

3 things you cannot have to achieve a low SCC: Part 1

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Often times, somatic cell count, or SCC, is used to judge the milk quality of a dairy herd. Most dairy farmers work very hard to achieve a low SCC. However, milk quality is more complex than purely SCC. There are at least 3 things most producers cannot have and still have a low SCC. This month we will discuss the first two factors.

First, a farm cannot have a high number of chronically infected cows and have a low SCC. A chronically infected cow is defined as two consecutive linear scores of 4.0 or higher. Herds with 20 percent of their cows chronically infected will have a hard time having a low SCC because mathematically it is hard to get a low average in most data sets if 20 percent of the data is high. Top herds can achieve 5 percent or less chronic but more commonly we see very good herds achieving less than 10 percent. Once this number gets much above 12 percent, it becomes very hard to have a SCC that is better than average. Because of this, it makes little sense to pay an SCC premium to your workers if your chronic rate is above 12 percent, because, there is not a lot they can do to lower the herd's SCC unless they are allowed to make culling decisions. To determine your percent chronics, look at your DHIA report, or if you or your veterinarian have DC305, use command: plot lgsc=4 by lgsc\zry. A good goal would be to aim for less than 10 percent chronic.

Next, you cannot have a low SCC and consistently dirty bulk tank cultures. A bulk tank culture may be one of the least appreciated tests. The important concept for environmental organisms on a bulk tank culture is simply that the culture reflects what was left on the teat prior to attaching units. In other words, it is a report card for teat preparation hygiene. Herds with very low SCCs may have an occasional high report, but typically maintain very clean tests at all times. In addition, putting too much manure into the milk due to poor teat hygiene usually leads to more subclinical and clinical mastitis and higher SCCs.

Next month we will discuss the third key factor in achieving a low SCC.