



The Center Spotlight

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Commitment to Quality Milk Necessity on the Dairy Farm

Editor's Note: This is part of a monthly series of timely articles and information from the Center for Dairy Excellence, a non-profit organization focused on strengthening Pennsylvania's dairy industry.

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Jimmy and Denise Carmack of Keymar, Carroll County, Md., have set their milk quality goal much higher than just receiving the quality premium from Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers Cooperative Association this month.

After 14 years of being honored with the cooperative's annual milk quality awards, given to those who receive a milk quality premium all 12 months of the year, the Carmacks are going for their 15th year. That's 180 consecutive months of somatic cell counts and bacteria counts that meet Maryland Virginia's quality premium levels.

It sounds impressive, but Jimmy says they don't really do anything that different from anyone else. "We just try really hard to do things right every day," he said. "It's not just one thing, but all those little things that you have to watch."

Carmack Dairy Farm is a 200-cow dairy operation just south of the Mason Dixon Line, where they rotational graze their herd from March through December. "Pasture accounts for anywhere from 25 to 75 percent of the cows' dry matter intake, depending on the season. We also feed a total mixed ration to balance the cows' energy needs," Jimmy explained.

The Carmacks recently received the Top Quality Producer Award from Maryland Virginia. Although they live in Maryland, Jimmy attends the Pennsylvania Dairy Summit each year. "We don't have anything like that in Maryland," he said.

Keeping a Close Watch on Quality

Carmack Dairy Farm had a 95,000 somatic cell count average in 2010 and maintained an average standard plate count of 1,667, and a PI count of 4,992 for all 12 months of the year.

They have a double-six milk parlor and work

hard to keep it clean and running well. "Keeping bacteria counts down involves a lot of little details," said Jimmy.

Keeping enough hot water around is a critical step Jimmy learned while breeding cows on other farms years ago. "I used to go into farms to breed when their washers were running, and it was tough to get water at 95 degrees," he said. "We have our well water run through a Freon heater before it enters our water heaters. We also watch our elements and washing equipment. It can be just one very small thing that can lead to a high count.

"We use the premium soaps. We usually get between 40 - 75 cents per cwt. in premiums. I don't mind paying the premium price for the detergent if I get a premium price for my milk."

The Carmacks' low somatic cell count Jimmy attributes to changes he made in the operation over the years. "About 12 years ago we installed co-pulsation in our milking parlor, and it helped contribute to better teat end health," he said.

"When we switched to grazing, that also helped because we weren't pushing our cows as hard," he said, adding that his herd average fell from 21,000+ to 17,400 pounds. "Because we weren't pushing them as hard, our cull rate improved, and we were able to start culling cows with higher somatic cell counts instead of trying to work with those cows to get their counts lower."

Jimmy adds that the attention to detail is critical. "A couple of years ago, we found some stray voltage in our milking parlor. We got that taken care of, and it has helped our somatic cell count ever since."

Producing Quality Milk Becoming Key

With more processors demanding higher quality milk, all dairy farms must evaluate milk quality protocols to make sure they're meeting and exceeding marketplace expectations.

In 2010, the somatic cell count average in Dairy Herd Improvement (DHI) herds in the U.S. was



Jimmy and Denise Carmack see producing quality milk as a necessity on the dairy farm.

228,000, down from 233,000 in 2009 and steadily tracking downward. Pennsylvania's current somatic cell count is also near at all-time low. More and more farms are recognizing the added revenues available through producing higher quality milk.

In Pennsylvania, dairy farms that are struggling with higher somatic cell counts or high bacteria counts can utilize a target team to improve.

Part of the center's "On-Farm Dairy Resource Team Program," a target team allows producers to put a team of individuals together to identify possible causes to the problem and develop a plan for resolving the issue.

New target teams have access to up to \$1,000 available to pay for discovery-related costs, such as milk culturing, and the cost of the team members. Existing teams can have \$750.

Any farm interested in applying to establish a target team can contact the Center for Dairy Excellence for more information. Call 717-346-0849 or log onto www.centerfordairyexcellence.org for more details.

Milk Margins Up 28 Percent On the Farm in March 2011

Pennsylvania Dairy Industry Performance Scorecard Summary	Mar. 2010 Report	Mar. 2011 Report	Change from last year	Target range
Milk Cows	541,000 cows	543,000 cows	+0.37%	
Rolling 12-Mo. State Milk Production	10.554 bill. lbs.	10.734 bill. lbs.	+1.71%	10.8 bill. lbs.
Wholesale Milk Price	\$17.00/cwt.	\$22.50/cwt.	+32.35%	
PA Daily Feed Costs (cost of corn, soybean & hay at 65 lbs. milk)	\$6.09/cwt.	\$8.06/cwt.	+32.35%	
Milk Margin (IOFC @ 100# of Milk)	\$11.21/cwt.	\$14.44/cwt.	+28.81%	
Milk Production/Cow/Day	64.15 lbs.	63.44 lbs.	-1.11%	80 lbs.
% of Herds with 80+ lbs./cow/day	16%	17%	+4.22%	
Rolling 12-mo. Herd Production Average	20,857 lbs.	21,169 lbs.	+1.50%	25,000 lbs.
Average Somatic Cell Count	261,320	242,630	- 7.15%	200,000
% of Herds below 200,000 SCC	40%	47%	+ 17.83%	
Average Days In Milk	181 Days	184 Days	+ 1.66%	185 Days
Average Age to First Calving	25.5 months	25.5 months	—	21—24 mo.
Average Days to First Service	89 Days	88 Days	-0.81%	< 80 Days
Average Cull Rate (% left herd)	33.7%	35.6%	+ 5.76%	20—35%
Average Pregnancy Rate	18.61%	19.66%	+ 5.64%	> 20%

To view complete scorecard, visit:

www.centerfordairyexcellence.org

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Milk prices jumped in March to \$22.50 per hundred-weight, driving up milk margins to the highest level in two years. Feed costs continue to be high, up 32 percent from a year ago.

Pennsylvania dairy farm families are benefiting from improved management, with somatic cell counts down 7 percent and pregnancy rates up nearly 6 percent. Pregnancy rates are approaching 20 percent in the state.

More than 17 percent of the dairy herds in Pennsylvania on DHIA are milking more than 80 pounds a day, while nearly 50 percent have somatic cell counts below 200,000. Average days to first service is also improving, down to 88 days in March.

Higher beef prices drove up culling rates, with herds averaging a 35-percent culling rate in March. This increase follows a national trend, with U.S. dairy culling up 9.7 percent in the first quarter of 2011 compared to the first quarter of 2010.

To view the complete scorecard online or learn about resources to benefit your dairy operation, visit us at www.centerfordairyexcellence.org or call the center at 717-346-0849.



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