



Rick, Mary and Alvern Poest

The Poests

MMPA's 2003 Top Quality Award Winners

How do you become MMPA's Top Quality Award Winner twice in three years? According to Alvern Poest, the key to consistently producing high quality milk is always having clean cows in a clean environment.

"Stall management is very important to keep the cows clean," Alvern advises. "You must have a clean and dry place for the cows to lay. If the stall is wet or dirty, the cows will not stay clean, which can cause SCC problems."

Alvern, a 35-year member of MMPA, farms with his wife, Mary, and their son Rick at Daisy-Row Dairy Farm in Zeeland. The Poests' 35-cow, registered Holstein dairy achieved the best milk quality records in 2003 of the nearly 1,900 farms belonging to MMPA.

To qualify for MMPA's prestigious Top Quality Award, a producer must meet MMPA's quality premium requirements for an entire year. The Poest's earned this year's award with quality averages of 1,083 raw bacteria count, a somatic cell count of 77,500 and a pre-incubated count of 1,917.

"It takes commitment by everyone on the farm to meet MMPA's quality premium levels every month of the year," says Gary Trimner, MMPA director of quality control and member services. "Being MMPA's top quality farm twice in the past three years proves the Poests' are doing all of the right things at the right time each and every day."

Since 1990, MMPA has recognized the farm that produces the highest quality milk for the year. This is the Poests' second time earning the top honor, having first received it in 2001. In addition to earning the top awards, the farm has received MMPA recognition for quality milk each year for the past nine years.

Achieving nine MMPA quality awards and two top quality awards in less than a decade does not happen by chance. The Poests' commitment to quality and strong work ethic help them to achieve these impressive results. They produce high quality milk every month of every year by paying attention to details and keeping their daily milking routines consistent by doing all the milkings themselves.

The farm's 32-stall tie-stall barn is a simple set-up that works well for the Poest family. Milk cows are housed full-time in the barn for most of the year. In the summer, they are turned out on pasture at night when the ground is dry.

"There is an area of dirt in the pasture that the cows like to lay on," Rick says. "We drag that area every third day so the sun dries out any bacteria in the soil. We believe it helps."

In the barn, tie-stalls are lined with rubber mats and bedded with chopped straw. Stall cleanliness is stressed at all times: they are cleaned in the morning and just after milking each cow to ensure she has a clean place to rest.

"Most of the time, our cows want to lay down when they are done milking so we make sure the stall is clean," Alvern says. "If the cow has leaked, we sweep it all up. The rubber mats sweep off really nice, then we sprinkle lime on the mat and put more straw down."

Before milking, all walkways are also cleaned, because according to Alvern, "you must have a clean work place to have clean milk."

The Poest's follow their milking routine the same way every day, milking the cows before 5 a.m. and at 4:30 p.m. They start by sanitizing the farm's four milking units in a bucket of chlorinated water. Gloves are worn during the entire udder preparation process. Any dirty cows are brushed off before pre-dipping teats with a one percent iodine/10 percent glycerin solution.

"We pre-dip two cows at a time," Alvern says. "The dip stays on the teat for about 30-45 seconds. It is really important that the teat is clean, sometimes we pre-dip twice to make sure it is very clean."

Teats are then stimulated and thoroughly wiped with a single-use paper towel. Rick checks any suspect quarters by pre-stripping into a strip cup or using a CMT paddle.

If no problems are found, the milker is attached. When a problem is found, a quarter milker is used. Dip in the teat dip cup is discarded after dipping any problem cow and fresh dip is used for the next cow.

When milk flow reduces to a certain level, the vacuum intensity of the DeLaval DV300 milking

unit reduces to a massaging function. Milkers are removed and teats are post-dipped with a different teat cup containing the same iodine/glycerin solution as the pre-dip.

DHIA and MMPA SCC reports are carefully monitored by Rick to find potential problem cows.

"With a herd that has such a low SCC, you can't really tell from feeling the quarter if there's a problem and that's why you have to use the CMT paddle," Alvern says. "Even the strip cup doesn't show the problems a CMT paddle does."

