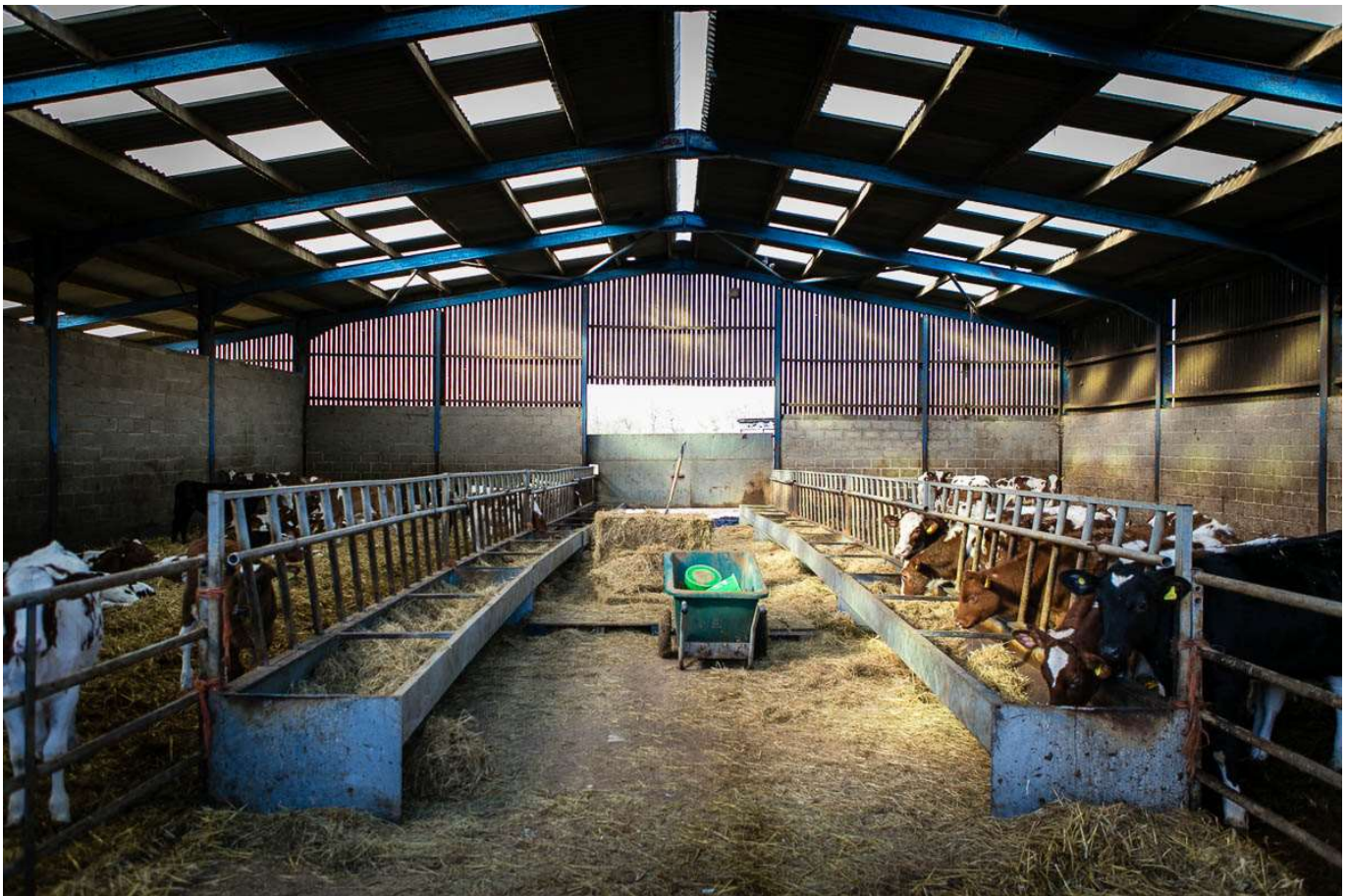


Portuguese mainland milk production



24 December 2016



Portugal has 10 million inhabitants and agriculture is characterized by a high diversity of farming systems and a great variety of farms in terms of production orientation, size and technical advance. Milk production represents a value of 750 M €, i.e. 27% of animal production output and 11.4% of gross agricultural output. In 2015, milk deliveries were 1 953 000 t accomplishing to 96.1% of national self-sufficiency for the whole set of dairy products. This production was achieved by 243 000 dairy cows with an average productivity close to 8 t milk cow⁻¹ year⁻¹. In the last three decades, changes in farm structure characteristics are occurring very fast. Between 1993/4 and 2009/10 (last robust data available), the number of dairy holdings has been reduced by more than 85% and, in 2016, is estimated to be ca. 4 000.

Portuguese dairy production is concentrated in the Northwest (NW) mainland area under an intensive zero-grazing system based on a double-cropping forage scheme that uses maize as a summer crop and Italian (annual) ryegrass as a cover crop in winter; both crops are for silage making. This system is responsible for about 60 % of the total Portuguese milk production. Cows are fed with a total mix ratio and kept 'indoors' all around the year generally parked in covered and cemented cattle sheds where they are in semi-freedom. The high forage yielding potential and the use of up to 3 t of concentrate feed per dairy cow allow animal stocking rates of 4 to 7 LSU ha⁻¹ (including replacement herd). This farming system may generate large N losses, particularly by nitrate leaching. The storage capacity of liquid manure must ensure that slurry spreading to fields is done twice a year, just before the sowing of each crop. Environmental issues play currently an important role, driving changes and adaptation measures to improve system sustainability to comply with legal regulations. Farms are generally transmitted father-in-law and the farmer is generally the landowner (80% of the cases). In terms of machines, the majority of the farmers have the basic equipment necessary in dairy farms (tractors, TMR equipment, slurry tank...), but they often use the services of the cooperative for the seeding and for the forage harvest. Main investments are related to the acquisition of new machines and the construction or restoration of the buildings.

The "Irmãos Sousa" is a business partnership of three brothers who run a milk specialized farm that has been in the family since 1970. The farm has 42 ha of agricultural land cropped with silage maize from May to September and with annual ryegrass in the rest of the year, also for silage. Cattle herd comprises 125 milking cows, 20 dry cows, 50 pregnant heifers plus 54 other heifers and 32 calves. Heifers of 5 months of age or older are contract reared by a neighbouring farm until they are 7-months in calf. The average milk production is 11 493 L cow⁻¹ yr⁻¹ and cows have a lifetime of 2.4 lactations. The farm buildings include a 2 100 m² stable for the milking cows, which includes a spine (12 x 12) milking parlour, plus another 1000 m² facility for the replacement young stock. All the milk (1 450 t) is sold to a Portuguese industrial group owned by a dairy union cooperative. Labour at the farm is supported by 4 persons: the 3 brothers plus the wife of one of them.

Research Themes

EuroDairy drives the engine of innovations on 4 main themes at dairy farms: animal care, biodiversity, resource efficiency and socio-economic resilience. Find more info on these dairy topics here!

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