

A bespoke approach to foremilk

Should foremilk form part of every herd's parlour routine? **Rachael Porter** spoke to two leading dairy vets to find out more



It is a commercial requirement, stipulated in many milk buyers' contracts, but should foremilk form part of a herd's regular parlour routine?

MASTITIS SURVEY

The 2013 National Mastitis Survey, sponsored by MSD Animal Health, certainly revealed an increase in the number of producers who 'always' foremilk and wash and dry teats prior to milking. And, again, a greater proportion of lower bulk milk somatic cell count (BMSCC) herds always foremilk all cows, while a greater proportion of higher BMSCC herds only foremilk sometimes – just some cows or some milkings.

What didn't sit comfortably were the figures that show that a higher proportion of herds that 'always' foremilk have more mastitis

than those that 'never' foremilk. "But we shouldn't read too much into this data," stresses Devon-based vet Andy Biggs, from the Vale Veterinary Group. "I don't believe that there's a cause and effect here. It could be that those producers who never foremilk have a very low incidence of mastitis and don't feel the need to foremilk as a way to detect the disease. And the flip side is that those who never foremilk could be failing to diagnose mastitis."

BENEFITS

He believes that foremilk is important – for several reasons – and adds that most producers do see the benefits of stripping quarters before milking once they manage to add it to their parlour routine. "There are many producers who don't foremilk because they believe

that it adds too much time to the milking routine and can't see a benefit. But it serves to remove high somatic cell count milk, it stimulates the cow and aids milk let down, and it helps to detect mastitis."

That said, he adds that it may not be for everyone: "There are risks, particularly if it's not done properly, and it can spread infection," he says. "Gloves and an effective pre-dip disinfectant are essential here. A suitable lag time between the milker stimulating the cow's udder and clus-

not done well – it can spread mastitis."

It is vital to detect infections, such as toxic or *E coli* mastitis quickly as early intervention is key to successful treatment.

"But it has to be done at every milking to be effective and technique is important to help prevent the spread of pathogens. The key is to avoid the milker becoming a vector," he said.

BESPOKE

Mr Allcock believes that a bespoke approach is the way forward. "Look at the current clinical situation on the farm – the incidence and the likely pathogens. Have a conversation with the vet and weigh up the relative risks and the relative benefits. Don't just take the tick-list approach. You have to consider cow health and what's best for mastitis control in your herd."

"It serves to remove high somatic cell count milk"

ter attachment, between 60 and 90 seconds to facilitate good milk let down, is also important. In large parlours this can be difficult.

"Changing the routine to incorporate foremilk, possibly by dealing with cows in smaller batches rather than as one long row, can be the answer. Getting the clock starting is important and stimulation – such as foremilk – is part of that."

NOT FOR ALL

Shropshire-based vet James Allcock, from Lambert Leonard and May, agrees that foremilk is not for everyone. "It has an invaluable place on some units, but on others – particularly if it's

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