

# DAIRY VETERINARY NEWSLETTER

September 2013

## USDA Milk Test Results and Other Updates from the AABP Conference

There has been a lot of interest in the dairy industry regarding the FDA testing for 32 drugs in milk from 1800 dairy farms, which was reported to have been completed in late 2012. Release of the results of this survey project has been anticipated for approximately one year. Once again this was a subject of discussion at the Milk Quality and Udder Health Committee meeting at the American Association of Bovine Practitioners conference a few weeks ago. It was reported that release of the results is anticipated to result in some negative publicity for the dairy industry, and that FDA is struggling with how to minimize such a response. Some committee members had been told that apparently there were a number of instances where drugs were detected in milk, but only below the threshold of violative levels. However, critics of the dairy industry are likely to publicize this in terms of drugs were found in milk, and it is legal. The release was expected to be before the end of 2013, but this week the expected release date has been pushed back to February 2014.

### **Providing information to the public as well as veterinarians, including via the AABP website**

Related to issues such as the above, there was a discussion of presenting information and answers to the public regarding dairy cow health, welfare, dairy beef and milk quality. Several members related that whenever they are involved in events at fairs, agricultural tours, and other interactions with the general public, the questions that every audience has regarding dairy or meat products are largely about the same subjects:

**Antibiotics**

**Hormones**

**Milk quality**

**Food safety**

**GMO's (genetically modified organisms)**

There was also quite a bit of commentary regarding social media outlets. Many news stories, including national or international incidents, disasters, as well as stories or regional or local interest are first "reported"

via social media. Before any traditional media, government or law enforcement spokespersons, etc. report on the subject, there are often “news reports” on social media, which may be misleading or incorrect.

Therefore it was recommended that a subcommittee of the AABP Milk Quality and Udder Health Committee begin to address the following, if the board of directors agrees:

The AABP website, which is difficult to use and which does not appear near the top of internet search results, should be reorganized. Better searchability and clear access to statements on policy, pertinent issues, and consumer information regarding meat and milk products should be the goal. Quite a bit of this information is already there, but hard to find. More information may be needed as well, but access has to be improved.

The AABP should consider development of an AABP professional Facebook page. Ideally at least one person at AABP would coordinate responses to negative press and incorrect statements regarding the cattle industries we are part of, and which we believe are in very large part producing high quality food with excellent care of the animals. Outlets such as Facebook and being near the top of internet searches for information are not only vital for the public, but it was noted that many AABP members, especially students and graduates within the last 10 years or so get much of their information that way. I myself, having graduated about 30 years ago, find internet searches from credible sources to be one important information source.

### **Are We Reaching the Employees that Take Care of Animals on Dairy Farms Like We Think We Are?**

There was an interesting presentation by Phil Durst from Michigan State University at AABP. Studies were carried out on multiple dairy farms in different regions of the U.S. Farm owners, herdspeople, other management personnel, veterinarians, milkers, feeders, calf care personnel, and some other categories of farm employees were contacted by postcard if they agreed to provide contact information. If and only if they called a phone number on the postcard and wanted to be interviewed, they were. The participation rate was surprisingly high, > 50%. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish or Portuguese (the latter may have included people from Brazil, the largest Portuguese speaking population in the world).

Each type of personnel was asked about what percent of their time on the farm was spent communicating with each other type of position. Farm owners, upper management personnel, and veterinarians all reported more time spent communicating with milkers, feeders, etc. than vice versa. Substantially more communication was estimated by people higher in the management hierarchy than was perceived by people in positions down the organizational chart.

Questions regarding training, written training or policy materials, standard procedures, farm employees receiving feedback in their jobs, etc. were asked of everyone. Farm owners and managers reported a higher percentage of training, written materials, etc. than other employees said they received such information.

Specific answers regarding milkers’, feeders’, etc. training often included statements like, “I was shown how to do it when I first got here”, “I received no training”, or “I am only told when I do it wrong”.

