

U.S. dairy 2023 statistics

The top dairy states maintained their positions on the leaderboard, with New York notching the most output growth.

by Abby Bauer

CONSISTENCY was the name of the game when it came to the nation's top milk producing states in 2023. In fact, the top 10 states in that category remained unchanged from the year before. The 10 states with the most cows in 2023 also landed in the same order as they appeared in 2022.

California ranked first in cow numbers and most milk produced, leading both of these categories by a significant margin. In the Golden State, more than 1.7 million cows made nearly 41 billion pounds of milk. Following behind in a strong second place was Wisconsin, where close to 1.3 million cows produced more than 32 billion pounds of milk.

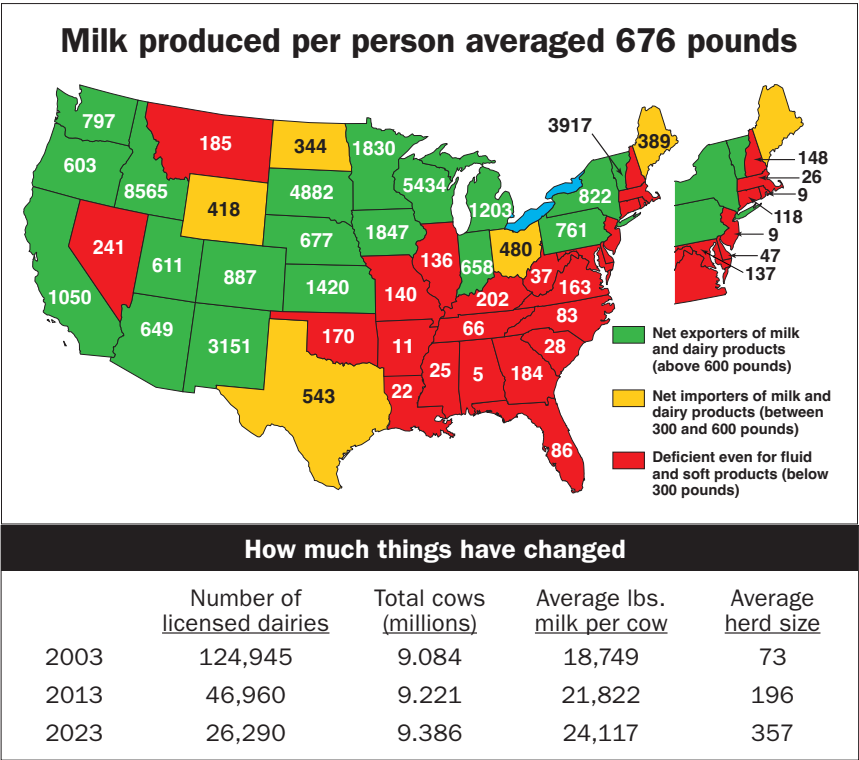
Idaho remained in third place in terms of cow numbers and milk production, followed by Texas. New York stayed in fifth place but had a strong showing in 2023, recording notable increases in cow numbers and milk production.

In fact, dairy farmers in New York tallied the most new milk produced in 2023, boosting their annual output by 433 million pounds. That was close to 100 million pounds more than Michigan, the state that ranked second in terms of new milk.

As one might expect, Michigan and New York were also some of the states that added the most cows in 2023, at 9,000 and 6,000 head, respectively, but the leader in this category was South Dakota with the addition of 15,000 cows. Idaho followed in second with 11,000 new cows in 2023.

Texas had been on a fast and furious growth spurt the past few

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years, but last year, the state's herd reduced by 4,000 head. That was a big swing in the opposite direction from the 24,000 cows the Lonestar State added in 2022.

Overall, the nation's herd size reduced by a small margin of 0.2% to sit at 9.386 million head. Nine states expanded their cow herds in 2023; the 41 remaining states reported no change or reduced herd size.

