

Grazing practices, perception and expectations of Walloon dairy farmers.

Lessire, F.¹, Bernard M.¹, Reding R.², Liroy R.², Kristensen T.³, Reuter W.⁴, Elias E.⁴ and Dufrasne I.¹

1. Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Nutrition Unit, University of Liège,
Quartier Vallée 2, Avenue de Cureghem, 6, 4000 Liège, Belgium

2. Convis SC, Zone artisanale et commerciale, 4, 9085 Ettelbruck, Luxembourg

3. Department of Agroecology, Aarhus University, Blichers Allé, 20, DK-8830 Tjele, Denmark

4. Dumoulin SA, Parc Industriel, 18, 5300 Seilles, Belgium



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

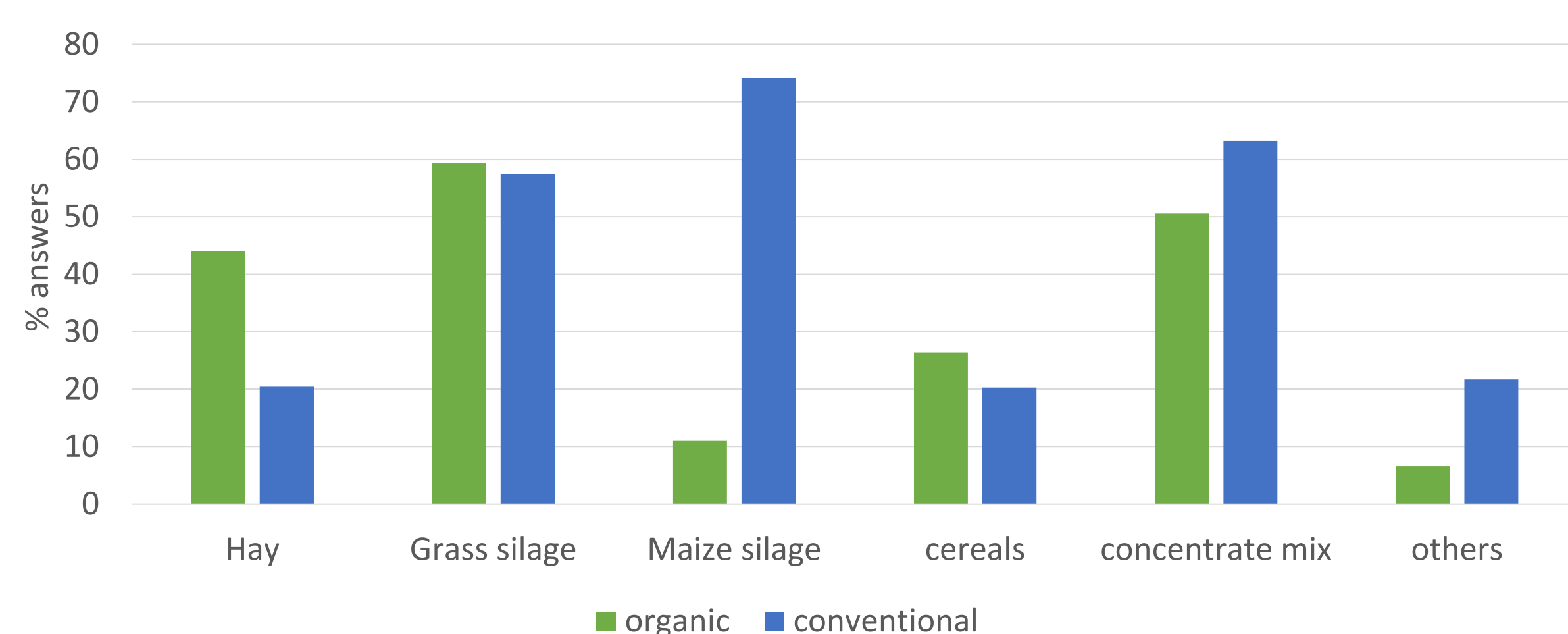
Grazing of lactating cows: 96% farms

96% grazed more than 4 months

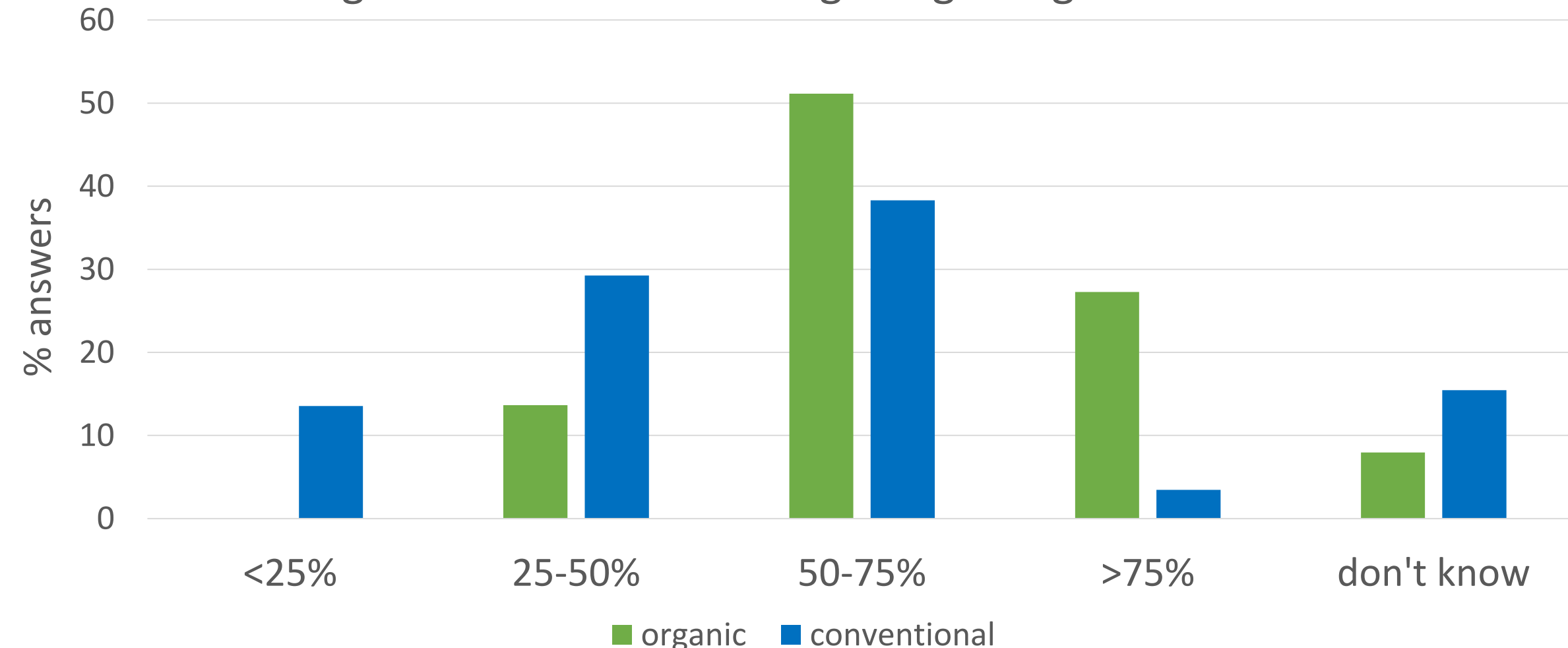
74% of farms grazed the lactating cows day and night

