.

» **A TEAM** of summer students are visiting dairy farms across Canada to seek more detailed information about animal care and biosecurity at these facilities. The information they collect will contribute to David Kelton’s national dairy study.

Kelton and his team then developed the questionnaire using this information. It outlined a wide range of topics from demographics to animal care and farm management practices. It was sent to every dairy producer in Canada.

More than 1,200 producers representing all 10 provinces completed the survey.

“I’ve been blown away by the response from producers,” says Kelton. “I think a lot of it is due to the trust and recognition of our research, and the excitement of doing this for the first time.”

Students will visit a random sample of producers this summer who completed the questionnaire. They will collect fecal and milk samples to test for common diseases and will seek detailed information about the farms’ animal care and biosecurity practices.

The students will also implement part of Dairy Farmers of Canada’s (DFC) pro-Action animal care requirements on the farms. This will involve scoring cows for lameness, injuries, cleanliness and body condition to create benchmarks for the industry.

Kelton estimates some of the results from this study will be generated as early

as the fall, and reports to the industry will be released soon after. He plans to make the information widely accessible so it can be used in further studies.

Kelton hopes this study will be conducted on an ongoing basis, every five to seven years, similar to the NAHMS study. 



Amy Westlund is a student writer for the University of Guelph’s office of research. The Dairy Research Cluster 2 Initiative, consisting of DFC, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Canadian Dairy Network and the Canadian Dairy Commission, provided funding for this research. This project is conducted in collaboration with project manager Dr. Cathy Bauman, a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Guelph. Others involved are Dr. Herman Barkema, University of Calgary; Dr. Jocelyn Dubuc, University of Montreal; Dr. Greg Keefe, University of Prince Edward Island and Dr. Fabienne Uehlinger, University of Saskatchewan. Ashique Rahman, University of Montreal, Emilie Belage, University of Guelph and Dr. Stephanie Croyle, University of Guelph are graduate students assisting with this project.