

Grazing practices, perception and expectations of Walloon dairy farmers.

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Introduction

The advantages of grazing are multiple:

- Environmental:**

Permanent grassland = carbon sink

Preservation of landscape

- Economical:**

Grazing => decrease in feeding costs

Positive effect on cows' health

- Societal**

Good image for the consumer

However grazing is decreasing and grassland areas are disappearing.

The aim of the survey:

To get an overview of grazing practices and farmers' expectations

Thus to suggest ways of improving these practices and limiting grassland loss disappearance.

Material and Methods

A questionnaire of eighteen questions focused on

- the description of the farm
- the grazing practices
- the perceptions and expectations

sent on 10/12/2015 to 3,152 Walloon dairy farmers with the help of the Comité du lait

Results

965 answers - 31% answer rate (28/2/2016)

90.5% answers = conventional system

9.5% = organic farms

957 farms = grazing vs 35 farms = no grazing

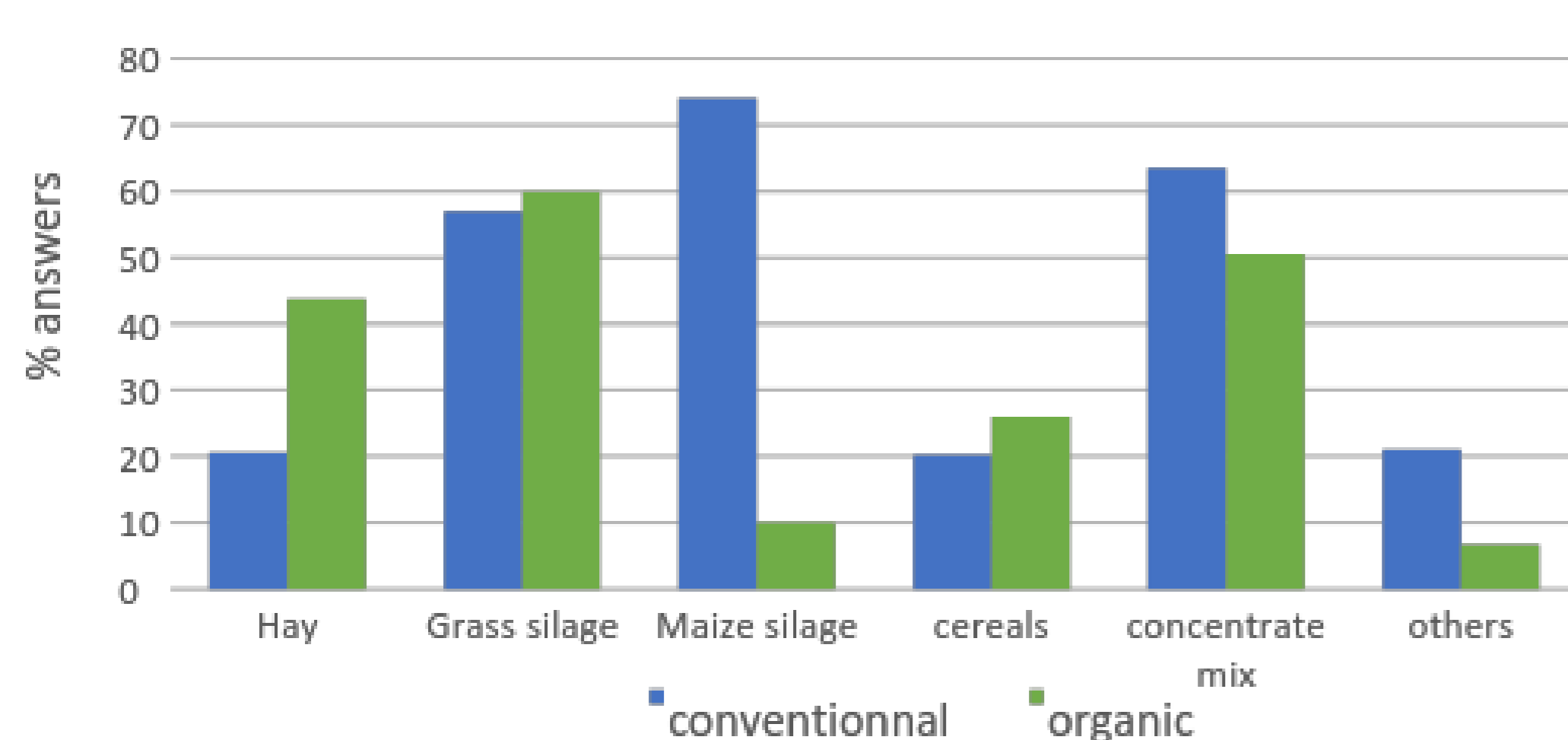
Grazing of lactating cows: 96% farms

96% grazed more than 4 months

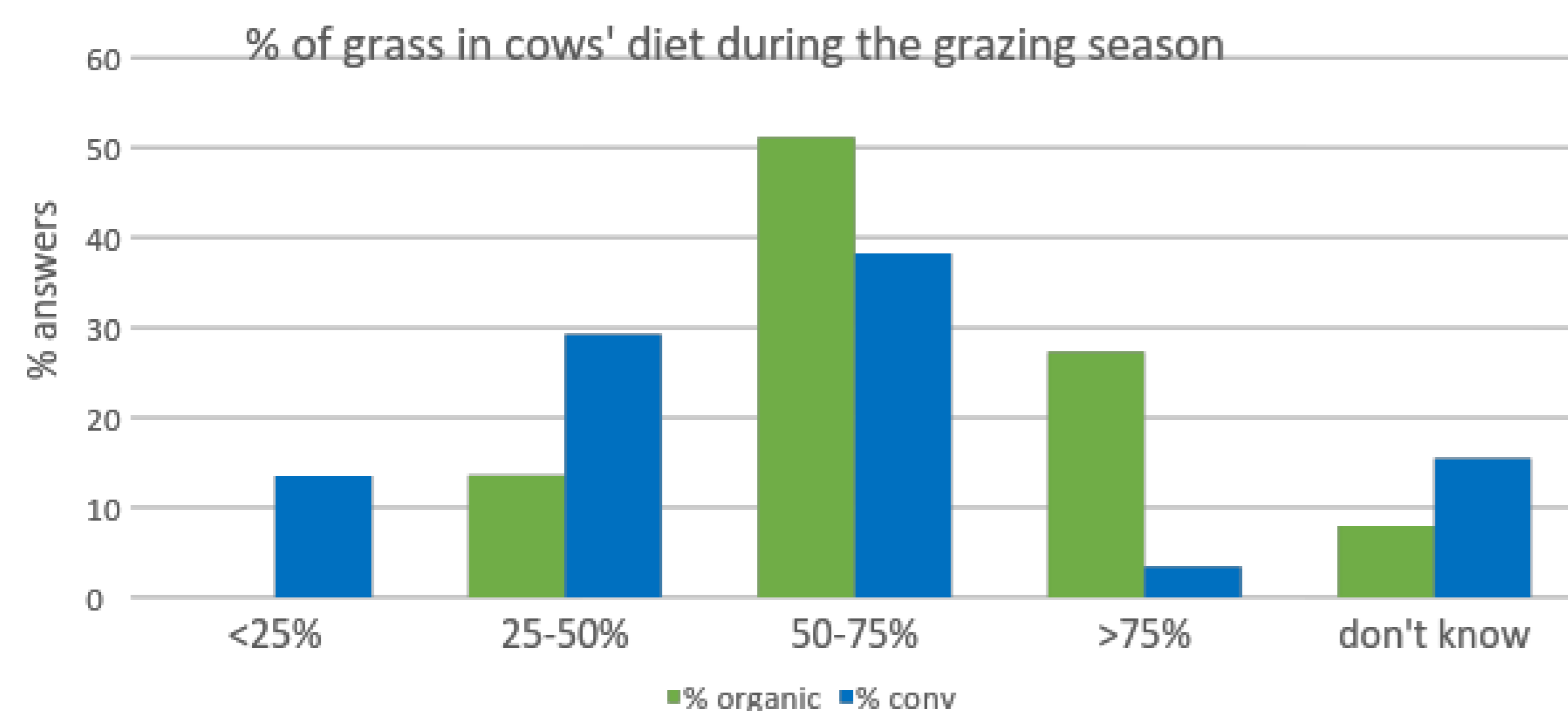
74% of farms grazed the lactating cows day and night

