

Somatic Cell Counts in Milk - Notes for Guidance

REGULATIONS (EC) NOS. 852/2004 AND 853/2004 (AS AMENDED)

SCC (Somatic Cell Count) Standard

Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 which lays down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin, sets standards for SCC. Producers are not permitted to sell milk for human consumption if their SCC is in excess of 400,000 per ml. This standard is an average calculated using 3 consecutive months' results.

If the standard is exceeded, producers have three months to investigate and make improvements. Exceeding the SCC standard for more than three months triggers suspension of collection of your bulk supply, by your purchaser, until the standard is met. This would result in huge losses and problems with disposal of the unsatisfactory milk supply.

Benefits of low SCC

The financial benefits of reducing your herd SCC are considerable. Low cell count milk has improved compositional quality compared to high cell count milk and attracts bonus payments while avoiding SCC penalties.

Cows with high cell counts may require costly veterinary treatments and milk may have to be discarded for a considerable period. Should your bulk tank milk supply become contaminated with antibiotic residues during such treatment this can also lead to a heavy fine.

Premature culling of cows is one of the main reasons for financial losses on the farm.

Reducing SCC

- Adopt a sound herd replacement policy. In general younger cows have low SCCs. Cull older cows with continual high SCCs. Aim for an ongoing herd replacement rate of 20-25% either by rearing or purchasing suitable replacements.
- Maintain your milking equipment in good working order. An inefficient milking machine can cause damage to teats and udder tissue resulting in elevated cell counts.
- Periodic testing/servicing of the milking plant is essential i.e. annual testing of vacuum levels and pulsation. Regularly replace rubbers as advised by your machine supplier. Teat cup liners should be changed after 2500 milkings.
- Avoid under or over milking as this can cause teat/udder damage. Don't leave the parlour during milking to feed calves or to carry out other tasks.
- Eliminate stray voltage and power fluctuations in the milking area which can cause stress to cows.

Managing SCC in your herd

- Draw up a SCC control programme in consultation with your Veterinary practitioner. Pay particular attention to good hygiene and animal welfare providing suitable well ventilated housing and adequate drinkers.
- Keep cubicle beds, roaming areas, yards and passages clean by scraping twice daily and provide adequate clean dry bedding.
- Dry off cows promptly as SCC tends to increase in late lactation. This gives cows adequate time to rest and recover before calving.
- Practise selective use of dry cow therapy and/or teat sealants taking into consideration the current herd SCC results and any milk recording information on individual cows.
- Always use veterinary medicines responsibly as their use is coming under increased scrutiny due to the emergence of antimicrobial resistant strains of bacteria.
(Refer to DAERA AfIB Guidance leaflet on Antibiotic Residues in Milk)
- Keep accurate records of all treatments administered to cows and review treatments for mastitis infections.
- Identify cows with high SCC by individually testing through your Veterinary practitioner or your milk purchaser and treat, dry off or cull as appropriate.

Milking Routine

- Examine and reject foremilk before udder preparation.
- Clean the teats and udders with individual paper towels and pre-dip if used. Use of cloths is discouraged unless a clean cloth is provided for each cow and these are sterilised after use.
- Do not over milk or under milk.
- Disinfect clusters with an approved disinfectant after milking cows with high SCC or mastitis infections before applying the unit to another cow.
- Segregate and milk high SCC animals last through the parlour if possible.
- Dip or spray teats with a suitable teat disinfectant immediately after milking.
- Do not allow cows to lie down for 30 minutes after milking to help prevent dirt and bacteria entering the teat canal.

Low numbers of somatic cells in your milk indicate a healthy, well managed dairy herd whereas high numbers indicate mastitis infection, udder damage or other welfare and management issues. High cell counts are one of the main reasons for having to cull cows and incur losses.

Protect milk quality, profits and longevity of your valuable animals by taking control of SCC in your herd.

For further information on Somatic Cell Counts in milk contact your Veterinary Practitioner and your local DAERA Milk Inspector:

www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/complying-hygiene-regulations-dairy-farms

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