Questions were also asked regarding how often employees received feedback regarding job performance, or whether they were encouraged to suggest improvements in how jobs might be done. Many reported little or no feedback for months or years. Much of the commentary concerning employees’ suggestions for changing how tasks were done on the farm indicated that suggestions were not implemented (perceived as “ignored” by the employees). However, there was a subset of employees that reported regular job feedback. It was

interesting that when they were asked more about the feedback, the vast majority reported that they were only told when they did things incorrectly, given conflicting instructions, “everything I do is wrong”, etc. Only a few reported regular job feedback that included constructive criticism or positive feedback.

It was also found that a considerable fraction of employees on dairy farms did not have much job satisfaction, and were on the lookout for the next job they could find. Much of the above probably applies to many businesses and organizations. I’m sure that some dairy producers, practice owners, university administrators, and other people in leadership positions might attribute much of the above to complaining by people who have not risen too high in their organizational charts for a reason. I would say there is certainly some truth in that. However, I would also say that from my experience in practice as well as many years of working with milkers, parlor managers, milking equipment dealers, farm management and herd veterinarians regarding mastitis and udder health, I have often seen that management’s perception of job training, performance feedback, working conditions, and the provision of written procedures for farm tasks is different than what the employees get.

A final interesting bit of information in this talk was regarding treatment protocols on dairy farms. Written protocols for such things as newborn calf care, standard treatments for mastitis, etc. were studied. It was often the case that farm owners, herdspeople, other supervisors, and the herd veterinarians all said that written protocols existed on a given farm. The only job category that said they did not have any such written protocols was the person on that same farm who worked on fresh cows, calf feeding, treating, milking, etc., the one person who would need to implement them. It was also of interest that approximately 20% of farm owners with written job materials said they would not know where to find them. Presumably locating or updating such materials was delegated to someone else.

Independence and stubbornness have often been identified by sociology studies as two characteristics of many successful dairy producers. This is why so many of them are successful and largely fun to work with. Countless times I have found out from dairy producers that the reason they started the business or were the only one of their generation who came back to the farm from some other kind of job was that they did not like jobs where they reported directly to a boss, had to deal with the public, had to live in large cities and deal with traffic, etc. As long as farmers have this vital independence, some of the above communication issues may be hard to solve. Nevertheless, dairy veterinarians should be aware that if we think our recommendations, including standard written procedures, are being routinely followed on dairy farms, any input that we can have regarding re-training, verifying that written materials are available, or checking in with employees who actually milk and take care of the animals is vital.

### **Dehorning and Use of Anesthesia on Dairy Farms, and Study of a New Analgesic**

A presentation by Matthew Stock from Iowa State University addressed the use of a new anesthetic while dehorning calves.

Information included:

94% of dairy farms routinely dehorn their animals

68% of beef veterinarians administer anesthesia while dehorning

63% of dairy veterinarians administer anesthesia while dehorning

12% of dairy producers administer anesthesia while dehorning

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The analgesic studied was firocoxib, an NSAID, sold as Equioxx ®, an equine labeled anesthetic. Equioxx is available as injectable liquid or oral paste. All calves studied were administered lidocaine local anesthetic. Four groups of calves were also administered one of: I.V. firocoxib 0.5 mg/kg (placebo group sterile saline) or oral firocoxib 0.5 mg/kg (placebo group hay paste). Electric dehorning of calves was then performed. Pain biomarkers of ocular temperature (color change view of increased eye temperature), nosiception meter (pressure device measuring how hard one may push on a spot before there is avoidance), and blood cortisol were used. There was no significant difference in analgesia compared with lidocaine alone.

If any of our readers have not attended an AABP meeting, I hope they will get the opportunity and will attend in the future.

Please let us know your comments and also suggestions for future topics. I can be reached at (435) 760-3731 (Cell), (435) 797-1899 M-Tues, (435) 797-7120 W-F or [David.Wilson@usu.edu](mailto:David.Wilson@usu.edu).



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