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

Composition of complement given during the grazing season

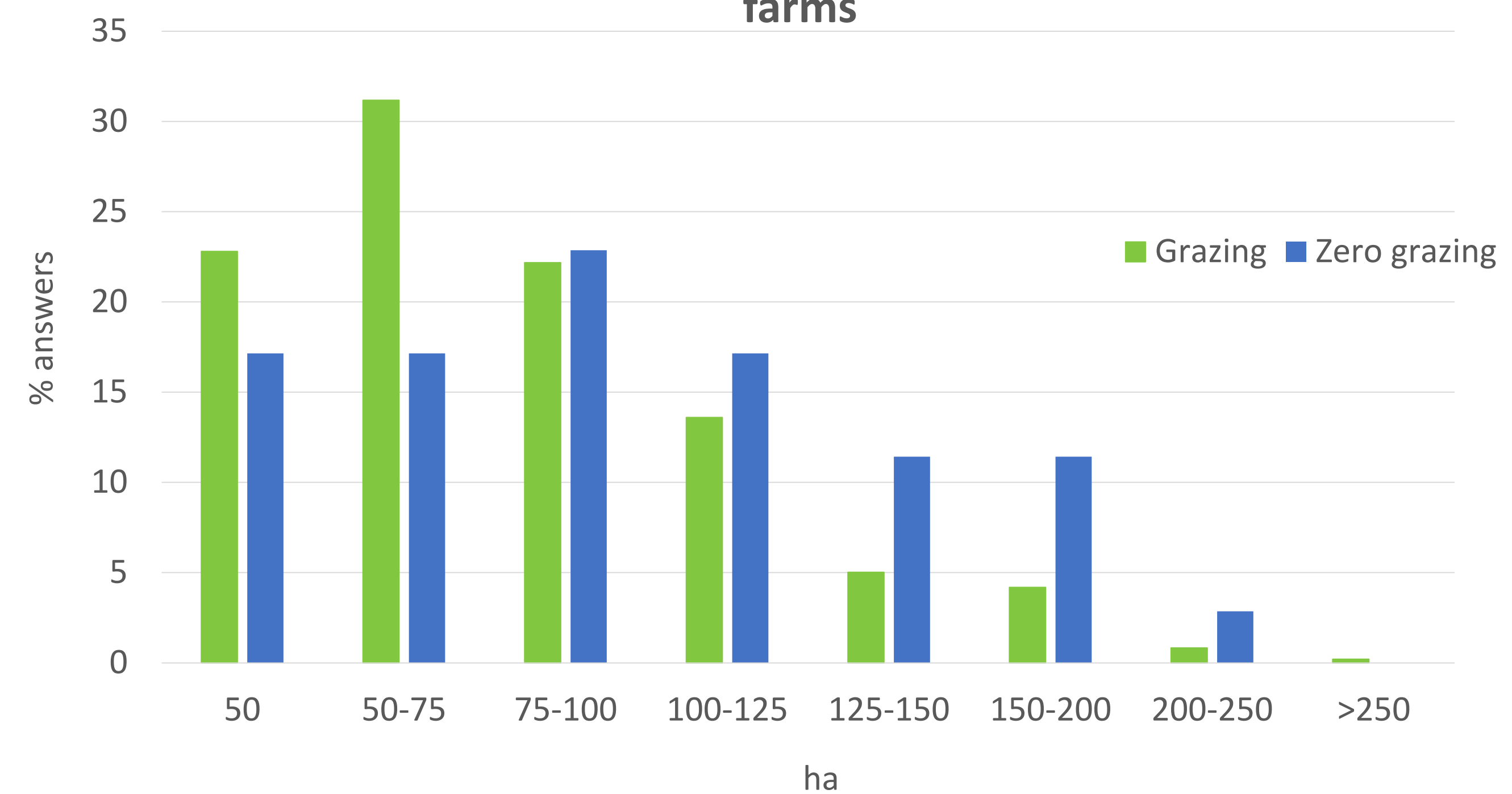


% of grass in cows' diet during the grazing season

