



Zero Tolerance

One of the most valuable roles Udder Health Systems can play for the commercial dairyman is to help implement **Zero Tolerance Programs**. Zero Tolerance is a management attitude that says you will never knowingly allow contagious mastitis infected cows to be milked with your clean cows. Most herds are free of *Streptococcus agalactia* and *Mycoplasma* but many dairymen have at least some *Staph aureus* mastitis in their herds.

Fortunately for most dairymen, typical Staph infection levels are low (less than 5%). The disease in the individual cow is typically a fairly mild case of chronic mastitis. Frequently there are no clinical signs detected in the first year of the infection. Even more advanced cases show only infrequent and mild clinical symptoms. Because so many dairymen have at least some Staph mastitis in their herds, a dangerous attitude of tolerance commonly exists. The attitude is that a few Staph cows will be tolerated as long as the overall herd quality statistics are good. The reality is however that the milk from these cows will **not** meet quality standards. These Staph infected cows are like smoldering embers on a pile of dry kindling. Unfortunately some dairymen have experienced the fire of a Staph outbreak. During an outbreak, infection levels can reach as high as 50% or more of the cows. This is when the true nightmare of Staph mastitis becomes evident. If *half your herd* does not meet quality standards, you **will** be degraded. With a disease that is largely incurable, it takes a long time to work out of a mess like that. That's why most dairymen that have had a Staph outbreak generally fall into one of two categories. They either learn to become experts in controlling the disease or the disease puts them out of business. Even if they are able to put out the fire, what you have left is hopelessly damaged, and half the herd must be culled. A dairyman who once has gone through this costly experience will never want to go through it again. His best defense against Staph mastitis is really a change in attitude. It's called **Zero Tolerance**.

Zero Tolerance is a management attitude that says you will not allow *Staphylococcus aureus* infected cows to be milked with your clean cows. This single slogan when implemented as a practice, is the best insurance you can buy to prevent Staph mastitis. It means that if you find a Staph cow you will do something about it *now*. You will treat her if you want to try to cure her. Once diagnosed with Staph, she can't be declared cured unless she is both CMT negative and culture negative. Much of the time unfortunately, she can't be cured

and you shouldn't even bother to try. If you can't or won't treat her, milk her last. Segregation strings are *very powerful* tools for controlling new infections. For them to be effective they must be based on accurate culture information, all the shedders must be in there. If you don't want to segregate then you must cull; the sooner the better!

There are many anti-agent mastitis control procedures that are effective in controlling contagious infections. These techniques include pre and post dipping, individual towels for drying, dry-treating all quarters of all cows during the dry period, and backflushing the milk unit between cows. All these techniques are applied systematically to the herd in an effort to slow the new infection rate. These tools are recommended as part of any herds' preventative mastitis program. They are essential for Staph problem herds. When applied successfully, it will keep the level of infection low. What is special about Zero Tolerance is that it recognizes that the reservoir of infection for this disease is the quarters of infected cows. For all practical purposes the only way a new case can occur is if a healthy cow is exposed to the milk of a carrier. So the simplest, most powerful and most direct method of controlling the disease is to control the individuals that have it. That is the source. Eliminate the source by curing her or culling her, and if you can't do either of those, then segregate her. When applied successfully Zero Tolerance will not just slow the disease, it will *eradicate* it. If you don't have the organism, you can't have the disease.