The Midwest and Northeast regions grew in herd size by small margins of 0.8% and 0.1%, respectively. The West fell by 0.6%, while the Southeast was down 2.3%. When looking at the change over the past five years, the Southeast lost nearly 15% of its cows and almost

40% of its dairies.

Michigan held the top spot in milk per cow for the sixth year in a row. Cows on Michigan dairies averaged 27,564 pounds of milk in 2023. Wyoming captured the second spot with 26,226 pounds per cow.

The national average for milk per cow was 24,117 pounds, up 30 pounds from the year before and setting a new record. The current average per cow is more than 1,200 pounds what it was just five years ago. In 2023, a dozen states sat above the national average for milk per cow.

The most milk per herd was found in New Mexico, where farms there sold 66.6 million pounds of milk in

2023. Arizona followed in a fairly close second place with 64.3 million pounds. The next highest production per herd came from Texas at 53.4 million pounds.

Cows in the nation's dairy herd produced 676 pounds of milk per U.S. citizen in 2023. Idaho remains the leader in milk per person, coming in at 8,565 pounds. Wisconsin was next, making 5,434 pounds of milk per person. In third place was South Dakota, at 4,882 pounds. New Mexico dairy farms made 3,151 pounds of milk per person, while Iowa was fifth, at 1,847. In all, 19 states were net exporters of milk in 2023, which means they produced more than 600 pounds of milk per citizen.

A handful of states are considered net importers of dairy products, with production between 300 and 600 pounds per citizen. Maine, Ohio, North Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming fall into this category. The rest of the country falls into the deficient category, which means they don't produce enough milk per capita to fulfill even fluid milk needs. These states either have low cow numbers, highly populated cities, or a combination of the two.

U.S. milk output in 2023 was down just slightly from the year before, coming in at 226.4 billion pounds. Again, the Midwest and Northeast saw slight gains of 1.4% and 0.9%, respectively. Meanwhile, the West and Southeast both saw production declines of 1.3%. Overall, the nation's production is up 4% from five years ago, when the national herd produced 217.6 billion pounds of milk with the same number of cows. 🐄

Top 10 dairy states in 2023

Most cows		Most milk (millions of lbs.)		Most milk per cow (lbs.)		Most cows per herd	
California	1,714,000	California	40,902	Michigan	27,564	New Mexico	2,710
Wisconsin	1,270,000	Wisconsin	32,123	Wyoming	26,226	Arizona	2,640
Idaho	667,000	Idaho	16,827	Colorado	25,930	Texas	2,071
Texas	642,000	Texas	16,565	Texas	25,802	Wyoming	1,860
New York	630,000	New York	16,079	New York	25,522	Colorado	1,827
Pennsylvania	466,000	Michigan	12,073	Wisconsin	25,294	Florida	1,745
Minnesota	452,000	Minnesota	10,500	Idaho	25,228	Idaho	1,710
Michigan	438,000	Pennsylvania	9,859	Nebraska	24,815	Nevada	1,650
New Mexico	271,000	New Mexico	6,663	Iowa	24,679	California	1,602
Washington	258,000	Washington	6,223	New Mexico	24,587	South Dakota	1,500
Most milk per herd (lbs.)		Most new cows		Most new milk (millions of lbs.)		Most new milk per cow (lbs.)	
New Mexico	66,630,000	South Dakota	15,000	New York	433	Alabama	3,333
Arizona	64,320,000	Idaho	11,000	Michigan	336	Montana	1,033
Texas	53,435,484	Michigan	9,000	South Dakota	327	Maryland	613
Wyoming	48,780,000	Iowa	6,000	Wisconsin	241	South Carolina	611
Colorado	47,381,818	New York	6,000	Idaho	199	Virginia	539
Idaho	43,146,154	Indiana	5,000	Iowa	153	Wyoming	463
Nevada	38,500,000	Kansas	3,000	Indiana	142	New York	448
California	38,226,168	Ohio	3,000	Ohio	132	Tennessee	421
Florida	35,454,546	Arizona	1,000	Arizona	52	Maine	412
South Dakota	34,523,077			Kansas	35	Ohio	260

