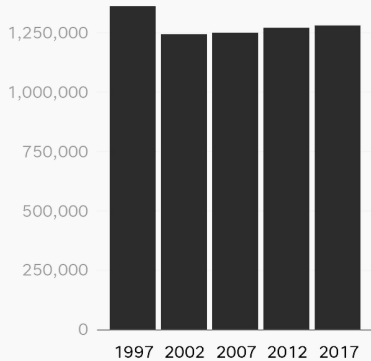
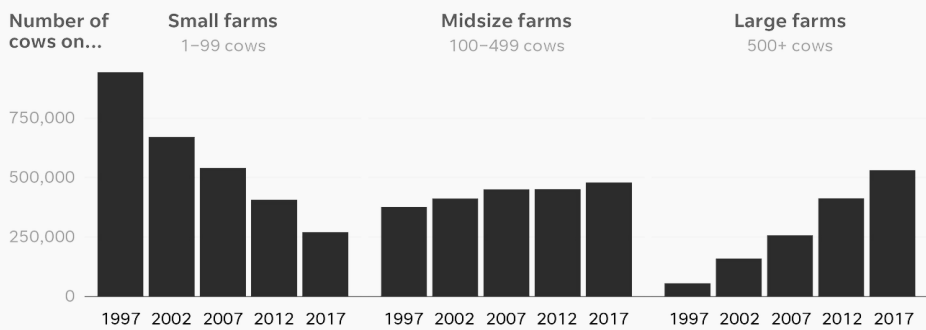


# THE DAIRY INDUSTRY IN WISCONSIN & U.S. IMMIGRATION

In Wisconsin, the number of milk cows has remained steady ...



... though more and more are part of larger dairy operations.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

For over 150 years, dairy farming has been a crucial industry in Wisconsin.

According to National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), in 1960, there were around 100,000 dairy farms in Wisconsin and the average herd size was 21. At the beginning of 2021, they indicated that there were about 6,500 dairy farms (6,533 in Jan and 6,495 in Feb) with an average herd size of 195.

This has led to farms employing more than just their family members and as rural populations have decreased, immigrants have filled those positions.

## Economic Impact

The dairy industry contributes **\$45.6 billion** annually to Wisconsin industrial revenues and makes up **7%** of the state's economy, according to the Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection.

In Wisconsin, where the dairy industry is the largest agricultural sector in the state, **migrants make up an estimated 40% of dairy workers**, according to UMOS, a farmworker advocacy organization headquartered in Milwaukee. UMOS estimates that at least 90% of migrant dairy farmworkers in the state are undocumented.

### By the numbers: the intersection of immigration & dairy

- 1 — Wisconsin's rank as U.S. cheese producer
- 2 — Wisconsin's rank as U.S. milk producer
- 34 — Percentage of U.S. dairy farms that employ immigrants
- 51 — Percentage of dairy workers nationwide who are immigrants
- 79 — Percentage of milk produced on U.S. dairy farms employing immigrants
- 76,968 — Estimated number of U.S. dairy workers who are immigrants
- 150,418 — Estimated number of U.S. dairy workers

Sources: 2016 Wisconsin Dairy Data, Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board; The Economic Impacts of Immigrant Labor on U.S. Dairy Farms, 2015, Texas A&M University for the National Milk Producers Federation



"In 17 years, I've never seen a person who was born here come in and say to my boss, 'I'm looking for a job. I want to milk cows.' "

-Guillermo Ramos Bravo, Lindstrom Valley Farm herdsman/manager

Photo credit: Twelve Letter Films & Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism

Addressing a Labor Shortage

Between 2000 and 2010, Wisconsin’s population grew by 6 percent, but more than a quarter of Wisconsin’s 72 counties lost population. Most of the losses in Wisconsin and nationally were in rural areas where the main industry is agriculture.

