Exploring the Canadian Dairy Industry’s Contributions to Biodiversity Stewardship

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The Canadian dairy industry provides a unique opportunity to understand the uptake of biodiverse farm practice, because dairy farms’ product (milk) is not grown directly, but is instead produced as the output of a semi-closed farming system. This study has two main premises:

• Milk quality and quantity is directly related to the overall health of the producing cows. A healthy (biodiverse) farm ecosystem means healthy cows, and more and better milk.
• A very high proportion of the work on a dairy farm is in the interest of supporting the cows through the production of high quality feed.

This research seeks to understand the barriers that affect Canadian dairy farmers’ willingness and ability to adopt biodiverse practices as normal parts of their farm practice.

Major Research Questions:
1. What barriers interfere with Canadian dairy farmers’ adoption of biodiverse farm practices?
2. What motivates Canadian dairy farmers to engage in biodiverse farm practices on their farms?

Methods:
1. Initial survey on farm background, state of biodiversity practice, farming methods and land management practices. Population from Dairy Farmers of Canada’s membership (~11,000).
2. Voluntary case studies examining on-farm biodiversity, use of biodiversity enhancement programs and impressions of biodiversity enhancement programs’ effects.

Anticipated outputs:
• Identify current state of biodiversity on Canadian dairy farms.
• Catalogue current land management practices.
• Understand reasons farmers do/do not incorporate biodiversity practices into their farming.
• Identify funding programs available for biodiversity enhancement efforts.
• Connect increased biodiversity to improved dairy performance.

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Reference list:
1. Courtesy Jeff Reichheld
3. Courtesy Wayne Caldwell