

Slaying the mastitis monster with automated dipping and flushing

Expanding herd size can bring challenges with mastitis management, as **Aly Balsom** reports

A gold-standard parlour routine, milking a high cell count group and installing an automatic dipping and flushing (ADF) system have all helped control the contagious mastitis "monster" at Richard Fair's Cheshire farm.

Having developed a greenfield site in 2005 and quickly expanded the herd from 350 to 500 cows, Mr Fair describes how cell counts shot through the roof and chronic cases became too much.

"At one stage 60% of the herd had chronic mastitis and cell counts were in the high 300,000 cells a ml, meaning we were receiving penalties on the milk cheque," he says.

"It would be fair to say as we expanded, the management of the cows wasn't quite as on the ball as it could have been.

"There are a number of reasons why it may have got so bad - it may have been the way we treated cows, or we could have brought it in when we combined our existing herd with two other herds and a few odds and sods."

After individual cow milk testing identified *Staph aureus* as the main mastitis-causing pathogen, vet Bill May of Lambert, Leonard and May worked with Mr Fair and his nephew Peter Cope, to formulate a "toolbox" to help rectify the problem.



Automatic dipping and flushing systems can be one part of an overall strategy to control contagious mastitis.

Mr May explains how the main aim was to slow down the rate of new infections, rather than try and increase cure rates through antibiotic use.

"At the time, sub-clinical and clinical cows were being treated with intramammary tubes or injectable antibiotics," he says. "This wasn't curing the cows, it was just managing bulk somatic cell counts in the short-term without solving the problem."

Because incidence was so high, there was no option to cull their way out of the problem. Consequently, advice included ensuring a "gold-standard" milking routine and forming a high cell count group.

Mr Fair says the biggest thing was setting up a high cell count group for cows with two readings of more

RICHARD FAIR AND PETER COPE'S TOP TIPS FOR MASTITIS CONTROL

MILK RECORD

- * It is crucial to understand individual cow cell counts and which are chronic animals
- * You can't get mastitis under control without milk recording

USE ALL THE TOOLS AVAILABLE

- * ADF is one tool in the mastitis toolkit - it isn't a shortcut
- * Parlour routine, good hygiene and staff training are important

MAINTAIN ADF EQUIPMENT

- * ADF only works if used correctly

- * Set aside a day every week to check every cluster
- * Maintain equipment well

BENCHMARK

- * Take advantage of benchmarking tools to see how you perform against others
- * Recording gives you a heads-up before a problem escalates

GET GOOD ADVICE

- * Tackling mastitis is a team effort including those working with the cows and the vet

than 200,000 cells a ml.

"These cows were milked last and, to start with we were manually spraying the clusters with peracetic acid between cows in the high cell count group," he explains.

Mr Fair then decided to look at putting in an ADF system to help manage infection rates.

"When we installed ADF two years ago, we initially didn't have a high cell count group. However, because of the size of the monster we had, it was too much for the ADF, so we reinstated the group. By reducing the challenge, it allowed the ADF to work to its optimum."

Parlour routine ensures cows are pre-wiped with an individual medicated wipe, then fore-milked and cupped on. Attention is paid to hygiene during fore-milking as this is when infection risk is high.

The ADF system automatically applies dip to the teats through the

cluster post-milking. Every liner is then disinfected and rinsed with water so the unit is thoroughly cleaned before using on the next cow.

"Eighteen months ago we had counts of 360,000-370,000 cells a ml and now we've reached our initial target of below 250,000 cells a ml," explains Mr Fair.

"The number of chronic cases has also dropped to 18-20% of the herd since installing the ADF." aly.balsom@rbi.co.uk



Chronic mastitis cases dropped from 60% of the herd to 18% since getting on top of new infection rates, say Richard Fair (left) and Peter Cope (right).

Find out more about mastitis and parlour options at the Livestock 2012 event, NEC

Birmingham, 4 and 5 September. For more information go to www.fwi.co.uk/livestock2012

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