U.S. dairy industry statistics, 2018 to 2023

Total U.S. milk production (millions of pounds)									Total cows (thousands of head)								Average milk production per cow per year (pounds)										Number of dairies	Average cows/herd	Average total milk per dairy
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	1-year change	5-year change	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	1-year change	5-year change	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	1-year change	5-year change					
Total U.S.	217,575	218,441	223,309	226,293	226,462	226,364	0.0%	4.0%	9,392	9,399	9,392	9,449	9,402	9,386	-0.2%	-0.1%	22,914	23,149	23,777	23,949	24,087	24,117	30	1,203	26,290	357	8,610,270		
Midwest									Midwest								Midwest												
Illinois	1,878	1,748	1,787	1,770	1,714	1,708	-0.4%	-9.1%	90	84	83	82	80	79	-1.3%	-12.2%	20,867	20,810	21,530	21,585	21,425	21,620	195	753	435	182	3,926,437		
Indiana	4,161	4,076	4,334	4,539	4,371	4,513	3.2%	8.5%	184	178	183	192	185	190	2.7%	3.3%	22,614	22,899	23,683	23,641	23,627	23,753	126	1,139	700	271	6,447,143		
Iowa	5,268	5,291	5,374	5,538	5,770	5,923	2.7%	12.4%	220	218	218	226	234	240	2.6%	9.1%	23,945	24,271	24,651	24,504	24,658	24,679	21	734	750	320	7,897,333		
Kansas	3,708	3,819	4,026	4,099	4,142	4,177	0.8%	12.6%	159	163	170	172	173	176	1.7%	10.7%	23,321	23,429	23,682	23,831	23,942	23,733	-209	412	190	926	21,984,211		
Michigan	11,168	11,385	11,685	11,952	11,737	12,073	2.9%	8.1%	424	426	430	441	429	438	2.1%	3.3%	26,340	26,725	27,174	27,102	27,359	27,564	205	-1,224	850	515	14,203,529		
Minnesota	9,868	9,922	10,167	10,538	10,472	10,500	0.3%	6.4%	453	448	448	461	453	452	-0.2%	-0.2%	21,784	22,147	22,694	22,859	23,117	23,230	113	1,446	1,855	244	5,660,377		
Missouri	1,194	1,100	1,085	1,010	941	867	-7.9%	-27.4%	83	78	76	71	67	62	-7.5%	-25.3%	14,386	14,103	14,276	14,225	14,045	13,984	-61	-402	480	129	1,806,250		
Nebraska	1,440	1,409	1,460	1,423	1,416	1,340	-5.4%	-6.9%	60	58	59	58	57	54	-5.3%	-10.0%	24,000	24,293	24,746	24,534	24,842	24,815	-27	815	90	600	14,888,889		
North Dakota	334	326	328	335	319	270	-15.4%	-19.2%	15	15	15	15	14	12	-14.3%	-20.0%	22,267	21,733	21,867	22,333	22,786	22,500	-286	233	35	343	7,714,286		
Ohio	5,532	5,425	5,618	5,640	5,526	5,658	2.4%	2.3%	259	251	254	257	250	253	1.2%	-2.3%	21,359	21,614	22,118	21,946	22,104	22,364	260	1,005	1,465	173	3,862,116		
South Dakota	2,705	2,810	3,120	3,602	4,161	4,488	7.9%	65.9%	121	125	135	156	180	195	8.3%	61.2%	22,355	22,480	23,111	23,090	23,117	23,015	-102	660	145	1,345	30,951,724		
Wisconsin	30,579	30,588	30,749	31,708	31,882	32,123	0.8%	5.0%	1,274	1,268	1,259	1,274	1,272	1,270	-0.2%	-0.3%	24,002	24,123	24,423	24,889	25,064	25,294	230	1,292	5,920	215	5,426,182		
