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WVS MILK QUALITY

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Interpreting Mastitis Culture Results:
A Practical Guide for Dairy Producers

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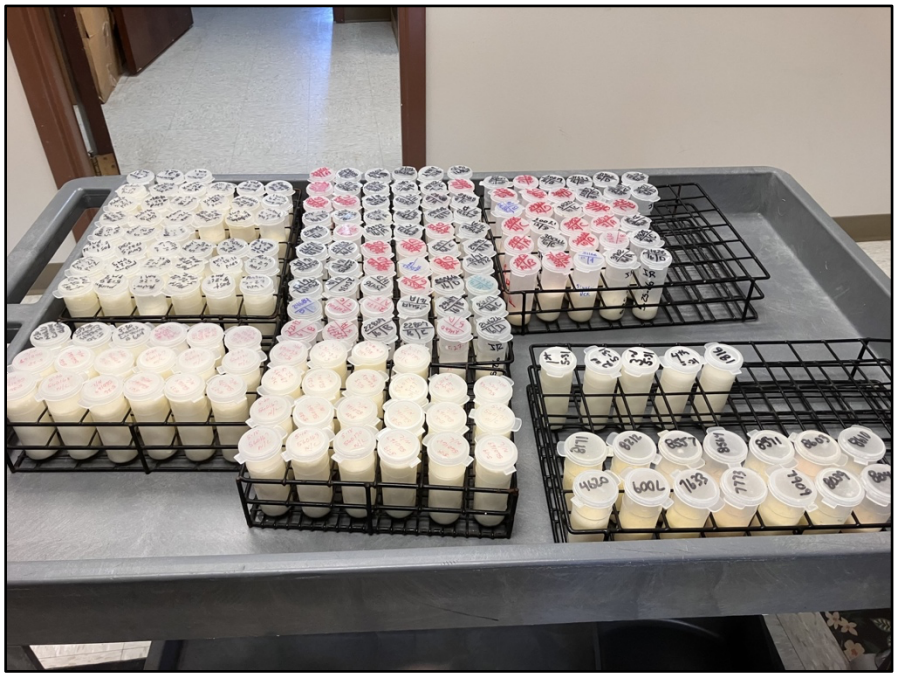
Milk culture is one of the most powerful tools for managing mastitis. Identifying the pathogen helps guide treatment decisions, reduce unnecessary antibiotic use, and improve herd health outcomes.

With normal expectations for culture results a significant portion of mastitis samples will result in no bacterial growth. In most herds and datasets, approximately 20–40% of milk culture results are reported as 'no growth', which is considered normal and does not indicate a problem with culturing when sampling and handling are done correctly.

Gram-Positive Pathogens includes Staphylococcus aureus, Streptococcus agalactiae, environmental streptococci, and coagulase-negative staphylococci. These infections are often longer-lasting and more likely to respond to antibiotic therapy, though cure rates vary by organism.



Our in-house milk lab runs hundreds of samples weekly and sometimes daily. For more information on bringing in your samples, please give the clinic a call!

Gram-Negative Pathogens (Coliforms) includes E. coli, Klebsiella, and Enterobacter. These infections are typically environmental, often acute, and many cases resolve without antibiotic treatment. Supportive care is often the primary approach.

No growth is a common result indicating no detectable bacteria at the time of sampling. Causes include prior immune clearance, intermittent shedding, or non-bacterial mastitis. About 20–40% of samples falling into this category is normal. These cases often do not require antibiotic treatment.

Mixed Growth or contaminated samples usually indicates contamination during sample collection. Results should not be used for treatment decisions and samples should be recollected using proper aseptic technique.

Yeast or Prototheca is often associated with prior antibiotic therapy and do not respond to standard treatments. Management may require culling or non-antibiotic approaches.

Contagious pathogens spread during milking and require improved milking hygiene and cow segregation. Environmental pathogens originate from bedding and manure, requiring improvements in cleanliness and housing conditions.

Apply culture results to guide treatment decisions, reduce unnecessary antibiotic use, and identify herd-level management issues such as milking hygiene or environmental cleanliness.

