

Midwest



MIDWEST REGIONAL WINNER Meekhof Dairy

Owners/Managers: Ken and Ruby Meekhof
Location: McBain, Michigan
Nominated by: Gary Koester, DVM,
Airport Animal Clinic, Cadillac, Michigan,
and Ron Bazuin, Dairy Farmers of America
Herd Size: 155 cows
Production: 25,966 lb. milk (2X)
Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12-month): 53,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 36,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 65,000
Clinical Mastitis Cases (12 months): 14

The Meekhof tradition of dairy excellence is made possible by family teamwork. Shown left to right, Rebecca, her fiancé Rob Bright, Deborah, Ken and Ruby, Sarah and Emily.

Encore, and then some

If dairy producers Ken and Ruby Meekhof aren't careful, they'll have to take some time out of an already extremely hectic schedule to build a new display case just for the awards they've compiled in the National Dairy Quality Awards Program over the last five years.

After capturing first place nationally in the 1998 awards program, this husband-and-wife dairying team from McBain, Mich., followed up a year later with a top-spot finish in the Midwest Region. Last year, they repeated as national winners. This year, they're No. 1 in the Midwest Region again.

Impressive, yes. But don't get the idea that accolades and awards have much, if anything, to do with the couple's ongoing efforts to produce a quality milk product.

"Consumers want and expect quality," says Ken. "Our job is to make sure that quality is what they get."

The Meekhofs deliver on that score. Consider this string of impressive numbers from one recent 12-month period: An average somatic cell count of 53,000 cells/ml (with a one-month low of 36,000), an average standard plate count of 1,333 and an average pre-incubation count of 1,917. Production average for the 155-cow Holstein herd was 25,966 lb. milk, with 813 lb. protein and 1,139 lb. fat.

Ken and Ruby are quick to point to a family teamwork approach as a critical element in their success. The couple's four daughters (Rebecca, Sarah, Deborah and Emily), Ken's dad, Don, and herdsman Rob Bright (Rebecca's fiancé) all strive to carry out the dairy's quality mission.

Some of the basics emphasized by the Meekhofs:

■ **Milking procedures.** As cows enter the double-eight herringbone parlor, one of the two milkers (usually Rebecca and Rob) hand-brush udders to remove any sand, dirt or manure. That's followed up with an iodine predip (complete coverage is emphasized for both pre- and postdipping) and drying with an individual paper towel.

If a cow comes in extremely dirty, milkers will use some water before applying the predip. "When we have to use it, we stress getting the entire udder dry before applying the predip. Otherwise water from higher up can run down onto the teats when we attach the milking unit," says Ken.

■ **Freestall care.** Don Meekhof rakes and levels the sand-bedded stalls and scrapes traffic alleys during each milking. "Sand is a real key," says Ken. "It's easy to keep dry, and bacteria just don't grow in sand."

■ **Mastitis control.** The Meekhofs rely on monthly SCC reports from DHIA to identify potential problem cows. Cows with high counts are forestripped for signs of clinical mastitis. If the forestripping reveals anything suspicious, the milk is cultured before treatment is implemented.

■ **Parlor hygiene—equipment maintenance.** The Meekhofs have their milk hauler draw additional bacteria samples several times each week. If they see counts rising, they immediately check out the potential cause—soap levels, water hardness, and so on. They also pay a local milking equipment dealer to do a complete system check each year.

"The Meekhofs are an example of excellent management leading to tremendous results," says veterinarian Gary Koester, of Airport Animal Clinic in Cadillac, Mich. "They deserve to be recognized for all they've accomplished."

MIDWEST REGIONAL MERIT WINNERS

Ran-Rose Dairy Farm

Owners/Managers: Randall and Rosalie Geiger
Location: Reedsville, Wisconsin
Nominated by: Scott Gunderson, Extension Agent,
University of Wisconsin, Manitowoc, Wisconsin
Herd Size: 65 cows
Production: 24,277 lb. milk (2X)
Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12-month): 64,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 18,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 119,000
Clinical Mastitis Cases (12 months): 2

Uhlenhopp Dairy

Owners/Managers: Phillip and Carol Uhlenhopp
Location: Sumner, Iowa
Nominated by: Jim Kuennen, Field Representative,
Associated Milk Producers Inc., Arlington, Iowa
Herd Size: 40 cows
Production: 23,521 lb. milk (2X)
Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12-month): 64,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 39,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 83,000
Clinical Mastitis Cases (12 months): 2