TOTAL	77,835	77,899	79,733	82,154	82,451	83,640	1.4%	7.5%	3,342	3,312	3,330	3,405	3,394	3,421	0.8%	2.4%	23,290	23,520	23,944	24,127	24,293	24,449	156	1,159	12,915	265	6,476,190		
U.S. share	35.77%	35.66%	35.71%	36.30%	36.41%	36.95%			35.58%	35.24%	35.46%	36.04%	36.10%	36.45%											49.1%				
Northeast									Northeast								Northeast												
Connecticut	427	428	438	435	430	427	-0.7%	0.0%	19	19	19	19	18	18	0.0%	-5.3%	22,474	22,526	23,053	22,895	23,889	23,722	-167	1,248	85	212	5,023,529		
Delaware	91.5	74	71	52	48	48	0.0%	-47.5%	5	4	4	3	3	3	0.0%	-37.5%	19,063	17,976	18,553	17,333	17,815	17,815	0	-1,248	15	200	3,200,000		
Maine	618	621	593	572	554	543	-2.0%	-12.1%	30	29	27	27	26	25	-3.8%	-16.7%	20,600	21,414	21,963	21,185	21,308	21,720	412	1,120	150	167	3,620,000		
Maryland	925	840	881	876	842	846	0.5%	-8.5%	45	43	42	42	41	40	-2.4%	-11.1%	20,556	19,535	20,976	20,857	20,537	21,150	613	594	300	133	2,820,000		
Massachusetts	202	193	200	195	188	179	-4.8%	-11.4%	11	10	10	10	9	9	0.0%	-18.2%	18,364	19,300	20,000	19,500	20,889	19,889	-1,000	1,525	100	90	1,790,000		
New Hampshire	249	239	236	227	219	208	-5.0%	-16.5%	13	11	11	11	10	10	0.0%	-23.1%	20,750	21,727	21,455	20,636	21,900	20,800	-1,100	50	90	111	2,311,111		
New Jersey	110	100	101	90	88	86	-2.3%	-21.8%	6	5	5	4	4	4	0.0%	-33.3%	18,333	20,000	20,200	22,500	22,000	21,500	-500	3,167	40	100	2,150,000		
New York	14,882	15,122	15,296	15,540	15,646	16,079	2.8%	8.0%	623	627	626	627	624	630	1.0%	1.1%	23,888	24,118	24,435	24,785	25,074	25,522	448	1,634	3,040	207	5,289,145		
Pennsylvania	10,665	10,108	10,279	10,114	9,949	9,859	-0.9%	-7.6%	519	490	482	474	468	466	-0.4%	-10.2%	20,549	20,629	21,326	21,338	21,259	21,157	-102	608	4,940	94	1,995,749		
Rhode Island	11.7	11	11	10	10	10	0.0%	-14.5%	0.7	1	1	1	0.5	0.5	0.0%	-28.6%	16,714	17,667	21,800	20,200	20,000	19,400	-600	2,686	8	63	1,250,000		
Vermont	2,680	2,697	2,603	2,567	2,554	2,536	-0.7%	-5.4%	127	126	122	120	118	117	-0.8%	-7.9%	21,102	21,405	21,336	21,392	21,644	21,675	31	573	500	234	5,072,000		
West Virginia	111	90	89	75	75	66	-12.0%	-40.5%	7	6	6	5	5	5	0.0%	-28.6%	15,857	15,000	14,833	15,000	15,000	13,200	-1,800	-2,657	30	167	2,200,000		
TOTAL	30,972	30,522	30,797	30,753	30,603	30,887	0.9%	-0.3%	1,406	1,371	1,354	1,343	1,327	1,328	0.1%	-5.5%	22,036	22,268	22,740	22,907	23,070	23,267	197	1,231	9,298	143	3,321,897		
U.S. share	14.24%	13.97%	13.79%	13.59%	13.51%	13.64%			14.96%	14.58%	14.42%	14.21%	14.11%	14.14%											35.4%				
Southeast									Southeast								Southeast												
Alabama	73	60	44	39	32	28	-12.5%	-61.6%	5	5	3	3	3	2	-33.3%	-60.0%	14,600	12,000	14,667	13,000	10,667	14,000	3,333	-600	10	200	2,800,000		
Arkansas	74	67	64	60	45	33	-26.7%	-55.4%	6	5	5	5	4	3	-25.0%	-50.0%	12,333	13,400	12,800	12,000	11,250	11,000	-250						

