



Dairy producers are vigilant about producing quality milk

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Editor's Note: This is a special feature from the Center for Dairy Excellence exclusively for the Farmshine newspaper.

The USDA recently announced new requirements for dairy products and dairy ingredients being exported from the U.S. to the 27 European Union countries. Basically, beginning Oct. 1, 2010, any dairy processor exporting to the European Union will need to certify that each farm supplying milk for those exports has a somatic cell count of below 400,000 and a standard plate count (bacteria) of below 100,000.

Currently the U.S. limit for somatic cells is 750,000. The EU established the 400,000 SCC requirement in the 1990s but allowed U.S. to meet the requirement with co-mingled loads. Recently they introduced the individual farm requirement, but only now notified the U.S. that they will begin enforcing it as of Oct. 1.

While the full impact of this decision is not yet known, it could have far reaching ramifications across the U.S., requiring all dairy farm families to be more vigilant in their milk quality protocols. Fortunately, Pennsylvania's dairy farm families are already working to improve milk quality.

According to the Pennsylvania Dairy Industry Performance Scorecard, published each month by

the center, Pennsylvania's dairy producers have improved our average somatic cell count by 2.9 percent over the past 12 months.

Pennsylvania's average somatic cell count for March was 261,000, with the rolling 12-month SCC average for the state currently at a three-year low. This is positive news for Pennsylvania's dairy industry and for individual producers, who open up new opportunities for increased production and added premiums with every drop in their SCC.

In this issue of the Farmshine center page, we showcase three dairy farms that excel in milk quality and share the farm families' perspectives on what producing excellent quality milk means for their dairy.



STAN AND CATHY GUEST Century Oak farm, Pottstown, Chester Co.

Stan and Cathy Guest milk 73 cows at Century Oak Farm, where they have a double-five parlor and freestall operation. Their rolling herd average is 23,655 lbs., and their somatic cell count is 120,668. They have won the quality award from Land O'Lakes for the past 10 years.

What influences milk quality: "Nothing goes into our milk tank that we wouldn't drink ourselves," says Cathy. "Basically that is the premise we work on."

"We try to be consistent and diligent in milking our cows — how we handle them and how they're prepped. We also try to be careful about choosing service sires that have low SCC scores and high udder confirmation scores. The most important thing for us is that the cows are clean and dry when the milkers go on."

Maintaining high milk quality: "We do regular maintenance on equipment, and we use our somatic cell report from DHIA to closely monitor subclinical cases of mastitis. We do use the CMT paddle to check quarters, both with cows showing signs of mastitis and with our fresh cows."

"We treat mastitis aggressively on our farm. We also use a Delvo test to test cows before they go back into the tank. And we keep a running log of the cows and quarters treated, what they were treated with, and when they were treated."

How has the program had value for you? "Besides being the right thing to do, quality premiums help the bottom line. Also, milk quality won't improve after it leaves the farm, so our goal is to produce the best quality milk for consumers."



BARRY & BARBARA HOSTETTER Valley River Holsteins, Annville, Lebanon Co.

Barry and Barbara Hostetter milk 65 cows in a tie-stall facility, where they have a rolling herd average of 24,300 lbs. and an average rolling somatic cell count of 79,000.

What influences milk quality: "For us, it is cow comfort, proper nutrition, and cleanliness," Barry says. "We have mattresses in our stalls, and the cows go out on pasture every day. We also have tunnel ventilation in our barn."

"We try to feed a properly balanced diet, and we switched to chelated minerals because I believe the cows get more out of it than regular minerals. We are pretty fussy about keeping cow beds clean, and we put lime down once a day with the shavings. We also clip udders at least twice a year."

Maintaining high milk quality: "We maintain our milking equipment and have it serviced regularly. We make sure we faithfully milk at 12-hour intervals. We use silicon inflations, and we make sure our cows are prepped properly and are clean. We strip, pre-dip, wipe, and post-dip after milking."

"We are also particular with our dry cows. We dry treat and make sure they have the proper vaccinations, including a J-5 shot and nine-way respiratory vaccination. We trim feet regularly because, if a cow is healthier on her feet, she is going to have a lower somatic cell count."

What is it worth? "Consumers buy our products, and higher quality milk gives them a longer shelf life. It tastes better, and it presents a better public image for our industry."

"I think you can lose a lot of milk if you have a high somatic cell count. All you're doing is spreading infections from one cow to the next."



SHANNON, BRENDA & AJ IRWIN Dairy Farmers, Centerville, Crawford County

Shannon and Brenda Irwin, with their son AJ, milk 115 cows in a freestall/milking parlor set up. Their dairy herd has a rolling herd average of 29,900 lbs. with a somatic cell count of 103,000.

What influences milk quality: "Three things that we believe influence our milk quality are using sand bedding, milking three times a day, and culling when necessary," says Brenda.

"We monitor our somatic cell counts, both through DHIA and visuals, and everyone is pretty vigilant about checking for mastitis. We treat the high somatic cell count cows longer before drying them off, and if that doesn't work, we will cull for high cell counts."

Maintaining high milk quality: "They sample our milk tank every day, and we call every three or four days to make sure we don't miss a flair up," says Brenda. "We also fore-strip our cows, and we pre and post-dip. We change our inflations at a set amount of milkings, and we clean the cows' beds three times a day."

"When we pre-dip our cows, we leave the dip on for contact time, and we use a one-step prepping procedure. We also use Orbeseal and J-5 vaccine at dry off. The Orbeseal isn't cheap, but we believe it is money well spent."

What is it worth? "Not only is it monetarily beneficial for farmers to produce quality milk, it is good for the industry," Brenda says. "Personally we believe maximum allowable US SCC and bacteria counts should be lower than they are now."

"For us, healthy udders make more milk easily. It is really all about vigilance."

