

## Mastitis survey reveals key causal factors and possible solutions

# Knowledge is power

A national mastitis survey – the largest of its type – was carried out by Intervet Schering Plough earlier this year. And the results are in! We asked a vet to help us interpret some of the data and to share a few interesting – and surprising – findings.

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**W**ith more than 1,300 producer respondents – milking 22,000 cows between them – the results of the Cobactan National Mastitis Survey have served to highlight the importance of milking routine, hygiene and grouping cows when tackling and preventing mastitis. The survey – the largest of its kind – was carried out by Intervet Schering Plough to find out more about how this costly and damaging disease is affecting UK farms and what steps producers are taking on farm to treat and control it. The information gathered should also, ultimately, help producers to improve mastitis control in their herds. Although some of the survey's findings were not surprising – such as a trend for larger herds to have a higher incidence of mastitis per 100 cows – the data provides an interesting and useful window into UK units and milking parlours, according to vet Andrew Biggs, from the Tiverton-based Vale Vet Group, who analysed the results.

### Melting pot

“Bigger herds can mean more mastitis – so maybe no surprises there,” says Mr Biggs. “Increased time pressure on staff plays a role here and there's also a bigger ‘melting pot’ for infection.” There was also a trend for larger

herds to see a higher somatic cell count and the survey also revealed that 75% of all mastitis cases reported by producers occurred within the first 100 days of calving.

“Again, this is what we expected to see as a result of things like the negative energy balance and increased stress on the cow at this time. And we also know that a lot of mastitis can be picked up during the dry period, which would also show up in early lactation.”

### Dry period

Mr Biggs says that there's a lesson here: “Pay more attention to udder health and the cow in general during the dry period and in early lactation if you want to reduce the incidence of mastitis.” Milking routine and grouping cows according to somatic cell count were just two of several other areas highlighted in the survey that have key roles to play in preventing mastitis.

One of the most surprising findings is that 5% of respondents omit post milking disinfection from their routine. It was less surprising that this group had, on average, a 6.5% higher cell count than those that did.

Mr Biggs stressed that, in addition to using a teat disinfectant after milking, keeping cows standing for 30 minutes after milking was also essential to prevent infection from entering the udder.

“The teat canal remains open for some



Andy Biggs: “Attention to dry cow and early lactation management will help prevent mastitis”

time after milking and, even with post milking teat disinfection, there's still a risk of picking up infection from bedding and yards.

“Ideally cows should be going to feed immediately after milking and they should also be returning to scraped, clean yards and passageways. That's very important.”

The survey also showed that although more than 50% of respondents foremilk, more than half of these producers were not using any form of teat preparation disinfectant to reduce the potential spread of infection.

“Even those that wash and dry will reduce that risk, but a fifth did nothing other than foremilk before applying the clusters.”

Mr Biggs was encouraged by data that showed that more than a third of respondents were using cluster disinfection to help stop the spread of mastitis from infected cows to other cows within the herd. “It's more common place than we anticipated with several adopting automated systems either in parlours or robots.”

He was also pleased to see that some

*Surprise finding: 5% of respondents omit post milking disinfection from their parlour routine*





*A true picture: the survey has given a real insight into how mastitis is being managed and prevented in UK herds*

#### Survey facts

Herds surveyed:	1,322
Total number of cows:	22,000
Average herd size:	165 cows
Average milk yield	7,750 litres

#### Parlour routine facts

(herds that add to their milking routine)

Cluster disinfection:	33%
Foremilking:	50%
Post dipping:	95%
Foremilking alone:	20%

herds are running separate high-SCC groups. "And, not surprisingly, those producers that run these groups tended to have higher cell count herds.

Managing separate groups can be difficult, whether cows are housed during the winter or out at grass. And how useful this approach is depends on the level of SCC."

If your herd's SCC is really high then running a 'dirty' group can be useful and it can be more useful than disinfecting clusters after each cow is milked in these situations.

"It goes a long way towards avoiding the risk of spreading mastitis from cow to cow."

However Mr Biggs favours running a 'clean' group – cows with individual SCCs of below 150,000cells/ml and up to 200,000cells/ml. "This protects a group of clean cows and can still offer advantages to herds, even if they have a relatively low bulk SCC."

#### Liner life

Staying with clusters, the survey also revealed how often liners should be changed. "More than 90% should be changing liners twice a year and about 25% of respondents should be doing it every three months.

"Often producers forget that if their herd gets bigger then liners will need replacing more often unless, of course, they expand their parlour due to increased herd size in relation to their parlour," says Mr Biggs.

"The information we've gathered from the survey certainly highlights areas where producers 'could do better' as well as aspects of mastitis prevention and treatment where producers are excelling. And further analysis and research should help producers to control mastitis more effectively on their units in future. So watch this space," he adds. |