

AS SEEN IN



# CLEANING UP – DOWN ON THE FARM

Got milk? Most of us do. But chances are you haven't given much thought to the laundering process on dairy farms. That process, however, can affect milk quality, and in turn, affect the end users and dairy suppliers.

Milk quality is evaluated based on the number of somatic cells, or white blood cells, present in milk, according to Dr. Mike Maroney, University of Wisconsin Extension milk quality veterinarian. Dairies with low SCC, he says, not only produce more milk per cow than dairies with higher counts, they enjoy larger monetary returns, or premiums, from milk processors. "Quality premiums increase the price the farmer is paid for their product," says Maroney. "Milk with lower SCC has been shown to yield more cheese."



Three Wisconsin dairies who recently installed on-premise Continental washer-extractors to clean the cloth towels used to prepare cow udders for milking believe that their new equipment may also help reduce cases of mastitis and correlate to decreased bacterial and somatic cell counts (SCC.) In return, they enjoy higher milk-processor incentives.

## REDUCING CELL COUNT; INCREASING PREMIUMS

Pond Hill Dairy, a 700-head operation in Ft. Atkinson, Wis., maintains an average SCC of 160,000, which generates premiums of up to \$10,000 per month, according to owner, Keith Moritz. They typically wash over 2000 towels a day. At Holsum

Dairy in Hilbert, Wis., premiums are even larger. The 3,400-head operation produces cell counts as low as 175,000. This generates monetary returns of up to \$20,000 per month, according to veterinarian and owner Dr. Kenn Buelow. Such incentives provide a significant boost to any dairy's bottom line.

In order to qualify for such premiums, Moritz and Buelow turn out SCC well below the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulatory limit of 750,000 and Wisconsin's average SCC of around 300,000.

"Having clean teats correlates directly with mammary health and low somatic cell counts," adds Buelow. He should know. The veterinarian spent 13 years making house calls to dairies throughout Minnesota, New Mexico, Colorado, Indiana and Texas, prior to establishing Holsum Dairy two years ago. Holsum Dairy processes approximately 9,000 towels a day in their Continental front loader and Huebsch 90 lb. dryer.

#### **PROPER PREPARATION USING CLEAN, ABSORBENT, REUSABLE TOWELS**

Proper preparation of the udder and teats is key to achieving lower SCC, according to Moritz and Buelow. And, they agree, using absorbent towels that have been properly cleaned helps ensure this success.

Dairy owner Dan Natzke milks 1,200 cows each day at Wayside Dairy in Wayside, Wis. He believes cloth is a better alternative to paper. "Paper towels cost too much because you use them once and throw them away," he says. "It's less expensive to wash and reuse cloth towels than it is to purchase and dispose of paper towels."

More importantly, Moritz, Buelow and Natzke

believe cloth is a more effective way to prepare the udder, especially when the towels have been thoroughly cleaned. The only trick to using cloth, however, is ensuring it is properly cleaned after each use.

#### **TOPLOAD WASHERS CAN'T HANDLE THE LOAD**

Before tripling the size of his dairy two years ago—from 400 to 1,200 cows—Natzke used a topload washer to clean dairy towels. It took 80 minutes to wash and dry a load of 100 towels. Now, with the new 55-pound capacity Continental washer-extractor and 75-pound dryer, it takes half the time to complete a load triple that size.

"On a dairy, there is too much dirt, sand and bedding for household washers," Natzke says. "They aren't strong enough. I wouldn't even consider a topload now. Larger dairies need a strong machine that can handle the load."

Machine ease of use is also critical in dairy laundries since more than one person typically handles the towels. And at most dairy laundries, employees who milk the cows also handle washroom duties. "The learning curve to operate the machine is very quick," says Moritz of his 30-pound washer-extractor. "You just touch a button and go." This is important, he says, since most of



his milkers are Hispanic and speak little English.

By carefully selecting laundry equipment to properly clean the cloth towels used to prepare cow udders for milking, Buelow, Moritz and Natzke feel they are not only helping to reduce cases of mastitis and ensure the production of higher quality milk – the dairies have reduced water, gas utilities and chemical usage.