

**What is the life expectancy of a dairy cow?**

The average life span of dairy cows in the U.S. today is 4 to 6 years old, however with a natural life expectancy up to 15-20 years, it is not unheard of to find a 10 or 15 year old cow still milking on a dairy. Cows can leave the dairy in a few main ways – they pass away on the dairy or are humanely put down by a trained veterinarian due to illness or injury, or they are shipped from the dairy. Factors that can affect when a cow may be shipped off of a dairy farm include her level of milk production, whether she gets pregnant (she needs to get pregnant to make milk), and if she stays healthy and free from disease and illness. When a cow leaves the dairy she is usually shipped to slaughter for beef. Dairy producers are financially and emotionally invested in their animals and the decision to ship a cow is not taken lightly.

~ Lindsay Ferlito, Regional Dairy Specialist, NNY Regional Agriculture Program