

FACTS ABOUT WASHINGTON'S DAIRY INDUSTRY

- There are approximately 416 dairy farms and 277,000 dairy cows in Washington (2016). The average herd size is 666 cows per farm. The number of farms has declined 4.8% since 2014, while cows increased by 1.5%.
- Washington ranks 10th in total milk production among the 50 United States (2015). Total milk production exceeded 6,606,000,000 pounds or over 766,357,000 gallons (2015), an increase of 0.5% from 2014 production levels.
- Washington ranks 6th in milk production per cow in the 50 United States (2015). The average Washington cow produced 23,848 pounds (or 2,767 gallons) of milk in 2015. The U.S. national average production per cow was 22,393 pounds (or 2,598 gallons) in 2015. Total U.S. milk production was 208,633,000,000 lbs. (or 24,203,000,000 gallons).
- Dairy foods constitute the 2nd largest agricultural commodity produced in Washington, with a direct economic impact valued at \$1.3 billion. Additional, indirect economic effects boost the total value of dairy farming to Washington's economy to an estimated \$5.2 billion (source: Washington State University study 2013).
- Dairy farms can be found in 29 of Washington's 39 counties. Whatcom Co. has the largest number, with 108 dairies. Seven counties have just one dairy: Island, Jefferson, Kittitas, Lincoln, Okanogan, Wahkiakum and Whitman. Yakima County – with 67 dairies – is among the largest dairy-producing counties in the nation. Dairies can be found in some perhaps unexpected places: King County – usually thought of as highly urbanized – has 30 dairies (2015).
- There are 38 certified organic dairies in Washington with about 13,100 cows (4.7% of the state herd); six dairies are transitioning to organic status (2015). Consumer demand for organic milk is relatively high in Washington compared with the rest of the nation: it currently averages 9.9% of all milk sales statewide (2015), an increase of 0.8% from 2014 totals. In Washington, organic milk sells at about twice the nationwide pace, and Seattle is regularly among the very top U.S. markets for organic milk sales.
- When it comes to milkfat levels, Washingtonians favor the richer types. Whole milk sales represented 24.7% of all white milk sales in 2015; while reduced-fat (“2%”) enjoyed the largest share-of-market, at 41.0% of all white milk sales. In contrast, low-fat (“1%”) sales represented 21.5% of all white milk sales; and non-fat (“skim”) milk enjoyed only a 11.3% share-of-market. Similarly, full-fat cheese sales represented 92.4% of all cheese sales in Washington (2015), with low-fat and non-fat cheeses each commanding less than a 1% share-of-market.
- Cows first came to Washington in 1836. Today, all seven of the major dairy cow breeds – Holsteins, Jerseys, Guernseys, Ayrshires, Brown Swiss, Milking Shorthorns and Dutch Belted – can be found in Washington. Holsteins – with their familiar black-and-white hide markings – are the most common breed, as is the case throughout the U.S.
- Cow's milk is composed of protein, carbohydrate, water-soluble vitamins, minerals and water (in fact, it is 87% water). It is especially rich in calcium, Vitamin D, riboflavin and phosphorus. It is also an important source of protein, Vitamin B-12, potassium, niacin and Vitamin A. USDA's 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends three cups of low-fat or fat-free dairy products daily for people 9 years and older.