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Adding it all up with CQM CQM

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RECORD-KEEPING IS A WONDERFUL thing. When operating a business, good management and good records typically go hand in hand. When it comes to dairy farming, not only do good records help producers become better farm managers, but they also contribute to the goal of building consumer confidence in dairy products. A new program which emphasizes record keeping and food safety in the dairy industry is the Canadian Quality Milk (CQM) program. With the program roll-out well under way across Ontario, many producers have become very familiar with the contents of the big yellow CQM binder. To quote the CQM reference manual, "food safety is everyone's business in the dairy industry."

And how true it is! The recent XL Foods recall in Western Canada is just one example of how easily consumer confidence in food safety can be compromised.

Some of the main aspects of the CQM program that promote food safety and good management include development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Corrective Action Plans (CAPs), a requirement for permanent and complete treatment records, and required veterinary prescriptions for all extralabel drug use.

SOPs are written instructions created by producer(s) that describe how activities are to be carried out on-farm. Setting up milking equipment, prepping udders and the actual task of milking must be performed accurately and consistently to produce milk in a safe and efficient manner. SOPs are to be made available to individuals such as relief milkers or other farm staff to reference for correct protocols and for use in employee training. In case of an emergency situation where the quality of meat or milk may be compromised, Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) provide detailed instructions on proper procedure and the phone numbers of who to contact for assistance. If an occasion arises where CAPs must be used, it is important for producers to review and revise their SOP protocols to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

Under CQM regulations for SOPs, producers are now required to obtain veterinary prescriptions or annual treatment protocols in order to use chemicals and medicines in or on dairy cattle in an "extra-label" manner (eg. extended therapy, altered dosages, treatment using a combination of medications or use of a product in a way in which it is not intended on the label). Veterinary prescriptions help to regulate unauthorized use of chemicals and medicines. In addition, they provide the herd veterinarian with an opportunity to educate producers on the use of appropriate treatment protocols. This, in turn, helps producers to determine the most effective protocols and products to use in treating common medical conditions in their herd. Scripts provide detailed information on the purpose of the

treatment, the duration and mode of therapy, the dosage as well as withdrawal times for meat and milk. The goal is to reduce and monitor extralabel drug use more closely. By doing so, food safety is ultimately improved as there is less potential for pharmaceutical residues to contaminate products leaving the farm.

As mentioned previously, the CQM program now requires producers to maintain and keep on-farm a permanent and complete record of all animal treatments. Currently, dairy operations vary widely in their method of maintaining treatment records; this ranges from jotting treatments down on a white-board or calendar to in-depth computer records and programs. For some producers, treatment records are not always permanent, so it can be difficult to recall information on past treatments.

As a result, there is a greater risk for contamination of milk or meat. This is especially true in cases where the individual responsible for treating an animal may not be the same individual responsible for milking or making culling decisions. Not only does keeping a permanent and detailed record of treatments aid in preventing unintentional contamination of meat and milk, but it makes it much easier to recall historical treatments on particular animals. Producers are then better able to review these permanent records to get an idea of the frequency of treatments on their farm and identify potential problem areas.

Most of the concepts introduced by the Canadian Milk Quality program are not new to the dairy industry. Many producers are voluntarily doing a lot of what is required. Consumers, however, demand more of the products they buy today than ever before and this requires written protocols and documentation to support the claim of quality milk and meat. It is important, therefore, for the industry to embrace the concept of CQM; after all, food safety is every-one's business.

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