

Production, Health and Culling in 109 Organic and 1226 Conventional Finnish Dairy Herds 1998 – 2002

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Organic production, dairy farming included, has considerably increased in recent decades. Management of organic herds differs from that of conventional herds, with potential influences on production and health. The objectives of this study were to 1) define herd level predictors for milk production and fertility in organic (ORG) and conventional (CONV) dairy herds in Finland, 2) to explore the differences between the production systems and 3) to describe disease occurrence/treatments and culling reasons.

Data in the national herd health recording database, from the years 1998 to 2002, were used. All organic, and a stratified random sample of conventional dairy herds, were included. Production and fertility were modelled with a linear mixed model with herd as a random effect.

Throughout the study years, average milk production increased in both systems (6822 to 7422 kg in ORG, 7426 to 8206 kg in CONV); however, production system and year explained only 4% of the between herd variation. The predictors for yield were year, herd size, mean parity, and calving interval in both, and mastitis treatments in conventional production. The lifetime yield of cows was 2050 kg lower in ORG. There were no significant differences in culling age or reasons. The differences in reproductive parameters were small and insignificant. Organic herds had fewer disease treatments than conventional herds.