

Selective Dry Cow Therapy: Is It Something I Should Try?

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Over the last few years, we have seen a big push do decrease antibiotic use in livestock as one way to reduce antibiotic drug resistance in both human and animal medicine. In dairy cows, one of the largest uses of antibiotics is for the treatment of clinical mastitis and the use of dry cow antibiotics to treat and prevent mastitis during the dry period. It has been a long-standing practice of many dairy producers to use blanket dry cow therapy (BDCT) using a dry cow antibiotic along with a teat sealant product on all quarters. Recently, many people are promoting selective dry cow therapy (SDCT), only using dry cow antibiotics on cows that would need the treatment.

To use SDCT, there are several things that are needed and others that are useful.

1. Somatic cell counts (SCC) data is needed on cows during the lactation. Only cows with low SCC's during lactation and especially the last few tests should be considered for SDCT.
2. Using on-farm culturing near dry off along with SCC data can pinpoint cows that are not infected and eligible for SDCT. Other tests like CMT and SCC are not as sensitive as culture.
3. Using a teat sealant on these cows can prevent infections later in the dry period and near calving.
4. You must be meticulous in cleaning and disinfecting teat ends when infusing teat sealants without dry cow antibiotics.

Studies performed at the University of Minnesota and other academic institutions have shown that these SDCT programs can be successful.

In our practice, we have had a few very well managed herds with low SCC's try SDCT on a limited basis. We are very cautious about this program at this time as we have seen serious problems. Almost all herds that we have seen try this, have seen cows shortly after drying up become infected with toxic mastitis which often leads to death. If you want to try this, consult closely with your veterinarian, and watch cows very carefully in the early dry period.