

Small Adjustments May Help Reduce Costs

By Dean Letter

Editor's Note: Following are small adjustments dairy farmers may make on their farm to cut costs while still maintaining milk quality. We plan to include similar information and articles in upcoming issues of the Michigan Milk Messenger.

Low milk prices have dairy producers sharpening their pencils in order to reduce input costs. Some of the little things that are done on the farm can have a significant impact on improving milk quality and increasing premiums while reducing costs.

Teat dip application: A missed opportunity for savings –

On many farms, more can be done to get the most out of teat dips. Many of the premium ready-to-use teat dips cost over \$10/gal. Large volume users may want to consider using concentrated teat dips, which could cut the cost of teat dips roughly in half. Regardless of the price of the teat dip, cost savings can be realized by correctly using teat dips.

Apply the teat dip to where it is intended, to the entire teat. Applying teat dip anywhere else such as the udder floor or the parlor floor is a waste of dip. There are three ways to get this done:

Sprayer – create a shield behind the teat to be sprayed with a gloved hand. The hand will collect the otherwise wasted dip and provides an opportunity to massage the dip into the cracks and crevices of the teat skin.

Dipper – use a two reservoir, non-return teat dipper. Fill the upper reservoir to apply dip to the entire length of the teat. Then massage the teat dip into the cracks and crevices of the teat skin with a gloved hand. Dippers with brushes along the rim save teat dip very effectively. However, they require additional maintenance and cleaning to assure that the brushes do not become laden with soil and bacteria.

Foamer – apply foam to the entire length of the teat. As with the dipper, massage the teat dip into the cracks and crevices of the teat skin with a gloved hand.

Note: massaging the teat dip into the skin tissue makes the teat dip more effective by getting the germicide in contact with the bacteria where they reside, in the cracks and crevices. Fewer bacteria equal fewer cases of mastitis. Fewer cases of mastitis are a benefit to the farm in many ways:

- Reduced cost of antibiotic use
- Reduced risk of antibiotic residue
- Less waste milk
- More milk can be offered for sale having a lower SCC which is eligible for additional premiums
- Reduced labor cost associated in dealing with treated animals

Parlor Maintenance

Shortcuts in parlor maintenance cost money in milking performance. While a producer may take the chance of reduced service intervals on some milking system parts and get away with it, other parts require routine checks and maintenance for them to perform at their best. Producers can complete some parlor maintenance on their own.

Vacuum regulator – most vacuum regulators should be cleaned at regular intervals (the manufacturer of one of the more common regulators recommends cleaning their regulator every 30 days). A dirty regulator can adversely affect milking system vacuum level and stability.

Short air tubes – replace these on a regular basis as well as when a hole is observed in them. Even a pin sized hole can negate the performance and milkability of even the most sophisticated electronic pulsators.

Vents (claw or inflation) – regularly check and clean the vents. Venting is required to effectively move the milk away from the teat end to the milk line or bucket. Consult your equipment service technician regarding the proper way

to clean the vents. Surge bucket milkers are an exception.

Inflations – change inflations at the prescribed interval. Worn inflations generally lose their tension, changing their milking characteristics. As a result, a producer may notice slower milkout and increased teat end trauma. If the cows seem to milk out more quickly with a new set of inflations, the old set may have been used too long. To help slow the aging process, sanitize the milking system just prior to milking, not one or two hours before milking.

Pulsators – should be checked by a knowledgeable service technician regularly (every six months, minimum for most systems). A dirty or malfunctioning pulsator can slow milking speed and contributed to teat end trauma. Installing a filtered air line keeps the pulsators much cleaner. If the long air tubes disconnect from the milk cluster and suck up some dirt, service the pulsator immediately.

Cleanliness

Equipment Sanitation – Most people cannot check the detergent, acid, or sanitizer strength of the various CIP cycles. However, they can contact the chemical supplier or their MMPA Member Representative when the chemical strength is in question. After consulting these people, producers can do some basic monitoring of their own:

Water temperature – hot water is one of the key components to most on-farm sanitation programs. It is one of the least expensive components as well. Checking the water temperature at least weekly can go a long way heading off the most common cause of CIP failures. Make sure the water temperature is correct for the cleaning products being used.

Chemical usage rates – chemical suppliers can provide information to provide the most cost effective wash. They can often suggest the most cost effective chemicals and usage rates for a particular situation so that chemicals are not over nor under used. Be sure that they are followed. Farms with automated chemical pumps should verify that the pumps are supplying the appropriate amount of chemical.

Regardless of the milk price, cows must be kept as clean as possible. The additional cost of labor and bedding costs are often negated through lower somatic cell counts, higher parlor throughput (cleaner cows are easier to clean and milk than dirtier cows), and animal comfort and well-being.

Milk Cooling

Milk should be cooled quickly. To help facilitate this, clean the condenser coils on the air cooled compressors. Dust collects on the coils over time reducing the efficiency of heat transfer. Optimize the use of pre-coolers because they are nearly always the most economical way to cool milk. The Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO) states, "Raw milk for pasteurization shall be cooled to 10°C (50°F) or less within four (4) hours or less, of the commencement of the first milking, and to 7°C (45°F) or less, within two (2) hours after the completion of milking. Provided, that the blend temperature after the first milking and subsequent milkings does not exceed 10°C (50°F)." Milk should be cooled and maintained at a lower temperature (36° to 38°F) to help keep pre-incubated bacteria (PIC) counts low.

Although farm milk receipts this year are roughly half of what they were last year, there are some relatively inexpensive things that can be done at the farm level to maintain the extraordinarily high milk quality that we, as a cooperative, have become accustomed to.



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