Here in the summer of 2008, dairy producers across the country are experiencing the highest prices ever for most of the feeds they purchase, for the fuel, energy and supplies required for producing crops and operating their dairies, and for the food and other personal items they must buy for their families. Profit margins are very slim, or nonexistent, for most dairy producers.

There are very good articles in farm magazines by respected nutritionists on how to reduce feed costs and use alternative feeds in order to realize more profit. Other articles and advice address cow management strategies to minimize milk production loss associated with summer heat and humidity stress, i.e. cooling cows, which can realize more income.

Another management practice that may be overlooked by advisors and producers that can realize more milk and profit in any economic environment is the practice of doing a consistent or perhaps better, job at preventing and controlling mastitis. There is no magic formula or product to give cows that will prevent or cure all mastitis. What producers must do is remember the “basics” of mastitis prevention and control, and keep implementing them even during times of economic stress.

I encourage producers to keep following the list of mastitis management practices that was developed several years ago by the NMC (National Mastitis Council). Those practices are: establish goals for udder health; maintain a clean, dry, comfortable environment; follow proper milking procedures; maintain and use milking equipment properly; keep good records; manage clinical mastitis during lactation appropriately; establish an effective dry cow mastitis management program (should also have a program for heifers); follow a biosecurity program against contagious pathogens; monitor udder health status regularly; periodically review your mastitis control program.

Producers should consult with their veterinarian or qualified advisor for specific advice on each of the 10 points, and for the latest recommended practices to minimize the impact of mastitis in their herd. By doing so, more milk and profit can be obtained from their cows, even during tough times.