

MIDWEST

Milking a better paycheck

Michigan dairy producer Dave Smith has a very simple reason for wanting to produce milk of the highest quality. “It pays,” says Smith, spokesman for a family management team that also includes his parents, Valmond and Esther, and his brother, Doug.

“When you keep quality at the forefront, your cows are healthier and they make more milk,” says Dave. “You don’t spend as much money for drugs, and you get a quality premium from your handler. In our case, it adds up to almost \$1/cwt. That’s worth striving for. The bottom line is that you can’t do anything to control the price of milk. But you can control milk quality.”

Attention to detail governs the Smiths’ approach to quality milk production. In the double-10 herringbone milking parlor, the emphasis is on a consistent routine. As cows enter the parlor for milking, teats are sprayed, then dipped with iodine.

Each quarter is hand stripped—to promote let down and to check for signs of mastitis—then dried with an individual towel before the machines are hung. “We try to keep the udder as dry as possible,” Dave notes. “We don’t want any of the water running down and getting into the cup.” When



The Smiths, (left to right) Valmond, Doug, Dave, Esther and Kevin, all believe that by working for a better quality product they receive higher returns.

the cows are milked out, teats are dipped again with iodine.

Dave and Doug do most of the milking. Family members pitch in as needed. The crew includes Dave’s wife, Beverly, and children Jennifer, Brad, Mandy and Jason, and Doug’s wife, Linda, and children Elizabeth, Stephanie, Scott, Kevin and Sara. “We try to do everything the same way each milking,” says Dave.

In the 125-cow freestall barn, the Smiths focus on cow cleanliness and comfort. Sand is used to bed the stalls. “Years ago, we used sawdust for bedding,” says Dave. “But we think sand is a definite improvement. You don’t have as many organisms growing in it. On the downside, we can have a little trouble with sand clogging up our manure-handling system. But that’s a trade-off we’re willing to make to keep the number of mastitis cases down.”

To keep stalls clean, the Smiths shovel debris off the alley curb each time cows are brought up for milking. Once every two to three weeks, they refill the stalls with fresh sand. They also scrape alleyways twice a day.

Dry-cow treatment—every quarter, every cow—is a major part of their mastitis-control effort. “If it’s not cleaned up at dryoff, it’s tough to get rid of mastitis,” says Dave.

For heifers, the Smiths use an *E. coli* vaccine. It’s administered three to four weeks prior to calving and then again right before freshening. “We think it has made a difference,” says Dave.

During the lactation, the Smiths rely on visual inspection—forestripping and weigh jars—during milking to spot clinical signs of mastitis. They also use monthly DHIA somatic cell count reports to get a jump on subclinical cases. “You can have some high-SCC cows that don’t show any clinical signs,” says Dave. “The information from DHIA is often the only way you can spot a potential problem.”

When they must treat for mastitis, the Smiths go all out to ensure that no antibiotics end up in the bulk tank. When a cow is treated, her udder is marked with Blue Kote. All treated cows are milked last and milk is dumped into the manure pit. Before any treated cows are allowed to return to the milk string, they must pass muster on a Delvo test.

“That gives us four checkpoints to make sure that nothing ends up in the tank that shouldn’t be in there,” says Dave. “It’s something that you just can’t afford to mess with.”

The Smiths’ efforts have impressed Don Kloska, a field representative for their co-operative, Dairy Farmers of America. “The Smiths do an excellent, consistent job of quality control,” Kloska says. “They never let up on good, sound dairying practices.”

MIDWEST REGIONAL WINNER

Smith Dairy Farm, Inc.

Owners/Managers: Valmond and Esther Smith

Location: Fremont, Michigan

Nominated by: Donald Kloska,

Dairy Farmers of America

Herd size: 180 cows

Production: 22,808 lb. (2X)

Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12 mos.): 71,000

Somatic Cell Count (Low): 50,000

Mastitis cases (12 months): 8

Antibiotic residue violations: 0

MIDWEST MERIT WINNER

Eberhardt Dairy

Owners/Managers: Robert and Pat Eberhardt

Location: Whitelaw, Wisconsin

Nominated by: Roger Hallberg, Land O’Lakes

Herd size: 62 cows

Production: 19,917 lb. (2X)

Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12 mos.): 74,000

Somatic Cell Count (Low): 45,000

Mastitis cases (12 months): 8

Antibiotic residue violations: 0