The U.S. grants about 1 million green cards for permanent immigration and about 925,000 temporary worker visas every year. There is a yearly limit of 140,000 employment-based immigrants, which includes the family of the person seeking a green card.

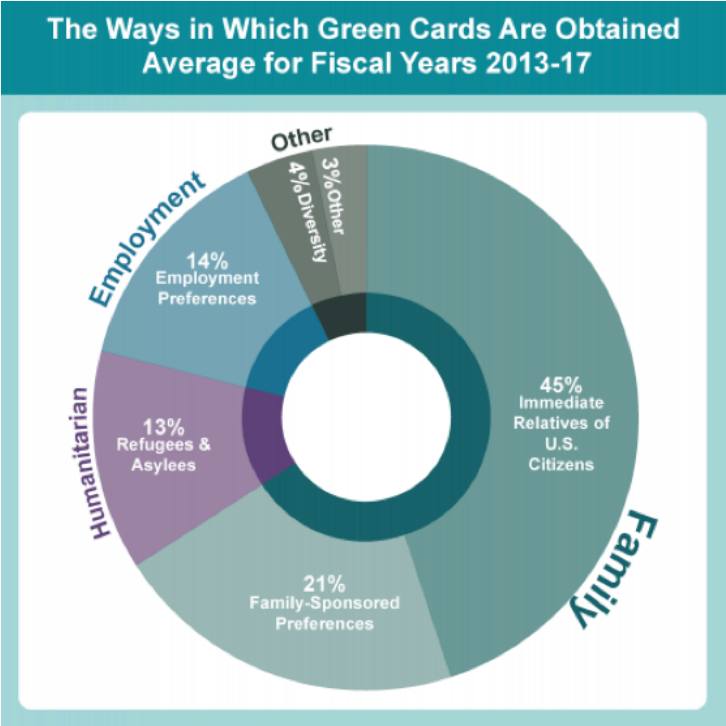
However...

Year-round agricultural workers without a college degree are **not yet included** in a US immigration visa category. The H2A visa is for agriculture, but it currently only applies to seasonal workers. Dairy farming is not seasonal, so workers continue to face immigration challenges.

Finding Solutions

There is an immigration bill proposed by the new administration that would give more farm workers the opportunity to obtain a legal status. There is also talk of expanding the H2A visa to include workers in the dairy industry, **but it is not yet in the bill.**

The intersection of immigration and dairy is complex, but it is clear that the two are interdependent and therefore processes must be improved to better serve everyone involved.



“I don’t think any of the farmers are trying to work around the system. They just need a person they can rely on to care for cows.”

-Shelly Mayer, Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin

Table 1. New Temp. Work Visa Approvals: 2010-2019

Visa Category	Type of Worker	Skilled or Unskilled	2010	2014	2019
E	Treaty Investors and Workers <sup>1</sup>	Skilled	33,954	49,971	59,001
H-1B	Professional	Skilled	117,828	162,239	189,847
H-2A	Seasonal Agricultural	Unskilled	55,921	89,274	204,801
H-2B	Seasonal Non-Agricultural	Unskilled	47,403	68,102	97,623
J	Exchange Program Worker	Both	258,935	216,558	230,000 <sup>3</sup>
L	Intra-Company Transfer	Skilled	74,719	71,513	76,988
O	“Extraordinary” Ability	Skilled	13,024	18,957	26,494
P	Athletes/Entertainers	Skilled	32,496	31,721	25,601
Q	Cultural Exchange Visa	Skilled	1,589	2,036	2,029
R	Religious Workers	Both	3,390	4,599	4,583
TN <sup>2</sup>	NAFTA Professionals	Skilled	3,392	11,207	21,193
Total			642,651	726,177	916,967

Source: State Department.  
<sup>1</sup> Total includes some family members.  
<sup>2</sup> Includes only Mexicans; does not include Canadians, who are not tracked by DHS.  
<sup>3</sup> Estimate of work exchange participants (filtering out students and other short-term exchanges) based on 2018 statistics.