

Growing a milk quality stream in practice

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Abstract

The elimination of milk equipment analysis by Dairy Farmers of Ontario left a void for this service. With a dairy farm background and interest in milk quality services, this speaker added a milk quality consultation service to his veterinary practice. For this endeavor to be successful, include the herd veterinarian and a milk equipment company representative in the action plan to improve milk quality.

Key words: milk quality, milking equipment analysis, National Mastitis Council, veterinarian

Résumé

La disparition de l'analyse de l'équipement de traite par les producteurs de lait de l'Ontario a laissé un vide pour ce service. Venant d'une ferme laitière et ayant un intérêt pour des services reliés à la qualité du lait, ce présentateur a ajouté un service de consultation sur la qualité du lait à sa pratique vétérinaire. Pour que cette initiative soit fructueuse, incluez le vétérinaire du troupeau et un représentant de compagnie d'équipement laitier dans le plan d'action pour améliorer la qualité du lait.

My Background

I grew up on a 30-cow, tie-stall dairy farm and took over management of the farm at age 19. Six years later, in 1994, I sold the cows and quota, and enrolled in the agriculture program at the University of Guelph. I was fortunate to be admitted to the veterinary school (Ontario Veterinary College) and graduated in 2001. I began my veterinary career at Mitchell Veterinary Services in 2001, and became a partner in 2004.

The Milk Equipment Analysis Service Journey

In 2007, the Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO), the milk marketing board in Ontario, discontinued their milk equipment analysis technicians. This was a fee-for-service group of technicians who would perform farm visits to help dairy farmers who were experiencing milk quality problems. The elimination of this service left a void with very few independent people left to do this work. With my background as a dairy farmer, I felt it would be a good fit for me to learn more about analyzing milk equipment.

In 2012, at the Dairy Health Management Certificate update meeting in Guelph, Ont., the theme was milk quality.

One of the speakers was Dr. David Reid, who explained how he created a milking analysis service within his veterinary practice. This gave me the push I needed and there were 3 other veterinarians in my area who also wanted to learn. We worked together, bought some equipment, and began learning how to perform the National Mastitis Council (NMC) dynamic milking system analysis. In the fall of 2012, I completed all 3 American Association of Bovine Practitioners pre-conference milk quality seminars, and later that year completed Boumatic's dynamic milking analysis technician training workshop in Madison, Wisconsin. This provided me a solid foundation to begin performing the NMC milk equipment analysis procedures in my clients' herds.

Ensuring Equipment Dealer 'Buy-in'

I identified milk equipment companies in the area and met with the owner of each company to explain what I was doing, how I was doing it, and why I was doing this work. I also laid out my plan for collaboration with these milk equipment companies as it related to milk quality. This included my testing protocol and the NMC guidelines. There was resistance to this collaboration at first, but over time, it has grown into effective collaboration. The key was identifying the right person at each company to collaborate with.

My Milking Analysis Protocol

Encourage the client to include farm advisors (veterinarian, nutritionist, milk equipment company representative) in the communication.

1. Talk with the owner, find out the presenting complaint, explain the protocol and procedures, discuss fee structure for the service.
2. Arrange a date for the milking time farm visit.
3. Perform the NMC Dynamic Milking time analysis.
4. Perform a few static tests after milking (pulsators, effective reserve, manual reserve, fall-off test).
5. Walk the barn with the owner/manager, identify quality milk bottlenecks.
6. Provide 1 to 3 recommendations in writing, before leaving the farm.
7. Create a comprehensive report (include DHI, Parlor, DFO data, dynamic/static results).
8. Arrange a meeting with the advisor team and owner (within 7 to 14 days of the farm visit) to review the report and *create the action list*.
9. Provide follow-up testing, if required, after changes are completed.

10. Follow-up with the herd veterinarian or owner in 4 to 8 weeks.

The Action List

I think this is the most important part of my analysis. The list is created by the whole team during the advisor team meeting and is based on my recommendations. The owner must agree to the items on this list, which creates buy-in. The action list is kept to 6 or fewer items and is written on a large Post-it note (20" x 23"). Each item includes what it is, who is going to complete it, and a proposed completion date. I take a picture of the final list for my files, leave the copy on farm in a visible place, and e-mail a legible copy to the owner and the advisor team who attended the meeting. Following the meeting, I use the herd veterinarian as the "coach" (if he/she is willing) to make sure the action list items are completed within the agreed upon time-frame. The herd veterinarian is best suited to do this task because of regular, frequent herd visits, an ongoing relationship with the herd and can monitor herd milk quality key performance indicators to provide feedback for the team.

Final Thoughts

In order to grow a milk quality revenue stream in your practice, milk quality needs to become a passion. You need to be willing to invest (after hours) time and some money into it. It is critical to have practice partner(s) buy into this endeavor as well. Consider collaborating with someone else in your area (neighboring practice) to help you through the learning stages of milk equipment analysis. Plan your approach to carrying out the analysis so it is effectively and consistently delivered each time. The NMC has several great resources on its website (www.nmconline.org) to help with this. I encourage you to include the milk equipment company and the herd veterinarian in the communication process to facilitate a successful program. Lastly, "Just Do It!" Jump in with both feet and don't look back. It will be a rewarding experience for you and your clients.