Supplement was given in 99% of farms during the grazing period.

Composition of complement given during the grazing season

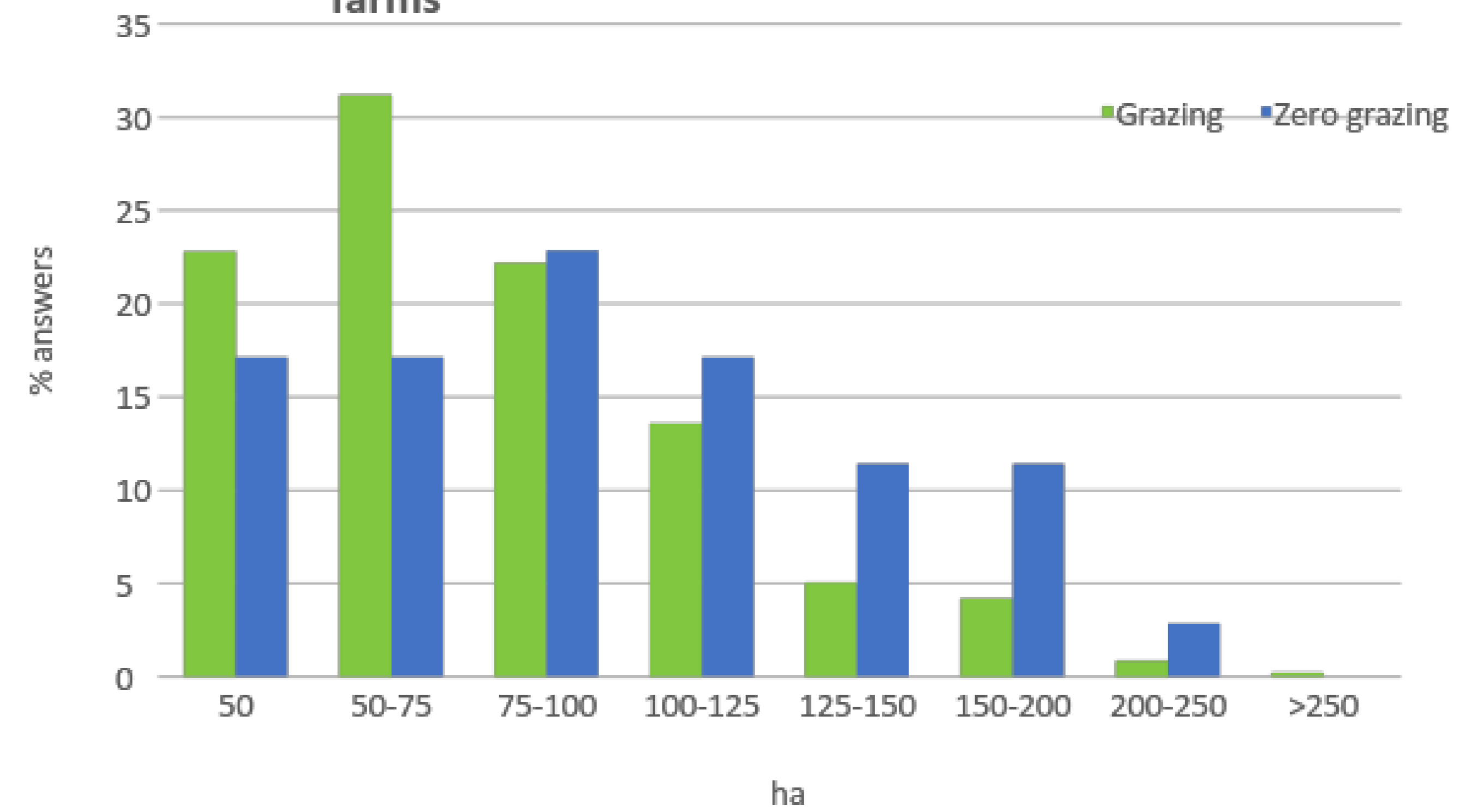


% of grass in cows' diet during the grazing season

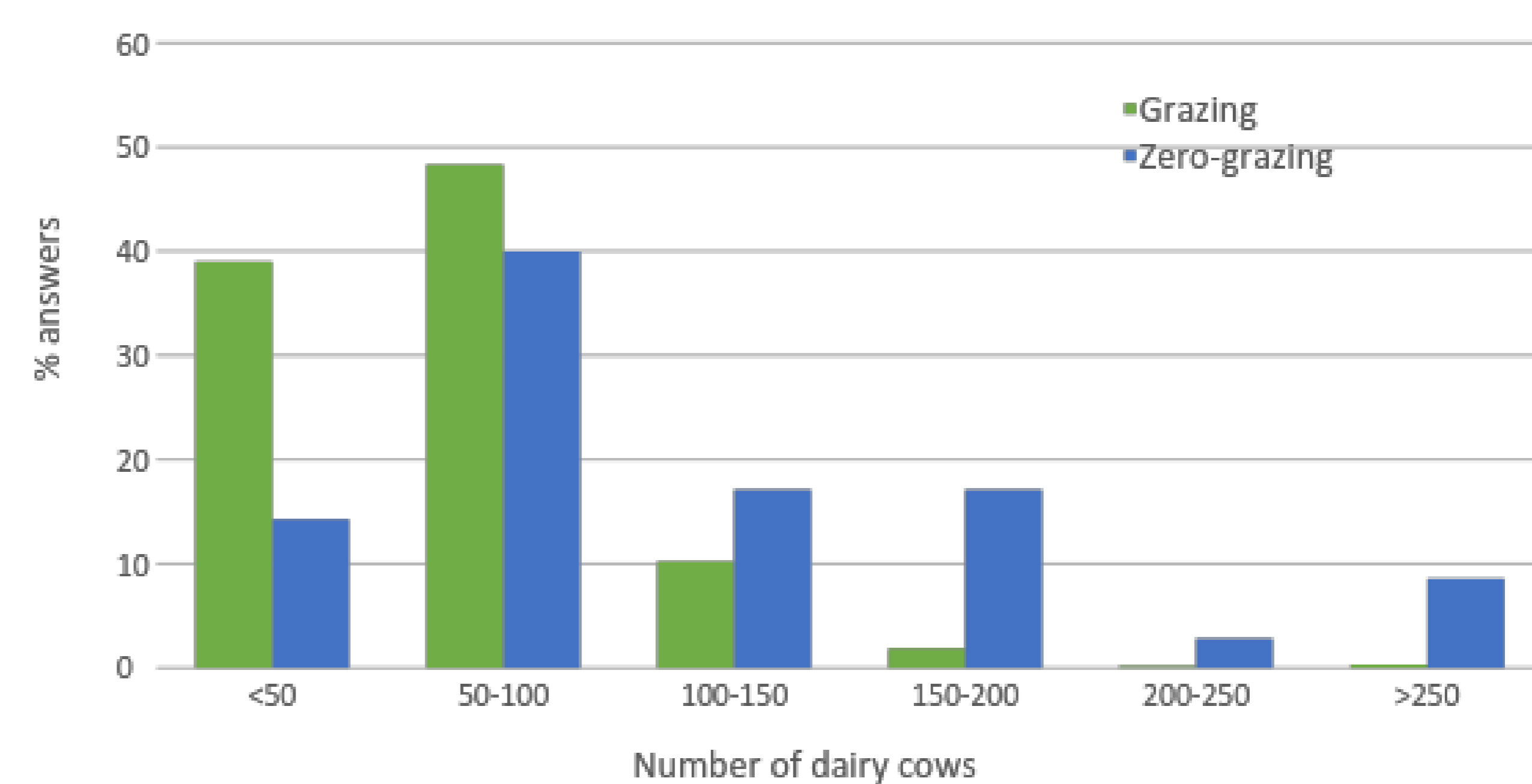


