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Problems
in a
Dairy
Cattle
Practice

Sam Elmer, D.V.M.

MASTITIS, from a disease standpoint is the most important problem concerning the dairy industry today. Veterinarians should meet the challenge offered by this problem and apply all the measures that we have found to stand the test of time and trial. There are countless preparations that have been offered by many individuals and organizations who are interested mostly in the financial end of the problem. This has amounted to a concerted effort to side track all that has been known in the treatment of his disease in favor of the use of medicinal agents. It is indeed unfortunate that so many worthy and necessary practices have been forgotten during this era of seeking sure-fire shortcuts to the cure of mastitis.

Veterinarians are now in a real position to recommend a complete program of control and prevention. Now that the Pure Food and Drug Administration has stepped in and stated that they will not allow any antibiotics to be present in milk, we can once again preach sanitation, housing and proper milking procedures.

Testing herds and examining them at regular intervals should be encouraged so that it becomes a more general practice. The cows should be arranged in the milking line to minimize the spread of infection, and all incurable and chronic shedders should be eliminated. All treatment should be placed on a professional and rational basis. The advent of improved drugs and antibiotics enables us to use preferred treatment according to the special considerations of each case.

The matters of favorable housing including proper sized stalls, bedding and handling should be stressed. In the constant effort toward increased production and bigger cows, the development of adequate housing has lagged seriously. The University of Wisconsin has prepared a bulletin (Special Bulletin #4—October, 1954) showing and describing plans for remodelling or construction of dairy barns that would be of considerable value to anyone needing help in planning a future dairy setup.

The use of proper milking procedures

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in a dairy herd is of primary importance. We should stress such points as proper sanitation, arrangement of cows in the proper milking order, preparation of each cow to stimulate milk let-down before the milker is applied, the use of strip cups, careful checks of the vacuum levels, thorough milking using machine stripping, and careful removal of teat cups at the proper time with the vacuum shut off. We must encourage the herdsman to practice them religiously or we can look for continued trouble and an endless headache, no matter what other procedures and treatment we apply.

Some additional management responsibilities that we should encourage the dairyman to follow are:

1. Selection in breeding for better udder and teats.
2. Prevention of calves suckling each other.
3. Constant watch over bred heifers and dry cows for abnormal size of quarters.
4. Placing corn starch between the thigh and udders of individuals that have large udders due to large amounts of edema.
5. Premilking cows with large pendulous udders.
6. The use of udder supports in the cases where they may be indicated.
7. Feeding a ration containing adequate protein to springers.

**STERILITY PROBLEMS**

The conditions which delay or prevent breeding fall into the general category of sterility problems. They have become of much greater concern in the last fifteen years due to the gaining momentum of artificial breeding. The advent of artificial insemination initiated the keeping of records and so animals which repeated four or five times became of greater concern to the dairyman.

In areas in which there are large numbers of commercial or pure bred herds, regular periodic herd examinations must be advised. Too often the veterinarian is called to examine and treat repeat breeders only after much time has been lost and the treatment has become much more difficult. We should take the necessary measures to alert our clientel to this costly situation, ready ourselves to deal with it, and then “sell” them this valuable service.

General herd health must be given very serious consideration. The proper amount of exercise is of great importance for both sexes. The nutritional angle must be stressed. Certain animals on poor rations and pasture show impairment of estral cycles or conception. We cannot expect a good breeding record from animals that do not show good libido. All aspects of the ration should be considered and any factor found lacking should be corrected.

**Genital Diseases**

Next, the venereal and genital disease should be given consideration. Brucellosis, a major problem of past years, is no longer of much concern. Trichomoniasis has now been fairly well controlled by sexual rest of the female and the elimination of all known infected males. Vibriosis is a disease that is difficult to positively diagnose. Many veterinarians do not consider the blood and serum tests to be reliable. It should be clinically suspected whenever abortions occur in which a more or less mummified fetus is expelled along with a heavy chocolate colored mucous discharge. Granular or vesicular vaginitis should be kept in mind and a careful examination made to determine its presence or absence. A few acute situations have occurred in which almost the entire herd was open months after the cows should have been pregnant. Its presence should be suspected if there is a history of the animals showing excessive symptoms of heat along with such symptoms as a serous or whitish discharge, a swollen labia, and a highly inflamed mucosa in the vulva and vagina.

**Record Keeping**

In the diagnosis of these diseases, a careful history of the heat, breeding and
calving should be obtained if it is available. It is often possible to establish their presence by conversing with the herdsman about certain characteristics of the diseases. Whenever they are present, artificial insemination should be resorted to. If this is impossible, one young bull known to be free of disease should be used on heifers and other bulls on the other cows in the herd.

The animals in the herd should be examined for signs of heat at least once and preferably twice daily. All housed animals should be turned out for exercise and should be very closely observed. Notation of heat periods on barn cards should be encouraged as irregular heat periods are more apt to be noted and anticipated heat periods are less likely to be overlooked. The cows should be bred during the latter part of the heat period because studies have shown that such animals have a higher conception rate. Cows should not be bred too soon after parturition because of the increased incidence of abortions, dystocias, and retained placentae in these animals. When cows show heat at five to six weeks after calving it is not a good practice to breed them until the next heat period or even the one following.

When the individual female is to be examined, the veterinarian should inquire into the previous breeding history of the animal. Factors to consider are the age of the animal, her heat cycles, the number of calves, and any difficulties she may have had at any previous parturition or otherwise.

It is well to note the general apparent health when approaching the animal. One should check for the presence of a discharge from the vulva and note its character. The presence of a puffiness or other condition of the labia in which they are parted favoring the entrance of feces or dirt should be noted.

Rectal Examination

Next the manual examination of the reproductive tract should be considered. As the gloved hand is passed forward in the rectum a careful survey should be made of the size and characteristics of the cervix. An attempt should then be made to gather the entire uterus up into the hand and draw it into the pelvic cavity. Except in old cows, this should be easily accomplished with a non-gravid uterus unless a metritis is present. At this time the comparative size and tonus of each horn should be determined. If either or both horns are enlarged and they seem to contain fluid, one can sometimes milk the contents into the vagina and, depending on its character, draw some conclusions as to its significance. This can only be done with an open cervix and in such cases there is usually a history of a chronic discharge. Further examination of the uterus involves careful palpation of both horns from end to end.

The fallopian tubes and ovaries should be palpated next. The size and apparent functioning or quiescence of each ovary should be considered. When small, hard ovaries are present, with or without the presence of corpora albicands, there is very apt to be a history of the herdsman having noted no heat periods. In many instances the condition is unilateral with the other ovary seeming to function normally. Such conditions frequently follow debilitating disease processes. On the other hand over-active function of one or both ovaries may occur in the high producing animals on heavy feed. The influence of heredity in these animals is unknown. There is some possibility that stilbestrol may accidently get mixed in some dairy rations and thus cause the condition. These animals present an abnormal enlargement of the ovaries and in many cases contain multiple cysts. The ovaries may be as large or larger than an orange. They have a history of frequent irregular heats. Some of the cysts rupture quite easily while in other cases the ovarian capsule is so tough that it is impossible to break them down.

Calorie deficiency, rather than a lack of vitamin or trace mineral factors, is the commonest nutritional cause of low reproduction rates in animal husbandry.