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## Food Quality from the Farm Side

Most people can't remember when the last gallon of milk went bad. They probably can't even tell you what brand of milk is in the fridge. They do know the color of the cap, which indicates if is 1 percent or 2 percent or fat free. They probably took a glance at the date to use by stamp at the store when they bought it.

Dairy producers are doing something right. A recent study presented in September, 2011 at the 3rd International Symposium on Mastitis and Milk Quality, show a lower bulk tank somatic cell counts which indicate the number of white blood cells (primarily macrophages and leukocytes), secretory cells, and squamous cells per milliliter of raw milk and is used as a measure of milk quality and as indicators of overall udder health. The milk-weighted geometric mean bulk tank somatic cell count was 295,000 cells/ml in 1997 and was 224,000 cells/ml in 2010, representing a 24% decrease.

Good news atop a high quality standard for milk in the American market. Reducing somatic cell counts in milk is can not be achieved by drug or antibiotic use. The overall management and health of the dairy cows is the key to improving milk quality. There are 25 listed practices including cow comfort, facility management, milking procedures, milk handling, etc. Of course health and animal health have a part also. Medication treatment options are a last resort for dairy producers. Any cows with routine need for treatments are not going to be profitable producing cows and are generally replaced in the herd in short order.

Automatic take-offs and parlor sanitation have also decreased SCC. Even summer variations, when higher temperatures and humidity increase stress on cows and provide conditions more favorable for bacterial growth, have also decreased over the years that were monitored. Dairy farmers and dairy markets have a powerful testing protocol in place to ensure that milk producers containing and antibiotic residues in the milk do not enter the market place. The dairy operator has instant loss of income and market until it can be proven the milk on hand is safe to ship.

It is interesting that increasing rules placed on livestock operations regarding quality standards and environmental management force them to become larger and more management intensive. This also creates the niche for unique operations which use organic standards or natural marketing options. Small unique operations sell the alternative idea or a vision to customers who have an interest. I have sometimes heard these operations go far afield to criticize commercial operations, when in fact the concept of a large commercial operation is what fuels the niche the small unique operation lives and markets in. I personally think there is room for both and creating dissension between them is counter productive to both sides of the issue. The important thing is milk quality, calcium, protein and vitamin D&E in our daily diet.

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