

CDE DAIRY MARKETS & MANAGEMENT UPDATE

All prices — Aug. 19, 2026 — except where noted

Labor force: According to the U.S. Labor Department's latest report, the percentage of our U.S. population in the labor force today sits at just below 60%, which is at its lowest point since July 2021. Unemployment rates in this country remain flat, with July's report showing unemployment at 4.1%. The unemployment rate represents the number of people not in the workforce who are actively looking for work. The difference represents those who are not currently employed or looking for employment. The average hourly earnings for all employees, including salaried employees, on private non-farm payrolls increased year-over-year by 3.2%, to \$37.62 per hour. At the same time, the average work week for all employees on private non-farm payrolls remained unchanged at 34.3 hours in July, while manufacturing jobs averaged 40.4 hours.

World Bank reported in 2023 that agriculture employees, including farmers, ranchers, and others self-employed represented 1.57% of the total workforce in the U.S. Across the broader food sector, there are 22.1 million jobs in the industry, representing 10.4% of U.S. employment. The report estimates employment in agriculture is expected to decline by 2% annually from 2023 to 2033. Yet, it also estimates an average of 116,400 job openings for ag workers annually during the same period.

One thing is clear. Finding, hiring and retaining good employees for your dairy is becoming more challenging, particularly with a decreasing workforce and other industries pushing hourly wages higher. According to a study from the ERS, about 47% of the nation's farm workers are foreign-born. However, as the nation continues to grapple with immigration reform and finding pathways to give dairy and other farmers access to a workable guestworker program, finding foreign-born workers to fill open positions on dairies has also become more difficult. Farms can lose out to other industries in the local worker pool too because work on a farm is often more physically challenging and can involve longer hours.

The Dilemma: With average herd size of 94 cows per farm, Pennsylvania is still unique in that many of our farms have only family labor taking care of the day-to-day responsibilities on the farm. However, as these dairies begin to grow, shifting from managing cows to managing employees can be one of the biggest hurdles that you encounter. Even if you just have one non-family employee who you depend on to milk 5 days a week, having them show up late, call off work, or cut corners around the dairy can cause a lot of stress. If they suddenly leave, it can wreck your whole world.

Since finding, cultivating, and retaining good employees can often be a bottleneck on a dairy, many organizations have started to develop programs and resources to help farm families build strategies to address each phase of the employee lifecycle, from attracting and hiring to onboarding and retaining those employees. Strategies like well-written job descriptions, regular one-on-ones, training meetings, and annual reviews are all becoming more commonplace. These strategies can help employees feel

confident and committed in their roles, which in turn helps the overall profitability of the dairy.

Recently, the Center staff visited a 200-cow dairy that invested in these types of strategies to keep employees engaged and motivated. Walking into their milking parlor, laminated sheets hung on the wall documenting the protocols to follow for the milking process. The same was true in the calf feeding area, feeding room, and milk house. Even though some of the jobs were most often done by family members, the laminated documents still guided anyone not familiar with the process.

In their office, they hung pictures of all their employees along with their names, their role on the dairy, and what their favorite thing was to do outside the farm. It was a way to build relationships among employees, so they all got to know each other better. In their situation, the farm family had several part-time employees who come in and out without crossing paths with the other employees. But the "Getting to Know You" sheets let them know who everyone was. They also had signs about their quality bonus program and how the employees could earn Sheetz gift cards for consistently showing up on time and doing a thorough job. Even with their small staff, they invested in pizza parties to bring the team together to talk about topics related to the dairy.

Resources to Help: Investing in simple ways to engage your employees like this may seem like a "nice-to-have" if you only had time. But it's a little like investing in proactive transition cow protocols. You are more likely to notice the impact of not making that investment than you are when you follow the protocols. A cow that has been well cared for through the transition process is more likely to deliver a healthy calf and acclimate quickly to being a productive member of the herd. Similarly, an employee who you invest your time in making feel supported and part of the operation is likely to show up, work hard, and be a productive member of your team.

