

6 Steps to Improve Milk Quality

IN THE LAST 50 YEARS, THERE HAVE BEEN NUMEROUS ADVANCEMENTS IN THE INDUSTRY THAT HAVE HELPED IMPROVE HERD HEALTH. BOVINE HEALTH IS CORRELATED WITH THE QUALITY OF MILK THE COW PRODUCES. LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT SOME IMPORTANT POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND FOR KEEPING COWS HEALTHY AND IMPROVING YOUR BOTTOM LINE TOO.

1



IT STARTS WITH A BALANCED DIET

Proper nutrition is imperative to maintaining bovine health. A missing piece in nutrition can greatly impact the immune system. More specifically, vitamin and mineral deficiencies can lead to bacterial infections (University of Arkansas Extension), while the supplementation of these vitamins and minerals can correlate with mammary gland health. According to Penn State Extension, research has shown that added selenium and vitamin E to stored forage diets can reduce mastitis.

2



MAINTAIN A TIDY BARN

Clean bedding is an important aspect of preventing mastitis. Floors should be cleaned and bedding changed regularly. The main types of bedding are straw and sand. Make sure the bedding is deep enough that the cow will not be injured or develop sores getting up and down in the stall.

When the barn is unusually wet, move the cows out to pasture to exercise on fresh ground. This activity is good for their overall health and it allows more time for the barn to dry out.

3



ADDITIONAL SUMMERTIME PRECAUTIONS

There are numerous challenges that are presented when the weather turns hot and humid. The extreme humidity in the air means surfaces will sweat and wet areas will take longer to dry. Warm wet areas are a breeding ground for bacteria and the heat only increases the chance of bacterial growth. The use of fans and/or open-sided barns will help dry out stalls (University of Minnesota Extension).

Flies are another area of concern during the summer months. Keep manure cleaned up in the barns, out of the cattle's area, and piled away from the barn. This will help keep the cows' feet, legs, and belly clean while reducing the presence of flies in the barn. There are many fly control options available. Consider your barn setup to determine which is best suited for your farm: fly trap bags, fly tape, back rubs, or insecticide spray.

4



SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE

University of Minnesota Extension recommends moving cattle slowly to minimize manure getting on feet and legs. Moving the cows slowly also reduces stress. DairyNZ explains that cows' heads should remain low when moving the herd. If their heads are up high, this means they are being pushed too much from the back. Ease up on the herd in order to minimize stress.

5



MONITOR STRAY VOLTAGE

Anxiety leads to challenges with milk letdown as well as other health concerns. This issue can also be experienced through stray voltage. This is when a cow touches two contact points of grounding at the same time (i.e. with front and back legs). Wisconsin Public Service notes that stray voltage is a likely occurrence on a farm. Extremely low levels are typically acceptable and tend to not affect behavior until stray voltage reaches 4–6 mA.

University of Arkansas Extension notes that stray voltage can cause production of epinephrine. The epinephrine prevents the release of oxytocin, which is needed for milk letdown. The failure of complete milk letdown will greatly increase the likelihood of mastitis. Have an expert conduct electrical testing on your farm to detect the level of stray voltage.

6



IF ALL ELSE FAILS

Some cows are genetically more susceptible to chronic mastitis and thus, regularly have a high somatic cell count (SCC). Others may not be receptive to antibiotics. These cows should be culled from the herd. The reasons for culling are two-fold: Culling prevents these chronically high SCC genetics from further reproducing into the herd and this will strategically lead to a reduction in the bulk tank SCC. A lower BTSCC, will lead to greater monetary incentive for you.

These preventative measures will help improve the long term overall health of your herd. For more details on improving herd SCC, please consult with your veterinarian.

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