

---

# WVS MILK QUALITY

*Waupun Veterinary Services, LLC - Your Progressive Dairy Partner since 1958*

---

## Why Bulk Tank Cultures Matter on Your Farm

Bulk tank milk is more than just a holding place for milk before pickup - it is a window into the health of the herd. One of the most practical and affordable tools dairymen have to monitor udder health is the bulk tank milk culture. When used correctly, bulk tank cultures help identify mastitis risks early, guide management decisions, and protect milk quality premiums.

What is a bulk tank culture? A bulk tank culture is a laboratory test that looks for mastitis-causing bacteria in a sample of milk taken from the bulk tank. Because milk from all lactating cows is combined in the tank, the culture provides herd-level information, not individual cow diagnoses.

Bulk tank cultures are important. There are early warnings for contagious mastitis. Contagious mastitis pathogens spread cow-to-cow during milking. Often, infected cows may show no obvious clinical signs yet still shed bacteria into the milk. Bulk tank cultures can detect these pathogens before a major SCC spike or outbreak occurs, allowing dairymen to act early.

Better mastitis control decisions can be made from culture results. Bulk tank culture results help determine whether problems are more likely contagious or environmental and help focus efforts on milking procedures, cow hygiene, housing, or identifying infected cows rather than guessing.

While bulk tank SCC shows inflammation, it does not identify the bacteria involved. Bulk tank cultures identify which organisms are present, helping dairies protect milk quality premiums and long-term marketability.

This is a cost-effective surveillance tool. Bulk tank culturing is inexpensive, easy to collect, and highly informative when done routinely. Trend monitoring over time provides far more useful information than a single culture.

Bulk tank cultures are good for detecting contagious pathogens, monitoring trends, identifying emerging herd issues, and evaluating mastitis control programs. However, they do not identify which cow is infected and are not a substitute for individual cow or quarter cultures.

Collect samples aseptically after proper tank agitation, chill immediately, and interpret results alongside SCC data, mastitis records, and parlor observations. Work with your veterinarian to establish a routine sampling schedule.

How often should bulk tank samples be collected?

The value of bulk tank milk cultures depends heavily on how often samples are taken and how results are evaluated over time. Repeated sampling is far more informative than relying on a single culture result. Bulk tank cultures are most useful when interpreted as trends alongside somatic cell count (SCC) data, clinical mastitis records, and management observations.

The recommended bulk tank culture sampling schedule is pictured on the back page.

***“Bulk tank cultures are a powerful, low-cost monitoring tool. When used correctly, they provide early warning of contagious mastitis, support better decision-making, protect milk quality, and help maintain herd profitability.”***

# Recommended Bulk Tank Culture Sampling Schedule

Herd Situation	Recommended Frequency	Purpose
Stable herd, good milk quality	Monthly	Routine surveillance to confirm absence of contagious mastitis pathogens and monitor background environmental flora
Proactive mastitis prevention program	Every 2 weeks	Earlier detection of emerging problems and improved trend interpretation
Elevated SCC or early milk quality warnings	Weekly	Identify developing herd-level issues and guide next diagnostic steps
Known or suspected contagious mastitis	Weekly until resolved	Monitor persistence or elimination of contagious pathogens following interventions
Milk quality penalties or regulatory concern	Multiple samples over consecutive weeks	Differentiate true herd infection from isolated contamination events

## Playing Sports Growing Up as a Farm Boy

**By Dr. Mark Sosalla  
of Waupun Veterinary Services**

I ran across this picture on a Facebook feed of my old high school baseball team. We were the first team from my hometown to make it to the state tournament.

I am the fourth person from the left standing. I came from a farming community and looking back I must admit we didn't look like much. That was before the class system, and we lost in the tournament to Nicolet High School. My hometown won the state tournament 10 years later.



People of my age will remember that if you came from a farm, you were lucky to be able to play high school sports. I knew a lot of good athletes that never had the chance to play because they were needed on the farm. I had two older brothers that played football and I was allowed to play basketball and baseball.

My senior year the football coach came to our farm while we were milking to ask my dad if I could play football. My dad said no because he said my brothers were not worth a sh\*\* working on Saturdays after football games. The coach told my dad that my brothers played in the line and got hit on every play. Evidently the coach did not think I was as strong or as tough as my brothers because he told my dad that I would play wide receiver and safety and wouldn't get hit as often and should be able to work on Saturdays.

If it was up to my dad I wouldn't have played, but my mom made him allow me to play. She helped with the milking on game nights. My football coach was a "Vince Lombardi style" coach and he said he enjoyed coaching farm kids because the more you yelled at them the harder they played.