Mycoplasma— A Tough Mastitis Bug

By: Jerry Bertoldo

Mycoplasma mastitis has made a splash in WNY this winter as a problem in herds both large and small. What has triggered its emergence on more than half a dozen dairies in the region...increased cold stress or maybe tighter barns? Since there are several potential reservoirs of Mycoplasma sp. on the farm, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact source when things go bad. Mycoplasma can be isolated from the eyes, ears, joints, reproductive tract, mammary glands and lungs with varying degrees of disease expression and health risk. When the problem is mastitis, the milking process becomes the focus of any attempt to stop transmission and implement preventive measures.

Mycoplasma is very contagious, lacks consistent response to antibiotics, does not lend itself to making effective vaccines, cannot be easily diagnosed by blood work and requires special media with a longer time frame to culture. Its lack of cell wall and unusual genetic profile puts it in a category by itself. In recent years a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test has been used to screen bulk tank milk.

MASTITIS

Mycoplasma mastitis has been known for decades. California was the place where it became notorious back in the 1960’s. Early reports of this mastitis often were dramatic - hard quarters, abnormal secretions, one or more quarters affected within a day or two. Surprisingly, cows were not very sick. Treatments of any kind proved to be useless as they still are today. Culturing, identifying and culling infected cows was the only sure way to cut down on the risk of transmission. The extremely contagious nature of these bacteria makes the milking process the prime means of spreading it.

Continued on page 3
Mission Statement

The NWNY Dairy, Livestock & Field Crops team will provide lifelong education to the people of the agricultural community to assist them in achieving their goals. Through education programs & opportunities, the NWNY Team seeks to build producers’ capacities to:

♦ Enhance the profitability of their business
♦ Practice environmental stewardship
♦ Enhance employee & family well-being in a safe work environment
♦ Provide safe, healthful agricultural products
♦ Provide leadership for enhancing relationships between agricultural sector, neighbors & the general public.

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Subsequently in the Northeast, the profile of mycoplasma mastitis has become less clear cut. We now see infections that range from classic off colored, thick secretions to brief flare-ups or just high somatic cell counts without any clinical mastitis. These differences may be explained by the fact that there are several species of Mycoplasma now prevalent that are capable of infecting the udder. How harmful these are to the udder varies greatly. It is sobering to think that up to 10% of the herd may have udder infections with Mycoplasma by the time it is diagnosed. Once infected a cow is considered to be a carrier for life. Infected cows may have consistently high somatic cell counts, but shed the bacteria only on a sporadic basis. Inconsistent shed says that individual cow cultures may be misleading if only performed once.

**PREVENTION**

Mycoplasma vaccines for use in cattle have been available for years either as commercially produced or autogenously made products. Results and expert opinion on the effectiveness of these products is varied, but not impressive. In the meantime, it remains a wise recommendation to do bulk tank cultures on a monthly basis if you are experiencing high cell counts, mastitis that is unresponsive to antibiotics and ear droop/head tilt in calves. You must ask for a Mycoplasma culture. It differs from the standard one.

Unfortunately, fresh cows as any other stressed bovine tend to shed rather heavily if infected. Depending on the length of time since exposure and organ system involved, some cattle may be systemically infected with Mycoplasma and capable of shedding via saliva, nasal secretions, uterine discharge as well as milk. The greatest threat to uninfected animals comes from sick or unapparent shedders placed in close proximity to fresh cows. Huge numbers of organisms can pollute the water sources, feed bunks and particularly bedding. It is commonly thought that there is a 7 month life span of Mycoplasma sp. in the environment under ideal conditions. In 2008 QMPS and the Cornell Diagnostic Lab surveyed fresh cow bedded packs and calf barns to see if indeed these could be reservoirs of organisms. Surprisingly, high levels of Mycoplasma were cultured from underlying surfaces of organic material or sand from numerous samples. Mycoplasma bacteria do not multiply in these environments. This study effectively demonstrated the enormous numbers of organisms deposited there by infected animals and their ability to survive.

