

# Northwest Veterinary Associates Newsletter

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## On-farm Health Protocols

### **Consistent protocols can help keep your herd healthy and productive**

On-farm health protocols for treatment of sick cattle and other herd health issues can help your dairy achieve more consistent performance. Protocols are good for uniformity and are especially helpful for training new employees. When developed with the help of your herd health veterinarian, they tell you and your staff what your veterinarian wants to be done. The goal of protocols should be to have your dairy's employees respond to health problems earlier and therefore have a higher treatment success rate.

Though protocols can never cover every situation, by covering some of the most common diseases or scenarios, as well as by explaining how to diagnose them in a practical manner, treatment plans can be devised that may help lower the incidence of more severe disease on your farm. Your veterinarian knows your herd and can help you make realistic diagnosis and treatment protocols for your farm. These should be tailored to your individual dairy's restraint facilities and abilities of its employees. Of course, the better the diagnostic abilities, the more specific the protocols can be. However, protocols should also include timely and realistic expectations so that a veterinarian is to be contacted if treatment is not working. A low incidence of severe disease is one good measure of how well your protocols are working for you.

When more people are involved in the care and treatment of animals on a dairy, as is the case with many farms in our area, protocol systems can become even more important. Treatment protocols are only as good as the people who put them into practice. Accurate diagnoses are critical to using protocols successfully. Therefore, you should work with your veterinarian not only in developing written program, but also in the training of your dairy's employees in diagnosis and treatment. For example, this can come in the form of an on-farm training session in fresh cow physical exam and common diseases. By understanding these diseases better, training such as this will help those involved better understand proper treatments .

Written protocols also provide information, such as drug administration routes and dosages, to be easily accessible. They can be an important part of the way your farm keeps records and help guide in drug

residue avoidance, drug inventory, and consistency. In addition, the use of on-farm protocols is an important step in the right direction in regards to upcoming welfare assessments. Sick cow protocols, such as mastitis treatments, or other management protocols, such as vaccinations, can also be incorporated into your farm's computer management system (PC Dart or DairyComp305). For example, you can develop an ongoing list of cows in the hospital group, with daily computer printouts. This list can help employees provide the right therapy for the cows under a treatment plan, and avoid milking or shipping cows with residues. It also can serve as a source of information for your veterinarian when addressing sick cow issues on your farm.

It cannot be stressed enough that on-farm health protocols should be developed with the help of your herd health veterinarian and tailored to your individual dairy's needs. There are many generic or cookbook type programs out there, but only you and your vet know what really is realistic for your farm. Protocols should also be regularly checked to assure that they are up-to-date, as well as that they are being followed. If they are not being used correctly or being used at all, get feedback as to why. "Protocol drift" or varying from original protocols can occur in even the best run dairies, so take time with your veterinarian to re-work protocols that may not be successful or practical, as well as to re-train staff in how to interpret and use your farm's protocols.

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