The bottom line is that culture results provide actionable information to improve mastitis control, enhance treatment success, and support better milk quality outcomes.

Producers can bring their samples into the clinic for testing any day of the week. Forms for the milk culture tests are available on our website at www.waupunvet.com click on LAB. These forms can be printed off at home and filled out ahead of time when you drop off your samples.

Tackling Milk Quality in Titletown: NMC Regional Meeting in Green Bay in June

Milk quality takes center stage in Wisconsin this summer as the National Mastitis Council (NMC) brings its 2026 Regional Meeting to Green Bay, June 16–18. Designed for dairy producers, veterinarians, consultants, and industry professionals, this regional meeting offers three days of hands-on education, expert-led sessions, and valuable networking—set in the heart of America's Dairyland.

The NMC Regional Meeting is well known for delivering practical, science-based information that participants can apply immediately on the farm. This year's theme, 'Tackling Milk Quality in Titletown,' reflects both the location and the meeting's focus on real-world strategies to improve udder health, mastitis control, and overall milk quality.

Hands-on learning starts on day one.

The meeting begins Tuesday, June 16, with a series of optional NMC Short Courses. These small-group sessions emphasize practical, hands-on training covering topics such as milking system analysis, teat disinfection, cleaning-in-place (CIP) fundamentals, on-farm culturing, and data-driven diagnostics. Short courses are designed to provide tools participants can immediately take back to their operations or clients.

That evening, attendees are invited to a special networking reception at Lambeau Field. Featuring Wisconsin cheeses, regional food, and a relaxed atmosphere, the reception offers a unique opportunity to connect with colleagues and industry experts while celebrating Wisconsin's dairy heritage at one of the state's most iconic venues.

There will be expert perspectives on current dairy challenges. On Wednesday, June 17, features the General Session, where nationally recognized speakers will address some of today's most important milk quality and udder health topics. Presentations will cover milking system evaluation, emerging mastitis pathogens, on-farm milk quality strategies, antimicrobial stewardship, and recent research in cow handling and training. Together, these sessions provide both scientific context and practical guidance to support decision-making on modern dairy farms.

Attendees will see best practices in action when the meeting concludes Thursday, June 18, with guided dairy farm tours in east central Wisconsin. Participants will visit well-managed operations such as Shiloh Dairy, Country Aire Farms, and Brightside Dairy, where they can observe milk quality practices firsthand, discuss management decisions with farm leaders, and see how theory translates into daily practice.

The 2026 NMC Regional Meeting combines education, collaboration, and Wisconsin hospitality into one comprehensive experience. Whether you are focused on reducing mastitis risk, improving milk quality consistency, optimizing milking systems, or staying current on emerging issues, this meeting offers valuable take-home information for everyone involved in dairy production.

Registration and lodging information, along with a detailed agenda, are available through the National Mastitis Council website. Dairy professionals are encouraged to register early and take advantage of this opportunity to learn, connect, and advance milk quality — right here in Green Bay.

Teat Drying With Towels Most Overlooked Step

The following is a summary of an article written by Andy Johnson in the Progressive Dairy magazine.

Andrew Johnson emphasizes that proper teat drying with towels is one of the simplest yet most overlooked steps in the milking routine — with major impacts on milk quality, mastitis prevention, and milking efficiency. By slowing down slightly and improving drying technique, dairies can significantly lower somatic cell counts, reduce clinical mastitis, improve milk letdown, and increase parlor throughput. These combined gains can effectively triple the profits associated with pre-milking preparation.

Johnson highlights that inconsistent or rushed drying leads to higher bacterial loads, poorer milk quality, and slowed milk letdown. Common mistakes include using towels that are too wet or dirty, failing to provide adequate absorbency, and overlooking employee training.

Best practices include using clean, dry towels for every cow, thoroughly wiping each teat — especially the ends — maintaining strict laundering protocols, and routinely evaluating drying effectiveness. Johnson stresses that proper drying is the most cost-effective improvement most dairies can make and should be a priority in all milking routines.