

Baseline survey of health prophylaxis and management practices on Swiss dairy farms

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Key words

Online survey, dairy farms, Switzerland, prophylaxis, management

Aim of the study

Many prophylactic measures have been described over the years, but there is currently no clear overview of how consistently these are implemented on each farm. The main objective of this research project was to find out which are the most common and effective preventive measures which are currently being used by the Swiss dairy farmers.

Material and methods

Information on management practices and disease occurrence was collected through an online questionnaire which was sent in March 2011 to 2'285 randomly selected Swiss dairy farmers. Five different sections gathered information regarding general farm management, feeding practices, reproductive management, udder health and demographic data. The questionnaire included a total of 75 questions which were developed in German, French and Italian within the open source survey application LimeSurvey (www.limesurvey.org).

Results and significance

The results of the survey indicated that the implementation of different management practices varies greatly between the different types of farms (tie-stall versus free-stall). Preventive measures which have shown to be effective in maintaining healthy herds were not always implemented by the dairy farmers. Individual risk factors from various topic areas such as general management, hygiene, feeding, reproduction etc. were significantly associated with clinical and subclinical mastitis incidence in tie-stall and free-stall farms. The heterogeneity of risk factors found in the different sub-analyses highlights the multifactorial complexity and thus need for group- or even herd-specific control efforts. Future health control programs should emphasise the importance of health prophylaxis and raise awareness on the benefits of a good dairy health management.

The information provided by this study could assist in improving future dairy health control programs. The good response rate of this survey (53%) indicated that farmers are willing to participate in surveys and are eager for information and advice regarding dairy health control programs.

Publications, posters and presentations

- Gordon P.F. (2012) Baseline survey of health prophylaxis and management practices on Swiss dairy farms. Dissertation, Vetsuisse Fakultät, Universität Bern (submitted Sep. 2012).
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- van den Borne B., Gordon P., Lokhorst A.M., Menéndez Gonzalez S., Cousin M.E., Kohler S., Doherr M., Reist M. Dairy farmers' knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards udder health in Switzerland. (2011). Poster and abstract in *Proceedings of the Mastitis and communication conference*, Utrecht (NL)
- Publications in several farming journals (*Bauernzeitung*; *Die Grüne*) in collaboration with BVET communication

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