Fall Mastitis Management Suggestions
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Fall is upon us and with it comes the challenge to dairy producers of keeping udder somatic cell counts (SCCs) and mastitis infection rates as low as possible. The hot and often humid weather that most herds have experienced for the past several months has perhaps weakened the cows’ immune systems to the point that the cows may now be more susceptible to bacteria and other pathogens invading the udder. Listed below are some suggestions of management practices that may help minimize the impact of fall weather on udder health. The list is by no means complete.

1. Continue to cool cows during the fall months when the daytime temperatures and humidity levels often continue to stress the cows. Remember, when the temperature humidity index (THI) is above about 72, cows will exhibit heat stress signs. And as the cows continue to be stressed, their immune systems are often weakened which can result in an increased incidence of udder infections and elevated SCCs.

2. Be sure the water mister and fan systems are operating correctly to maintain adequate cooling and ventilation of the cows. Installing cooling systems over resting and feeding areas in the housing barns, in the parlor holding pen and return alleys, and over the feeding area of dry cows can help keep cows cooler and improve their udder health and milk producing ability.

3. Continue to keep the bedding material clean, fresh and in an adequate amount to encourage the cows to use the stalls or pack area to lie on rather than stand in dirty, wet areas of the barn or lot. In extremely humid locations the bedding material may need to be changed more frequently.

4. If the humidity remains high and the dryness of the bedding material is a problem, consider adding a product that helps to regulate the pH of the bedding material to retard bacteria growth. Reducing the bacteria load that udders are exposed to can help reduce the udder infection rate. While some of the pH regulating products are expensive, they can be cost effective in herds with a serious udder infection problem that is associated with the bedding material.

5. Be sure that the post milking teat dip is applied evenly and correctly on all teats of every cow. Some producers have found a reduction in udder infection rate and SCC levels of lactating cows by using a barrier dip that is usually applied to dry cows. The longer lasting protection between milkings provided by a barrier dip may be helpful in herds exposed to high humidity and warm/hot daytime temperatures in the fall.

6. If a significant number of heifers are freshening with udder infections, try applying a barrier teat dip weekly for the last two weeks of pregnancy. Some trials have shown a beneficial effect of reducing the udder infection rate at parturition.

While we can’t control the weather, producers can use management practices that will minimize its effect on the udder health of their dairy cows. Seek the advice/suggestions of a competent consultant to help reduce the elevated udder infection rate and SCC levels that occur in many herds during the fall weather transition months.