Dairy farm departures retracted slightly

The pace of dairy farm loss slowed in 2023 compared to the year before, but the number of U.S. dairy farms was still reduced by 5.9%.

by Abby Bauer, Managing Editor, Hoard's Dairyman

MILK prices retreated from their record highs while feed prices climbed, resulting in tight margins for dairy producers in 2023. With those conditions, it is not surprising that some dairies chose to leave the business, although the rate of attrition was somewhat slower than the year before.

In 2023, 1,642 farms milked cows for the last time, reducing the number of licensed dairy farms to 26,290. That 5.9% loss in farm numbers compares to the 6.4% reduction tabulated in 2022, when 1,910 farms left the business.

The region with the most dairy farms saw the most departures, with the Midwest losing 7.8% of its dairies in 2023. That was a little higher than the 7.3% loss noted in 2022. In that region, Michigan lost the most farms at 15.8%, followed by Missouri (14.3%) and North Dakota (12.5%).

Over the last two decades, the Southeast region has been the loss leader a majority of the years, but that was not the case in 2023. Still, 7.2% of dairies exited last year, led by Arkansas and South Carolina, with dairy numbers falling by 16.7% in both states.

The West reduced dairy farm numbers by 4.4%. Two states, Montana and Oregon, lost more than 10% of their state's farms.

As a region, the Northeast showed the strongest retention numbers, losing just 3.4% of its dairies. Several states in that region remained unchanged from 2022, and the state with the most farms in the Northeast, Pennsylvania, only saw a 1.2% reduction.

Overall, Wisconsin is still home to the most dairy farms, at 5,920. In second place is Pennsylvania, with 4,940 dairies. Neighboring New York is third, with 3,040 dairy farms. Minnesota had 1,855 licensed dairies in 2023, while Ohio rounded out the top five with 1,465.

Table 1 shows the 31-year history detailing the number of dairy farms holding permits to sell milk. Since 1992, the dairy farms licensed to sell milk fell from 131,509 to 26,290. That's an 80% drop during that time, with 105,219 fewer farms but close to the same number of cows.

Those changing dynamics mean that average herd size has been on a

steep and steady incline. Out West, the average herd size is now 1,549 cows. The Southeast averaged 318 cows per herd in 2023. Even in the Midwest and Northeast, which have traditionally had smaller herds, average herd size has escalated over the past few decades. In 2023, the average herd size in the Midwest was 265 cows, while in the Northeast it was 143 head.

Table 2 provides an overview of the change since 1992. Nationally, the average herd size has grown 382%. From 1992 to 2023, the herd size climbed from 74 to 357 cows. Regionally, the West (+489%) and the Midwest (+420%) have seen the largest percentage gains in herd size.

From 1992 to 2003, *Hoard's Dairyman* partnered with the American Farm Bureau Federation to obtain milk permit data. Today, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) tabulates these numbers. 🐄

