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Economic aspects of mastitis: New developments

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Abstract

Good udder health is not only important for the dairy farmer but, because of increasing interest of consumers in the way dairy products are produced, also for the dairy

production. Mastitis is a major problem in dairy farming, leading to economic losses on production and animal health. The aim of this review is to provide an overview of the current knowledge on mastitis and its control. The review is based on a search of the literature on mastitis in dairy cattle, focusing on the epidemiology, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mastitis. The review is structured as follows: first, the epidemiology of mastitis is discussed, followed by a discussion of the diagnosis and treatment of mastitis. Finally, the prevention of mastitis is discussed, with a focus on the role of the dairy farmer in preventing mastitis.

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terms of disease, e.g. incidence of clinical mastitis, but also in monetary terms; and to make good decisions, it is necessary to provide the dairy farmer with information on the additional expenditure and reduced losses associated with alternative decisions. Six out of 18 preventive measures were shown to have a positive nett benefit, viz blanket use of dry-cow therapy, keeping cows standing after milking, back-flushing of the milk cluster after milking a cow with clinical mastitis, application of a treatment protocol, washing dirty udders, and the use of milkers' gloves. For those measures that included a large amount of routine labour or investment, the reduced losses did not outweigh the additional expenditure.

The advisor cannot expect that measures that are cost-effective are always implemented. Reasons for this are the objectives of the dairy farmer can be other than maximisation of profit, resources to improve the mastitis situation compete with other fields of management, risk involved with the decision, economic behaviour of the dairy farmer, and valuation of the cost factors by the dairy farmer. For all decision-makers this means that, although financial incentives do have an effect on the management of mastitis, it is not always sufficient to show the economic benefits of improved management to induce an improvement of management of mastitis.

KEY WORDS: Udder health economics decision support management motivation

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