

Opportunities for future Australian dairy systems: a review

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Abstract

During the last decade, Australian dairy farmers have been challenged to increase total factor productivity (the ratio between the rate of increase in total output and the rate of increase in the use of all inputs) in order to attenuate the negative effects of a steady decline in the terms of trade over the same period of time. Overall, the increase in total factor productivity has been low (1.5%) and farmers are questioning the most appropriate production system for the future. In an attempt to address this central question, we first identified the nature of the key pressures dairy farmers in Australia are likely to face in the future, namely labour and feed related issues. We then discuss major opportunities for developing new dairy production systems based on increased efficiency in the use of land and cows and on increasing the efficiency of labour management and lifestyle. We do not attempt to provide the best futuristic option for dairy systems in Australia. Instead, this review discusses key areas of the production system with potential to impact positively on any or all the physical, economic and labour-related aspects of modern dairy farming. By so doing, this review highlights the research questions that need to be addressed now in order to provide Australian dairy farmers with improved tools to manage their production systems in the future.

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