

Efficient milking practices

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Summary

- Milk must be produced to the highest standard possible.
- Implement good work practices so milking is safe for both the milker and the cow.
- Changing hands and a correct routine when attaching clusters will help reduce Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI).

Introduction

The milking routine from start to finish has an important bearing on the efficient and hygienic removal of milk from the udder. Milking starts when you begin collecting the cows from their housing or the field.

The importance of routine cannot be overemphasised. Cows are creatures of habit, and the more you can make each day exactly the same as the previous day, the more relaxed and productive they'll be. Getting your milking routine right is good for you, your cows and your business. The benefits are threefold:

- Maximum product quality.
- Safety for milker and cows.
- Efficient use of time spent milking.

Preparing for milking

Before the cows are brought in for milking, the parlour should be ready. Hose down the parlour, parlour walls and collecting yard to allow easier cleaning and wash down afterwards. Check availability of teat dip (prepare if necessary), ensure that the meal hoppers, where used, are filled and that the milking plant is rinsed out and ready for milking. When this is completed, bring in the cows from the paddock or house for milking.

A proper milking routine requires clean milking garments (i.e., disposable nitrile gloves and a clean parlour apron/parlour suit). This helps prevent the spread of mastitis and ensures that the operator is clean and safe from any excretions. Rinse and disinfect gloves regularly throughout the milking.

The cow's teats should be clean and dry before milking. If dirty, they must be washed and dried. A dry wipe with some paper towel is sufficient for clean teats.

Preparing cows in batches

Preparation of cows should take place in groups of 4–6 starting from the front of the row and working downwards towards the end. Preparation of each cow takes place first, followed by cluster attachment to the same group in the same sequence.

Cluster attachment

Hold the cluster with the hand closest to the cow exit side (usually the hand nearest to the dairy). This means that you will change hands to hold the cluster depending on which side you are attaching the cluster as illustrated in Figure 1. Changing hands will help minimise the risk of (RSI).

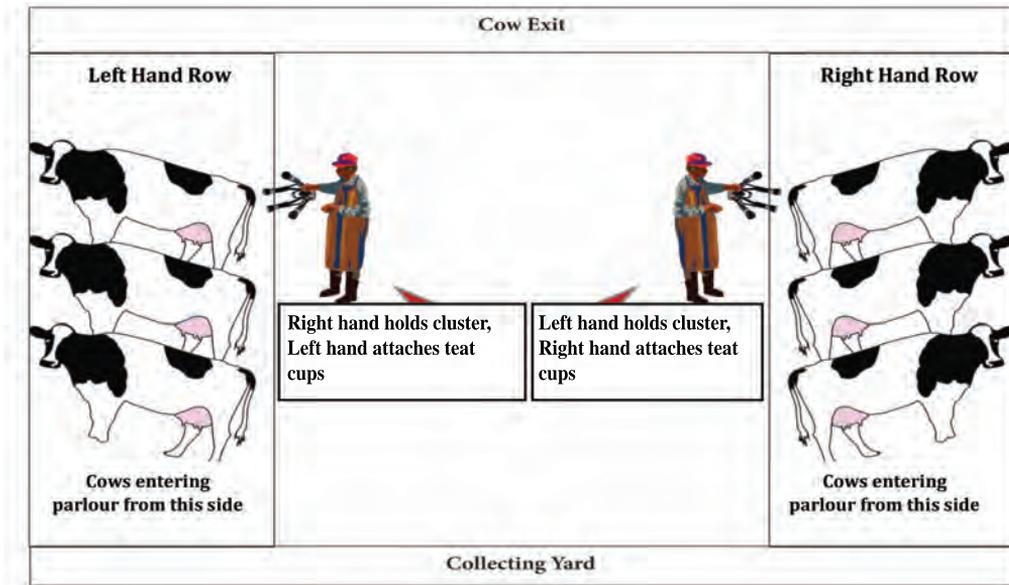


Figure 1. Milker position when attaching clusters

Removing Clusters

Manual cluster removal should start when a single stream of milk is visible in the claw piece. This minimises the risk of over milking. Remove the cluster without causing air blasts. Turn off the vacuum by kinking the long milk tube close to the claw piece or using the button on the claw piece and allow the cluster to become limp on the udder

Teat Disinfection

When a batch of 4–6 units has been removed, teat spray or dip the teats of that batch of cows in the same sequence. Ensure that at least 15 mls of teat spray or 10 mls of teat dip are applied evenly to the teats of each cow after milking. Ideally this should be done as soon as possible after cluster removal. Cover the entire teat from tip to top.

Conclusions

Milking cows requires doing the simple things well and attention to detail. Milkers need to remember that they are producing a food and the quality of this food is paramount in sustaining existing markets and creating new markets. A good milking routine is a key driver of milk quality and creating a safe environment for both milkers and cows.