Ensuring animal health issues are dealt with effectively is very important, particularly as herd sizes become larger - problems can go unnoticed as numbers rise and the scale of outbreaks can be larger.

It is important to take the time to actively observe animals when getting them in and as they move through the yard and dairy. Any signs of an animal health issue should be noted and followed up.

**Benefits**

**Restrict the transmission of disease**
- Early intervention will ensure the disease is not transferred to the rest of the herd.

**Prevent animal health problems**
- Good management practices will restrict the incidence of animal health problems.

1.1 Prevention through good management practices

Prevention is always better than cure. Many animal health problems are associated with poor management and can therefore be prevented by improved management practices e.g. excessive pressure placed upon cows when shifting them can increase the incidence of lameness.

It is important that systems and training exist within the farm operation to safeguard animal health. For example, in the case of mastitis this would include:
- protocols around teat disinfection as part of the milking routine,
- milking hygiene to prevent cow to cow transfer,
- milking machine maintenance,
- drying off management,
- recording and monitoring of infected animals,
- treatment of cases
- and monitoring of SCC.

To prevent the transfer of other infections between stock protocols dealing with the segregation of infected animals and the quarantining of new stock are important.
1.2 Recording and monitoring of herd health

Accurate recording of all animal health events is important for timely identification of disease outbreaks, identification of recurrently affected cows for culling, effective management of sick cows, information for your vet and design of preventative programs. Recording systems must include:

- the milking animal number;
- condition/disease and veterinarian (if consulted);
- the type of treatment (including dose);
- the date of each treatment;
- the date of last treatment and
- the date that milk re-entered the bulk milk tank.

Monitoring this information allows any increasing levels of disease in the herd to be identified early and managed, which is particularly important for larger herds where small and subtle changes can quickly lead to significant effects.

Make sure there is a designated area in the dairy where this information can be recorded.

Figure 1. An example of a method for recording animal health issues.
1.3 Training in early detection of disease

Detection of disease can be difficult and cases are sometimes not detected until later in the course of the disease e.g. a missed clinical mastitis case may result in less chance of a cure and transmission to other cows. People must have training in ‘cow signals’ e.g. how to identify early signs of lameness, teat damage and mastitis. In the case of mastitis two signals to look for could be: kicks cups off when usually doesn’t or an inflamed quarter. People are not always naturally observant, particularly if they don’t know what they are supposed to be looking for. Some useful targets for assessing herd health include:

- if more than 10% of your herd have lameness throughout the season or;
- more than 10% of your herd fails to get in calf or;
- more than 15% of your herd have a SCC above 150,000 at any herd test.

If you believe you have an issue contact your vet, or a DairyNZ Consulting Officer if you have a query they can help with, for example, if you want to find out who your local Healthy Hoof provider is.

1.4 Use your vet

Talk to your vet about best practice prevention and management of dairy cow diseases. In many cases they can provide resources and training. Don’t forget the PAR vet consultation that is a legal annual requirement. Many vets now also provide Herd Health Management Plans for farmers that look at prevention, identification, management and treatment of animal health issues from the start of the season. This planning can help set the animal health policy in the Farm Operations Manual (for more about this see Chapter 5. Managing People. Farm operations manual). Agriculture ITO also provide a Mastitis Management course (for more information ring 0800 691 111 or visit www.agricultureito.ac.nz).

1.5 Timely treatment of sick cows

Animals that have to wait for treatment are likely to have a longer recovery time and/or a poorer health outcome. Make sure that there are enough people trained in herd health procedures so there is always someone with the appropriate skills available to address any problems.

It is illegal in New Zealand to milk sick cows for food production and they must be treated as soon as possible to fulfil the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act. Signs of a sick cow are:

- dull coat,
- dull/sunken eyes,
- arched back,
- sunken flanks or rapid weight loss,
- ears droopy,
- head lowered, and
- tend to stay away from other cows.
Animals which are showing clinical signs of, or have been diagnosed with a disease or illness, must be removed from the main milking herd, marked and recorded, and their milk withheld from the bulk milk tank until the clinical signs have been resolved. (Refer to New Zealand Food Safety Authority- DPC2, section 3 [www.nzfsa.govt.nz]).

Figure 2. Prompt treatment of sick and lame cows is best for the cow's welfare and will also mean there is less of a drop in milk production. Recording the cause of lameness is an important part of prevention.

1.6 Further reading


Action points

- Train people so that they know how to recognise and treat animal health problems.
- Provide a method of recording animal health events in the dairy, such as a white board.