Comparison grazing - no grazing farms

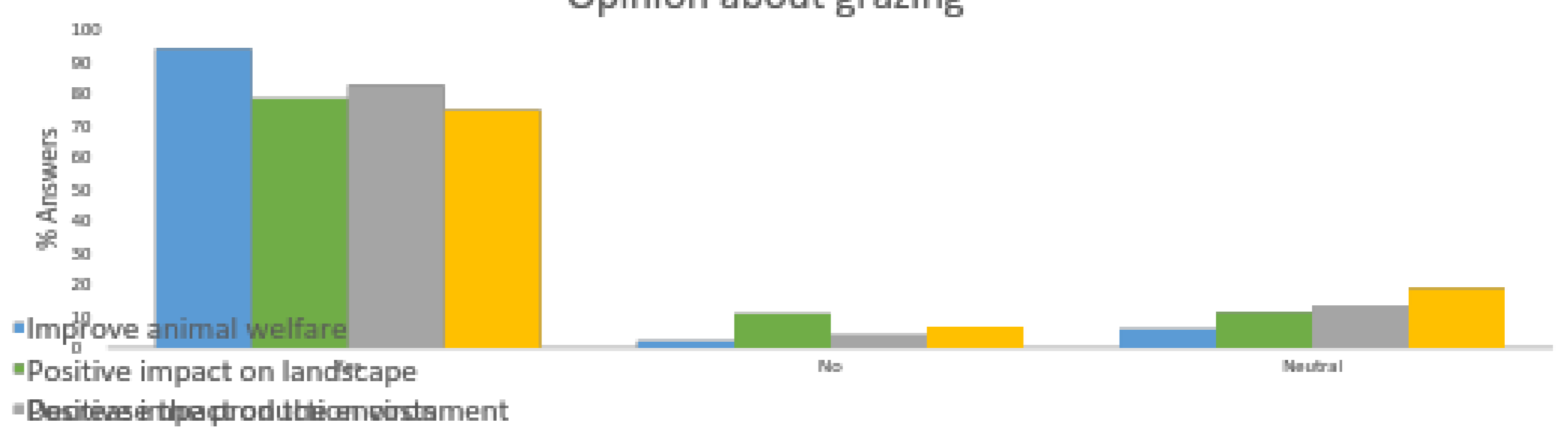
Surface of the farms: comparison of grazing and no grazing farms



