

Keeping the Family in Family Farms



Have you ever thought of what it might be like to live in the same place where you had to work? Imagine having teachers who lived at the school or bus drivers who lived in a big parking lot with all the buses. Most people have jobs that are physically separate from their personal lives. Farming is not just a business or a rewarding way to make a living; it is also a way of life.

Calling it a “family” farm means that the farm is the centre of the family’s life. On a family farm, every member of the family has important responsibilities.

Farming practices have even influenced our school system. In the past, many families depended on all family members to plant and harvest crops. School was scheduled to allow for time for children to help with planting and harvesting. That’s why many schools still have a long summer break.

Some people are worried that the family farm is disappearing in Alberta. They think that we will lose an important way of life if fewer young people decide to stay in the family business of

farming. Young people who have many choices for work and education might not want to continue working on the family farm. It is difficult for young people to get into farming if they don’t have a family member who is willing to pass along the land, the equipment, and has experience needed to become a successful farmer.

The cost of buying the land and equipment needed to run a dairy farm means that smaller farms may need to grow so that they can afford it. The computerized robotics that automatically milk cows can cost close to \$300 000 for each machine. One machine can usually milk about 60 cows each day.

These machines can make one farmer more efficient by reading an electronic tag on the cow to identify it, recording how much milk the cow normally produces, and checking for problems with the milk. Robotic milking machines can help a smaller farm milk more cows and produce more milk. It is easier to run a family farm with this technology.

A Day in the Life of a Robot Milking Machine

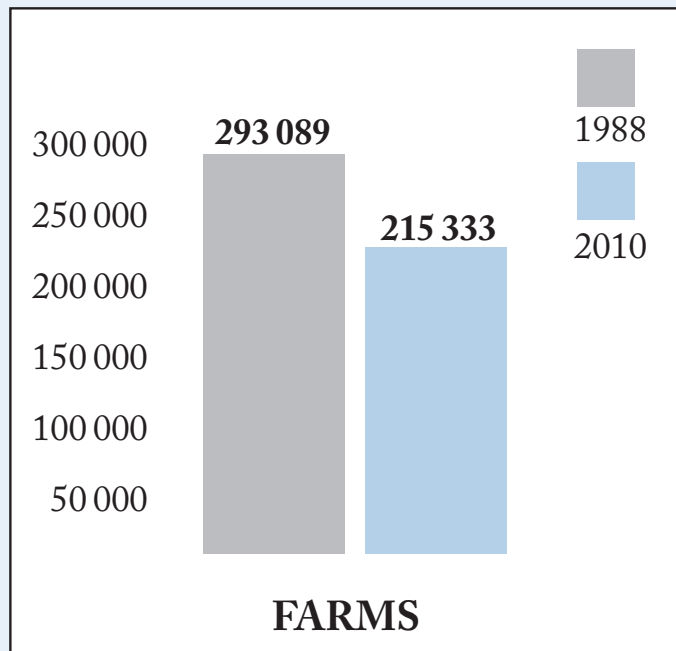
The robot milking machine has a very long day! It runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Cows are free to get milked as many times as they want. Some cows want to release their milk twice a day, and others will go for milking up to four times a day. The cows are attracted to the robot with healthy feed and grains. They learn to walk through a gate to hook up to the robotic milking machine. Many cows come for milking at the same times each day!

Farm Trends

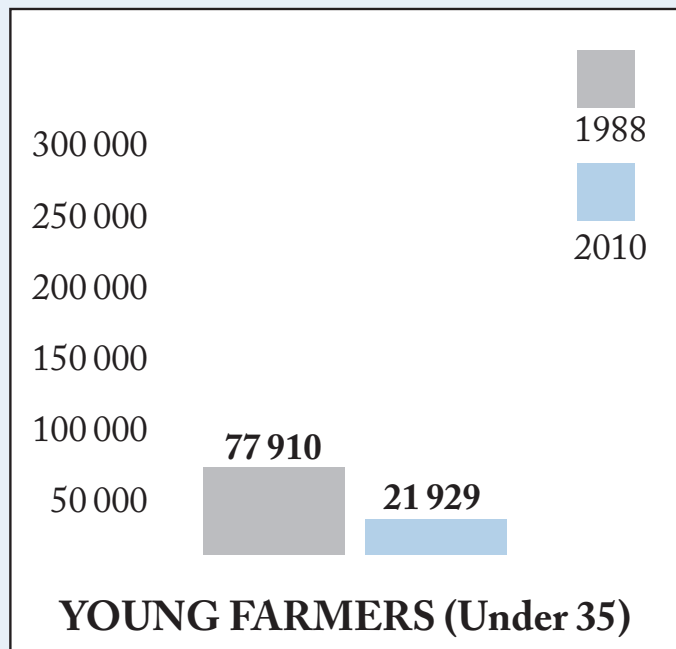
Rural communities require people and farmers. Canada has lost almost 80 000 farms since 1988 and the number of young farmers has decreased. Some people believe that family farms are in danger of disappearing. Some also believe that the population of rural communities is decreasing and these communities will not be able to provide people with the services they need.

