

As a farmer, why is mastitis control important to you?

Michelle McGrath, Assistant CellCheck Programme Manager

Mastitis and high somatic cell counts (SCC) can result in significant losses on any farm as mastitis reduces milk yield and leads to poor quality milk. Together, these factors erode the milk income received by farmers and processors. Research has shown that the average dairy farmer can improve net profitability by at least 1 cent per litre by improving mastitis control to reduce SCC to an achievable and sustainable level.

Programme goals for 2025

For any new entrant to dairying and as a general refresher to those that are well established in dairying, CellCheck is the national mastitis control programme. It is coordinated and facilitated by Animal Health Ireland (AHI) and was launched in 2010 in response to industry concern that bulk tank somatic cell counts (SCC) had been slowly rising since the late 90's. It was also recognised that there was little or no coordinated approach to mastitis control at that time, often with inconsistent advice being given to farmers from various sources.

CellCheck is supported by a Technical Working Group (TWG) and an Implementation Group (IG). The TWG is comprised of experts from a variety of fields who are tasked with drawing up factual resources, the development of decision-making tools, and the identification of areas for further research and development. The CellCheck Implementation Group plays a key role in the strategic direction and delivery of the CellCheck programme, as well as exploring and addressing the key industry challenges. The IG is composed of representatives from all industry stakeholder bodies.

Significant progress has been made in the udder health of the national herd since the establishment of CellCheck, with national SCC reducing from 272,000 cells/mL in 2009, to 182,000 cells /mL in 2021.

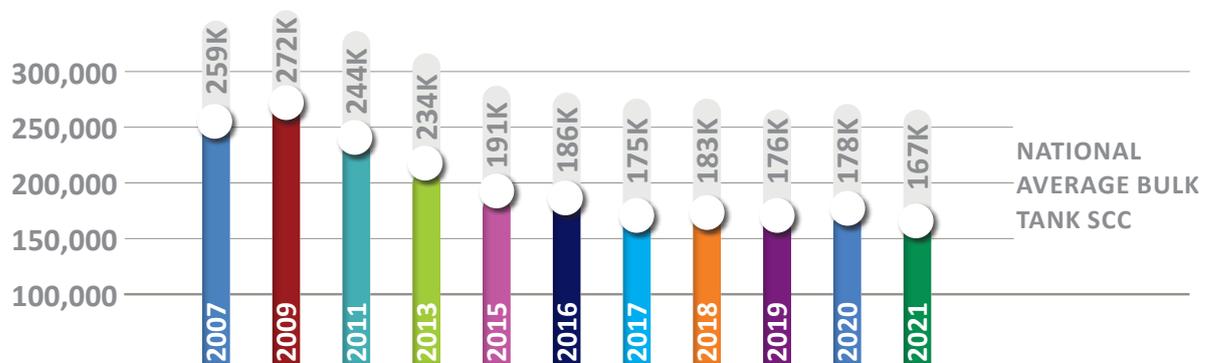


Figure 4. Annual average SCC (2007-2021).

National Average Bulk tank SCC from 2007-2021

One of the most important activities within the CellCheck programme has been to establish a national SCC database. Since 2014, the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) has been collecting bulk tank SCC data directly from the milk processors and Co-ops. This dataset has been invaluable in agreeing common industry targets and demonstrating progress in udder health nationally.

New programme targets, to be reached by 2025 were established by the Implementation Group in 2021, which address not only SCC but also milk recording and data collection. The series of industry agreed targets are as follows:

Goal 1 - SCC target

- 80% of national milk supplied with an SCC <200,000/mL.
- 75% of milk supplied between January and April with an SCC <200,000/mL.

Goal 2 - Milking Recording target

- Increase of 15 percentage points annually for 2 years, from 43% of herds recording in 2020 and 5% increase annually thereafter aiming for over 90% of herds to be milk recording by 2025.
- Increase the average number of recordings per annum from 4.5 to 6.

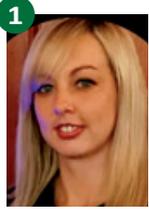
Goal 3 - Data collection target

- 30% of dairy farmers recording mastitis treatments online.
- 75% of dairy farmers recording dry cow treatments online.

The Implementation Group recognises the importance of these measures in terms of both driving forward further improvement in the national SCC (which has been relatively static since 2017) and addressing the challenges of the Veterinary Medicine Regulations from now on in terms of the transition to selective dry cow therapy.

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