In the past, the Poests treated every cow with SCC problems, but found it to be ineffective in some cows. Today, they evaluate each cow on a case-by-case basis.

"Each case is different," Alvern says. "We definitely treat if a quarter is inflamed, swollen and hard. Cows that don't appear sick and don't have a big, hard, quarter – we let them work it out on their own." The cow is monitored with a CMT paddle at each milking and milked with a quarter milker until she has normal milk.

If they decide to treat a cow, she is treated with Pirsue in the

infected quarter and given inter-muscular antibiotics.

"If we use Pirsue, we use it four milkings in a row, something our vet recommended," Alvern says.

With such a low SCC, mastitis cases are uncommon in the Poest's herd. Only a couple mastitis cases occur each year and most are a result of teat injuries.

"About 90 percent of our problems come from teat injuries," Rick says. "Being in a tie-stall barn, we have more teat injuries."

The Poests' philosophy is that an injured teat is trouble and will cause more problems down the road. Their goal is to dry up the injured teat's quarter forever. "Somehow the cows always manage to injure their teats after we have found out they are pregnant," Rick jokes.

Dry cows are kept in one of five individual pens in the barn. The pens are bedded with chopped straw placed over kiln-dried wood shavings and cleaned daily.

All dry cows are treated at dry-off. Orbeseal is administered to cows with teats that have a

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The Poests keep everything consistent by following the same procedures at every milking. Clean cows and clean stalls are stressed at all times, and the Poests clip the cows' udders regularly. Disposable gloves are always worn during milking and teats are dipped (left photo) with a teat cup containing a one percent iodine/10 percent glycerin solution, which is left on for 30-45 seconds. Teats are wiped (middle photo) with a single service paper towel and the milker is attached. A CMT paddle (right photo) is used on all fresh cows and any suspects. With such a low herd SCC, the CMT paddle picks up problems that a strip cup doesn't.

In recent years, milk from distant markets has been qualified in our federal order to take advantage of the PPDs. Since this milk is pooled voluntarily, it can be depooled or disassociated from our federal order when the Class III price is higher than the blend price.

Liberal pooling provisions for distant milk allows such milk to ride the pool when beneficial and to disassociate when not. This is particularly troubling when significant volumes of distant milk are not needed to meet the fluid milk needs of our market. We believe the pooling and depooling provisions need to be addressed in a federal order hearing to provide for more orderly marketing of milk.

Why doesn't MMPA just depool?

MMPA has not supported depooling under normal market conditions because it can create inefficiencies in milk marketing. However, when other organizations and cheese manufacturing plants are allowed to retain the higher proceeds from Class III milk, MMPA must also consider depooling to keep our producer pay prices competitive under these market conditions. Accordingly, MMPA will depool its Class III milk as long as necessary to ensure our members receive their fair share of milk value in the marketplace.

What is MMPA doing to correct this situation?

MMPA is talking to other cooperatives and the Mideast Market Administrator for this federal order to develop recommendations for a federal order hearing to address the depooling and repooling issue.

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tendency to leak.

"Last year our vet, Robert Vlietstra, suggested we use the teat sealant," Alvern says. "We also dip teats with our regular teat dip once a day for about one week when they are first dried off. It helps to sanitize them and prevent bugs."

Rick uses the CMT paddle on all fresh cows to check for any problems. Their milk is kept out of the bulk tank for at least six milkings, depending on the cow. After the fifth or sixth milking, they are milked last in the milking string and their milk is put into a glass jar for visual evaluation. Low SCC milk with a yellowish cast is fed to the

calves. Mastitic milk is never fed to calves. The herd is tested yearly for Johne's Disease and is Johne's free.

In addition to producing top quality milk, the Poests maintain a closed herd and raise all of their own replacements and market registered Holstein heifers.

The Poests also have two married daughters who help out on the farm from time to time: Karen and her husband Keith Ykema, and Dawn and her husband Bob Brinks. Even the next generation likes to help out: granddaughters Courtney, 5 and Kaylie, 2 1/2, Ykema help Mary feed calves when they come to the farm.



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