

Chronic mastitis: Use all tools for a healthier herd

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Chronic mastitis: It's a headache for every dairy. However, you have four tools to manage chronic mastitis infections:

- Individual cow Somatic Cell Counts (SCC)
- Milk culture results
- Culling
- Pharmaceuticals.

These tools aren't new, but methods for integrating information about your herd's mastitis status are giving you and your veterinarian more effective approaches to keeping your herd healthy.

First, determine if chronic infections are a problem in your herd. Top Northeast herds consistently have fewer than 6% of their cows carrying chronic mastitis infections. If more than 8% of your herd are chronically infected, you may benefit from an integrated response to chronic animals. (Figure 1)

You need individual-cow SCC to identify chronically infected animals. If a cow's SCC is greater

than 200,000, or Linear Score (LS) greater than 3.9, for two months in a row or two out of the last three months, she is chronically infected.

When it comes to culturing, the flow chart (Figure 2) can help you choose the best candidates. Once you prioritize the animals to culture, follow these steps:

- Take milk samples in small sterile vials following the correct procedure.
- If you're new to taking milk culture samples, contact Quality Milk Production Services (QMPS), your Dairy One technician or your veterinarian for directions on the best procedure.
- Freeze samples you can't culture immediately.
- Send samples with your Dairy One technician to its laboratory, to QMPS or to your veterinary clinic if it's using the "Culture Tracker" system.

The Culture Tracker involves software that will track each animal's culture results and then put them into your herd's Scout, Dairy Comp 305 or Dairy One Technician's Dairy Comp records via the Internet.

Once culture results are integrated with your cows' Scout or Dairy Comp 305 records, you can easily look up an individual animal, summarize how mastitis in your herd is changing and make the information available to your advisers.

There are several advantages to having an animal's production, reproduction and SCC history integrated with milk culture results. You can:

- Better make decisions for chronic cows.
- Devise treatment protocols for specific infections and implement them.

This will improve cure rates, decrease expenses by not treating animals unlikely to respond, and reduce the risk of having milk or meat residues by incorporating withhold dates directly into the cow card.

The flow chart summarizes the process for detecting chronic subclinical cows and treatment options. For animals more than 200 days in milk (DIM) and pregnant, early dry-off with the appropriate antibiotic is a good option to consider.

Mastitis is a headache for every dairy. However, by using all the tools available, you can construct logical and effective protocols to diagnose and resolve high bulk milk SCC.

Figure 1. Action triggers for mastitis cases

| | New | Chronic | Fresh |
|--------|------------|----------------|--------------|
| Top | ≤5% | ≤5% | ≤10% |
| OK | ~8% | ~8% | ~15% |
| Not OK | 10+% | 10+% | 20+% |

than 200,000, or Linear Score (LS) greater than 3.9, for two months in a row or two out of the last three months, she is chronically infected.

You can determine the percent of your herd chronically infected by using your DHI SCC summary report high SCC list and counting animals with a high count last month. Or calculate it with Dairy Comp.

If more than 8% of your herd is chronically infected, create a list of the animals to submit milk samples for culturing. Identify animals for this list from Dairy One SCC lists or your dairy software.

The High Linear Score report (DHI-241) makes it easy to select chronically infected animals. You can also prioritize animals to begin culturing based on their contributions to your bulk tank.

To cull or to culture

It's easy to decide whether to cull some chronically

