

NORTHEAST

Team play produces a

Teamwork is the cornerstone of the milk quality effort at Brabant Farms in Verona, N.Y. “Everyone here is dedicated to producing a quality product,” says Joe Van Lieshout, spokesman for a family management crew that also includes brothers Paul, Steve, Phil and Pat, and their dad, Henry. “We believe we have an obligation to provide clean and healthy milk for consumers. That’s what they’re paying us to do.”

At this dairy, the emphasis on teamwork starts in the milking parlor. All milkers—the family member-partners plus three full-time and three part-time employees—adhere to a strict milking routine. “Cows are creatures of habit,” says Joe. “Our goal is to do things exactly the same way at each and every milking.”

As cows enter the double-12 herringbone parlor, milkers check udders for dirt and manure. Excess debris is brushed off by hand or with a clean paper towel. Once the udder is clean, teats are sprayed with a hydrogen peroxide dip. “The important thing is to get complete coverage with that spray,” Joe notes.

Next, milkers dry each cow with an individual paper towel. “We dry three cows, then attach the milkers,” says Joe. “We try to get units on within 45 seconds after spraying. But we also want to leave the dip on for at least 30 seconds to get an effective kill of bacteria.”

After milking units are removed (via automatic take-offs), teats are dipped with an iodine-based product. Cows are then routed back to the freestall barn and a fresh supply of feed. “We want to keep cows from laying down in the stalls too soon after milking,” says Joe. “Having the feed right there when they get out of the parlor keeps them standing for a while and gives teat ends time to close up.”

Postmilking cleanup is just as important as the milking routine at this dairy. After each milking, the floor is flushed with pre-cooler water and all milking equipment is hosed down with a power washer. Every two or three weeks, barn walls are scrubbed thoroughly.

The Van Lieshouts pull out all the stops to help milkers and cows perform at the highest level at milking time. For example, they’re extremely diligent about keeping milking equipment in tip-top operating condition. Joe’s brother Pat



The Van Lieshouts (left to right) Phil, Joe, Steve and Paul, (as well as Pat and Henry, who are not pictured), are individually and collectively committed to helping milkers and cows perform at the highest level.

NATIONAL WINNER NORTHEAST REGIONAL WINNER

Brabant Farms

Owners/Managers: Henry, Joe, Pat, Phil, Paul and Steve Van Lieshout

Location: Verona, New York

Nominated by: Chris Cardner, Dairylea Cooperative, Inc.

Herd size: 500 cows

Production: 26,050 lb. milk (3X)

Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12 mos.): 83,000

Somatic Cell Count (Low): 60,000

Mastitis cases (12 months): 25

Antibiotic residue violations: 0

monitors all equipment daily to make sure it’s functioning properly.

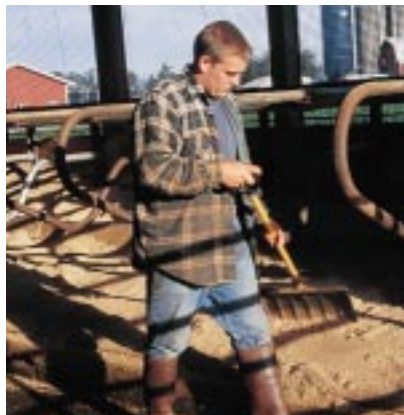
Twice a year, a local equipment dealer runs a complete check on the entire milking system. Cost of the service is roughly \$35/hour. “It’s a drop in the bucket,” says Joe. “If your equipment isn’t working right, you can get a lot of mastitis cases in a hurry. If you get enough of them, it will break you.”

Coaching employees on milking routine and procedures is also a major part of the daily management routine for family members. “We spend a lot of time with them going over how we want things done,” says Joe. “If we see a problem, we try to address it immediately.”

On a formal training level, all employees attend a seven-day milking school conducted by Cooperative Extension. “It’s really helpful,” says Joe. “A lot of the school deals with practical milking routine and procedures. But the milkers also get some theory that helps them understand the cow and why it’s important to do things a certain way.”

As another way of assisting the milkers, the Van Lie-

winner



All aspects of the Van Lieshouts dairy receive attention. Their quest for quality means equipment is well maintained, stalls are cleaned several times a day and cows have tails docked for an added measure of cleanliness.



shouts single udders on all milk cows five or six times per year. "It makes it easier to keep cows clean," says Joe. "We also cull cows with low udders because it seems like they're always dirty."

