

Familiar faces



Dean and Patti Tohl, of Chasin' Rainbows Dairy in Tillamook, Ore., are no strangers to top honors in the National Dairy Quality Awards Program. This husband-and-wife team captured first place in the under-100-cows category in 1997.

This year, the Tohls are back on top as West Regional Winner and overall National Winner with another impressive string of quality-related numbers. During one recent 12-month period, somatic cell count (SCC) for their combined 105-cow Jersey-Holstein herd averaged 69,000 cells/ml. Both the pre-incubation count and standard plate count averaged 1,000.

Production for the 50 Holsteins in the herd averaged 30,470 lb. milk with 962 lb. protein and 1,145 lb. fat on 2X milking. For the Jerseys, production averaged 20,702 lb. milk with 771 lb. protein and 989 lb. fat.

Not all that surprisingly, the Tohls have made relatively few changes since their last trip to the winner's circle. They still emphasize paying attention to detail and a comprehensive approach to management as the surest pathway to producing quality milk.

"There are no shortcuts or magic formulas," says Dean. "It's all the little things you do time after time."

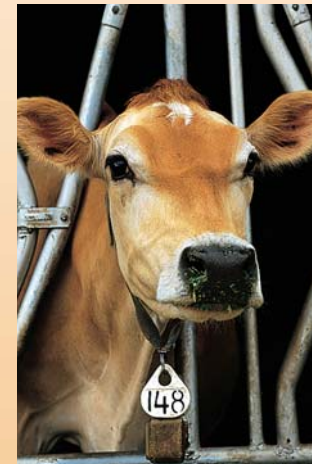
Adds Patti: "It all works together. You can't do things well in one area and not do them well in another. You have to stay on top of everything."

Patti and Dean Tohl, Tillamook, Ore., agree that there are no shortcuts to quality milk. "You just have to stay on top of everything," says Patti.

Milking procedure is where the Tohls sweat the details. Patti and Dean do all of the milking at Chasin' Rainbows. Wiping cows with individual paper towels, forestripping, dipping with iodine and postdipping are procedural mainstays.

NATIONAL AND WEST REGIONAL WINNER Chasin' Rainbows Dairy

Owners/Managers: Dean and Patti Tohl
Location: Tillamook, Oregon
Nominated by: Bryan Gibson, Field Representative, Tillamook County Creamery Association, Tillamook, Oregon
Herd Size: 105 cows
Production Holsteins: 30,470 lb. (2X)
Production Jerseys: 20,702 lb. (2X)
Somatic Cell Count(Avg. 12-month): 69,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 48,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 84,000
Clinical Mastitis Cases (12 months): 15



Everyone at Chasin' Rainbow works to keep cows clean, dry, healthy and comfortable.

They also wear gloves for all milkings. "The cracks in your hands can carry bacteria that get spread from cow to cow when you're wiping off dip with a towel or when you're forestripping," says Patti.

The Tohls are also sticklers for keeping their milking equipment in tip-top working order. They contract with a local service to perform a regular system check—air controllers, filters, vacuum reserve, and so on. The service also changes liners in the milking machines on a regular basis. Cost for the service works out to about \$600 annually.

"If your equipment isn't working properly, your cows won't get milked properly," says Dean.

Freestall care is another emphasis area. When cows leave the barn for milking, Dean rakes and levels stalls and scrapes alleys with a skid steer and blade.

Stalls are rebedded with shavings once a month during the summer (when cows spend most of their time on pasture), about twice a month during the rainy winters. "Keeping cows clean, dry and comfortable makes your work in the parlor so much easier," says Dean.

For mastitis control, the Tohls rely on DHI somatic cell count records and visual inspections during milking as first lines of defense. If the Tohls detect a problem during milking—an enlarged quarter or garget in the milk—they immediately run a California Mastitis Test (CMT).

The Tohls also do CMTs on all cows at dryoff and at the first milking after freshening. "It's a lot easier to treat a cow that's subclinical at freshening than it is to treat her when she's 60 to 90 days into the lactation and milking at her peak," says Dean.

"At peak, she's under more stress. And whatever bug you're dealing with has more of a chance to embed itself in the tissue of the udder. That makes it tougher for whatever drug you're using to do its job," he says.

WEST REGIONAL MERIT WINNERS

CW Dairy, Inc.
Owner/Manager: Craig Westover
Location: Lewiston, Utah
Nominated by: Lindsey Dimond, Field Representative, Dairy Farmers of America, Grace, Idaho
Herd Size: 99 cows
Production: 24,468 lb. milk (2X)
Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12-month): 139,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 104,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 159,000
Clinical Mastitis Cases (12 months): 5

Boschma Living Trust
Owner/Manager: Ed Boschma
Location: Tolleson, Arizona
Nominated by: Allen Herring, DVM, Dairy Veterinary Services, Litchfield Park, Arizona
Herd Size: 2,600 cows
Production: 23,000 lb. milk (3X)
Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12-month): 141,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 85,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 230,000
Clinical Mastitis Cases (12 months): 108

To ensure that antibiotics stay out of the bulk tank, the Tohls mark all treated animals with red leg bands and list identification numbers on a parlor chalkboard and on a barn calendar.

Their computerized milking equipment also flashes a "hold" signal when a treated cow's number is entered. Milk from treated cows is dumped. The Tohls administer a Charm test on milk from treated cows before those animals re-enter the milking string.

"Dean and Patti take an uncompromising approach to producing premium milk," says Bryan Gibson, a field representative for Tillamook County Creamery Association (TCCA), the Tohls' handler. "Their intelligent planning and attention to detail set them apart. They're real leaders."

Bottom line for the Tohls: Producing quality milk pays off. TCCA pays a quality bonus of up to 70¢ per cwt. for milk meeting the highest quality standards. Healthier cows also produce more milk.

"And the quality of your milk tells you what kind of job you're doing in other areas of your operation like nutrition and herd health," says Dean. "It's all part of a total package."



Equipment is kept well maintained. "If your equipment isn't working properly, your cows won't get milked properly," says Dean.