

## Udder Health/Milk Quality Concerns Milk Quality Report Cards IV: DHI Reports

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In this chapter in our continuing series on milk quality reports, I will discuss use and interpretation of individual cow somatic cell count (SCC) data for individual cows and as a herd management tool. This type of data is most commonly available to DHI members who have elected to have samples tested regularly for somatic cells. Herds not on DHI have at least two ways to obtain individual cow SCC reports: owners can collect samples on their own and submit them for testing by a DHI lab, or they can test cows themselves using the California Mastitis Test (CMT) at cowside.

### Use of SCC Data: Individual Cow Management

Cows with high SCC almost certainly have had an intramammary infection at some point; **HOWEVER** not all cows with high SCC have an infection at the present time, and not all cows with low SCC are free of infection. In an eradication program (i.e. to eliminate Mycoplasma or Strep. agalactiae from a herd) one should not rely on individual cow SCC to identify all actively infected cows. It is recommended that SCC be used only as a **screening test** in an ongoing control program in a herd **without** Mycoplasma or Strep. agalactiae. Cows with SCC above 400,000/ml (CMT score of 1 or greater using the scale of Negative, Trace, 1, 2, 3) should have samples collected for culture, and then managed according to the culture results. Decisions to cull a cow should be based on .....(Page, please fill in the blank!) As part of that decision making process, individual cow SCC can be followed over time to estimate the duration of a potentially chronic intramammary infection. (Help me this doesn't jive with what he said earlier?)

### Use of SCC Data: Herd Management Tool

For herd management, we look at averages or numbers of individual cow SCC's in different SCC categories or cow groups. The DHI Herd Summary has a very useful SCC summary. For a quick evaluation of herd udder health, we can look at the percent of the herd in the low SCC category (% L on the DHI sheet; should be greater than 90%) and at the average SCC for all cows (Avg SCC on the sheet; should be less than 200). If these parameters are abnormal, we can look at the average SCC's by lactation number and by days in milk, allowing us to identify problem areas or groups. At the bottom of the DHI Herd Summary, 12 months of data can be found (including % L and Avg SCC) to let us see whether any significant trends exist.

For non-DHI members, many of the on-farm herd management programs such as Dairy Comp and Dairy Decisions can generate similar reports. Private consultants are available who can test cows on a regular or as-needed basis and will provide SCC or CMT summaries. Microcomputer spreadsheets can be used to sort and summarize SCC data, but data such as lactation number and days in milk, as well as SCC, would need to be entered by hand or by computer transfer.