Key figures based on somatic cell counts – Improving udder health in Germany

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Introduction

Even though a lot of effort has been made over the last decades to improve udder health, mastitis is still one of the most common diseases in dairy farms worldwide. In order to effectively monitor udder health, a strategic approach is needed. In the course of the project milchQplus, a new udder health monitoring report, comprising six udder health key figures, is available for German farms since 2015. They are computed based on the somatic cell counts obtained from the monthly DHI system. Namely the health keys are: proportion of cows with healthy udders, new infection rate during lactation, chronically ill cows with poor prognosis, new infection rate and cure rate during dry period, and new infection rate in heifers. The standardized information is available to farmers in a monthly report as tables and charts.

Aim and Methods

The motivation to introduce six automatically calculated key figures to all farms taking part in the monthly milk recording in Germany was to represent the status quo of udder health based on standardized facts. For each key figure, regional reference values of the 25% best farms are displayed in monthly and annual reports, giving farmers the opportunity to compare with colleagues, self-assess their performance and to evaluate strategies for improving udder health.

The aim of this contribution is to give an overview of the development of udder health in Germany since introducing the udder health key figures.

Results and Conclusion

The DLQ (umbrella association of all regional DHI organizations) has received positive feedback from its members in regard to practical use of the key figures. The monthly reports help farmers to keep an objective eye on important risk factors, leading to enhanced udder health: from 2015 until today the mean values of all key figures have improved.