

Milk Somatic Cell Count Levels Trend Downward
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How has your herd's monthly milk somatic cell count (SCC) values changed over the last few years? Have the values trended downward, upward, or stayed fairly flat? While there have most likely been seasonal changes, hopefully the overall trend has been downward.

Over the last 3 years the national SCC values reported by DHI show a gradual downward trend. For 2003, the average DHI herd SCC value was 319,000 cells/ml. The values have ranged from 304,000 to 322,000 between 1995 and 2002. The long term trend over these 8 years, however, has been for a yearly average increase of 1,700 cells/ml. Supporting the DHI SCC downward trend for the last 3 years is information from four federal marketing orders which produce about 46% of the milk produced in the U.S. The data from those marketing orders for 1997 through 2002 shows a downward trend from 331,000 to 320,000. These values were weighted for amount of milk produced by herd from the 50,000 herds included in the data set.

North Carolina DHI herds have also shown a general downward trend in SCC values from year to year since 1995. Values in 1995 showed monthly weather related fluctuations that ranged from a low of 341,000 to a high of 533,000. Monthly values in the intervening years until the present have continued to show weather related fluctuations. Values for 2004 have ranged from 334,000 to 367,000. While these values continue to be above national DHI and marketing order values, they show that our state's dairy producers are following the national downward trend and producing high quality milk for consumers.

So, how do your herd's SCC values compare with the state and national values stated above? How closely do you monitor and use the SCC information you receive from either DHI, or your milk handler, or the state health department? Do you make herd management decisions based upon the milk quality information you have available to you? As a dairy producer, if you are not using the SCC information you receive to improve the quality of milk you are producing and selling, I suspect you are not maximizing the economic potential from your herd.

I encourage all dairy producers to review their management practices that affect udder health and the quality of milk produced. Involve your veterinarian, extension person, milk handler field representative, and other qualified consultants in your review process. Develop a mastitis management program for your herd that will help you attain the goals you and your team of consultants establish. Your herd's profitability can be greatly affected.