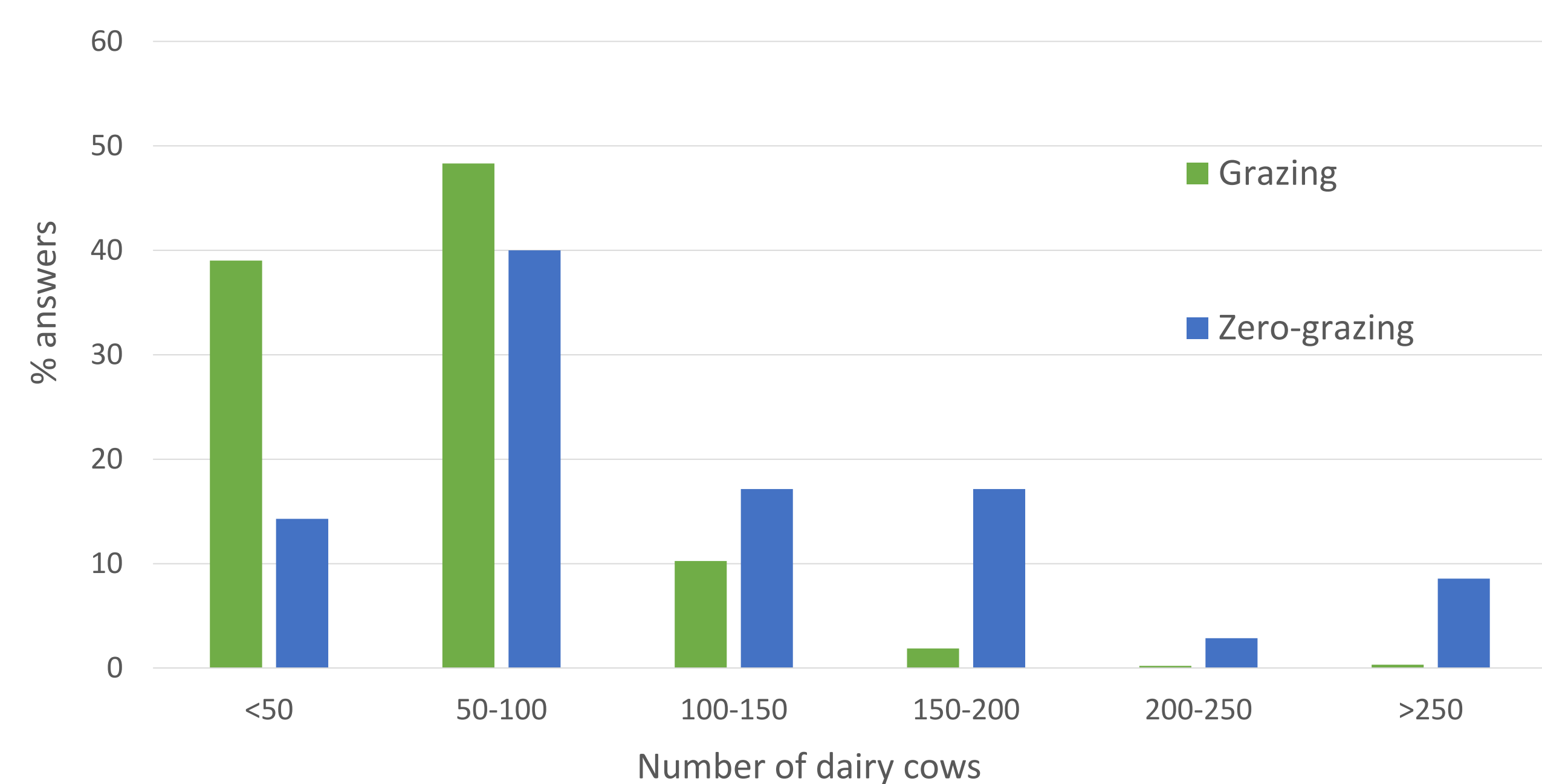


Comparison grazing - no grazing farms

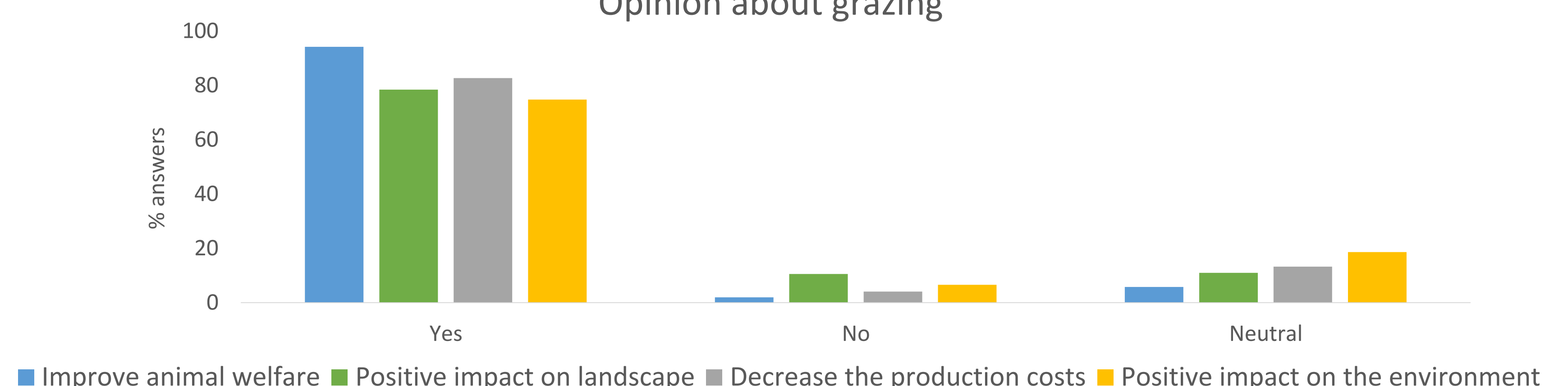
Surface of the farms: comparison of grazing and zero grazing farms



