What are the monthly and yearly trends in your herd’s somatic cell counts? As a producer, do you take the time to look at the data and strategize on how your management practices could be improved so the SCCs continue to decrease over time? I believe all dairy producers should be giving adequate attention to the SCC data they receive, and continually strive to produce higher quality milk.

It is an accepted fact that herd SCC values vary by region of the country. The weather conditions in the southeast/southern states make it more challenging to produce milk with a consistently low SCC than in most other regions of the country. And still, there are many herds in the southeast region that consistently produce milk of very high quality. There are herds in every southeast region state that produce very high quality milk with low SCCs. Here in North Carolina there are herds, both small and large (1,000+ cows), which have been producing milk with a SCC of under 200,000 as a yearly average for many years. For the last twelve years the North Carolina Dairy Producers Association has sponsored a quality milk producer award program which each year recognizes the top quality milk producing herds in the state. The award recipients have consistently had yearly herd SCC averages in the low 100,000s. For 2006 the top nine recipients (three in each of three herd size categories) all had yearly SCC averages between 107,000 and 172,000. Not bad for herds in a state that each year receives many months of humid and hot weather.

So, if some herds in the “challenging” southeast region can produce milk with very low SCCs, what do other dairy producers need to do to also be able to produce very high quality milk. I suggest that the basics of producing high quality milk need to be followed religiously. In a previous article I discussed those basic practices which have been established by the National Mastitis Council. I repeat them here for your review.

1) Establish Goals for the Udder Health Of Your Herd
2) Maintain a Clean, Dry, Comfortable Environment For Cows and Heifers
3) Follow Proper Milking Procedures
4) Maintain and Use Milking Equipment Properly
5) Keep Good Udder Health Treatment Records
6) Manage Clinical Mastitis During Lactation Appropriately for the Type of Mastitis
7) Establish an Effective Dry Cow Management Program
8) Follow a Biosecurity Program Against Contagious Pathogens
9) Monitor Udder Health Status Regularly
10) Periodically Review Your Mastitis Control Program With Competent Advisors

I believe that nearly all dairy producers can produce higher quality milk if they give adequate attention to the practices required to do so. Producers should establish a Herd Udder Health Advisory Team, and then implement the recommended programs that will lead to lower somatic cell counts, higher quality milk, improved udder health, more milk and more profit from you herd.