

MMPA Members 'Got Quality'

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MMPPA members as a group produce some of the best quality milk in the country. Some may consider that a bold statement, but if you consider the facts, most MMPA members produce quality milk and some are truly outstanding in their efforts.

How Does MMPA Measure Milk Quality?

While many different standards are used to determine milk quality, somatic cell count (SCC) has become the gold standard measure of milk quality. While a low bulk tank SCC is a good indicator of mammary gland infection, it also has a strong correlation with other quality measurements such as Raw and PI bacteria counts. Each month, around 80 percent of MMPA members receive a quality premium because their Raw bacteria count is 10,000 or below and their PI bacteria count is 20,000 or below. More than 50 percent of MMPA members receive some level of premium for their SCC level from the SCC adjuster in the Federal Pricing formula and MMPA's SCC premium program.

Record Year for Quality Awards

Each year MMPA presents Bronze, Silver and Gold quality awards to members who have consistently achieved outstanding quality during the past fiscal year. The number of awards presented has steadily increased over the last 5 years with a record 360 quality awards being presented this year. The awards presented this year include 20 farms that achieved the quality criteria every month, and maintained an average SCC of 100,000 or less.

The January 10 issue of Hoard's Dairyman will announce the National Dairy Quality Awards winners. MMPA members will be very well represented in the list of winners in this national recognition

program, including the best of the best category (Platinum Award), where only five farms across the country are recognized.

How Do They Do It?

Have you ever wondered how these farms can maintain consistently excellent quality numbers? What sets them apart? What do they do differently that helps them produce such high quality milk month after month?

All dairy producers work hard to produce good quality milk, but several factors set this group of producers apart from their neighbors.

This summer, MMPA set out to determine what factors set the cream of the quality crop apart from other producers. In cooperation with student intern Erin Howard from the Michigan State University School of Veterinary Medicine, MMPA worked to identify common factors that make a difference in producing low SCC and superior quality milk.

Quality records for twelve months (April 2005 thru March 2006) were used to identify 50 of the lowest SCC farms. Over 80 percent of the farms agreed to participate in the study and partake in an in-depth interview with Erin that included her observation and evaluation of their milking procedures. Erin and several MMPA Member Representatives collected a huge volume of specific data detailing the practices used on each farm. That information is now being analyzed to determine which practices and factors contribute significantly to lower SCC levels and exceptional milk quality.

Common Factors

While it is too early to present specific conclusions at this time, there were some factors that were common on each of the farms interviewed. The most obvious factors were that the cows were clean, the housing was clean and dry and the

udder prep procedure was especially successful in getting every teat clean before the milking unit was attached. These factors may seem too simplistic to have major implications in the effort to achieve SCC levels below 100,000, but I assure you that these factors are where the quest for low SCC milk starts. Without addressing each of these factors, the pursuit to achieve SCC levels below 100,000 is difficult.

Consider the fact that bacteria that are not removed from the teat and teat end during the udder prep process have the opportunity to go directly into the milk or become pathogens that enter the mammary gland and cause mastitis. Clean cows have far fewer bacteria to remove from the teat tissue. Good udder prep is most effective in reducing bacteria numbers on clean cows.

An uninfected mammary gland produces milk that has a SCC level well under 100,000, so there is a great opportunity to improve milk income by lowering your SCC count. The udder prep procedure is the best line of defense against new infections in lactating cows.

Milker Training Schools – A Great Opportunity

Recognizing the value and importance of udder prep procedures in the quest for lower SCC levels, MMPA is again offering Milker Training Schools during February and March 2007. Whether you are a dairy farm owner who does all the milking or if you use hired labor, it is critical that whomever is milking the cows understand the importance of proper udder preparation. Attendance at the Milker Training Schools can provide you and your employees with valuable tools and techniques that may very well help your bottom line by bringing in additional income through quality premiums.