

Review Countdown

Downunder records

Every farm should have a mastitis strategy to suit its individual goals. Progress toward these goals can be achieved by setting targets. An annual review produced by the farmer provides a factual basis for:

- Assessing the progress of the mastitis control strategy.
- Providing a context for current activities.
- Planning the following year's activities and targets.
- Assisting advisers asked to investigate or comment on mastitis in the herd.

Although it is essential for farmers to own their strategies and annual reviews, advisers may often facilitate this process. A number of mastitis monitoring services are offered in Australia by individual advisers – through herd health services in year-round calving herds, as adjuncts to milk recording services, or as on-going monitoring services following the resolution of problems in herds where major mastitis investigations have occurred. There are significant business opportunities for advisers who develop services that help farmers plan and monitor the progress of their mastitis control programs.

24.1 Calculate the figures for your farm in the past 12 months, and set targets for the next 12 months.

A 12 month review

An annual summary may include:

- A brief description of the herd. For example, the number of milking cows, age structure of the herd, number of introductions, and production figures.
- The major components of the current mastitis program. For example, teat disinfection practices, the number and type of Dry Cow Treatments used, the dates of machine services, and visits from dairy advisers, etc.
- A list of the results of any special investigations. For example the result of milk cultures, upgrades of milking machine equipment, etc.
- Any major events that affected the mastitis program. This should include unplanned activities that competed for resource or labour.
- A review of mastitis indices. For example, the rate of clinical cases, the proportion of bulk milk cell counts below 400,000 cells/mL, the proportion of milk supply of premium quality, etc.
- A brief description of the farm staff. This should include the number of people, their skills and any additional training during the year.

Confidence – Moderate

Advice on warning levels is based on limited experimental observations and extensive field experience.

Research priority – Moderate

Some further benchmarking information would be useful to enable farmers to better judge their performance and progress, and to set targets.

Technote 22.1 discusses the benefits of setting time aside for planning a mastitis strategy and the components of a mastitis plan.

Some of the questions used in the mastitis and milk quality investigations in Technote 13.1 could be adapted for review purposes.

Technote 4.9 gives examples of measures for assessing clinical case management.

Technote 6 describes checks for milking machine function.

Technote 11 discusses monitoring bulk milk cell counts.

Technote 12.3 gives examples of individual cow cell count measures used for management decisions.

Setting targets

The farm targets:

- should be realistic and achievable;
- can be more ambitious than the minimum standards required to satisfy a quality assurance program; and
- must be more stringent than the Countdown Downunder recommended warning levels for mastitis indices.

Annual targets can measure the:

- rate of clinical cases – available from clinical case records;
- level of subclinical mastitis in the herd – based on herd recording information;
- proportion of milk supply attracting premium payments – from factory records; and
- estimated cost of culling due to mastitis – depending on the amount of detail kept by the farmer.

24.2 Seek advice if farm indices are above the warning levels.

Technote 13 gives warning levels for some mastitis indices.