One program we have at the Center to help with employee management is Dairy Decisions Consultant (DDC). While some farmers have used our DDC for financial management or business transformation, we have consultants who will help farms develop workforce strategies — plans that can mean the difference between retaining a high-performing workforce and feeling like you're constantly spinning your wheels. The Center also offers a Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship to level up, and we recently introduced a Robotic Dairy Herd Manager Apprenticeship too. We also support programs on workforce development offered both by Penn State and Cornell. A good website for resources, including onboarding, employee handbooks, and job description templates, is <https://agworkforce.cals.edu> or go to www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/workforce-resources/ to find other resources.



JAYNE SEBRIGHT
Exec. Director, CDE, 717.346.0849
jsebright@centerfordairyexcellence.org



Prices change daily. This market information is an example for educational purposes. The market data shown below are compiled weekly by Farmshine, via CME & USDA reports.

CME DAILY FUTURES TRADING - AUG. 19, 2026 AT THE CLOSE

	AUG-26	SEP-26	OCT-26	NOV-26	DEC-26	JAN-27	FEB-27	MAR-27	APR-27	MAY-27	JUN-27	JUL-27	TREND			
	CLASS III MILK FUTURES (\$/CWT) vs. week ago: 2026 contracts down \$0.10-0.30, 2027 generally steady, spots down \$0.05 to up \$0.10.												12-Month Avg. 17.39 ↓↓			
	16.50	17.15	17.33	17.35	17.43	17.41	17.48	17.50	17.52	17.58	17.68	17.84	↓↓			
	CLASS IV MILK FUTURES (\$/CWT) vs. week ago: Aug26 up \$0.30, Sep26-Mar27 up \$0.75-1.25, Apr-Jul27 up \$0.15-0.25.												12-Month Avg. 18.60 ↑↑			
	17.25	18.80	19.25	19.04	18.94	18.64	18.38	18.77	18.45	18.45	18.50	18.70	↑↑			
	CORN FUTURES (\$/BU)													TREND		
	SEP-26	DEC-26	MAR-27	MAY-27	JUL-27	SEP-27	DEC-27	MAR-28	MAY-28	JUL-28	SEP-28	DEC-28	JUL-29			
	4.730	4.980	5.136	5.206	5.230	5.020	5.064	5.172	5.226	5.250	4.932	4.972	5.136	↑↑		
	SOYMEAL FUTURES (\$/TON)													TREND		
	SEP-26	OCT-26	DEC-26	JAN-27	MAR-27	MAY-27	JUL-27	AUG-27	SEP-27	OCT-27	DEC-27	JAN-28	MAR-28			
	318.9	321.0	325.6	327.6	329.7	331.6	333.9	332.3	329.6	326.0	327.3	327.0	325.7	↑↑		
	U.S. AVG PREMIUM ALFALFA & ALFALFA/GRASS HAY 20-22% CP - Source: USDA Monthly National Dairy Comprehensive Report															
	APR-25	MAY-25	JUN-25	JUL-25	AUG-25	SEP-25	OCT-25	NOV-25	DEC-25	JAN-26	FEB-26	MAR-26	APR-26	MAY-26	JUN-26	*JUL-26
	195.50	187.01	188.00	195.00	202.00	179.00	192.00	202.00	206.60	208.60	215.90	193.75	211.24	220.22	233.00	*247.56 ↑↑

DMC	FEB-25	MAR-25	APR-25	MAY-25	JUN-25	JUL-25	AUG-25	SEP-25	OCT-25	NOV-25	DEC-25	JAN-26	FEB-26	MAR-26	APR-26	MAY-26	*JUN-26
MARGIN	13.12	11.55	10.42	10.40	11.10	10.94	11.52	10.87	10.52	10.04	9.42	7.81	8.46	9.57	10.54	10.62	*10.88 ↑↑
ALL MILK	23.60	22.00	21.00	21.30	21.30	20.80	20.90	20.40	20.00	19.70	19.00	17.50	18.30	19.70	20.80	21.30	*21.10 ↓↓
FEED \$	10.48	10.45	10.58	10.90	10.20	9.86	9.38	9.53	9.48	9.66	9.58	9.69	9.84	10.31	10.26	10.68	*10.22 ↓↓

