

Maryland has new tool to fight mastitis

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Mastitis is the most costly disease in the dairy industry. The National Mastitis Council estimates the economic loss is \$2 billion yearly. Maryland alone loses \$23.5 million per year.

The largest cost to the dairyman is in lost milk production, says Robert R. Peters, extension dairyman at the University of Maryland. He estimates that 10 to 15 percent of production potential is never achieved because of subclinical mastitis. This type of mastitis accounts for over 90 percent of mastitis cases.

Subclinical mastitis is practically impossible to diagnose without testing the cow's milk. The milk and udder of infected cows appear normal; therefore, dairymen assume these cows are healthy and producing at their highest.

The National Mastitis Council estimates that 40 to 50 percent of the cows in a typical herd are infected with mastitis. The average cow with subclinical mastitis produces 12.5 percent less milk, a \$294 loss per infected cow (using current milk prices of \$13.05/cwt and average milk production of 15,000 lb/cow/year). In a 40 cow herd, for example, the dairyman loses \$5,292 per year without realizing it.

Maryland Dairy Herd Improvement Corporation now offers a new option to assist dairymen in managing udder health. The somatic cell count program, Peters says, is designed to initially establish the extent of mastitis infections in a herd and later to serve as a constant monitor of each cow's udder health.

The program costs 12 cents per sample per month and has been operating in Maryland since October 1. A herd with 40 cows would pay \$19.20 per month to use the SCC program. This is a small amount when compared with the \$5,292 losses from subclinical mastitis, Peters says.

The SCC measures the number of body cells found in milk from individual cows. The two major types of somatic (body) cells found in milk are epithelial cells (sloughed secretory cells from the mammary gland) and leucocytes derived from blood. Leucocytes are present in milk to help the mammary gland fight against mastitis or other infection.

Normal milk contains less than 300,000 somatic cells per milliliter. If the udder is injured or infected, the somatic cell count increases dramatically.

A high SCC would indicate

that a problem has developed in the herd management. However, a particular SCC value will not identify the mastitis problem.

Peters recommends the following for a sound mastitis control program:

Proper installation, use and maintenance of milking equipment and at least an annual inspection by a qualified person.

Proper milking procedures including teat dipping with an effective teat dip.

Treating all quarters of all cows at drying off with an effective dry cow product based on bacterial sensitivity and culture results.

Good sanitation in the housing area of lactating and dry cows and also in the maternity area.

Culling any cow with a SCC of 1,000,000 or more throughout lactation if she does not respond to treatment.

Conducting a thorough check for subclinical mastitis before purchasing lactating cows.

Housing replacement heifers in individual pens or trying them during milk feeding to prevent the spread of mastitis-causing organisms to the immature mammary gland of the suckled heifer.

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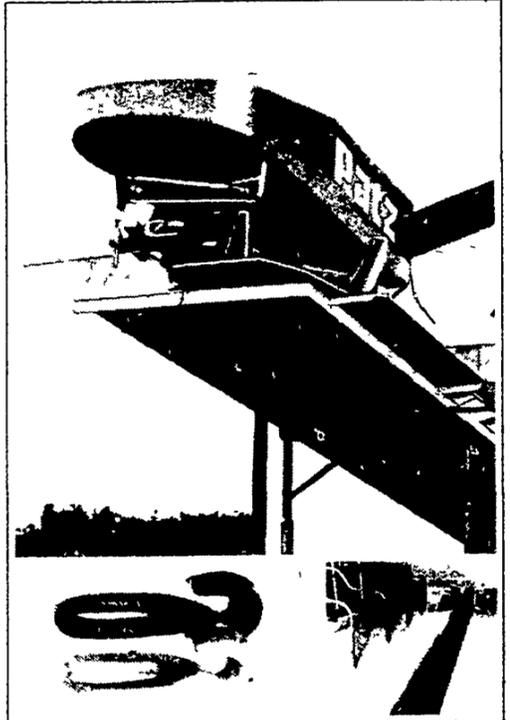
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