Emphasis on teamwork is evident in the 510-stall curtain-sided freestall barn as well. The focal point here is keeping cows clean and comfortable. For example, as each production group heads off to the holding area for milking, one of the two milkers walks the alleyway between stall rows, stopping to clean manure and dirt out of stalls and cover wet spots with kiln-dried sawdust.

Every five days or so, a fresh supply of new sawdust, purchased from a local furniture manufacturer, is brought into the barn. "For a couple of years, we used paper fiber as a bedding over the mattresses," Joe explains. "But it would get dusty, and it seemed like it stuck to everything. That created problems in the parlor. With the

sawdust, we haven't had any problems that way."

As another measure aimed at promoting cow cleanliness, the Van Lieshouts dock tails on all cows. "When we first built this barn [in the late 1980s], we tried shortening up the stalls by moving the brisket board back a little bit," says Joe. "The idea was that the cow's back end would lay over the curb and we wouldn't have much mess in the stalls."

"But that was a mistake. The cows would still mess in the stalls, and when they were lying down, their tails would end up in the alley. They'd get that much dirtier. Docking tails is a much better way to go."

Mastitis prevention and treatment is the third leg of the Van Lieshouts' milk quality stool. Since environmental mastitis is the most common problem on this dairy, all cows in the herd receive an *E. coli* vaccination three times a year.

Cows entering the 60-day dry period receive a dry-cow treatment. When they enter the prefresh pen about two to three weeks prior to calving, they're also checked for mastitis. "We want to get everything cleared up before the lactation starts if we can," notes Joe.

On the treatment side of the equation, milkers provide the first line of defense against mastitis by watching for visual signs. "Good cow people have a knack for spotting cows with mastitis," says Joe.

The Van Lieshouts also utilize a variety of record-keeping tools to spot potential problem cows. Data from computerized parlor equipment enables them to spot individual production decreases that could indicate a problem. Regular reports from DHI and their milk handler—Dairylea Cooperative, Inc.—provide information on somatic cell counts.

When a potential mastitis case is detected, the cow is identified with a red band on one of her legs and moved to the dairy's hospital pen. Her identification number is also entered on a calendar kept in the herdsman's office.

Treatment varies with the suspected bug. If a cow doesn't respond to an initial treatment, a sample is sent for culturing. Cows with chronic problems are culled from the herd. "Most of our culling is for mastitis," says Joe.

To ensure that milk from treated cows doesn't end up in the bulk tank, the hospital pen is milked last. Milk from this string is dumped into the manure pit. As another safeguard, the Van Lieshouts strictly adhere to withdrawal times on all treatment drugs. If they use extra-label treatments, they'll consult with their veterinarian and run a Delvo test before returning a cow to the milk string. "You just can't take any chances with something this important," says Joe.

A variety of numbers relating to milk quality offer a testimony to the accomplishments of the Van Lieshout team. During one recent 12-month period, somatic cell counts for this dairy averaged 83,000 and standard plate counts averaged 22,000. Over the same time-frame, the annual cull rate for the herd was 30%.

"This is an outstanding farm," says Chris Cardner, area supervisor for Dairylea Cooperative, Inc. "The Van Lieshouts set very high standards for themselves. They've taken on a leadership role in the community and do an excellent job of promoting milk as a healthy and safe food product."

NORTHEAST REGIONAL MERIT WINNERS

Androscoggin Holsteins, Inc.

Owners/Managers: John and Sandra Nutting

Location: Leeds, Maine

Nominated by: Betty Estes, Oakhurst Dairy

Herd size: 48 cows

Production: 21,814 lb. milk (2X)

Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12 mos.): 63,666

Somatic Cell Count (Low): 39,000

Mastitis cases (12 months): 6

Antibiotic residue violations: 0

Forbes Farm

Owners/Managers: Ralph, Jim and Fred Forbes

Location: Cortland, New York

Nominated by: Harold Marvin Sr.,

Dairylea Cooperative, Inc.

Herd size: 410 cows

Production: 19,300 lb. milk (2X)

Somatic Cell Count (Avg. 12 mos.): 127,000

Somatic Cell Count (Low): 94,000

Mastitis cases (12 months): NA

Antibiotic residue violations: 0