

WET WEATHER WOES

Colorado experienced record-shattering wet weather this spring. With the rain came the mud, the pools of standing water and an increase in mastitis of environmental origin on most dairy farms. To develop control measures that will better equip you to battle the infections resulting from wet weather, consider the following questions about your operation. The answers may provide solutions for your mastitis problems.

Did your herd experience an increase in clinical mastitis infections this spring and early summer?

Recording the number of cows in the sick pen, and the causes of their illnesses, each month provides an important baseline for your operation. Abnormal trends in your pen may tip you to early recognition of disease outbreaks. Under optimal conditions no more than 3% of your milking herd should develop clinical mastitis per month. (Cont. pg 2).

Has your bulk tank cell count risen as well this summer?

Not all environmental mastitis cases show clinical symptoms. Somatic cell counts are an excellent method for keeping track of the level of sub clinical mastitis. Bulk tank and DHI cell counts are commonly available. Tank counts should be under 200,000/ml, and 90% or more of your individual cows should have cell counts less than 250,000/ml.

What organisms were responsible for the mastitis outbreak on your farm?

Cultures are the only way to know. It is unnecessary to culture every cow with mastitis, but it is important to culture 5-10 in a row every couple of months to be sure that your treatment and control measures are appropriate. Increased mastitis in this year's wet weather was most commonly due to environmental organisms, but you cannot distinguish these from contagious pathogens without cultures. The cost of inappropriate treatment or management can easily cover the cost of the cultures. BULK TANK MILK should also be cultured, a service provided by WDCI.

Did your cows have a clean, dry place to lie down?

Probably not!! Although a clean dry lounging area was impossible to provide this spring on most dry lot dairies, here are a few suggestions that may minimize moisture build-up. Add bedding before and after a storm, and remove it afterwards; harrow corrals daily and keep alleyways scraped clean. Dairy farmers fortunate enough to have free stall barns must pay particular attention to daily maintenance of stalls and alleyways. During this dry weather it is important to fill or fence off low spots.

What are your premilking udder prep procedures?

If cows are entering the parlor with teats and udders covered with mud, it will be physically impossible to clean them properly. Installing a wash pen is one solution; hiring

an additional milker may also make a difference. Dry weather is an excellent time to reevaluate all aspects of your udder prep routine to ensure that teats are clean and dry when milking units are attached. If changes must be made and milkers retrained, the transition is easier when practicing on relatively clean cows.

Why do cows vaccinated with the J-5 vaccines still get coliform mastitis?

The J-5 vaccine does not prevent infections but does help cows combat the infection resulting in shorter and less severe clinical signs. The duration of immunity produced by the J-5 vaccines is fairly short. If average days in milk of acute mastitis cases on your farm is greater than 120 days, you should consider a booster dose at 90-100 days after calving to provide protection during this time.

What changes will you make before next spring?

It is reasonable to expect that this year's extreme weather will not be repeated soon, but we can expect increased moisture and environmental mastitis from time to time. Extraordinarily wet weather conditions of 1995 highlighted weaknesses of Colorado dairies. Certain changes can be instituted to prepare for excessive moisture. Choose your projects based on the magnitude of their expected benefit and the likelihood you can get them done.

Good Luck!

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