

The Role of Somatic Cell Count Monitoring

Managing Fresh Heifers

The dairy heifer represents the future of every dairy herd and should contribute to the farm income upon freshening. Whether purchasing or raising your own, don't assume that your dairy heifers will freshen clear of an udder infection. Studies indicate that intramammary infection (IMI) (mastitis) in heifers is frequent; on average 50% of heifers have some type of IMI at freshening and up to 90% have been re-

Uninfected heifers should have a SCC less than 75,000 cells/mL one week after calving.

ported to have at least one infected quarter at calving.

Somatic cell counts (SCC)

are widely used as indicators of udder health within a herd and can be an effective tool in evaluating and improving herd management practices. The lower the somatic cell count, the healthier the udder and a higher quality and quantity of milk is produced.

Monitor the incidences of clinical mastitis in fresh heifers; if more than 10% of heifers per year have clinical mastitis within the first two weeks of lactation there is likely a problem with your mastitis management program.

Somatic cell counts should be one of the management tool used in evaluating fresh heifer udder health. Conducting *cow-side somatic cell tests* can help you to identify milk quality trends in specific cows in a timely fashion.

- Collect quarter samples for SCC from all heifers 3 to 6 days after freshening.
- Monitor SCC regularly during the first few weeks postpartum.
- SCC's are a useful tool for monitoring the success of mastitis therapy.
- Heifers with SCC greater than

200,000cells/ml should be cultured to identify infectious organism.

- Heifers from herds with a high prevalence of contagious mastitis will likely be infected with contagious pathogens.
- Heifers from herds with a high prevalence of environmental pathogens (clinical mastitis) will likely be infected with coagulase negative staphylococci (CNS) and/or environmental streptococci.
- Heifers from herds with a high SCC tend to calf with a higher incidence of mastitis.

Pre-Calving Heifer Mastitis Management Considerations

- Reduce exposure to environmental pathogens
- Segregate bred heifers from dry cows
- Treat prior to freshening (consult with veterinarian)

- Barrier teat dips/sealants
- Mastitis vaccination program
- Somatic cell monitoring post calving

By regularly monitoring and lowering your herds somatic cell count; milk production will increase and so will your profits.

Heifer IMI may persist for long periods of time, cause elevated SCC and may impair mammary development adversely affecting milk production over subsequent lactations.

Monitoring individual and bulk tank somatic cell counts is an important part of a sound mastitis control program