

Low Cell Counts Improve Bottom Line

JAYNE SEBRIGHT
Lancaster Farming Staff

MILLMONT (Union Co.) — Maintaining a low somatic cell count in their dairy herd has helped the Snyders of Millmont improve their bottom line.

Joseph, Sr. and Annette, along with two of their children, Joseph Jr. and Chris Snyder Kauffman, maintain a rolling somatic cell count of around 63,000. The 63-cow herd averages 23,181 pounds milk, 869 pounds fat, and 774 protein.

The Snyders have won many awards for their somatic cell count from the county and state Dairy Herd Improvement Association, along with their milk cooperative, Dairy Farmers of America.

According to Joseph Sr., getting the 55-cent bonus per hundredweight for keeping their cell count below 100,000 is an important part of the Snyder's overall business plan.

"If my cell count goes over 100,000, my bonus falls to 35 cents," said Snyder. "If my herd produces 100,000 pounds a month, that's \$220 in lost profits."

Keeping a low somatic cell count adds dollars to a producer's pocket by generating more than just bonuses. Research shows that lowering a herd's annual average somatic cell count in half can increase milk production as much as 400 pounds per year.

Closely Monitor Individual Cow Cell Counts

The Snyders rely on DHIA tests to closely monitor their somatic cell count. "When we get the DHIA paper, we look at the somatic cell report and find out what our cell count was for the month," said Snyder. "Then we flip it over, and if we don't have any cows with a linear score at four or higher, we know we did a good job."

In December, Snyder got his report back and realized that he had two high cell cows. The one cow's milk production dropped from 111 pounds in November to 78 pounds in December. So the first thing he noticed is that the high count robbed him of some milk production.

The Snyders immediately began treating both cows to eliminate the high somatic cell count. After treatment, the cows' linear scores dropped to less than 0.4 and their production rose to more than 100 pounds on January test.

Catch Mastitis Early

The Snyders rarely have to cull cows due to mastitis because they catch infections early. They strip the cows several times before each milking and use individual towels to dry the teats. They pre-dip and post-dip with a solution from ABS. When milking, the Snyders all wear latex gloves to prevent against spreading infections.

When they prep the cows for milking, they closely monitor the milk and the cow's udder for problems. If anything looks suspicious, they use the California Mastitis Test (CMT) paddle to find out if she has subclinical mastitis. If the cow has mastitis, they take a sample of the milk and freeze it. They hold her milk from the tank and start treating the mastitis.

If in two or three days, the mastitis isn't clearing up, the Snyders then take the frozen sample to their veterinarian to identify the infection and determine the most appropriate treatment. The Snyders normally treat their cows for about six days.



Stripping cows out several times before each milking is part of the Snyders' management practices to maintain low cell counts.

"I've found out in the past that if you treat the cow only three to four days and stop treatment once the milk looks cleared of the infection, then eight or nine days later by the time the cow's milk is good, the mastitis flares up again," said Snyder.

Use Preventative Measures

The Snyders feed their herd a total mixed ration of home grown forages, high moisture corn, cottonseed, soybean meal, and minerals. A well-balanced ration helps their herd produce quality milk and minimize high cell count problems.

The cows are treated with QuarterMaster when they're dried off. The Snyders also give the cows MuSe shots when they dry them off and when the cows freshen. They also administer J5 vaccine when they dry the cows off and as soon as the cows begin to show signs of freshening.

Keep Cows Clean And Dry

The Snyders' cows are kept in tie stalls. They are bedded with sawdust that is kept very dry and cleaned out several times a day.

When the cows are dried off, they kept on a bedded pack with clean, dry straw.

"Make sure your dry cows are kept on a good program," said Snyder. "Don't just put them out and forget about them. Keep the nutrition up to snuff and keep them clean and dry."

The Snyders also prevent mastitis by maintaining their milking equipment. "The milking system is checked out every six months," said Snyder. "And we change the inflations according to the manufacturer's recommendations."