

# Research Summaries 4

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## Use of veterinarians on U.S. dairy operations

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### Introduction

For the past 15-20 years, veterinarians have been focused on reproduction management on dairy operations. The introduction of relatively inexpensive pregnancy diagnostic tests could displace the veterinarian from this role on the dairy. There is also a trend for larger dairies to hire non-veterinarians to perform pregnancy exams and surgeries which have been traditionally reserved for veterinarians. Conversely, antimicrobial and other drug use in livestock is coming under increasing scrutiny and veterinarians are likely to have more oversight and responsibility in this area in the future. The objective of this study was to determine the percentage of US dairies that used veterinarians, how frequently veterinarians visited the operation and the services provided by the veterinarian.

### Materials and Methods

The National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) Dairy 2014 study was conducted in January 2014. NAHMS Dairy 2014 studied 1,191 dairy operations in the top 17 dairy states representing approximately 80% of dairy operations and dairy cows in the U.S. Participating dairy operations had at least 30 cows. A portion of the survey, which was developed with the assistance of the AABP VCPR BMP Task Force, was devoted to the use of veterinarians. Statistical software which accounted for the complex study design was used to provide estimates that are reflective of the U.S. population of dairy producers.

### Results

Almost 97% of dairy producers worked with or consulted a veterinarian in 2013. Of the 3% that didn't work with or consult a veterinarian, more than two-thirds reported not needing one on their operation. Only

7% of those operations not working with a veterinarian reported a veterinarian wasn't available in their area while 20% reported veterinarians were too expensive. Approximately 70% of dairies reported having a veterinarian on the operation at least monthly. More than 80% of producers reported that their veterinarian was very good or excellent in terms of availability, knowledge of dairy cattle, and performing procedures and tasks. The top 6 services provided to dairies were: emergency services (91% of operations), reproductive management (86%), disease diagnosis and treatment (85%), drug sales (85%), LDA surgery (65%), and vaccination (53%). Reproductive management was one of the most important services provided on 62% of operations. Less than 20% of dairies reported using their veterinarian for biosecurity for new herd additions, employee training, nutrition services, and facility design. More than 30% of dairies involved their veterinarian in protocol development for reproductive management, disease diagnosis and treatment, and vaccinations. Prescription veterinary drugs were purchased directly from the primary veterinarian on 76% of operations while non-prescription drugs were purchased from the primary veterinarian on 32% of operations. Overall, 38% of operations reported purchasing non-prescription drugs directly from a farm/ranch or feed store.

### Significance

The majority of dairies use veterinarians for traditional veterinary services such as reproductive management. Based on current trends in the dairy industry, the percent of operations requesting these traditional services will likely decrease in the future. The good news for dairy practitioners is that there are a number of non-traditional services already being provided to dairies and the percent of dairies requesting/needing these non-traditional services will likely increase in the future.