SmartSAMM Powered by DairyNZ

DRY PERIOD

TECHNOTE 18

Check udders after dry off

Udder infections of dry cows are most likely to occur immediately following dry off and around calving. Cows are susceptible to new infections particularly in the first week of the dry period before the teat plugs have formed and sealed the teat ends (Thomas *et al.* 1972, Williamson *et al.* 1995).

Infections in the drying off period must be detected and treated so that they do not persist and create problems after calving. Cows should be closely observed during the last week of their lactation and in the first 2 weeks of their dry period.

18.1

Observe cows daily in the paddock and look for swollen quarters.

Confidence – Moderate

The recommendation that farmers examine udders visually rather than manually may result in some infections being missed, but this is likely to be outweighed by the practical advantages.

18.2

Check swollen quarters manually.

Research priority – Low

The udders of dry cows should be inspected as a routine part of checking the cows because clinical mastitis can occur during the dry period. Quarters that are not treated may have lower production in the next season.

Visual observation of udder size and symmetry is all that is required, and often all that is possible. It is, however, necessary to handle the udders of cows suspected to be infected.

Secretions stripped from the suspect quarter after dry off may differ from normal dry cow secretion, which becomes viscous and clear, like honey in colour, over a period of 2-4 weeks after dry off. Secretions that are very runny, cloudy or clotty may indicate mastitis. If there is any doubt about the status of a cow, she should be treated as a clinical case.

In the first few days after dry off, cows should be checked carefully for signs

Technote 4.1 describes how to check swollen quarters.

of sickness i.e. swollen udder, difficulty walking or off their feed. These new infections can occur as a result of poor hygiene at the time of administration of antibiotic dry cow treatment (DCT) and/or internal teat sealant. These types of infections can be life threatening to the cow so advisors and farmers should be aware of this possibility.

18.3

Run all cows through the farm dairy for a manual check of the udder after 14 days.

SmartSAMM advises manual checks of all udders fortnightly for the first 4-6 weeks of the dry period. New clinical cases are most likely to be found between 14 and 28 days after dry off, before the keratin plug has fully formed. Applying teat spray to the teats after the inspection is also worthwhile.

Technote 4.1 describes an udder palpation technique.

Technote 19 describes the benefits of using teat disinfectants in the dry period.

18.4

Treat clinical quarters by stripping out completely and using a lactation antibiotic.

Cows that develop clinical mastitis over the dry period are treated in the same way as lactating cows.

Additional considerations when treating these cows are:

- it is important to avoid handling or stripping the unaffected quarters so that the teat seal or plug remains intact;
- use of oxytocin should be avoided in the dry period; and
- injectable antibiotics or intramammary products for lactating cows can be used even if the quarter was previously infused with antibiotic DCT.

A full course of treatment should be used, and each treatment given at the recommended time intervals, as per the label.

These cows should NOT be retreated with antibiotic DCT once the lactating course of antibiotics has been completed. This practice will increase the risk of Inhibitory Substances grades.

Acknowledgements

DairyNZ and NMAC (NZ National Mastitis Advisory Committee) acknowledge the huge contribution of Dairy Australia's Countdown Downunder as the original source material from which SmartSAMM Technotes are derived, being updated and adapted for NZ dairy farming in 2011.

These SmartSAMM adapted resources are made available to NZ dairy farmers and advisors through a Memorandum of Understanding between Dairy Australia and DairyNZ.

The SmartSAMM programme is funded by DairyNZ, and supported by the MPI Sustainable Farming Fund.

Key papers

Thomas CL, Neave FK, Dodd FH, Higgs TM. The susceptibility of milked and unmilked udder quarters to intramammary infection. *J Dairy Res.* 1972; 39:113-131.

Williamson JH, Woolford MW, Day AM. The prophylactic effect of a dry-cow antibiotic against *Streptococcus uberis. NZ Vet Journal* 1995; 43: 228-234.