



**FOCUS  
ON  
DAIRY**

**Penn State Cooperative Extension  
Capitol Region Dairy Team**

**AVOID MYCOPLASMA  
LIKE THE PLAGUE  
Dr. Arlen Mills  
Extension Veterinarian  
Capitol Region**

I received a call recently from a producer concerning a mastitis problem. He had been having an unusually high number of clinical mastitis cases that he thought were typical of coliform infections. Udders apparently fine at one milking would be hard with no milk at the next. These cases did not seem to respond to any of the drug treatments which had been tried.

On arriving at the farm to have a look, the producer also mentioned that he was having some calf problems. I walked out to the hutches to have a look at the calves first. Several calves had pneumonia, but I saw one calf with enlarged joints and one droopy ear. I then asked the producer if he had heard of Mycoplasma. He hadn't, but cultures confirmed that the mastitis in the cows and the calf problems were all caused by Mycoplasma infections.

Mycoplasma organisms are unique agents because they are bacteria-like but lack the cell wall that other bacteria have. Mycoplasma infections are nothing new to producers who raise poultry or hogs, but the strains that are being isolated from cattle are not coming from the other animal species.

Many producers bring the organism onto the farm by purchasing infected animals. This may be either from lactating animals that are shedding the infection in the milk or can also be brought onto the farm in the respiratory form as pneumonia.

The udder form is spread most effectively in the milking process from cow to cow. It can affect single or multiple quarters but often spreads quickly to any uninfected quarters.

There are several species of Mycoplasma, and some are much more likely to spread than others. Mycoplasma bovis seems to be a particularly nasty type, causing pneumonia, ear infections, reproductive infections, and mastitis.

Routine mastitis cultures will not detect the Mycoplasma organism. The lab must be told to culture specifically for Mycoplasma and, if it is cultured, be certain that the species is identified. The organism is slow growing, so reports will take several days longer than routine mastitis cultures.

There is no effective treatment for mastitis caused by Mycoplasma infections. Because it is so contagious, all infected cows



**Dr. Arlen Mills**

need to be found and isolated. Once Mycoplasma has been confirmed to be on a farm, all fresh cows should be cultured before being put in the milking string. All clinical mastitis cases should also be cultured to be sure that no mycoplasma infected cows are missed.

If only a few cows are infected, culling these cows is the safest strategy. Some cows may recover enough to again produce milk, but most of these cows continue to shed the organism. These cows can be a source of infection to start another outbreak. Herds with large numbers of infected cows will try to isolate these cows into a Mycoplasma group that is milked last, but this requires stringent routines to control the infections.

Infected calves which show infected joints or ear infections are also not responsive to treatment. Infections diagnosed early before they develop these signs may respond to an appropriate antibiotic. This may be tetracycline, Micolil, Nuflor, or Baytril. But there is still the chance that these heifers may continue to shed the disease and develop mastitis when they eventually freshen. They are a risk.

I used to think that Mycoplasma was a "California" disease. But no longer. I hear of new cases every week. Most new infections can be traced to the arrival of heifers or cows from off the farm. If you are anticipating buying lactating animals, require the herd of origin to be "bulk tank culture negative" for mycoplasma. Isolate all incoming stock from the herd for a minimum of three weeks and, if lactating, culture individual cows before they are allowed to enter the milking string.

This disease can be devastating, and the best way to combat it is to avoid it. Be on your guard.

**Lancaster Holstein To  
Tour Mifflin County**

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Lancaster Holstein Club plans a tour to Mifflin County on Tuesday, March 25.

The tour will leave the Lancaster Farm and Home Center, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster, at 7 a.m. Cost is \$20.

Tour members are encouraged to bring a lunch. Supper is sched-

uled at Stop 35 Restaurant.

Four stops include Paul Neer, Lynn Neer, Mel Peachey, Vernon Yoder, Mike and Bill Ammon, and Kish-View.

For more information and to sign up before March 20, contact Lowell Brubaker at (717) 653-2612 or Joe Wivell, (717) 426-1501.

**Spring Means Produce Auctions  
Open For Business**

EPHRATA (Lancaster Co.) — Now that spring is just around the corner, produce auctions will soon be under way.

Several auctions have announced their starting dates and times. Here is an alphabetical list of auctions and starting information.

- Buffalo Valley, Richfield. Begins April 15 at 10 a.m. Sales will include mostly flowers, including Easter, in addition to bedding plants.

- Cumberland Valley, Shippensburg. Sales begin March 25 with flowers at 9 a.m.

- Kirkwood Produce Auc-

tion, Kirkwood. Begins April 24, with sales on Thursday at 9 a.m. to start and then every Tuesday and Thursday until the season progresses.

- Kutztown Produce Auction, Kutztown. Begins March 25 and will be every Tuesday and Thursday at 9 a.m. A Saturday auction is at 9 a.m. Special nursery auctions will be March 27, April 10, April 24, May 8, May 22, and June 5.

