Controlling Mastitis:
Best Management Practices

There are a number of time-tested, proven steps you can take to manage mastitis, limit the spread of intramammary infections and stay one step ahead of bacterial growth within your herd.

A recent Progressive Dairyman article referred to a series of nine "scientifically proven principles" all dairy farms should consider when developing a mastitis-prevention protocol.* Here's a summary:

1. CLEAN SURROUNDINGS
Create a clean, stress-free environment, including clean stalls and parlor.

2. CLEAN TEATS
Always clean teats before attaching the milking machine. This is essential to prevent bacteria from being forced into the teat during milking. Beware of using too much water in the cleaning process, as it can unwittingly spread bacteria.

3. HEALTHY TEATS
Examine the udder before each milking. Do not use chapped, cracked or bleeding teats, as these are susceptible to new infections.

4. TEAT DIPS
High-quality germicidal teat dips reduce bacteria on teats and help lower the number of new intramammary infections. Follow careful procedures to keep dip cups clean.

5. DOUBLE DIP
An extra dipping step with pre-dip can be valuable in reducing somatic cell counts.

6. DRY TEATS
Before milking, dry teats with either a paper towel or reusable cloth towel, one per cow. Dryness is essential for best suction and also prevents chapping, further protecting the cow from mastitis-causing bacteria.

7. FORE-STRIP EACH QUARTER
Fore-stripping can increase milk flow rate, improve milk quality and teat end health, reduce the rate of new infections and improve parlor performance.

8. KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT
Be sure all personnel are trained on the proper use of milking equipment (attachment, adjustment, removal). This includes understanding the need for careful observation and adjustment throughout the milking process.

9. NEVER STOP MONITORING
Sticking to a carefully planned milking parlor routine is an important component of a mastitis management program. This requires diligence to ensure that all staff are using machines properly and following mastitis-control protocol.