Statistics Canada also found that the number of farms in Canada has decreased. However, the amount of milk produced has stayed almost the same.

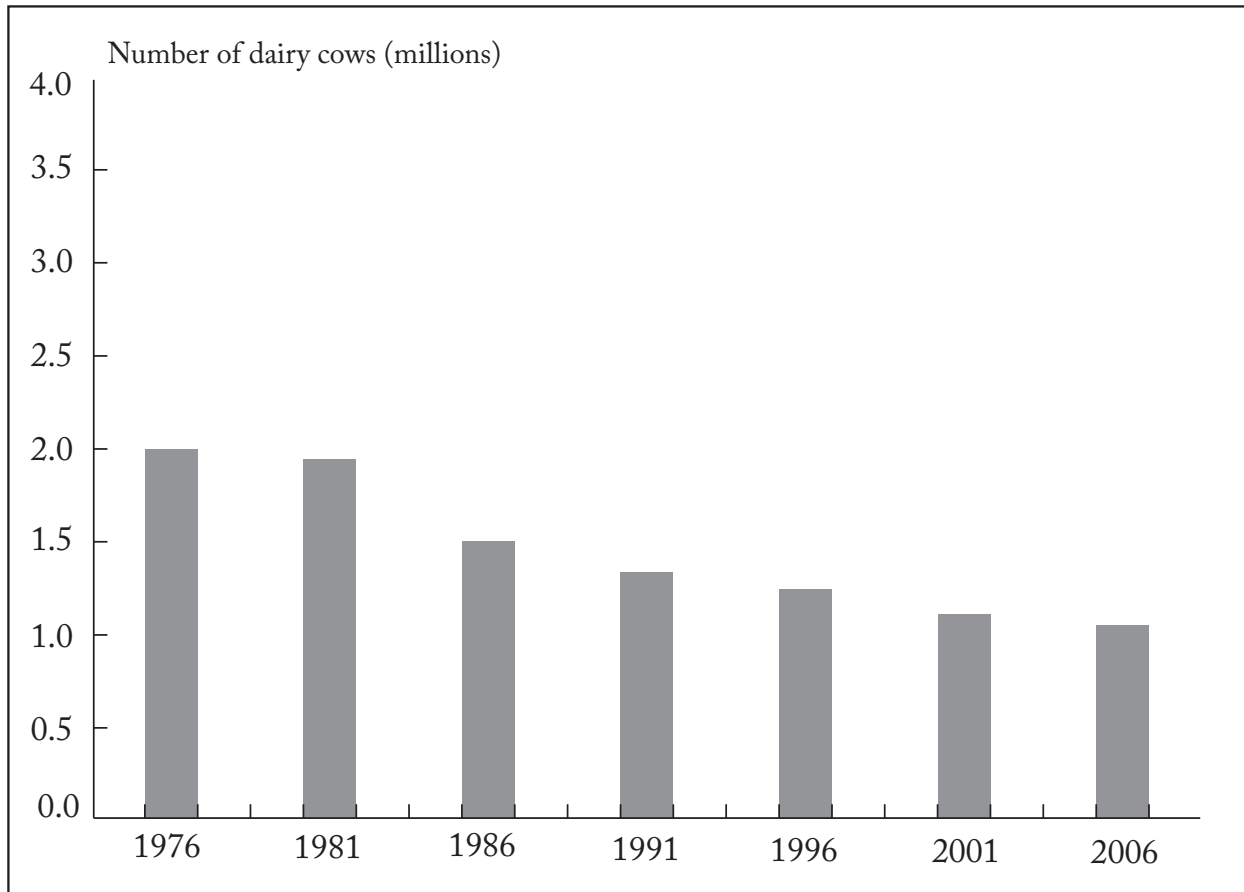
Canada's Farm and Farmers by Category



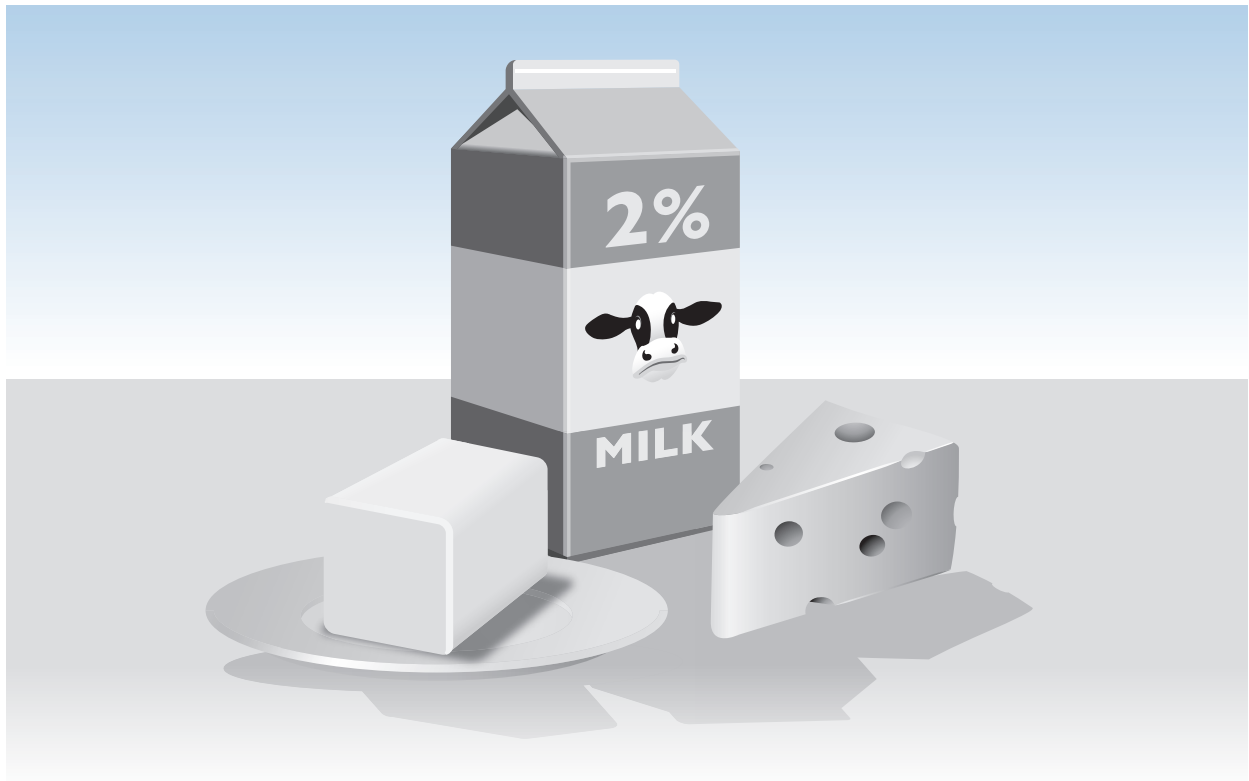
Milk production stays constant between 1976 and 2006!



