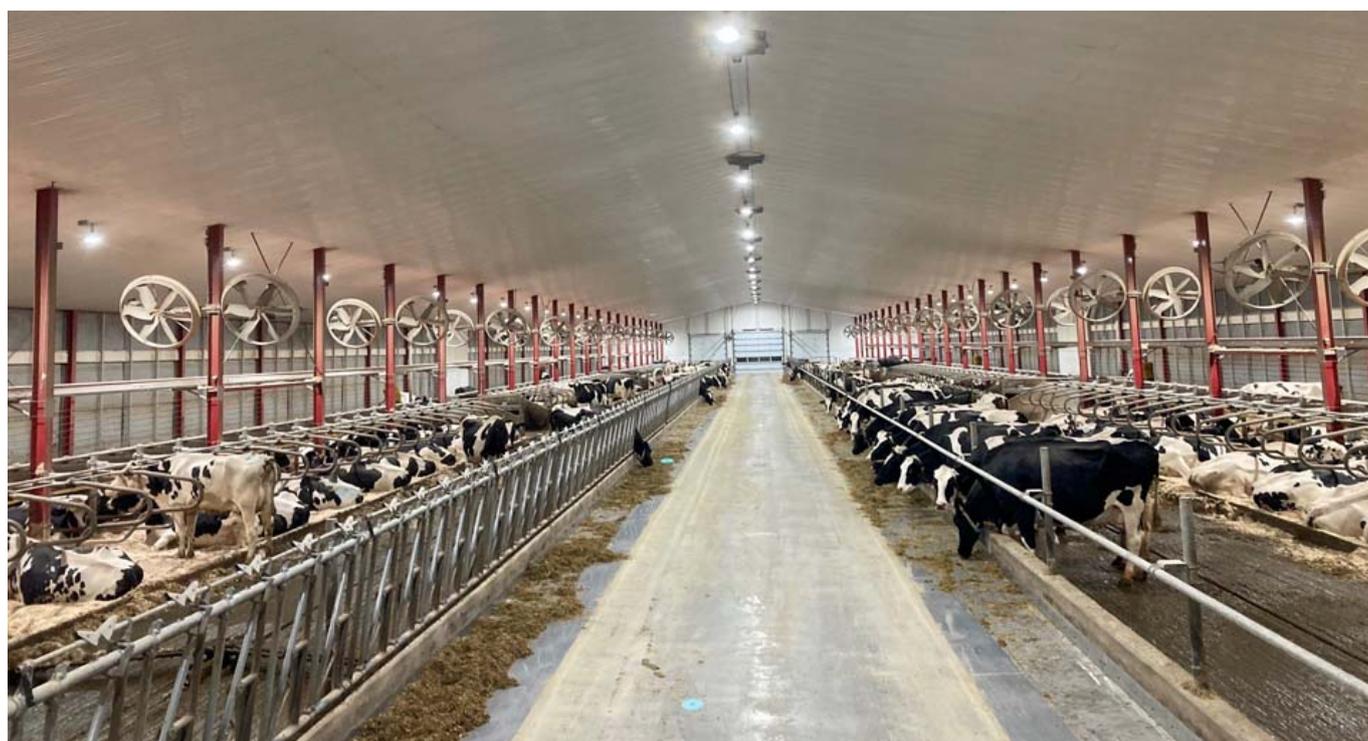




# **Innovative practices in comfort and welfare: The secret to a sustainable and profitable dairy?**

June 17, 2022

Survey results and data reveal the innovative practices employed by dairies ranking high in sustainability, including the progressive animal management techniques that may lead to gains profit margin.



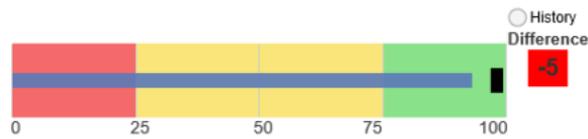
Today's conscious producer is concerned with their impact on the environment, animal care, waste, working conditions, human wellness, workforce shifts and business models. This goes beyond the traditional meaning of sustainability. This new sustainability is something we should all invest in, and a new tool is here to help you get started.

## A good Sustainability Index for a better margin

On Jan. 19, during Lactanet's ["Sustainable and Profitable, it's Possible!" webinar](#), participants learned more than \$90,000 in margin separates farms in the bottom 10% and top 10% of the Sustainability Index (Figure 1). This discrepancy in margin, revealed by the index unveiled in Quebec and Canada's Atlantic provinces in early 2022 (available throughout the country later this year), raises the question of how to bridge this margin gap when a farm falls in the lower 10%.