Since this disease does not lend itself to cures, prevention must be the focus. Future vaccines may prove valuable, but reducing the risk of respiratory infections and monitoring udder health will remain a key part of keeping Mycoplasma in check. Paying attention to bedding area maintenance is now on the list as well. Helpful resources are available on line at https://ahdc.vet.cornell.edu/sects/QMPS/. Consult your veterinarian if you are experiencing frustrating mastitis cases or high somatic cell counts.
Livestock Handling Tips from the Expert, Dr. Temple Grandin

By: Nancy Glazier

The NY Beef Producers Association hosted Dr. Temple Grandin at January’s winter meeting. She shared some of her experiences working livestock. Grandin has Asperger’s Disease, an Autism Spectrum Disorder, which has given her insight into animals. She has spent her life studying animal behavior.

Grandin sees the world in pictures. She has a difficult time with abstract ideas; she needs things logical as she is methodical. Animals think in pictures, smells, touches, tastes and sounds. They have long memories of bad experiences. Low stress handling will allow better weight gain and milk production, and is safer for both animals and humans.

Livestock need to be moved when they are happy. Watch their ears and look at their eyes. If their ears are up and eyes are brown, they are ready to move. If one ear is pointed in a different direction the animal is ‘watching with its ear’; it is listening to a sound from the direction it is pointed. If ears are pointed forward and white around the eyes is seen, this animal will be prone to flight if startled by something and the herd will go with it.

Grazing animals see some colors but not the full spectrum that humans see. They have two-color receptors while humans have three-color receptors. They are most attuned to yellowish green and bluish purple, and do not see red. They also have dichromaticism which means they are sensitive to harsh contrasts between light and dark colors. They are hesitant to approach shadows in a confinement setting.

Livestock will react to human touch. Gently stroke grazing animals, don’t pat. They may interpret patting as hitting. The forehead is a ‘no fly zone’ and off limits, according to Grandin. That is not the place to touch. Think of touch in the way a mother animal links her young.

Be aware of an animal’s flight zone. All animals (and humans) have a comfort zone. Animals that have been around humans regularly handled with low stress have a small flight zone. Those that have been out in the ‘back 40’ for the summer may need some different handling techniques.

Work with the grazing animal’s point of balance. This is at the shoulder of livestock. To move the animal forward, approach it from behind the shoulder.

Moving in front of the shoulder will get it to turn around and head in the other direction.

Signs of fear and distress:

♦ Tail switching with no flies present. The faster the switch the higher the stress level.
♦ Whites of the eyes are visible.
♦ Head is lifted up in a vigilant posture (looking for danger).
♦ Quivering skin.
♦ Increase in respiration rate.
♦ Increase in defecation or loose stools.
♦ Ears are pointed in the direction of the concern. Ears pinned back may be a sign of fear or aggression.

Take some time and check out your barn and handling facilities. Look for things that make unnecessary noises such as loose chains, rattling windows or boards. Keep quiet when moving animals, just make quiet ‘shhhh’ sounds to get their attention. No yelling allowed!

If you’d like to learn more about livestock handling check out Temple Grandin’s website at http://www.grandin.com. She also has an excellent book written with Mark Deesing, Humane Livestock Handling.
Now that we have had a soybean yield contest in NY for three years, I am getting more questions on how to improve soybean yields. This is great because this contest was created to increase interest in growing soybeans, push production methods and of course spark a little friendly competition!

Average soybean yields in NY have continued to rise and we achieved a record high average of 48 bushels in 2013. However, many growers are averaging 60 bushels and many are telling me they are hitting between 80 and 90 bushels on the yield monitor. Proof of higher yield potential also can be seen in the soybean contest. In 2012, six contest yields were over 80 bushels with 85 bushels taking top prize. Even though 2013 was a tougher growing season for beans, we still had five entries over 72 bushels with 77 bushels at the top.

Increasing soybean yields really starts with basic agronomics. How many of these can you check off?

