

# SOP For Making Changes

Dr. Kyle Steeves

I recently saw a dairy herd that had an increase in somatic cell counts (SCC). Upon further investigation, it was determined that they actually had an increase in cows they were treating for clinical mastitis as well. Milk culture results indicated that the cause of most of their cases of clinical mastitis was a contagious bacteria that can spread between cows. When we sat down to discuss their milking routine, we found that they were currently not pre stripping or pre dipping cows. The main reason they were not doing this was that it was going to take more time and milking would take longer. The producer said that they were reluctant to change as they had been doing it this way since they started farming.

This is a good example of how making a small change can make a big difference.

I was at a conference where they presented a decision standard operating procedure (SOP) for making changes. It is quite easy to use and can help make some potentially “difficult” decisions easier. I will walk through each step in this decision SOP with reference to my example above.

## **1) What change will be made? How much will it cost?**

In this herd, the change to be made was pre stripping, pre dipping and wiping cows before attaching the milker.

Let us assume the cost of doing this is \$15 per day for this herd. This includes the cost of the pre dip and the extra time required to pre strip and pre dip. The cost of making this change will be \$450 per month.

## **2) What will we see?**

We will see a reduction in clinical mastitis and fewer new cases of mastitis that culture contagious bacteria. In addition, we will see a lower herd SCC.

## **3) When will we see it? How soon will we notice a difference?**

We should notice a reduction in new clinical cases of mastitis within 3-4 weeks. It may take a bit longer for the SCC and culture results to change until all “old” infections are cleared up or the cows are culled.

## **4) How will we measure the change?**

Comparing records of the SCC, the number of clinical mastitis cases and the number of milk cultures with contagious bacteria for the three months before the change with the three months after the change should provide evidence as to whether there is improvement.

## **5) How will we measure the economics?**

We would compare the cost of making the change with the savings the change will create.

Let us assume treating a case of clinical mastitis costs \$600 – this would include direct costs such as labour and antibiotics and indirect costs such as reduced production, increased culling, etc. We could even add in the economic benefit of reducing the herd SCC but we will not include it to keep things simple.

If we reduced the clinical cases by even one per month, this would save the farm \$600/ month. When comparing this to the cost of making the recommended changes at \$450/month (see step 1), this change will save the farm \$150/month.

## **6) Document how to un-do the change?**

This is a simple answer in this case; we just would stop pre stripping and pre dipping.

This SOP should not be used with every change you make on your farm but it can be very useful to help determine the economic impact of any major change that you make. If there is something we can do to make our herd more profitable, reduce disease or make herd management easier, we should jump on this opportunity. Do not be afraid of change as without it, we wouldn't have many of the modern advances in dairy farming.

Every farm is different and change is not about comparing your farm to your neighbour's. A simple measurement of change can be: is your farm better today than it was yesterday? If the answer is yes, you are moving in the right direction.

Following up with the producer after a few months of instituting the pre stripping and pre dipping plan they were very happy. We saw a reduction in clinical mastitis cases and did not culture any more contagious bacteria. They hardly noticed the extra time that pre stripping and pre dipping were taking, as it had become part of the routine. The producer made the comment, "Why didn't we make this change ten years ago?"