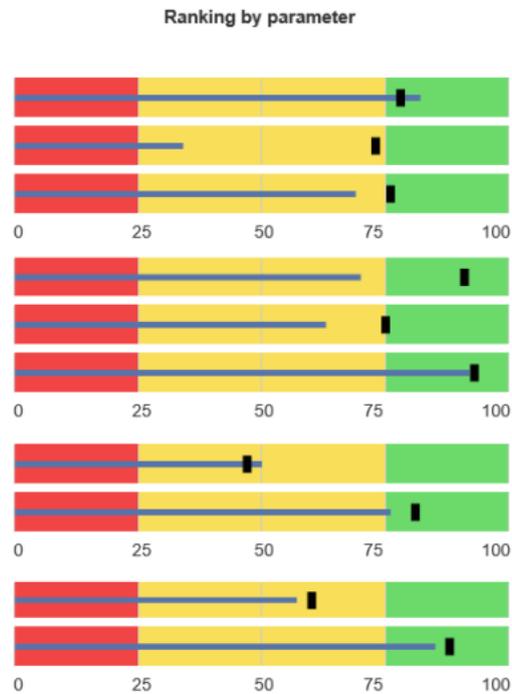
Figure 1. SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

## Sustainability Index



Last 2 evaluations  
10 Aug, 2021 7 Dec, 2021

	Last 2 evaluations	
	2021-08-10	2021-12-07
<b>Longevity and Culling</b> <input type="radio"/> History		
Cows in 3rd lactation or + (%)	45.5	46.4
Involuntary Cull Rate (%)	19.1	29.6
Cow Mortality Rate (%)	1.7	2.5
<b>Feeding and Production</b> <input type="radio"/> History		
MUN <5 or >18 mg N/dl (%)	1.3	2.7
Management Index - Milk (kg)	572	154
Transition Cow Index	940	856
<b>Heifers</b> <input type="radio"/> History		
Calf Mortality Rate 0-24 hr (%)	6.8	6.7
Age at First Calving (months)	23.6	23.8
<b>Health</b> <input type="radio"/> History		
Cows with BHB >0.20 mmol/l (%)	2.1	2.4
Cows with SCC >200,000 cells/ml (%)	11.1	9.9



Between April 2020 and January 2021, over 2,000 dairy farmers in Quebec participated in two surveys on cow and calf management and housing. The data collected highlighted the need to emphasize progressive practices for a more sustainable and profitable business.

To add value to the data collected from those surveys, we called upon our experts in data analysis, comfort and welfare to cross-reference the responses from the producer surveys with the index. As a result, several influential practices (i.e., practices few surveyed farms employed but that are in use on most operations with a good index) were identified. Here are a few of them.

## Practices in calf feeding

When we talk about calf raising, we cannot ignore the [importance of the environment and of colostrum](#). The influential practices that emerged from the surveys are:

- Test the quality of the colostrum.
- Give the calf its first meal of colostrum within at least one hour of birth.
- Administer at least 4 litres or more of colostrum to the calf at its first feeding.
- Have an area for calves that is dry, clean, comfortable and soft, with thick bedding.

Providing an excellent start and managing [thermal stress](#) in calves is a key practice – be it from cold or heat.

## Practices for better transition

The response from producers performing in the top 10% of the index indicated they strive for next-level transition practices for dry cows, close-up dry cows and calving pens, such as:

- Adding a feeder liner
- Adding a secondary [source of ventilation](#)
- Providing deep bedding

Although some of these practices require a little investment, they all improve the comfort of your herd, which translates into happier, productive cows that meet the expectations of their owners. Essentially, having a trouble-free herd contributes to a rewarding work environment.

## Practices for better transition

According to 2020 data, the most important causes of involuntary culling are reproductive problems, mastitis, high somatic cell count (SCC), feet and leg problems, as well as accidents and injuries. Therefore, it's not surprising that feedback from the survey reflected the following influential practices to reduce culling:

- [Trimming hooves](#) three or more times per year
- Incorporating a [footbath](#) into hoof health management
- Running the alley scraper continuously

## Animal comfort and welfare always pays off

Surveys, data collection and analysis provide you with the information you need to compare your typical management practice with progressive methods that have been successful for others. Collectively, this leads to a trajectory of improvement for the entire dairy industry.

This new index will help producers reach that long-term goal. It's most satisfying when the best animal management practices can improve farming life for producers and their families.

*The surveys for the "Portrait of Quebec Dairy Farms in Terms of Management and Housing" project are funded under the Canada-Quebec Agreement for the Implementation of the Canadian Agricultural Partnership. Together, the federal and Quebec governments have invested \$293 million over a five-year period from 2018 to 2023. This agreement supports strategic initiatives that will help Canada's agriculture sectors grow, innovate and prosper.*





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