* Soybeans like well-drained soils
* pH should be above 6.5 so the plant can uptake available nutrients
* P and K levels based on soil sample results (broadcast or put down through the planter)
* A good inoculant (2-3X on first-time fields – pre-inoculated + dry or liquid)
* A fungicide + insecticide seed treatment (reduce your seeding rate by 20 thousand)
* Plant 1” to 1.5” deep depending on soil moisture
* Row spacing of 20” or less intercepts maximum sunlight quicker (30” where white mold present)

What about time of planting? Many growers are planting soybeans around May 1 and late April if the conditions are right. This can be risky if they come up and get hit by frost but it might be worth the risk. If you look at the last two years of the soybean contest, beans planted before May 15 averaged 5.5 bushels higher than those planted after. If the planting conditions are right, I say plant them. It looks like it may be a later planting season in 2014!!!

Good pest management is crucial to keeping soybeans stress free and growing. Timely spraying of weeds is so important when it comes to competition for resources. I’m seeing more growers widen their options and putting down a pre-emerge program. These have worked well as long as we get the rainfall to activate them. On post-emerge programs, make sure weeds are sprayed before they are six inches tall.

An insecticide seed treatment should take care of initial soybean aphid populations. Otherwise, fields should be scouted weekly and populations assessed. If aphid counts reach 250 per plant, an insecticide application is justified. In years of heavy and frequent rainfall, foliar leaf diseases can be a problem. If diseases are present, fungicides can be applied for control. However, we have seen modest economic return with fungicides on soybeans here in NY.

Foliar feeding trials that I have run with growers in the region have had very inconsistent results. At this point I would recommend tissue sampling and only apply additional nutrients if a deficiency is detected.

This summer I will be looking at applying additional nitrogen and sulfur at different growth stages with stream bars.

Unfortunately for us one of the biggest determinations of soybean yield is one that we have no control over…...the weather. Available moisture during pod fill in the month of August can make or break us. Wish we could stockpile some of our snow this winter and save it for late summer.
Performance of NY’s Dairy Farm Businesses in 2013 – Some Early Results

By: John J. Hanchar

Summary

* While milk sold per cow was relatively stable, milk receipts per hundredweight (cwt.) rose 9.3 percent to $21.81 in 2013 when compared to 2012.
* In 2013, the total cost of producing a cwt. of milk was $20.51, an increase of 5.6 percent relative to 2012.
* As of mid February 2014, early results suggest that the same 32 New York State (NYS) dairy farms in Cornell University Cooperative Extension’s Dairy Farm Business (DFBS) Program achieved greater levels of profit in 2013 compared to 2012 - for example, in 2013, the rate of return on all assets without appreciation averaged 7.8 percent compared to 6.0 percent in 2012.

Introduction


Size of Business

* The average number of cows per farm rose from 771 in 2012 to 798 in 2013, an increase of about 3.5%.
* Worker equivalents per farm rose about 2.7% to 17.3 in 2013.
* Total tillable acres increased from 1,564 to 1,648 acres.

Rates of Production

* Milk sold per cow averaged 25,674 pounds in 2012 compared to 25,630 in 2013.
* Hay dry matter per acre rose 16.7% to 3.5 tons, while corn silage per acre rose from 16 to 17 tons.

Income Generation

* Gross milk sales per cow increased from $5,122 in 2012 to $5,589 in 2013, an increase of 9.1%.
* Gross milk sales per hundredweight (cwt.) rose from $19.95 to $21.81.

Cost Control

* Dairy feed and crop expense per cwt. of milk rose from $8.43 in 2012 to $8.72 in 2013, an increase of 3.4%.
* In 2013, purchased input cost of producing a cwt. of milk was $18.58, an increase of 5.6% relative to 2012.
* Total cost of producing a cwt. of milk rose from $19.42 to $20.51, an increase of 5.6%.

Profitability

* Net farm income without appreciation per cwt. of milk averaged $3.22 in 2013, an increase of 36.4% compared to 2012.
* Rate of return on equity capital without appreciation rose 38.9% in 2013 from 7.2 in 2012.
* In 2013, the rate of return on all assets without appreciation was 7.8%, an increase of 30% relative to 2012.

Final Thoughts

To learn more about some early NYS DFBS results for 2013, visit <www.nwnyteam.org>.

