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Seasonality effect on milk and milk product supply in Central America

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Fresh milk production in Central America has reached 3.1 million tons valued at US\$1.1 billion in 2009. Seasonality has long undermined milk supply; milk production is 40 % less in the dry season compared with the rainy season. Milk supply relies mostly on small-sized dairy cattle farms, which comprised of 83 % of the total 373,758 farms. Generally, a farm operates as pasture-based in the 6 month-long rainy season and adopts different feedstuffs in the dry season.

Few studies have compared Central American dairy farm operation in the two seasons. A recent study compared farm operational efficiency in dry and rainy seasons and found that, though milk supply decreased, the milk yield per dairy cattle was more in the dry season. Dividing farm operation into two seasons might reveal valuable explanation for understanding the effect of seasonality on milk supply in the region.

To understand the effect of dairy cattle operation on milk, milk product and beef (weaned steers) outputs in the dry and in the rainy seasons is, therefore, the aim of the present article. Dairy cattle farm from El Salvador was the research focus. Questionnaire was used to collect data about dairy cattle operation during dry and rainy seasons. The interview was conducted in three different periods from year 2009 to 2011.

The result showed the farm adjusts between intensive to extensive operation in the dry and rainy seasons. In the rainy season, the gross milk production was higher, but the amount of milk products was lower than in the dry season. The lactating herd size, calving month pattern and feedstuff management changed the quantity of milk and milk products between the two seasons. The study revealed a holistic operation of the Central American dairy farms; the farms adjusted optimal input management depending on the seasons.

Keywords: Dairy cattle farm, Seasonality, El Salvador, Dry season