

Milking Gloves: Production or Comfort?

Is the growth of wearing gloves during milking due to increased milk production, lower SCC count (both proven by research) or is it due to increased milker comfort? Owners and managers are pleased with the safety and production results and milking personnel appreciate cleaner, non-chapped hands.

Management Benefits

Wearing gloves during udder prep and milking has been proven to reduce the incidence of intramammary infections. The gloves help to prevent bacteria from collecting on the hands of operators in cracks, folds and around fingernails. These pathogens can be transferred from quarter to quarter or from cow to cow.

Preventing the transfer of pathogens to otherwise healthy quarters or cows lowers total herd counts, produces better quality milk and increases pounds of milk produced. The modest investment in gloves can yield profits many times greater than their initial cost.

Universities and Veterinarians Agree

University field studies on milking routines and procedures have produced techniques such as the “One Step Cow Prep” and others. The title “One Step” refers to combining pre-dipping and cleaning with stimulation, thereby doing a better job of both, while saving operator motion and time. Wearing gloves during this procedure is a key to insuring the maximum benefits.

Dr. Andy Johnson (Total Herd Management Services, Inc., Clintonville, WI) feels so strongly about using gloves in a properly-managed milking routine that he stated (2000 National Mastitis Council Annual Meeting, Reno, NV, page 123): “If milkers are not using gloves, I feel it is enough of a reason to terminate them from employment.”

But sadly—and almost unbelievably—not all dairies are including gloves in their milking routines! The National Animal Health Monitoring System’s (NAHMS) Dairy 2007 study surveyed dairy operations in 17 states, representing 79.5 % of U.S. dairy operations and 82.5% of U.S. dairy cows (United States Department of Agriculture, APHIS).

The results of the survey showed that only **55.2 %** of the dairies surveyed reported that milkers wore gloves to milk all cows! It appears that larger operations tended to be more diligent in requiring the use of gloves, which is logical, since larger dairies normally have more management involvement with veterinarians and university personnel.

Hoard’s Dairyman also surveys dairy producers, but on an annual basis. (NAHMS surveys every 5 Years). The Hoard’s survey showed **48.2%** of milkers were required to wear gloves.

Both surveys indicated that the percentage of milkers using gloves was greater on larger dairies—however, the results show that only about half of milkers wear gloves.

Perhaps the survey figures do not reflect such a low percentage in your area—great! But the fact that all dairies are not yet using gloves for milking is a genuine cause for concern on a number of levels—especially management.

Operator Benefits

Comfort during milking is an important component of doing a thorough job of cleaning and stimulating teats before machines are attached. Some teat dips can irritate chapped hands. Cold temperatures in winter make wet hands an unpleasant experience in general. When gloves are worn, milkers tend to do a more thorough job and conform to the milking routine.

Be sure to select a high-quality glove for your people to use. Nitrile gloves are resistant to chemicals, hypo-allergenic, more comfortable to wear and are more durable than other formulations. Operators are more willing to comply with specified management objectives when the gloves provided are better in quality and more comfortable to wear.

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