Milk Quality - Who Is Responsible?
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Dairy producers, who is responsible for the quality of the milk being produced by your dairy? I would suggest that on every dairy farm there is a team of people who are responsible for producing quality milk. On smaller dairies the team is composed of just a few people, while on larger dairies many people are members of the team.

The people who milk the cows are key members of your team. They are expected to follow the milking routine established by you. That routine should include the practices of pre-dipping, stripping, drying the teats, making sure the teats and teat ends are clean, attaching and adjusting the milking unit properly, removing the units when each cow is milked out if automatic detachers are not used, post dipping every teat correctly, and maintaining a calm environment in the parlor. Additionally, the milking personnel are expected to be observant and identify cows whose udders show signs of impending clinical mastitis, as well as identifying cows having clinical mastitis, and to withhold milk from those cows from the bulk tank. The milking personnel on most dairies must communicate to other personnel the information about which cows have clinical or impending clinical mastitis so those animals can be treated or attended to. On most dairies the milking personnel are also responsible for operating the equipment for cleaning and sanitizing the milking system, as well as making sure the milk cooling system is operating properly. The milking personnel truly have a major role in affecting the quality of milk being produced and sold.

There are other personnel, however, who are also important members of your milk quality team. The people who are responsible for the cleanliness of the cow housing facilities have an important role in producing quality milk. Keeping the stalls or resting pack clean, dry and properly bedded helps keep the udders clean so only minimal cleaning is required at milking time. Likewise, keeping the alleys and walkways as clean as possible promotes for cleaner udders and better quality milk.

Dry cow caretakers are important team members. As with the milking cows, keeping clean and dry facilities for the dry cows is important. Observing the udders of dry cows for inflammations, especially during the first two and last two weeks of the dry period, is important in having cows freshen without clinical mastitis.

The people who care for the calves and heifers are also important team members. As with adult animals, keeping the facilities and bedding clean and dry, and observing for udder inflammations and infections are important steps in preventing mastitis in the animals while they are growing, as well as at calving time. Observing and handling calves/heifers who nurse one another is important in preventing future clinical mastitis problems.

The people who treat clinical mastitis cases are team members sometimes overlooked. Whether it be cows or heifers, using the proper medications, administering/infusing the medications properly, recording information about the treatments administered, and
noting the time period milk must be withheld are important steps in preventing milk residue accidents.

While all these personnel have important roles in producing quality milk, the owner/manager is the person ultimately responsible for the quality of milk produced by a dairy. The interviewing of prospective employees, development and implementation of job responsibilities and procedures, training and retraining of employees, conducting performance evaluations, providing the supplies and equipment required to perform jobs properly, having periodic milk quality team meetings to review the team’s performance in producing quality milk, and making the decisions and handling the responsibilities that only the owner/manager can perform or delegate are what really determines the quality of milk produced by a dairy.

I would encourage all dairy owners/managers to continually strive to improve their knowledge, skills, and personnel management ability so they can produce the highest quality milk possible. Attend educational programs and conferences, talk with knowledgeable consultants, read unbiased literature and materials, talk with other respected dairy producers who are successful, and visit dairies to learn how others are producing high quality milk. Doing all the things required to produce high quality milk can result in more profit for your dairy.