Owners of dairy farm businesses cooperate in Cornell University Cooperative Extension’s DFBS Program for the purpose of identifying strengths and weaknesses by comparing their results to results of other cooperators. Are you interested in realizing the benefits of DFBS participation? Call John Hanchar – for contact information, please see information at the front of this newsletter.
What You Need to Know about the Small Business Health Care Tax Credit

By: Joan Petzen

How will the credit make a difference for you?

For tax years 2010 through 2013, the maximum credit is 35 percent of premiums paid for small business employers.

For tax years beginning in 2014 or later, there will be changes to the credit:

* The maximum credit will increase to 50 percent of premiums paid for small business employers.
* To be eligible for the credit, a small employer must pay premiums on behalf of employees enrolled in a qualified health plan offered through a Small Business Health Options Program (SHOP) Marketplace.
* The credit will be available to eligible employers for two consecutive taxable years.

Here’s what this means for you. If you pay $50,000 a year toward workers’ health care premiums — and if you qualify for a 15 percent credit, you save... $7,500. If you save $7,500 a year from tax year 2010 through 2013, that’s total savings of $30,000. If, in 2014, you qualify for a slightly larger credit, say 20 percent, your savings go from $7,500 a year to $10,000 a year.

Even if you are a small business employer who did not owe tax during the year, you can carry the credit back or forward to other tax years. Also, since the amount of the health insurance premium payments is more than the total credit, eligible small businesses can still claim a business expense deduction for the premiums in excess of the credit.

Can you claim the credit?

To be eligible, you must cover at least 50 percent of the cost of single (not family) health care coverage for each of your employees. You must also have fewer than 25 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs). Those employees must have average wages of less than $50,000 (as adjusted for inflation beginning in 2014) per year. Remember, you will have to purchase insurance through the SHOP Marketplace to be eligible for the credit for tax years 2014 & beyond.

You are probably wondering: what is an FTE. Basically, two half-time workers count as one FTE. That means 20 half-time employees are equivalent to 10 FTEs.

Now let’s talk about average annual wages. Say you pay total wages of $200,000 and have 10 FTEs. To figure average annual wages you divide $200,000 by 10 — the number of FTEs — and the result is your average annual wage, $20,000.

Continued on page 10
Many tools are available to farmers to help them manage the nutrient status of their crops. Ultimately if all of the required nutrients are not present in sufficient amounts (or in excessively high amounts) yields, plant vigor, & crop quality will suffer. Proper tissue testing requires proper crop sampling, knowing the sufficiency ranges of field crops for the macro and micronutrients, and the ability to make mid to late season nutrient applications to correct a documented deficiency.

**Sampling Methods**

More samples are needed for crop tissue testing than soil testing in order to account for the greater variability in plants compared to the soil, Table 1. Often tissue samples are taken separately from “good” and “bad” areas of the field to diagnose in-season problems. Soil samples are also usually taken from both areas as well to see if other issues, such as compaction or poor tilth, are contributing to seemingly nutrient deficient crops. It is best to compare areas in the same field with the same agronomic practices (i.e. planting date, variety, etc.). As crops grow and develop the method of tissue sampling changes, Table 1. As crops mature the likelihood of a yield response to nutrient applications generally decreases. Prior to sending tissue samples to the laboratory the crop tissue should be dried in a paper bag or shipped overnight to a commercial lab. Each lab might also have their own slight variations on the crop tissue sampling methods, but generally they are similar to the procedures in Table 1.

**Sufficient Levels of Crop Nutrients**

When crops have insufficient amounts nutrients signs of deficiencies are possible. While some of these indicate a true nutrient deficiency others are a temporary function based on weather. Early season purpling in corn is often a temporary phosphorous deficiency or crop physiological condition associated with cold, wet weather, Figure 1. This condition usually corrects itself as the soils warm up and dry out. Starter P fertilizer sometimes results in green plants, but does not necessarily increase yields.

Potassium deficiency in alfalfa was documented under the flooded conditions of 2013, Figure 2, but resolved once the waters subsided.

