

Impact of feeding strategies on milk production and milk income over feed cost: A case study of organic, grazing, and conventional Wisconsin dairy farms

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Within an on-going Wisconsin project surveying a large number of organic (ORG), grazing (GRAZ), and conventional (CONV) dairy farms, we randomly selected 1 ORG, 1 GRAZ, and 1 CONV with the aim to preliminarily describe the impact of feeding practices on milk production and milk income over feed cost (IOFC). The data presented here were collected for May 2010. The 3 selected farms used pasture as part of the milking cows' diet. Pasture dry matter (DM; lb/cow/d) intake was higher in ORG (30.7) and GRAZ (28.0) than in CONV (11.5). Nonetheless, CONV used more conserved forages (38.2) than GRAZ (5.4) and ORG (0). Grains were used in similar amounts by the 3 farms: ORG (5.3), GRAZ (6.3), and CONV (6.0). Milk production (lb/cow/d) was higher in CONV (67.8) than ORG (40.9) and GRAZ (40.3) with a feed efficiency (milk/DM intake) of 1.2, 1.1, and 1.0, respectively. Feed cost (\$/cow/d) and DM intake (lb/d) were higher for CONV (1.57 and 55.7), compared with ORG (0.90 and 39.7) and GRAZ (0.89 and 33.6). In spite of higher price for organic grains, feed cost was similar for both ORG and GRAZ. As expected, milk price (\$/cwt) was higher for ORG (\$24.8) than GRAZ (\$15.3) and CONV (\$14.7). Overall, ORG had a much higher IOFC even though it had lower feed efficiency than CONV. The calculated IOFC (\$/cow/d) was \$10.1 for ORG, \$9.5 for CONV, and \$6.2 for GRAZ. The National Organic Program from the USDA is now requiring grazing management practices as part of the organic dairy production standards. Our preliminary results indicate that, given May 2010 prices, ORG could be as much or even more economically sustainable than CONV or GRAZ systems when including these grazing standards.