DAIRY COMMODITIES - GLOBAL BIWEEKLY Internet Auction (\$/LB) 08/18/26				U.S. CME SPOT DAILY (\$/LB) 08/19/26				U.S. WEEKLY USDA NDPSR (\$/LB) WK ENDING 08/15/26*			
Weighted Avg. 1 to 6 mo. FORWARD CONTRACTS per metric ton converted to \$/LB				Prev. 5 day Lds				FMMD PROD			
NEXST GDT Auction 09/01/26				28				MIL. LBS			
SKIM POWDER (SMP)				1.5889 ↑↑ 7.6%				1.93 1.5800 ↑↑			
ALL-PRODUCT INDEX				1.7573 ↑↑ 2.3%				1.4849 ↓↓			
BUTTER				2.3094 ↓↓ 2.0%				1.6350 ↑↑			
MILKFEAT (AMF)				1.6897 ↑↑ 0.6%				REPORT ENDED			
BUTTERMILK POWDER				1.9211 ↑↑ 6.1%				NEW USDA \$/CWT* APR-2			
LACTOSE				1.6293 ↑↑ 3.0%				ALL-MILK BF *MAILBOX			
								FL \$24.90 3.88 \$24.33			
								*SE 23.96 3.96 \$23.35			

ANNOUNCED FEDERAL ORDER PRICES (\$/CWT)				NASS ALL-MILK (\$/CWT)			CURRENT FEDERAL ORDER VALUES (\$/LB) * = * NEW						
				WEIGHTED AVG. 4-WK JULY 1-31, 2026				JULY 2026					
CL I ADV	CL I SKIM	CL II	CL III	CL IV	ALL-MILK-U.S	ALL-MILK-PA	PRODUCT VALUE (New Make Allow vs Old)		NET VALUE		COMPONENTS		
*17.04 (SEP)	*12.16 (SEP)	21.89 (JUL)	15.52 (JUL)	18.34 (JUL)	21.10 (JUN)	22.70 (JUN)	CHEESE	1.5149	*(0.2519)	0.2003	1.2630	PROT	2.3202
AUG CL I Skim	ESL Adj. (+0.81)	*NEW RULE; ADV BF	\$1.52	4.23F	4.19F		BUTTER	1.6036	*(0.2272)	0.1715	1.3764	B.FAT	1.6668
							NFDM	1.6474	*(0.2393)	0.1678	1.3535	N.FAT	1.3940
							DRYWHEY	0.6522	*(0.2668)	0.1991	0.3854	OS	0.3907
18.76	13.88	22.78	15.98	20.96	21.30 4.31F	22.10 4.25F							
18.70	9.34	19.31	17.32	18.89	21.30 4.19F	21.30 4.14F							

	U.S. AVG. BRED COWS & HEIFERS (3rd trimester) per head as reported by USDA Monthly National Dairy Comprehensive Report												WI	\$19.60	4.33	\$19.12
	MAY-25												TA	\$19.70	4.47	\$19.02
	JUN-25												TXR	\$21.20	4.51	\$19.40
	JUL-25												WALKE	\$21.55	4.47	\$21.36
	AUG-25												NEBR	\$19.70	4.45	\$19.04
2650												CA	\$20.70	4.26	\$21.46	
N/A												NM	\$19.60	4.18	\$18.51	
N/A												SD	\$20.10	4.67	N/A	
N/A												ID	\$21.10	4.43	N/A	
N/A																
U.S. AVG. FRESH / MILKING COWS per head as reported by USDA Monthly National Dairy Comprehensive Report																
3021																
N/A																
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PA/NY Auctions, Aug. 13-18, 2026, cows weaker, calves drop lower.	FED STEERS (\$/CWT LIVEWEIGHT)	Holstein	Beef-X-Dairy	WK AGO	YR AGO
CULL MARKET COWS (\$/CWT LIVEWEIGHT)	Choice & Prime 1250-1550 lb	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Premium White	Breakers	Boners	Lean		
N/A	172.60 ↓↓	163.85 ↓↓	146.75 ↓↓		
WEEK AGO	173.00	165.10	148.25		
YEAR AGO	163.75	157.10	145.25		

Average to high dressing	FED CALVES: No. 1 & 2, 90-130 lbs	(\$/cwt liveweight)	70- 85 lbs	1050.00 ↓↓	1350.00 ↓↓	1075.00	1560.00	925.00	1300.00
				1075.00 ↓↓	1475.00 ↓↓	1150.00	1650.00	1000.00	1550.00



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