Figure 1: Purple Corn

Figure 2: Alfalfa Field

Source: Mike Stanyard
Often crop nutrient deficiencies are not visible to the human eye. These deficiencies are usually a “hidden hunger” in our field crops when their nutrient levels fall below the sufficiency ranges in Table 2. Sample fields as described in Table 1 and send the tissue samples to a commercial lab for analysis if you have a concern in your field crops.

**Correcting Deficiencies**

Up to the flowering growth stages tissue testing is a very good tool to assess field crops. However after flowering, tissue tests are not as accurate due to many nutrients being mobilized from the plant tissues to the seeds. Late season nutrient applications should be timed prior to flowering of field crops to maximize the potential for their use by the crop. If the macronutrients (listed in Table 2) are deficient apply fertilizer to the soil or as a foliar application if the amounts needed are small. If the micronutrients are deficient (also listed in Table 2) use a foliar application. A number of crop yield responses have been documented after applying mid to late season applications of the following nutrients based on tissue testing: In small grains responses have been found for N, S, Mg, Cu, & Zn. Grasses typically respond to N and S. Forage legumes (alfalfa, clovers, & birdsfoot trefoil) are the most responsive to K, S, & B. Corn has responded to N, S, Mg, Cu, & Zn and soybeans to K, S & Mn.

Due to space limitations Tables 1 and 2 are not printed with this article. See the full article online, Tissue Testing Field Crops.”
Also, the amount of the credit you receive works on a sliding scale; the smaller the business, the bigger the credit. So if you have more than 10 FTEs or if the average wage is more than $25,000 (as adjusted for inflation beginning in 2014), the amount of the credit you receive will be less.

**Are any employees excluded?**

The following individuals are not considered employees when you figure this credit. Hours and wages of these employees and premiums paid for them are not counted when you figure your credit.

* The owner of a sole proprietorship.
* A partner in a partnership.
* A shareholder who owns (after applying the section 318 constructive ownership rules) more than 2% of an S corporation.
* A shareholder who owns (after applying the section 318 constructive ownership rules) more than 5% of the outstanding stock or stock possessing more than 5% of the total combined voting power of all stock of a corporation that is not an S corporation.
* A person who owns more than 5% of the capital or profits interest in any other business that is not a corporation.
* **Family members** or a member of the household who is not a family member but qualifies as a dependent on the individual income tax return of a person listed above. Family members include a child (or descendant of a child), a sibling or step-sibling, a parent (or ancestor of a parent), a stepparent, a niece or nephew, an aunt or uncle, or a son-in-law, daughter-in-law, father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, or sister-in-law. A spouse is also considered a family member for this purpose.

Leased employees who have been employed in your business for more than one year are included as employees for the purpose of calculating the number of FTE’s and credit in many circumstances. Details for handling leased employees are included in the instructions for claiming the credit.

Seasonal employees who work for you 120 or fewer days during the tax year are not considered employees in determining FTEs and average annual wages. But premiums paid on their behalf are counted in determining the amount of the credit. Seasonal workers include workers employed exclusively during the summer.

Household employees and other employees who are not performing services in your trade or business are considered employees if they otherwise qualify as discussed above. A sole proprietor must include both business and nonbusiness employees to determine FTEs, average annual wages, and premiums paid.

**How do you claim the credit?**

You must use Form 8941, Credit for Small Employer Health Insurance Premiums, to calculate the credit. For detailed information on filling out this form, see the Instructions for Form 8941.

If you are a small business, include the amount as part of the general business credit on your income tax return.

Don’t forget... if you are a small business employer, you may be able to carry the credit back or forward.

Source: www.irs.gov
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Watch a Webinar

By: Libby Gaige

Don’t give up on continuing education as spring arrives. Webinars bring knowledge right to your office.

Winter is “meeting season” for dairy producers and crop farmers alike. Veterinary clinics and crop consultants host client meetings, NEDPA, Pro-Dairy and Cornell Cooperative Extension bring you many conferences and courses. By the time spring rolls around many farmers stop looking for educational opportunities and shift their focus to the fields.

