

Factors Associated with Nonambulatory Cattle on U.S. Dairy Operations

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Nonambulatory cattle are of interest for a number of reasons, including welfare concerns, loss of producer income, and the potentially elevated BSE risk in this population. In May 2005, the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) published the first official national estimates of the scope of nonambulatory cattle and calves in the U.S. Results of the NASS study revealed that approximately 1 in 4 dairy operations (26.5 percent) had one or more nonambulatory cattle in 2004; one in 20 beef operations (5.1 percent) had one or more nonambulatory cattle. About 1 in 100 dairy cattle weighing 500 pounds or more (1.2 percent) became nonambulatory; an average of 1 in 500 beef cattle weighing 500 pounds or more (0.2 percent) became nonambulatory. Cattle and calves unable to stand or walk for any period of time, including those that recovered, were counted as nonambulatory.

Due to the higher operation-level frequency of nonambulatory cattle on dairy operations compared with beef operations, a focused on-farm dairy survey was implemented. Twenty-one major dairy States accounting for 83.8% of U.S. dairy operations and 86.3% of U.S. milk cows were chosen to participate. Data were collected on inventory, management and handling practices, as well as producer opinions of causes of nonambulatory animals during 2500 on-farm personal interviews that took place from April 1 through May 13, 2005. Results, including farm-level factors associated with risk of nonambulatory dairy cows, will be available for the full paper by January 2006.