- Lebanon Valley Produce Auction, Reistville. Begins with a shrub sale April 5 at 9:30 a.m. A special opening day is April 15 at 9:30 a.m. with flowers and early produce.

- Leola Produce, Leola. Sale begins March 20, 10 a.m.

- Shippensburg Produce Auction, Shippensburg. The auction has been open prior to Valentine's Day and offers produce all year. The auction is open Tuesdays at 9 a.m. until April, when days will expand as season progresses.

- Snyder's Produce Auction, Port Trevorton. Begins March 21 at 10:30 a.m. with produce.

- Weaverland Produce Auction, New Holland. Begins March 20 at 9 a.m., with mostly flowers. March 27 will begin nursery stock sales with sales every Thursday.

**Organic Dairy Meetings Set  
In New York State**

ITHACA, N.Y. — A series of three meetings on Organic Dairy Production will take place across New York State, sponsored by the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY) and Cornell Cooperative Extension.

The meetings are scheduled on March 20 at the Civil Defense Center in Bath, NY; April 8 at the Cooperative Extension Office in Watertown; and April 9 in Richfield Springs at the Tally Ho Restaurant.

Lisa McCrory, Dairy Technical Assistance Coordinator for NOFA-VT and staff person for the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance (NODPA), will be featured in the morning program of each event.

Ms. McCrory has extensive experience with organic dairy producers throughout the Northeast, and edits the NODPA Newsletter, which is sent to all organic dairy farmers in Maine, Vermont, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New York. She will provide valuable information on how the new Federal Organic Standards affect production practices and regional organic dairy market prospects.

In 1992 there was one certified organic dairy farm in New York State; now there are over 100. Dairy farmers are encouraged to visit NODPA's website at [www.nodpa.com](http://www.nodpa.com). NODPA's mission is "To enable organic family dairy farms, situated across an extensive area, to have informed discussion about matters critical to the well being of the organic dairy industry as a whole."

In the afternoon, panels of

New York or Pennsylvania organic dairy farmers will discuss issues of particular local and audience interest with plenty of time for questions and answers. Finally, researchers and educators from Cornell and NOFA-NY will solicit input on future research needs and educational efforts.

These meetings are primarily oriented toward existing organic dairy producers, but will cover much of interest to those seriously considering transition to organic practices. There will be a follow-up organic dairy meeting in each location next fall, which will focus on mastitis and herd

health management on organic dairy farms.

An attendance fee will be charged. Lunch will be provided. To pre-register and for more information and directions, please call (607) 664-2300 for the Bath meeting, (315) 788-8450 for the Watertown meeting, or (607) 334-5841 for the Richfield Springs meeting.

These meetings are funded in part by Cornell's Funding for Research in Organic Agriculture Program. For more information about many other small farm topics, visit the Small Farms Program WebSite at [www.smallfarms.cornell.edu](http://www.smallfarms.cornell.edu).

**USDA Reminds Producers  
Of March 17 Closing Date**

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) reminded farmers and ranchers interested in purchasing crop insurance that the closing date to participate and receive coverage is March 17.

"Last year's drought in various parts of the country is a vivid reminder why producers should use risk management tools such as crop insurance," said Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman. "This year's closing date is fast approaching and, we encourage interested farmers and ranchers who haven't done so yet to take advantage of these important resources."

To mitigate concerns about drought coverage, RMA encour-

ages producers to buy higher levels of crop insurance in 2003. "Many producers have better prevented planting coverage during drought than they realize," said RMA Administrator Ross J. Davidson Jr. "Crop insurance protection is a vital part of producers' risk management strategy."

Information regarding current coverage on prevented planting, agent locator assistance, as well as a list of the states and crops with a March 17 deadline is at <http://www.rma.usda.gov/>. Information is also available at local Farm Service Agency offices.

**State House Committee To Attend Senate  
Public Hearing On Dairy Proposal**

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Rep. Ray Bunt (R-Montgomery) announced members of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee will be attending a Senate hearing on March 19 in State College to receive testimony from parties affected by a proposal from the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board (PMMB) that would change the formula for distribution of premiums paid to dairy farmers.

"We appreciate the invitation from the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee to participate in this hearing on a com-

plicated and controversial proposal," Bunt said. "We must examine and research this proposal carefully before a decision is made."

The PMMB's proposal covers the "pooling" of the over-order premium paid to dairy farmers on drinking milk that is produced, processed, and sold in Pennsylvania. The hearing is being held to help the members of the House and Senate Committees, which are currently reviewing the regulation, better understand what the PMMB is proposing.

Since the premium's inception in 1998, roughly \$280 million has been distributed to members of the dairy industry. Bunt said these numbers make it especially important that the committees take their time with their decisions.

"This is a complicated and controversial matter within the dairy industry. The stakes are high," Bunt said. "We must proceed carefully and work hand-in-hand with those who this will directly affect — the dairy farmers."