

Review Your Milking Management Practices

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As a dairy herd manager, how well are you monitoring the job being done by the people who milk your cows? Do you check to see that they are following the milking routine you established for them to use? Do you have that routine and the other things the workers are supposed to do while milking cows written down? Do you train new milkers, and do you ever retrain workers who have been with you for sometime? I would guess that very few producers are doing all these things. However, research conducted at the University of Wisconsin by Dr. Pamela Ruegg, DVM, and her colleagues strongly suggests you should be.

Results from their study on 101 Wisconsin dairies using freestalls revealed that the combination of using a complete milking procedure, providing frequent milker training, and having and using a written milking routine protocol resulted in improved parlor throughput and a reduced number of new cases of mastitis when compared to herds that did not follow these procedures. A complete milking procedure was defined as a routine that included forestripping, predipping, drying before unit attachment, and post-dipping.

The use of the three practices independently had a significant impact on cow throughput rate and clinical mastitis cases. The number of cows milked per hour per operator increased by over 5 when a complete milking routine was used, and the monthly rate of clinical mastitis was cut in half (from about 10% to about 5%). The impact of milker training was also dramatic. Cow throughput rate increased to almost 50 per hour with frequent training versus only about 33 per hour with no training and about 41 per hour with training only at time of hiring. Clinical mastitis cases were reduced by about 50% with training versus no training. Following a written milking routine protocol also impacted performance greatly. Throughput rate was increased by about 12 cows per hour, and clinical mastitis cases were reduced by about 50%. Combining the practices resulted in the greatest improvement in parlor throughput rate, increasing from between 35-38 to 52 cows per hour.

So, the message from this study is that the people who are milking cows need to have a written milking routine protocol they can refer to and use, the workers need to be trained when hired and then receive periodic refresher training, and the milking routine they use needs to be a complete one (strip, predip, dry attach, post-dip). Cow udder health will improve and parlor throughput rate will increase when these procedures are followed. For more information on the Wisconsin study, contact their internet web site at <http://www.uwex.edu/milkquality> .

For additional recommendations on proper milking procedures to follow contact your Extension agent or specialist, veterinarian, milk handler/co-op field representative, or other competent consultant. The potential is there for greater profit from your dairy by improving your milking management practices.