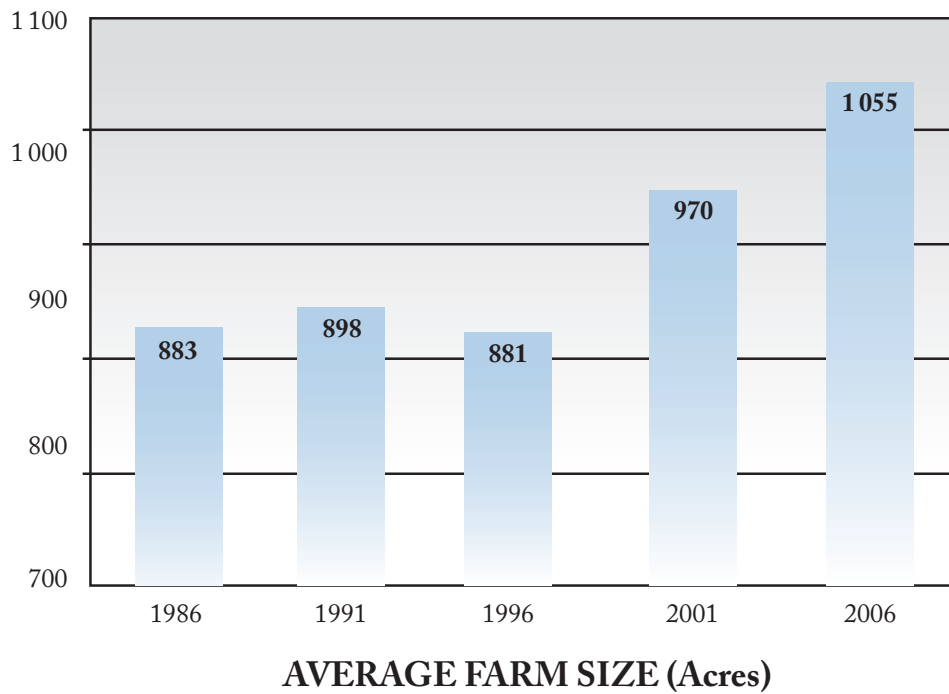
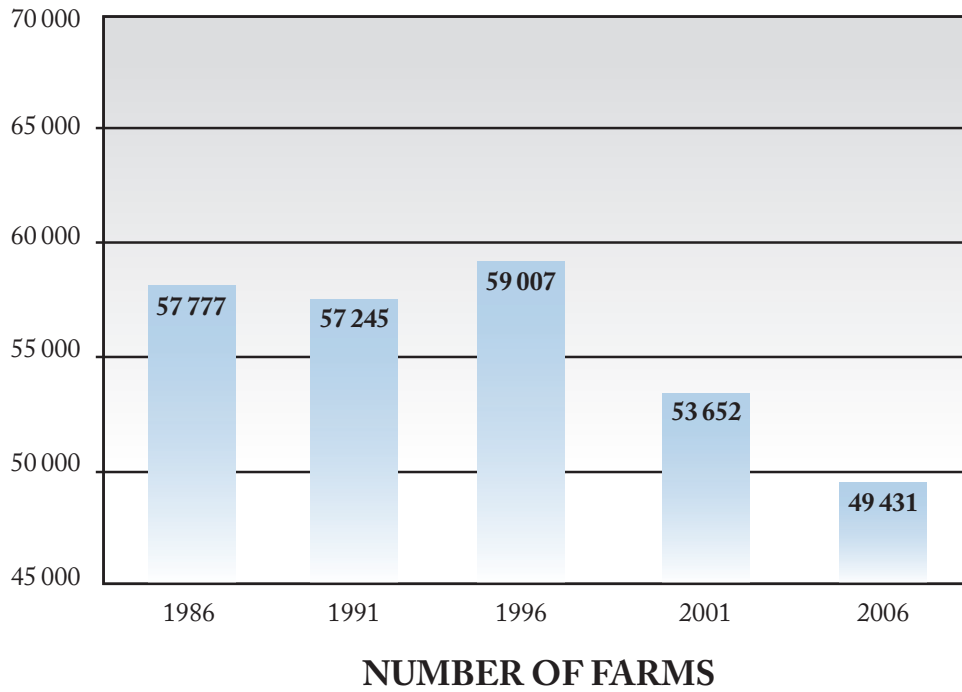
Dairy Cows from 1976 to 2006



From *Snapshot of Canadian Agriculture*. Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 1976 to 2006 and CANSIM. www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2006/articles/snapshot-portrait-eng.htm

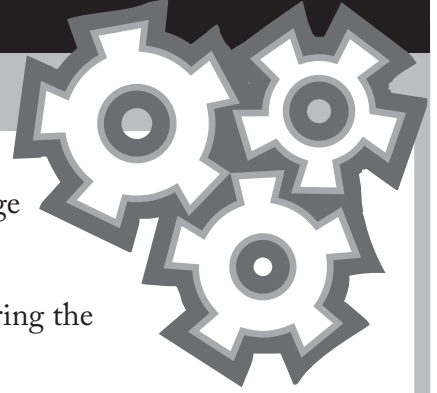


Alberta Farm Numbers and Average Farm Size



Government of Alberta: Office of Statistics and Information website at <https://osi.alberta.ca/osi-content/Pages/Factsheets/AlbertaCensusFarmNumbersandAverageFarmSize.aspx>.

Using Statistics



Statistics involves the collection and analysis of data. Statistics can help people to identify trends. A **trend** is a pattern of change or a movement that occurs over time.

What trends can you identify in dairy farming? Start by answering the questions below about each graph.

- a. Look at the Canada's Farms and Farmers graph. How would you describe the changes in the number of farms? Over what period of time has this change occurred?

- b. What has happened to the number of young farmers? What effect do you think this trend could have?

- c. Look at the Dairy Cows graph and the newspaper headline. What has happened to the number of milk cows between 1976 and 2006? What has happened to milk production?

- d. Why do you think the change in the number of milk cows and milk production has happened?

- e. Look at the two bar graphs that show Alberta's Farm Numbers and Average Farm Size.
What do you notice about the average size of farms in Alberta?
What do you notice about the number of farms?

- f. Why do you think the change in farm size and numbers has happened?

What do you think the effect of these trends might be?
