

## Ready..... Set..... Milk

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The Canadian dairy industry has a common goal - produce more high quality milk. The hurdle that many producers are having is how to ramp up production without increasing cow numbers or having more fresh cows. The solution is management. Many articles have evaluated and analyzed different management techniques on dairy farms. Successful farm managers consistently make a plan. Effective managers spend their time doing important jobs, they anticipate potential pitfalls and actively investigate and implement solutions and they limit the amount of time they spend dealing with urgent jobs.

So what are the important jobs, and pitfalls that must be managed to increase salable milk, today, tomorrow, and in nine months?

Today you can decide to put all of the salable milk produced on your farm in the bulk tank. As an economic decision feeding calves whole milk is costing you money. Calf growth and health can be maintained with the selection of a high quality milk replacer, proper attention to mixing instructions adjusted for the weather conditions that the calves are experiencing. Selecting an appropriate milk replacer for calves requires some investigation but remember on a dry matter basis whole milk ranges from 24 to 27% crude protein and 28-30% fat. Use these numbers as a starting point to achieve average daily gain on milk replacer that you had with whole milk. The early supply of a calf starter can help you achieve your calf health goals.

Increasing milking from twice daily to three times a day will increase milk production per cow. This change is perhaps the most intense on the management side. Increased labour, standardizing milking routine, and monitoring teat health will become critical control points for success. The next most obvious place to produce more salable milk is to prevent sick cows. Easier said than done! Since the implementation of CQM, every farm will now have several years of treatment records. Sit down with your farm advisors, DHI files, and treatment records and identify what diseases are important on your farm. Mastitis, metritis, pneumonia, ketosis, etc.

If mastitis is your primary cause for treated cows, the important work is in the parlour and in the barn evaluating milking procedures, milking equipment function and environmental cleanliness. Exceptional managers evaluate milking routine with all milking personnel regularly to ensure that every time a cow is milked or a stall is cleaned it is done according to plan. One French study showed a significant reduction in somatic cell count between clean udders and dirty udders upon arrival at arrival the parlour.

Remember that vaccination works. Mastitis vaccines and the traditional 5-way vaccines are very effective at reducing the risk of disease.

In the event that your prevention plan does not work, develop standardized treatment protocols. Treatment protocols are used to define standard treatments for common diseases on dairy farms. Focusing on mastitis treatment protocols often result in higher adoption of record keeping, and increased use of milk cultures. Protocols are based on a solid veterinarian/client/patient relationship (VCPR). This relationship requires that the veterinarian assumes the responsibility of making medical judgment regarding the health of the animals requiring treatment and the owner

agrees to follow the instructions and seek additional advice if conditions have changed. The goal of these protocols is to optimize opportunity for treatment success and set an end point where additional therapy will not yield a better result. In the end this approach will control the number of days out of the tank for individual cows while maintain excellent milk quality.

Over the next two months focusing on the dry group has the largest opportunity to improve peak milk production. This increase in production is through controlling the risk of new intramammary infections, a direct effect on milk production and the control of hypocalcemia or milk fever will reduce the risk of metabolic disease in the transition period. In general terms the goal of the dry cow program are to maintain dry matter intake around 13 kg of dry matter per day, limit energy consumption. In addition to the requirement for a well balanced dry cow ration it is crucial that dry cows are not over crowded, air quality is controlled and hoof health issues are addressed immediately.

To improve milk production long term requires that you focus on reproduction in your heifers and cows. First set goals for age at first calving, days in milk at first breeding, heat detection rate. These are simple management decisions that can be changed immediately. Focusing on getting cows and heifers inseminated will increase the number of fresh cows available and will increase milk production as well.

Above all else remember the biosecurity principles that have been stressed through the Johnes control program and will be reinforced in the biosecurity module of ProAction. If you are going to add animals to the herd to increase milk production today have a discussion with your farm advisors. Request animals be sourced from healthy herds that are well vaccinated and have high quality milk. Milk these new animals last until you have a culture results to confirm their udder health.

All of these management decisions can increase milk production in your herd without the addition of stalls or building a new barn. Successful implementation of these ideas does not require more time, it simply require a plan that everyone in the barn is willing to work toward.