

# Mastitis - Sort out the priorities

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Why talk about mastitis? It's nothing new. It's been around as long as we've been milking cows — even when they were milked by hand. Machine milking has been blamed by some people for mastitis cases, sometimes with justification. But the problem predates the milking machine and occurs regardless of the brand of equipment or procedure used.

Mastitis occurs in other species — sheep, goats, sows, mares and even humans. Over the years, it's been treated in many ways. Yet despite all efforts, the problem is still with us, in every U.S. dairy herd as well as in those of other countries.

Antibiotics are our most potent weapon against mastitis. We've been using them for almost 40 years now, and still we have mastitis — chronic or acute or both, without let-up.

Are we wasting our time on present treatments? Are we pursuing the wrong priorities when we wait until the clinical stage to appear during lactation and then treat? Certainly, recent FDA regulations have added a new perspective to our efforts to cure mastitis. These regulations say:

**IF YOU TREAT,  
 DON'T SHIP!  
 IF YOU SHIP  
 DON'T TREAT!**

In other words, we must guard against treatment residues in milk and meat. These residues are not allowed to enter the market. The milk of treated cows must be discarded for 3 days at least, and carcasses of treated cows can't be sold for meat unless the animals were slaughtered at least 30 days after the last treatment. So, if a cow may be a cull candidate anyhow and is on the stand-by list for shipment, the FDA says, **DO NOT TREAT**, even if she has mastitis. Instead, ship her right away, while you can still get money for the meat.

By shipping residue-free cows, you're protecting future meat sales. You're also not wasting money on treatments which may have dubious results, and you're culling animals with a possible disposition toward mastitis — the most costly disease in dairying today. In the process, you may

even be selecting genetically against mastitis.

In other words, instead of investing in a battery of stand-by treatments for mastitis after it develops clinically in lactating cows, maybe it's time to tackle this disease from some other angles.

By now, dairy producers know plenty about mastitis from all the research and publications reaching our farms every day. We

know the names of the most prevalent microorganisms which cause mastitis. And we know that when we culture milk samples, we're going to find many pathogens, like *E. coli*, which penicillin won't kill.

Yet, without culturing milk samples, we can't be at all sure we're using the right antibiotic. We're only guessing — shooting in the dark.

Mastitis treatment failures usually are due to one or more of the following causes:

- \* Using the wrong antibiotic.
- \* Waiting too long before treatment.
- \* Using too low a dosage.
- \* Stopping treatment too soon.
- \* The presence of microorganisms resistant to treatment.
- \* Failure of treatment to reach

the walled-off site of infection.

- \* Chronic cases with poor recovery chances.
- \* Dirty cows which quickly become reinfected.
- \* Wet udders during milking which easily transmit infection.
- \* Careless or inexperienced milking procedures.

We also know from research that three-fourths of all mastitis cases, (Turn to Page C3)

## Hoe, hoe, hoe, Dave!



Renowned for its dairy and livestock production, Lancaster County is also the hub of modern scarecrow technology as evidenced by these two state-of-the-art examples to be found along Route 896 south of Strasburg.

Patrolling one truck patch, the scariest of scarecrows brandishes her long gun to keep birds at bay. A close look at her right shoulder, however, reveals that not all avian free-loaders are easily impressed.



Meanwhile, just a short jog up the road, a more traditionally frocked "woman behind the man" makes sure that Dave keeps the weeds at bay in the onion patch.

Clearly no laughing matter.

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