

Arizona DHIA
Phone: 480-894-0156

Dairy Lab Services
Phone: 563-557-7421

Dairy One Cooperative Inc.
Phone: 607-257-1272

DHI Cooperative Inc.
Phone: 800-DHI-OHIO

Idaho DHIA
Phone: 208-733-6372, ext. 104

Indiana State Dairy Assn.
Phone: 765-494-8025

Lancaster DHIA
Phone: 717-665-5960

Minnesota DHIA
Phone: 763-682-1091

NorthStar Cooperative
DHI Services
Phone: 800-471-3716

Puerto Rico DHIA
Phone: 787-544-6690

Rocky Mountain DHIA
Phone: 435-374-0218

San Joaquin DHIA
Phone: 209-824-7790

Tennessee DHIA
Phone: 865-974-7289

Texas DHIA
Phone: 806-651-8750

United Federation of DHIAs
Phone: 540-552-2541

Vermont DHIA
Phone: 802-295-3379

Washington State DHIA
Phone: 360-755-0375

Got dairy data? Letting your cows

On Nov. 22, 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Agriculture Marketing Service issued a "Notice to the Industry." This notice referred to the European Union Health Certification Program for dairy products imported into the European Union.

Your cows will appreciate if you keep reading. These regulations are important to maintain U.S. dairy exports, which in turn help keep or increase the demand for dairy products, including those exported from the United States. This, in turn, helps keep dairy product demand and prices at current or higher levels. Generally, this is good news for dairy producers and cows.

Keep reading and you will be able to communicate with your cows even more. The notice deals with somatic cell count (SCC) and standard plate count (SPC) for milk going into dairy products. These levels have been debated in the United States over the last few years and the impact the levels would have on dairy production. Those debates about SCC levels are over and the regulatory and milk processors/cooperatives are the groups to ask questions about the policy. Following is the major point:

- Effective Jan. 1, 2012, the U.S. dairy industry must begin the transition to the farm level milk sampling program to verify SCC and SPC compliance with EU regulations for SCC levels.

So, what does this have to do with DHI and communicating with my cows?

Measuring the SCC levels as part of regular test day occurs in about 95% of the herds on DHI component testing plans. The measurement of somatic cells helps indicate the potential level of mastitis that in many

cases may be subclinical. These SCC levels and their monitoring help identify milk quality or health problems in the cow that may be subclinical, rather than acute. Further follow-up on which quarter or quarters are actually infected is required. The SCC measurement is overall for the cow and not an individual quarter.

DHI adopted a SCC reporting system in the 1980s known as somatic cell score (SCS). The SCS has 10 categories – from 0 to 9 – which are related to the range of SCC measurement (**see Table 1**). This allows for a level of SCC to be presented on a standardized scale. The general rule is that each increase of 1 linear score (e.g., from 3 to 4 SCS) doubles the SCC and milk production loss of 375 pounds of milk per lactation or about 1.4 pounds of milk per day on second and greater lactation cows. That can add up to lost milk production and profit if just 5% of the herd has a SCS higher than what might be managed through the measurement and communication of SCC.

Getting management solutions and working to control or cull problem cows, generally, has a major impact on the overall herd SCC score or better yet the bulk tank SCC.

Why do cows have the SCC measurement they have? What is being communicated?

- Poor milking equipment and system

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communicate with you

– examples are vacuum fluctuations, old or cracked inflations, and leaks in the vacuum system.

- Poor milking practices – examples are hygiene practices, such as milking prep and washing teats; post-milking practices, such as sloppy teat dipping and drying teats; and rapid temperature and humidity changes upon parlor discharge.

- Dirty resting and eating areas for cows. This could be in either tie-stall or freestall housing. Dirty walkways, alleyways and lots are something to evaluate. Standing water in housing, lots or access to creeks or ponds are major sources of problems that impact udder health and SCC.

- Animal health and particularly udder health programs need to be in place and followed during lactation and dry periods. This helps reduce SCC and increase overall health of individual cows and the herd.

Make sure to follow the protocols and standard operating procedures for all treatment programs.

The management of individual cows based on what they are communicating to you as a manager is an important step in keeping the herd bulk tank SCC at the level downstream organizations desire and expect to be compliant based on regulatory guidelines implemented on Jan. 1, 2012. DHI can help measure SCC and then the herd manager can manage the cows and herd to gain the lowest SCC level possible.

Good measurement and communication for management is a strong relationship the cow and herd manager can achieve together. DHI information and reports can be built to help manage the dairy operation as a vital link in that communication effort.

Table 1. SCS, SCC relationship

SCS	SCC (1,000's/ml) Midpoint	Range
0	12.5	0-17
1	25	18-34
2	50	35-70
3	100	71-140
4	200	141-282
5	400	283-565
6	800	566-1130
7	1600	1131-2262
8	3200	2263-4525
9	6400	>4526



Proper milking practices – from milking clean and dry teats to post-dipping teats – go a long way in producing top-quality milk and protecting and building international dairy markets.