Webinars (web based seminars) are a great way to continue learning, even when you’re too busy to leave the farm. As webinars take place year-round, presenters can offer information that is up-to-date and more relevant to what you’re doing in the field and on the farm today, not next season. Another added bonus is that most webinars are free!

While the location (your computer, smartphone or tablet) is certainly convenient, the timing can’t always fit with everyone’s schedules. Most websites that host webinars also archive them online so that you can watch them at your own convenience. If you want to watch the webinar live (in most cases giving you the chance to ask questions), some websites even offer reminder emails to let you know when the webinar starts.

Here are some upcoming webinars for you to take a look at:

AgriSafe Network:
http://www.agrisafe.org/training/agribusiness-webinars/
April 16, 12:00pm-1:00pm
Prevention of Grain Fires & Dust Explosions
Presented by Dan Neenan, Director

DAIRExNET: http://www.extension.org/dairy_cattle
April 7, 12:00PM- 1:00PM
Milking System Design and Analysis
Presented by Roger Thomson, Milk Quality Consultant

Source: https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/events-and-training/webinars/

Dairy Herd Management: http://www.dairyherd.com/webinars/
Archived webinar:
The Value of Amino Acids in your Dairy Herd Ration
Bill Chalupa, University of Pennsylvania
John Azzone, HJ Baker

Hoard’s Dairyman: http://www.hoards.com/webinars
April 14, 12:00pm- 1:00pm
Cow Welfare – Opportunities and Challenges
Presented by Dan Weary, University of British Columbia

Penn State: http://extension.psu.edu/animals/dairy/courses/technology-tuesday-series
April 8, 8:30AM-10:00AM
Getting a Handle on Lameness
Presented by Dr. Ernest Hovingh and Dan McFarland, Penn State Extension

April 29, 8:30AM- 10:00AM
Robotic Milking Edition:
Cow Behavior in a Robotic Milking Dairy
Presented by Janice Siegford, Michigan State University

Archived webinars:
Crop Management at http://extension.psu.edu/plants/crops/courses/crop-management-webinar-series/webinars

Archived webinars:
Cover Crop Innovations at http://extension.psu.edu/plants/sustainable/courses/cover-crop-innovations-webinar-series/webinars
Grass-Fed Beef Carcass Evaluation Workshops: “Hoof to Rail”

April 16, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
Wild Geese Farm, 8499 Agett Rd., Franklinville

April 26, 8:30 - 11:30 a.m.
Grizzly’s Custom Cutting
10042 S. River Rd., Hunt

Participants will learn how to visually determine when an animal is properly finished for harvest. The skills to estimate backfat and the visual factors that affect quality grade, yield grade and dressing percent will be taught.

Pre-registered required by: April 14. $15 per farm/family (2 participants) covers both workshops, includes handouts and refreshments. For more information, please contact Lynn Bliven 585.268.7644 x18 or email lao3@cornell.edu

Farewell, Beth

Please join us in wishing Beth Dahl, Harvest NY’s Dairy Modernization Specialist, the best. She is returning to her love of calves on a farm in the region. We recognize her significant contributions to dairy farms of the region that have looked to improve facilities, management and bottom line. See you ‘round, Beth!

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8  Herd Health and Nutrition Conference, Doubletree Hotel, 6301 State Route 298, East Syracuse, NY

9  Dairy Farm Business Summary Meeting, Location TBA

16 Grass-Fed Beef Carcass Evaluation Workshop, Part 1: “Hoof to Rail”, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Wild Geese Farm, 8499 Agett Road, Franklinville. Pre-registration required by: April 14, $15 per farm/family (2 participants) covers Part 1 & 2. For more information contact: Lynn Bliven, 585.268.7644 x 18 or lao3@cornell.edu

26 Grass-Fed Beef Carcass Evaluation Workshop, Part 2: “Hoof to Rail”, 8:30-11:30 a.m., Grizzly’s Custom Cutting, 10042 S. River Road, Hunt. Pre-registration required by: April 14, $15 per farm/family (2 participants) covers Part 1 & 2. For more information contact: Lynn Bliven, 585.268.7644 x18 or lao3@cornell.edu

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