Clean udders are easier to prep for milking and, along with other practices, can help keep somatic cell count (SCC) numbers low and attribute to high-quality milk production.

Aside from the overall health and well-being of the cows on a dairy farm, the other main objective is to produce high-quality milk. Many management factors go into producing this wholesome product. A healthy, well-cared-for dairy cow is the top priority to achieve this goal. Nutrition, cow comfort, water availability, and a well-maintained milking system are just a few pieces of the puzzle in producing a quality product. In further discussion of the milking system, many factors also contribute to the success of a dairy farm—perhaps the most important being cleanliness. A clean parlor, equipment, environment, and, especially, cows all contribute to the final product being produced on dairy farms across the country.

Removing udder hair is one step you can take to help keep udders free from manure and debris, which can harbor and aid in the transmission of pathogens. Udder hair that is kept short will be less likely to harbor bacteria that could potentially contaminate the milk.

In the past, many dairies used electric clippers to shorten udder hair, thus making the debris less likely to stick to the hair follicles. While clipping is effective, it takes a lot of time and patience. There is also noise associated with this method, and physically running clippers on the udder can make cows nervous and increase the risk of injury to the cow and the person clipping the udder.

Another way to shorten the hair is to singe the udder. Many dairies are finding it easier to use this method. This simple procedure can have a significant positive impact on milk quality. Singeing off the hair is done with a cool, 3-to-4-inch propane flame that is passed along the udder in a back-and-forth motion. Occasionally, the debris present on the udder can cause a flare-up during the procedure; the person doing the actual flaming should wear a flame-resistant glove. This technique will take approximately 15 to 20 seconds per animal. With this procedure, the animal remains calm since there is no physical touching of the udder or the animal itself, and there is considerably less noise and less trauma to the animal.

**Procedure**

- Remove all organic matter from the udder hair.
- Light the wand. The flame needs to be yellow or orange (cool burning).
- Pass the wand 3 to 4 inches from the udder floor.
- Move in and out in less than a second.
- Move the wand up the back of the rear quarters.
- Use a leather or cloth glove to pat out any flare-ups.
- Total time should be less than 5 seconds per cow.

Whether the udder hair is clipped or singed, proper management practices must be followed to ensure the safety of both the animal and the person removing the hair.

**CONTINUED ▶**
How to Singe Your Cow’s Udders

A. Tool to use for singeing.
B. Pass cool flame across base of udder, all quarters.
C. Pass cool flame up the rear of the udder.
D. Pass cool flame across both front quarters.

Photos by Greg Strait

References

Oregon State University Extension. extension.oregonstate.edu.