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## Pictures from the president: Views of the Colorado Dairy Tour

### Logan Bower, PDMP President

Northeastern Colorado—This was a really good tour. These were big dairies, ranging 2,000 to 10,000 cows, but each one was very different. All seven dairies were managed differently with different philosophies and different amounts of milk production.

Water is a big issue out there. They have to buy their water to grow crops. Most of the dairies buy their feed, but the people who grow the feed have to buy the water to irrigate. Dairies and growers in the region have changed cropping schemes to try to get more dry matter with less water. Alfalfa takes a lot of water, so some have moved toward growing sudan sorghum grasses and other crops that have lower water needs.

The dairies in Colorado benefit from low cost housing, as we quickly saw by the number of feedlots converted to dairy. All but one herd had all dry lot facilities. The one freestall facility we saw was relatively new. On one dairy, the cows were penned 250 cows to a corral.

The climate is cow-friendly. Even though it gets into the 90's in the summer, it normally gets down to 60 at night and the humidity is low. We were told that annual rainfall averages about 10 to 12 inches, including the snow, so there's not a lot of water.

Most every dairy separates their manure and composts the solids. The composted solids are reused as bedding or sold to landscapers. The liquid portion is used for irrigation.

It was interesting to see the rows and rows of calf hutches. On one dairy, the calf housing was simply wire dividers with canvas stretched over them. That's it.

Most of the places we visited bottle feed their calves to weaning. All those calves, 4, 5, 600 bottles. That seems time-intensive, but they have figured out a system for how to make it work efficiently. They use pasteurizers and feed the waste milk and use technologies like automatic bottle washers. The same principles of implementing a management practice can apply whether its 9, 90, or 900 calves.

At Johnson Dairy II, in Eaton, we saw what is said to be the largest milking parlor in the world, inside the largest barn. The double 80 parallel milks close to 10,000 cows three times a day. The holding pen holds 1200 cows with two crowd gates. Their full capacity is to milk 900 cows per hour.

At Johnson Dairy II, owned by John Johnson, the focus of their management style was throughput efficiencies.

At Dycrest Dairy, Fort Collins, I was impressed by the milk production. The herd is all registered, and their production is 88 to 90 pounds all year, without using BST. Of the cows they cull, a lot are sold for dairy purposes.

The snow-capped mountains off in the distance added to the ambience of the visits. On every dairy we visited, we saw the snow capped mountains.



In traveling from dairy to dairy, a lot of our discussion focused on the cost of production: East versus West. We talked about it with our hosts and among ourselves. Their feed costs in Colorado have really driven up their cost of production, where in years past, they used to have a fairly significant cost of production advantage over the east.

Higher feed costs take away some of that advantage, and the milk price is not as good there as it is here. At the end of the day, it's about the same.

Last year's tour to Washington state was a great one because the dairies were more our size. But this year's tour was just as good or better because we were seeing different management styles.

Even though the farms were bigger, there was a lot of information to take home: Information on how these dairies manage their cows, personnel, cost of production, and differences in how they handle and manage their calves.

In Colorado, the dairies have a climate that is more forgiving. Their housing and management are certainly different from ours in some important ways. However, we learned a lot and enjoyed the opportunity to gain insight into that region and aspect of the dairy industry.

To read more about it and view more photos, visit the Colorado Dairy Tour blog created by Dan Brogdon of AgChoice Farm Credit at [colodairytour.blogspot.com](http://colodairytour.blogspot.com).

#### PHOTO CAPTIONS:

A former feedlot converted to a dairy. Northeast Colorado has a good cow climate. In the summer it gets into the 90s as far as temperature, but the humidity is low and the night temps get down to 60. Average rainfall is 10 to 12 inches annually, and that includes snow. Water is a premium, but housing is simplified.



“Over-Under” is the way to travel at Johnson Dairy II, Eaton. They built a bridge, to coordinate two lanes of traffic to and from the parlor. Managers confirmed that the cows really like to go up on the bridge and look around.



Most of the housing in Colorado is outdoor dry lots. The cow-friendly climate enables a lower investment in housing.



Lots of calves to feed, and most farms on the PDMP/Dairy Alliance Colorado tour explained that calves are all bottle-fed. Automatic bottle washers help streamline the process. A lot of care and attention are required with so many calves. At Johnson Dairy II, Eaton, for example, 40 to 60 new calves are born each day.



It was impressive to see the five bulk tanks, four of them pictured here, at the 10,000-cow Johnson Dairy II, Eaton.



Rows and rows of composting manure solids. A lot of the dairies in the region use composted manure solids for bedding and sell the product to landscapers. The liquid portion is precious for irrigation.

