

High SCC cows? Don't turn a blind eye!

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While maximising production and selling as much milk as possible may be a priority this autumn, turning a blind eye to animals with a high somatic cell count (SCC) could prove to be a very costly exercise. Cows with a high SCC have a subclinical infection- they are not producing milk to their full potential because this infection has damaged some of the mammary tissue. Feeding cows has already been a costly exercise on many farms this year-are you sure that all cows are giving you a return and not just costing you money? To make matters worse, high SCC cows are a constant source of infection in your herd! So how should you deal with them?

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. While milk recording might be seen as an extra cost, it can be more expensive not to! 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. Milk recording will also allow you to identify the most productive cows in terms of fat, protein and milk yields, and who are 'paying their way'.

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. Thus, high SCC cows should be marked and milked last to minimise disease spread. If it is not possible to run them as a separate herd, hold them back and milk them as the last row. This will prevent them infecting other cows.

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.

- **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.

- **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.



California Mastitis Test (CMT) to identify infected quarter

For more information on controlling mastitis in late lactation and dealing with high SCC cows, see Guidelines 14 and 15, and Management Note M in the CellCheck Farm Guidelines for Mastitis Control.