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SPRING CLEANING

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As I write this newsletter with snow still on the ground (again), it's hard to believe that true spring weather will ever come. While we wait for green grass, manure spreading, and planting season to come, it's a good time to take a look around your farm and tidy things up!

Start with the obvious. It's time to remove non-functioning machinery from working areas and disregard items that are no longer used or ineffective. Throw away or recycle accumulated materials that piled up over the winter months. Repair or fix gates and doors that may have been damaged over the winter to remove these safety concerns for your animals and people. Repost information regarding visitors and biosecurity on your farm.

Roll or drop down your barn's curtains for adequate ventilation. Clean and repair any holes or damaged incurred during the winter season now, so that when colder temperatures arrive again they will be in good working condition. Clean your barns cooling fans now (and whenever they look dirty). Dirty fans can cut their efficiency in half, decrease the life of the motor and fan itself, and provide poorer ventilation for your cows (their whole point!). Fan cleaning and repairs should be made now, in order to ensure that when hot and humid weather does come your barn is ready.

Thoroughly scrub all water tanks and drinking cups. You can help sanitize further by diluting ½ cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water for cleaning – this will help minimize bacteria and ensure your cows are consuming high quality water. If concerned about your farm's water overall mineral or bacteria levels, have your water tested and consider options such as water additives or obtaining other water sources. Remember – milk is 87% water, so poor-quality water can be a limiting factor for how much milk a cow produces.

Carry out a fridge/freezer audit. Clean and wipe everything down and defrost the freezer if necessary. Make sure that fridge and freezer temperature settings are correct so that both vaccine and medicine products, as well as milk/colostrum, are properly stored. Go through your dairy medicine inventory – check expiration dates and properly discard outdated products. Make an inventory list of the products you use and keep on hand in order to help keep supplies in stock. Make sure to maintain your lactating and non-lactating medications separately, with proper labeling.

Review your protocols and records. If your Veterinary Client Patient Relationship (VCPR) has become out of date, contact your herd health veterinarian to get this updated and at the same time review treatment and vaccine protocols. Spring is often a time to focus on vaccination, but also look at your

parasite and fly control programs for the coming warmer weather and grazing season. When going through paperwork you can do some tidying up- but remember to keep your written treatment records for at least 3 years!

On the whole herd level, make sure that you have a clean herd by taking advantage of our bulk tank testing program. Your veterinarian will help you review your results and take any necessary steps to eliminate potential detrimental diseases found from the testing. On the individual cow level- consider utilizing our milk lab and look into culling your chronic mastitis or chronically high cell count cows.

Don't forget about the animals when doing your clean-up. Winter can be tough on feet and with these low milk price times, foot trimming can go by the way-side. Lameness is a major concern on most every farm- these cows make less milk, are less likely to get pregnant, and represent an overall animal welfare concern. Walk your barn and identify lame cows for trimming and if possible schedule regular foot trimming for the whole herd this time of year. Also make sure your foot bath programs are back up and running- they can be difficult to maintain during the frozen months, but are a necessary part of your operation to help keep feet healthy and disease free.

Are your cows and young-stock looking a little scruffy? Maybe you have noticed increased scratching, licking and even bald spots. After a long winter we can see signs of mange, lice, and ringworm in our barns. Clean up your cows' and heifers' external parasites by using a pour-on insecticide. When animals are itchy they waste energy that should be used for growing and making milk!

Don't forget about your calves. Go over your calf-feeding equipment with a fine-toothed comb. Your newborn calves are the future of your herd and deserve the investment. Replace calf buckets with scratches and cracks and replace worn calf nipples and bottles. Worn feeding equipment is difficult to properly clean and can harbor harmful bacteria. If having issues, consult your veterinarian, as we offer walk-throughs, hygiene audits and colostrum culturing- to name a few ways we can help you keep your calves healthy.

Of course, I know that cleaning isn't fun, but I hope that some of these examples give you a push to consider ways you can tidy up your farm before the busy summer months arrive!

