

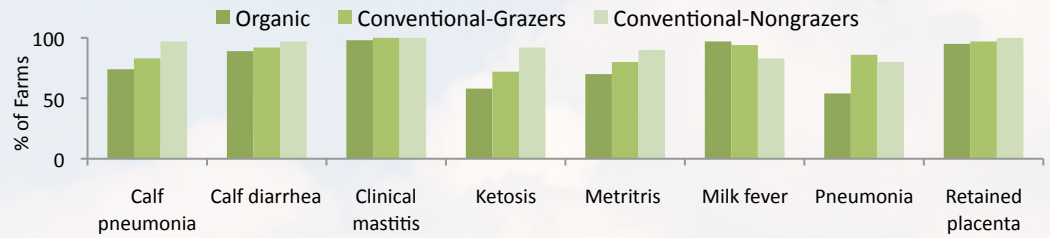


## WHERE ARE THE VETERINARIANS ON ORGANIC FARMS?

According to a recent study on the impact of organic management on dairy cow health and well-being<sup>1</sup>, organic herds reported the least presence of disease and need for veterinary treatment compared to conventional-grazers and conventional-nongrazers.

However, conventional farms in the study were more likely to schedule veterinary visits in advance for reproductive and routine work. During these regular visits, veterinarians were also more likely to examine a potentially sick cow. The majority of organic farms had no routinely scheduled visits. Greater reliance on veterinarians to diagnose and treat disease increased the opportunities for veterinary care of individual animals.

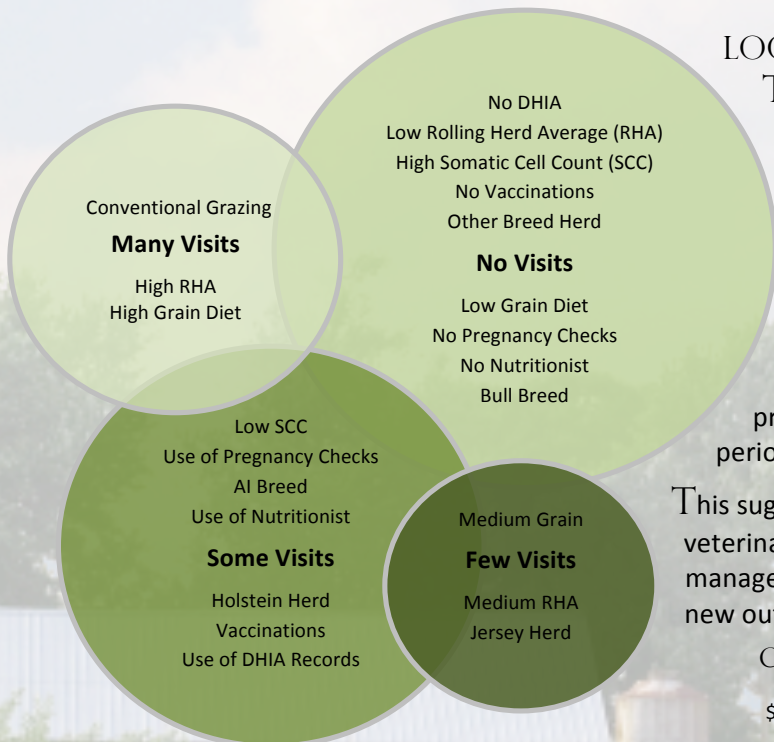
HERDS REPORTING PRESENCE OF DISEASE ON FARM



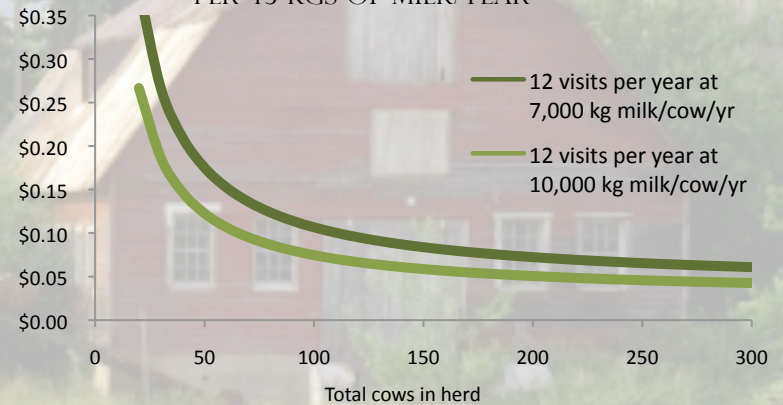
## LOOKING AT 'INTENSITY' OF MANAGEMENT

The study aimed to characterize the role veterinarians play in the health management decisions of farmers. But neither 'organic' nor 'conventional' status was significantly associated with the rate of visits. Although organic farmers tended to use veterinarians the least, veterinary usage was more closely associated with the intensity of management practices on the farm. Farmers who used more intensive management practices, such as use of vaccinations and a willingness to rely on other dairy professionals, reported more veterinary visits during the study period and a higher likelihood to call a veterinarian for a sick cow.

This suggests that the motivations of organic farmers to utilize veterinary services are complex. Veterinarians should consider these management characteristics when developing and implementing new outreach strategies.



COST OF ROUTINELY SCHEDULED VETERINARY VISITS PER 45 KGS OF MILK/YEAR



## ECONOMIC BARRIERS TO ROUTINE VISITS

The fixed cost of scheduling routine veterinary visits was a barrier for smaller dairies. The majority of farmers with small herds in the study did not schedule a routine visit during the one-year period.

Researchers measured the number of veterinary visits as a rate of visits per 100 cows to compare the expense of these visits to herd size and production. The results showed that the cost of routine visits per 45 kg of milk per year decreased exponentially as herd size increased and production became more efficient.

Increasing the perceived value and efficacy of routine veterinary visits is key to expanding service to smaller, organic farmers. Successful health care programs address farmers and veterinarians as equal partners jointly collaborating on herd health issues.

<sup>1</sup>Richert, R. M., K. M. Cicconi, M. J. Gamroth, Y. H. Schukken, K.E. Stiglbauer, and P. L. Ruegg. 2012. Management factors associated with veterinary usage by organic and conventional dairy farms. J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc. In press.