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Abstract

Purpose: The article surveys dairy farmers' lay knowledge of climate change and the adaptation strategies they have implemented to respond to climatic and economic drivers. Dairy farming is highly dependent on climate. The case study is in Western Victoria, Australia, part of a major dairy farming region that contributes 26% of national milk production and 86% of the country's dairy exports.

Design: This study utilised a survey and semi-structured interviews in Corangamite Shire, to document dairy farmers' perceptions of climate variability and the adaptation strategies they have implemented, compared to meteorological data on climate variability in the recent past.

Findings: Farmers in this region perceive a change in rainfall and temperature broadly in line with meteorological records. Those that have experienced a greater degree of climate variability were found to perceive it more accurately. Almost all respondents had already made changes to their dairy businesses, but in doing so only a small percentage were responding directly to seasonal variability or to longer term changes (9% and 15% respectively); the majority said they were responding to changing economic conditions in the industry.

Originality/value: A primary survey of dairy farming adds to knowledge of how climate changes are perceived, and how they are adapted to in a region heavily reliant on rainfall for its prime economic activity.

Key words: Climate variability, farmer perceptions, adaptation, dairy farming, Corangamite Shire, Victoria, Australia

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