Review Your Mastitis Control Program

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Several years ago the NMC (National Mastitis Council) developed a list of 10 steps to follow in a mastitis control program. That list was recently updated. As we start a new year, I believe it would be good for all dairy producers to review the list and compare their program with what mastitis researchers and educators are suggesting. The edited list follows. For a complete listing of the recommendations go the NMC website and look under the “Information and Resources” section (http://www.nmconline.org/).

1) **Establish Goals for Udder Health** – set realistic targets for average herd SCC and clinical mastitis rate – review your goals on a timely basis and prioritize management changes to achieve your goals

2) **Maintain a Clean, Dry, Comfortable Environment** – stall size, bedding management, housing and traffic area cleanliness, ventilation system, stocking density, environmental influences (heat stress, stray voltage, etc.), and keeping cows standing after milking are topics to consider under this category

3) **Follow Proper Milking Procedures** – examine foremilk for mastitis, apply pre-milking teat disinfectant, dry teats properly, wear clean gloves, attach teat cups squarely and level with the udder, adjust cluster during milking as needed, avoid machine stripping, apply teat disinfectant after teat cup removal, use teat dips that have been proven effective, teat dips are preferred to sprays, and milk cows infected with contagious mastitis last are topics to include in your program

4) **Maintain and Use Milking Equipment Properly** – install or upgrade equipment to standards, service and maintain equipment according to guidelines, replace wearable parts on a schedule as recommended or sooner if broken, sanitize equipment properly

5) **Keep Good Records** – keep thorough records of udder health treatments, use computerized or manual records of subclinical mastitis information (SCC data)

6) **Manage Clinical Mastitis During Lactation Appropriately** – establish a Herd Udder Health Advisory Team and then develop and follow a protocol for handling clinical mastitis cases (treatment methods, costs, drugs to use, etc, should be part of the plan the advisory team develops)

7) **Establish an Effective Dry Cow Management Program** – proper nutrition, dry treatment procedures, facility and environment management for maximum health benefits, the use of appropriate vaccinations, and cow cleanliness are points to include in an effective program

8) **Follow a Biosecurity Program Against Contagious Pathogens** – check cows for mastitis before purchase and then isolate purchased animals, market or segregate cows that are persistently inflected, check udder health status of first-calf heifers as this can have an effect on the herd’s status

9) **Monitor Udder Health Status Regularly** – use SCC information (either from a lab or cow-side test) to regularly monitor individual cow, group, and total herd udder health data, use the data to evaluate protocols, compare herd data with average data from regulatory or milk marketing organization
10) **Periodically Review Your Mastitis Control Program** – have your Herd Udder Health Advisory Team meet at regularly scheduled intervals to review the udder health status of your herd, and to adjust your mastitis control program as needed.

Comparing your mastitis management programs and procedures with those in the recommended list from the NMC, and then changing or improving your program as needed can lead to improved udder health, more milk and more profit from your herd. Don’t delay in talking with a knowledgeable advisor who can help you establish a Herd Udder Health Advisory Team for your herd.