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TEXAS DAIRY LANDSCAPE SHIFTING, BUT COMMITMENT TO TEXANS REMAINS CONSTANT

By Darren Turley

Texas' dairy landscape continues to evolve, the latest milk production statistics from the Milk Market Administrator show.

For the first time, Castro County in the Texas Panhandle is the top milk producing county in the state, taking over that spot from Erath County, which had held the position since June 1990. At the same time, Hopkins County in East Texas is no longer in the top 10.

These latest statistics show changes that have been a decade in the making. For many years, Northeast Texas and its grass-based dairy system ruled Texas' dairy industry. But in the late 1980s, the dairy industry in Central Texas expanded and prevailed atop the milk production rankings. Now it's the High Plains region, where the wide open spaces and moderate climate are quite inviting to producers from across the country.

Although the industry is shifting within Texas, it is – as a whole – very healthy. For the first eight months of 2011, statewide milk production rose by more than 8 percent as a result of an expanding cow herd, mostly in the western region.

As a result, Texas likely will become the sixth largest milk producing state in the nation before the end of this year.

Yes, Texas' dairy industry has its challenges, largely now from Mother Nature. The ongoing record drought, with no end in sight, has dairymen struggling to find hay and other forage for our cows at an affordable price. Producers are searching as far as Canada for good sources of forage.

But producers are committed to meeting the appetite of our state's growing population for milk and other wholesome dairy products. The production for this growth will be provided by various areas of the state, but it will most definitely continue to expand in the Panhandle.

While future industry growth likely will stay in the Panhandle, that does not make our dairies in Central, North or East Texas any less vital.

Our dairies – no matter where they are located – not only feed our state. They contribute to local and state economies. But, most importantly, as your neighbors they are dedicated to remaining part of your community.

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