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Improve SCC to Boost Income

Milk prices are down across the country. One way to increase milk income is to capture more of the premiums many cooperatives are offering for low somatic cell count (SCC) milk. To capture those premiums, first implement the National Mastitis Council's five-point control plan of:

- Dip every teat of every cow after milking
- Dry cow treat every cow
- Practice proper pre-milking procedures
- Check for proper function and operation of milking equipment
- Treat clinical cases of mastitis with appropriate antibiotic therapy

Although these steps help reduce somatic cell counts to less than 400,000, greater reductions are possible. Researchers from the University of Minnesota, Cornell University and University of Prince Edward Island have reported that herds with somatic cell counts less than 150,000 have an attitude of "clean and accurate." Thus, attitude is a key component in improving milk quality. As a manager, you have to show your employees that you are dedicated to producing high quality milk and must work with your employees to set a somatic cell count goal for your herd.

Once a goal to improve milk quality is set, the goal must be shared by everyone from the manager to the milker and the consultants. The outside crew that maintains housing facilities must also share the vision. To reach the goal of reducing somatic cell counts consistent attention to detail is required. Although not in the original five-point program, the following practices can help reduce somatic cell counts as well:

- Remove udder hair
- Clean free stalls or areas cows lie regularly
- Check dry cows for clinical mastitis
- Provide clean calving pens
- Keep milk from fresh cows out of the bulk tank the prescribed amount of time
- Dip teats rather than spray
- Provide nutrient supplementation for springing heifers and dry cows
- Milk only dry, clean teats
- Culture clinical cases of mastitis
- Develop an inventory control system so critical supplies are available
- Train new employees and retrain current employees

To provide continual feedback to employees, post somatic cell counts with the goal marked so employees can monitor progress. Working together you can reduce somatic cell counts which can increase milk income.

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