Number of dairy cows in grazing and no grazing herds

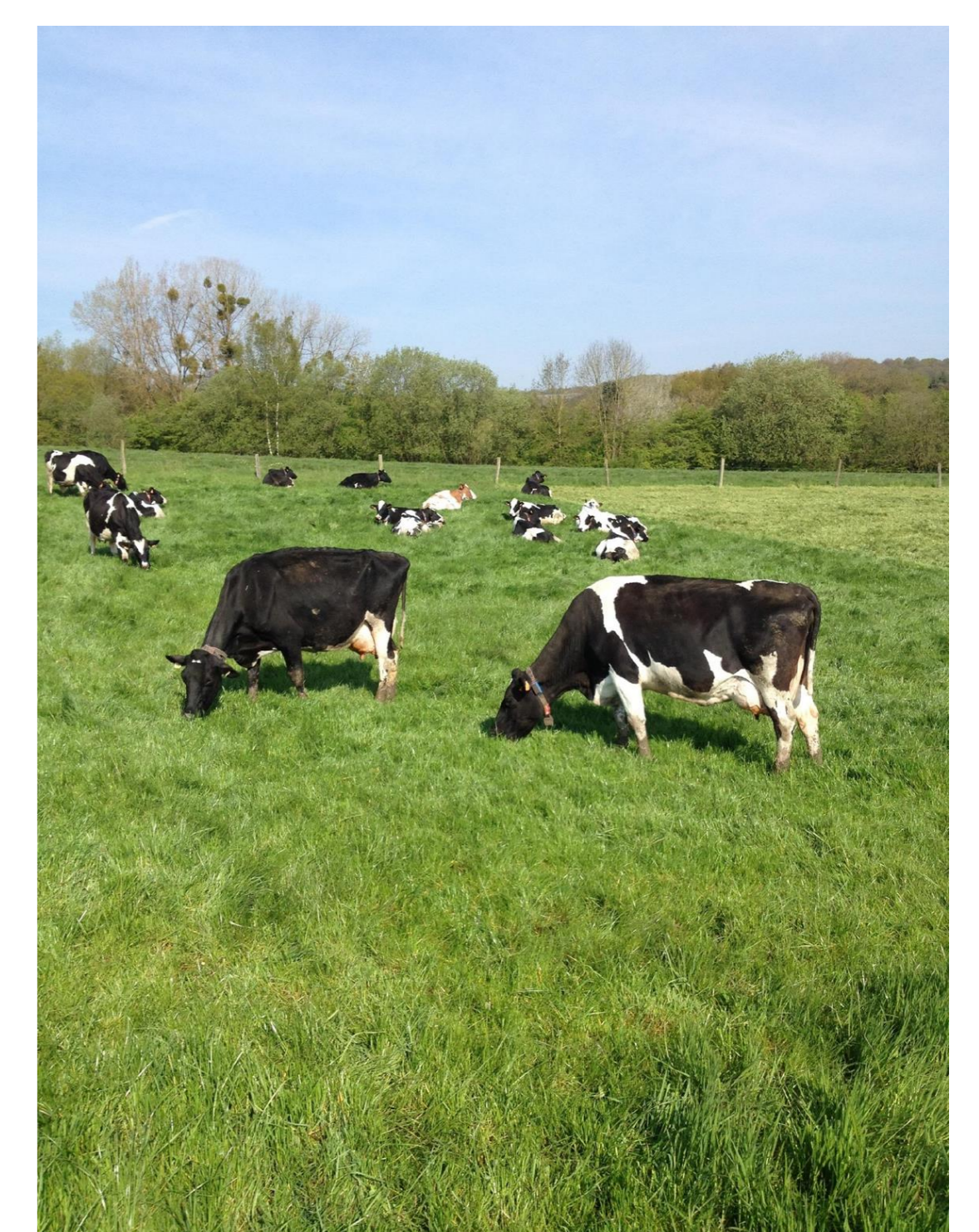


Opinion about grazing



Reasons for no grazing

- Environmental reasons: 9/35 farms
 - bad weather
 - poor soil conditions
 - both
- Management difficulties: 27/35 farms
 - difficulty to manage cows in pasture (18/35),
 - the distance to pastures (12/35)
 - limited grazeable areas (20/35).
- Economic reasons: 14/35 farms
 - lower milk production at pasture
 - other



Discussion - conclusion

- Grazing is still very common in Wallonia.
- The increased herd/farm size seems hinder grazing
- Management difficulties are the most common reason for no grazing
- In grazing farms, the proportion of grass in cows' feed was moderate, even during the grazing period and a high level of supplementation was reported.

This may suggest low confidence in grass quality and quantity.