Number of dairy cows in grazing and zero grazing herds

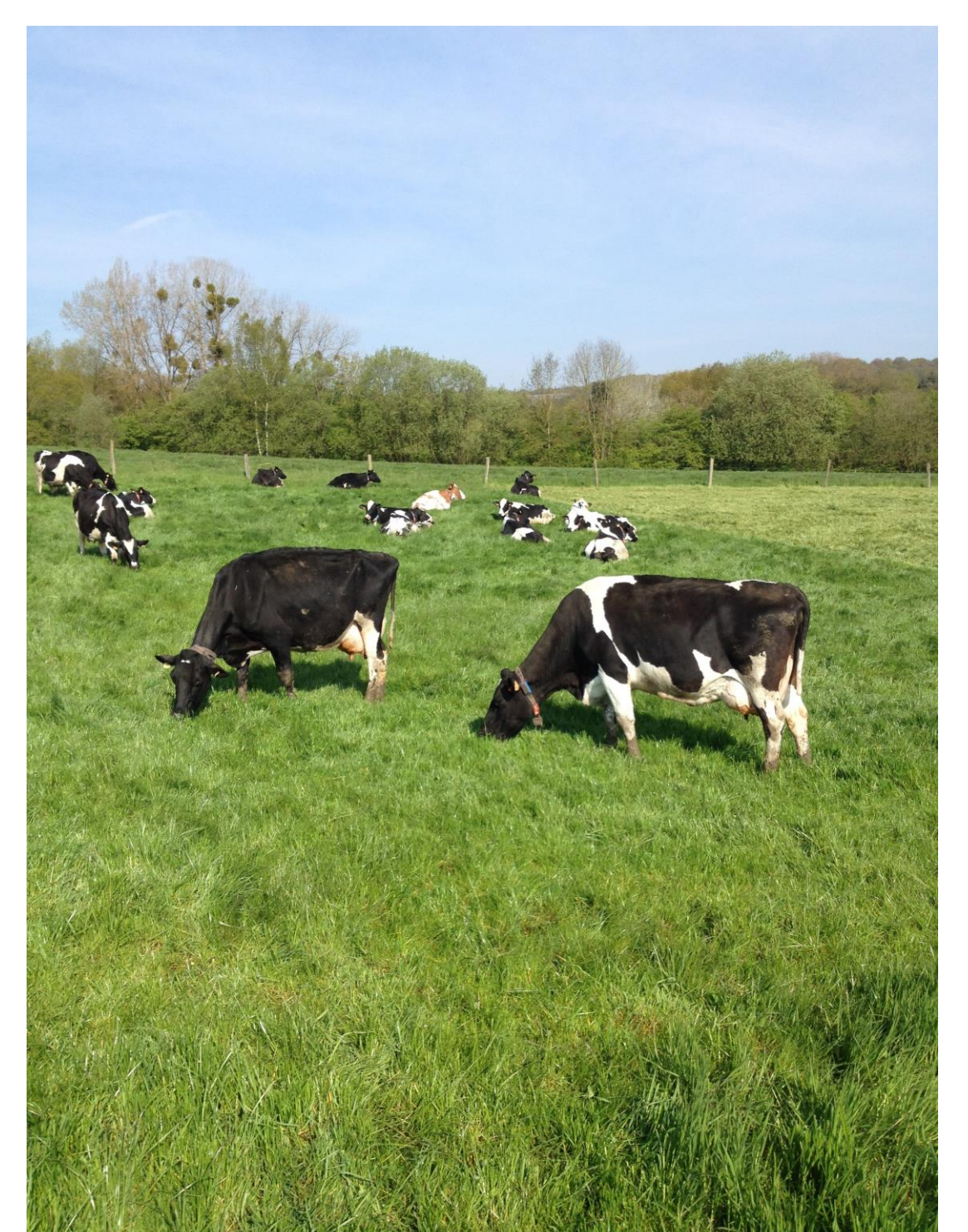


Opinion about grazing



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.