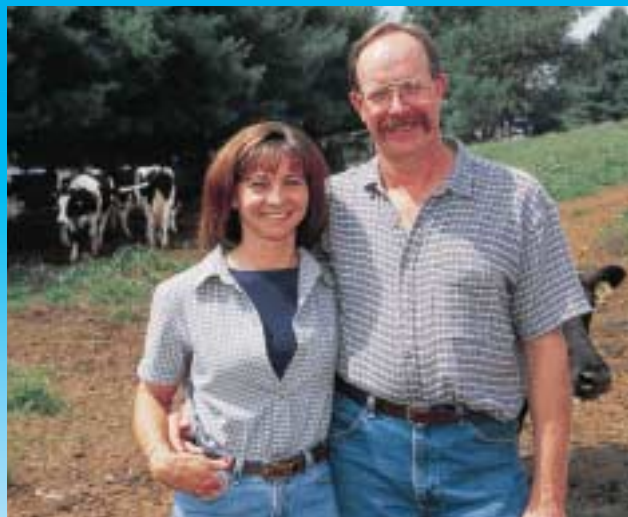


Patience, Patience, Patience



Patience is more than a virtue at the Johnny and Jeanie Crater Dairy near Woodlawn, Va. It's also the pathway to an impressive track record for producing high-quality milk.

During one recent 12-month time frame, somatic cell counts for the Craters' 30-cow Holstein herd averaged 116,000. Their highest count during that time was 188,000; their lowest was just 26,000.

"You have to take your time and pay attention to every detail," says Jeanie. "You have to keep the cows clean, use good milking procedures and keep your equipment clean and in good repair. Getting in a rush and trying to cut corners leads to problems."

Start with a look at this husband-and-wife team's milking procedures. Cows enter the milk barn three at a time. Two go to one side of the facility, one to the other side. The milker—Johnny or Jeanie on alternate days—starts by touching each teat and knocking any loose dirt off. Next, the milker forestrips each teat. "It's about three or four squirts," says Jeanie. "If something

doesn't feel normal, we strip into a teat cup with a screen on it and see if there are any lumps or flakes."

If there's a fair amount of dirt on the teats, the milker will wash it off with sanitized water, then dry with a cloth towel. "We keep the cows on pasture with lots of tall grass," says Jeanie. "So they usually come in fairly clean and we can just wipe with the towel. Johnny clips hair on the udders regularly and that also helps."

The milker then waits 10 to 15 seconds before attaching the milking unit. "With only three cows in here at a time, it's pretty easy to watch them to make sure that we don't overmilk," says Jeanie. "That's one of the worst things you can do. It causes a lot of stress that the cow just doesn't need."

After the machines come off, teats are dipped with an iodine dip. When they exit the barn, cows enter a lot where there's fresh feed and water waiting for them.

Keeping mastitis in check is another major piece in the Craters' overall qual-

"You have to keep the cows clean, use good milking procedures and keep equipment clean and in good repair," says Jeanie Crater, who dairies with husband Johnny.

ity effort. Forestripping is their first line of defense. "If something is pretty evident, we'll dump the milk and treat with an antibiotic," says Jeanie. "If it's more questionable, we'll ask our fieldman to culture her so we can see what kind of mastitis strain we're dealing with, then ask for his ideas on treatment."

Internet technology is also helping the Craters track herd performance. "We can log on and get pretty up-to-date information on protein, butterfat and somatic cell counts. If we see a jump in cell counts, we can go back and look to see which fresh cows have just come back into the barn. That's usually where the problem is."

The Craters have put strict protocols in place to ensure that milk from treated cows stays out of the milk supply. They use a bright orange paint stick to mark the legs of any cows being treated. They also write the ID number of each treated cow on the barn calendar and on a message board in the barn. They go one milking beyond label before putting milk from a treated cow back into the bulk tank. "If we have any questions at all, we'll ask the fieldman to run a test," notes Jeanie. "You just can't take any chances."

Gary Ashford, field representative for Dairy Farmers of America, has definitely been impressed with the Craters' approach to milk quality. "Working with the Craters is a real pleasure," says Ashford. "They strive to produce top quality milk. Their somatic cell count stays under 100,000 most of the year and has never been above 200,000."

SOUTHEAST REGIONAL WINNER

Crater's Dairy
Owners/managers: Johnny and Jeanie Crater

Location: Woodlawn, Virginia

Nominated by: Gary Ashford, Dairy Farmers of America

Herd size: 30

Production: 22,875 lb. (2X)

Somatic Cell Count

(Avg. 12 months): 116,000

Somatic Cell Count (Low): 26,000

Somatic Cell Count (High): 188,000

Mastitis cases (12 months): 8

SOUTHEAST MERIT WINNER

Green Hills Dairy LLC
Owners/managers: David and Kenneth Hooley

Location: Amelia, Virginia

Nominated by: Dale Gardner, Virginia State Dairymen's Association

Herd size: 140

Production: 22,182 lb. (2X)

Somatic Cell Count

(Avg. 12 months): 159,000

Somatic Cell Count (Low): <100,000

Somatic Cell Count (High): 250,000

Mastitis cases (12 months): 5