

Educational Tools for Dairy Workers for Identification and Treatment of Sick Dairy Cows

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Introduction

Maintaining good herd health is an ongoing problem in the dairy industry. Dairy cows are under physiologic stress due to the unique requirements necessary to maintain high volume milk production. As such, dairy cows are prone to illness and attention is needed to ensure they remain in good health. An unhealthy dairy herd causes daily economic losses to the dairy in the form of lower milk production, the cost of treating sick cows, the loss of herd numbers due to death, and the potential economic loss if a disease spreads within the herd. Keeping their cows as healthy as possible should be a main concern of the dairy producer.

There is no way to stop cows from ever getting sick, but we can work to better prevent illnesses from occurring and try to identify cows that are sick at an earlier stage of illness. Early diagnosis and prompt treatment of sick cows saves the producer money, and helps to ensure a better prognosis. Illnesses that are not treated right away will cost more to treat later when the illness is more severe and the likelihood of losing the cow altogether is increased. An effective illness management program for a dairy must include guidelines for workers to be able to identify sick animals, know when and how to treat them themselves and know when they need to call the veterinarian. This summer our goal was to create an easy to follow guide for the dairy worker to better enable them to identify sick cows, recognize the common illnesses seen in dairy cattle and how to give the proper treatments and know when this is appropriate.

Materials and Methods

To create a guide on dairy cow health for dairy workers, we first identified the most important features of dairy cow healthcare that we wanted to include in the guide. These included: How to differentiate a sick cow from a healthy cow, how to do a physical exam, disease information on the 16 most common ailments in dairy cows and how to recognize them, information on the different types of treatments and how to follow through with correct treatment procedures, including how to correctly give antibiotics and understanding the importance of following proper drug withdrawal times. We then researched the topics and wrote up instructional material to incorporate on an easy to follow CD that will include small video clips, pictures, and text. Our sources of information were current literature, established texts, credible web sites, onsite dairy visits, and CSU large animal clinicians.

Results

Material was created and compiled to create a CD to distribute to dairies as part of an illness management educational seminar program for dairy workers. These seminars will enable the dairy producer to implement better healthcare programs on his/her operation and have the educational materials to follow through with training after the seminar is over. It is our hope that this instructional guide will help dairy producers and their herdsmen to better understand the basics of dairy cow health, recognize the most common illnesses seen in dairy herds, be able to identify illness in their herds earlier and enable them to properly administer treatments according to good food safety practices. Our goal is to enable them to work more closely with their veterinarian to ensure their herd remains as healthy as possible.

