

Quality Goes With the Job

Colorado dairy producer Andy Wick summarizes the importance of striving to produce high-quality milk with a few words. “Our job is producing food for other people to consume,” says Wick. “When that’s your job, you should be concerned about quality. How can you not be?”

Numbers from a recent 12-month period indicate that Wick and his family—wife Polly and sons Jeff and Matt—are very good at that job. Average somatic cell count for their 300-cow herd was 137,000 cells/ml. Standard plate count averaged 1 and pre-incubation count averaged 5.

“This dairy has received the [cooperative’s] quality bonus award for 132 consecutive months,” says Kay Blackburn, field representative for Dairy Farmers of America. “The facility is always neat and clean. This is truly an exceptional operation.”

Some of the basics of the Wicks’ quality program:

- **Corral management.** Open lots are harrowed twice a week during most of the year, more often during the winter.



“Our job is producing food for other people to consume,” says Andy Wick (center), pictured here with his wife, Polly, and son, Jeff. “When that’s your job, you should be concerned about quality. How can you not be?”

“It’s imperative that the cows have a clean, dry place to lie down,” says Wick. “If it snows, we want to get out there and get that snow out of the corrals before it melts. We’ll also go into the mounds [built up from harrowing throughout the year] and dig out dry manure for bedding. If it’s really cold we’ll bring in straw, so the cows don’t have to lay on the cold ground.”

In the nicer-weather months, the Wicks concentrate on keeping the area near the feedbunks clean and dry. “Cows spend a lot of time there,” Andy notes. “The better you treat the cows, the better they’ll treat you.”

- **Milking procedures.** Wiping cows clean with individual cloth towels (laundered on the dairy), spraying with an iodine prepip and postdip, utilizing automatic takeoffs to prevent overmilking, and timely equipment maintenance are the basics of the Wicks’ parlor program.

“We used to use a barrier dip, but we found that our milkers weren’t always getting to those far teats,” he explains.

- **Employee management.** “Good employees make all the difference,” says Wick. “We’re constantly reminding employees that they shouldn’t be putting any milk in that tank that they wouldn’t drink themselves. It’s a matter of learning a few simple rules and doing things right milking after milking, day after day. We also try to bring in a specialist every so often to talk to the employees about how to prevent and recognize mastitis.”

- **Culling.** Wick’s culling rate runs about 25% per year. Likely cull candidates are cows who don’t respond to treatment, older cows with high somatic cell counts or cows with large teats that make milking difficult. “If you keep a cow that doesn’t respond to treatment, you run the risk that she’ll be spreading the bug to the rest of the herd,” Wick says.

- **Dry-cow program.** Cows are dried off 50 days before their expected freshening date. Along with a dry-cow treatment, they also receive an injection of J-5 vaccine. Three weeks before freshening they’re moved to a warm-up pen. Anionic salts are added to the ration at that point, and cows receive another J-5 injection.

WESTERN REGIONAL WINNER Upper Valley Holsteins, Inc.

Owner/manager: Andy Wick
Location: Austin, Colorado
Nominated by: Kay Blackburn,
Dairy Farmers of America
Herd size: 305
Production: 31,000 lb. (3X)
Somatic Cell Count
(Avg. 12 months): 137,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 114,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 157,000
Mastitis cases: 51

WESTERN MERIT WINNERS

Pleasant Pastures
Owner/manager: Keith Fagernes
Location: Rochester, Washington
Nominated by: Norman Hansen,
Northwest Dairy
Herd size: 72
Production: 22,287 lb.
Somatic Cell Count
(Avg. 12 months): 45,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 32,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 59,000
Mastitis cases: Not available

McCatharn Dairy
Owner/manager: John McCatharn
Location: Albuquerque, New Mexico
Nominated by: Richard Patton,
Dairy Nutritionist, Galisteo, N.M.
Herd size: 1,059
Production: 23,586 lb.
Somatic Cell Count
(Avg. 12 months): 188,000
Somatic Cell Count (Low): 167,000
Somatic Cell Count (High): 205,000
Mastitis cases: 120