

What to do with those problem cows?

[\[Click here\]](#) for previously published tips

Last month's tip looked at the impact that an increasing bulk tank SCC can have on your farm profit, and that it commonly starts to creep up from summer time onwards. We also explained that it is because the number of infected quarters in your herd is starting to increase. So what should you do about these infected quarters?

1. Know who the culprits are!

Milk record the whole herd now- any cow with an SCC>200,000cells/mL is likely to have at least one infected quarter. These infections are often subclinical i.e. there are no visible signs, but they are caused by the same bacterial infection as clinical cases. If you are not milk recording, how will you know who the culprits are? You may suspect a few, but you will miss many more.

2. Minimise the spread of infection!

After a high SCC cow is milked, the bacteria from the infected quarter can be detected on the liner of that cluster for up to 6 milkings. That means that the next 6 cows that are milked with the same cluster are at risk of being infected with those bacteria. The best way to break this cycle is to mark these high SCC cows and milk them last to minimise disease spread. If you are milking a large herd, you may find it easier to just run these cows as a separate herd, and milk them last.

Good hygiene during milking (of the cow, the milker and the parlour) and a good milking routine are also essential to prevent the spread of bacteria.

3. Deal with these problem cows now!

Don't ignore these high SCC cows-just because their infections may not be visible to the naked eye, this does not mean they are insignificant. In fact, these infections can have more of an impact on your herd than clinical infections as they can lurk for longer before being detected and dealt with.

4 Should you treat this infection?

While this may be a logical option, treating high SCC cows is not always appropriate or recommended. Remember that cure rates can range from 20-80% depending on various factors such as the bacteria involved, the duration of infection and the cow's lactation number. Discuss a treatment plan for these cases with your vet.

5. Remove the source of infection instead

- Drying off individual quarters will prevent the spread of infection, and the impact that these cows have on your bulk tank SCC. Use a CMT to identify the problem quarter and simply stop milking it, do NOT use a dry cow tube.
- Alternatively dry the cow off early, particularly if she is a candidate that would benefit from a longer dry period. Discuss an appropriate dry cow treatment with your vet.
- Finally, sometimes you need to just cut your losses. Consider culling if the cow is a repeat offender i.e. high SCC in two consecutive lactations.

For more detail on dealing with high SCC cows, see Management Note M in the *CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control*.