Table 1. Licensed U.S. dairy farms			
Year	Number	% change	
1992	131,509		
1993	124,945	-5.0	
1994	117,732	-5.8	
1995	111,825	-5.0	
1996	106,181	-5.3	
1997	99,413	-6.4	
1998	91,508	-8.0	
1999	87,527	-4.4	
2000	82,937	-5.2	
2001	76,875	-7.3	
2002	74,012	-3.7	
2003	70,375	-4.9	
2004	66,830	-5.0	
2005	64,540	-3.4	
2006	62,070	-3.8	
2007	59,130	-4.7	
2008	57,127	-3.4	
2009	54,932	-3.8	
2010	53,132	-3.3	
2011	51,291	-3.5	
2012	49,281	-3.9	
2013	46,975	-4.7	
2014	44,809	-4.6	
2015	43,534	-2.8	
2016	41,819	-3.9	
2017	40,199	-3.9	
2018	37,468	-6.8	
2019	34,207	-8.7	
2020	31,652	-7.5	
2021	29,842	-5.7	
2022	27,932	-6.4	
2023	26,290	-5.9	

Table 2. How our industry changed from 1992 to 2023									
	1992			2023			Percent change		
	Herds	Cows (1,000s)	Cows/ herd	Herds	Cows (1,000s)	Cows/ herd	Herds	Cows	Cows/ herd
Midwest	80,135	4,100	51	12,915	3,421	265	-84	-17	420
Northeast	29,758	1,765	61	9,290	1,328	143	-69	-25	134
Southeast	12,057	1,253	104	1,355	434	318	-89	-65	206
West	9,559	2,515	263	2,722	4,214	1,549	-72	68	489
U.S.	131,509	9,692	74	26,290	9,386	357	-80	-3	382

Table 3. Dairy farm numbers by state and region				
State	2022	2023	Change	Percent change
Midwest				
Illinois	480	435	-45	-9.4
Indiana	735	700	-35	-4.8
Iowa	800	750	-50	-6.3
Kansas	210	190	-20	-9.5
Michigan	1,010	850	-160	-15.8
Minnesota	2,035	1,855	-180	-8.8
Missouri	560	480	-80	-14.3
Nebraska	100	90	-10	-10.0
North Dakota	40	35	-5	-12.5
Ohio	1,525	1,465	-60	-3.9
South Dakota	155	145	-10	-6.5
Wisconsin	6,350	5,920	-430	-6.8
	14,000	12,915	-1,085	-7.8
Northeast				
Connecticut	85	85	0	0.0
Delaware	15	15	0	0.0
Maine	170	150	-20	-11.8
Maryland	310	300	-10	-3.2
Massachusetts	110	100	-10	-9.1
New Hampshire	95	90	-5	-5.3
New Jersey	40	40	0	0.0
New York	3,210	3,040	-170	-5.3
Pennsylvania	5,000	4,940	-60	-1.2
Rhode Island	10	8	-2	-20.0
Vermont	550	500	-50	-9.1
West Virginia	30	30	0	0.0
	9,615	9,290	-327	-3.4
Southeast				
Alabama	10	10	0	0.0
Arkansas	30	25	-5	-16.7
Florida	60	55	-5	-8.3
Georgia	95	90	-5	-5.3
Kentucky	380	360	-20	-5.3
Louisiana	65	60	-5	-7.7
Mississippi	45	40	-5	-11.1
North Carolina	130	120	-10	-7.7
Oklahoma	85	75	-10	-11.8
South Carolina	30	25	-5	-16.7
Tennessee	140	130	-10	-7.1
Virginia	390	365	-25	-6.4
	1,460	1,355	-105	-7.2
West				
Alaska	1	1	0	0.0
Arizona	80	75	-5	-6.3
California	1,115	1,070	-45	-4.0
Colorado	110	110	0	0.0
Hawaii	1	1	0	0.0
Idaho	410	390	-20	-4.9
Montana	45	40	-5	-11.1
Nevada	20	20	0	0.0
New Mexico	110	100	-10	-9.1
Oregon	170	150	-20	-11.8
Texas	320	310	-10	-3.1
Utah	150	140	-10	-6.7
Washington	310	310	0	0.0
Wyoming	5	5	0	0.0
	2,847	2,722	-125	-4.4
United States	27,932	26,290	-1,642	-5.9