

COULD YOU DRINK YOUR COWS WATER AT A PUSH?

A science project completed by an enterprising 15 year old girl from Paeroa found its way to the Tatua Dairy Factory.

It was a graphic reminder of how we must care for our water on the farm and keep it clean and safe.

Some of the issues that are important are as follows:

At Source

With the advent of submersible pumps, many of the sources of water are well below the surface of the land, and away from contamination. The top of the bore needs to be covered however to stop slugs etc from falling into the water.

Concrete-lined wells are always a problem. They must have a tight fitting concrete lid to exclude light, nasties, and children. Hedgehogs have an unhealthy knack of falling into the wells, and polluting the water therein.

If your water comes from a stream or creek, then you should fence above it to protect the environment and the water source. It is no use having cattle polluting the water above your water source.

At The Shed

We pumped our water from a covered well into a 21,000 litre concrete tank by the cowshed. It got absolutely filthy, and was cleaned out six-monthly. By which I mean we pumped the tank out, bucketed the last water out, got it and waterblasted and cleaned it, then bucketed the rinse water out until we got it crystal clean. It was then disinfected to kill any nasties, before refilling with water.

The roof water off the cow shed also went into the tank, and can be a steady source of contaminants. This might include dead birds, rats, leaves, dust and so on.

The tank at the cowshed should also be sealed, not only to keep bugs etc out, but also to keep out light. Light starts up algae, and then you have a polluted tank.

At The Vat

Don't be tempted to wash the last of the milk into the vat with the farm water. Farm water is a constant source of bacteria etc for milk downgrades at the plant.

It is imperative that you are using clean water to wash the milk plant. Any nasties will almost certainly give you downgrade in your milk.

Ensure the right amount of detergent is used, and watch your water temperatures carefully for the hot washes. If your hot wash drops below the optimum temperature, this can cause the detergent and substances to stick to the milk line, rather than being washed away.

At The Trough

This is a big one on all dairy farms, and any farms for that matter. Big troughs from all cow means plenty of volume for multiplication of all sorts of organisms eg. worms, algae, grass etc. A big cow might be able to handle a stomach full of worms etc, but what about those poor calves.

Look at it this way, you rear those beautiful calves, feed them the very best of food, meal and clean milk etc, and then you put them out on nice clean pasture in the spring sunshine. When they go to the trough for a drink instead of finding fresh clean healthy water, they are forced to drink heavily bug infested dirty water. Trough water is a constant source of filth, to be sucked up when those young stock drink the water. Cows carry sods of grass, dirt and worms, and drop them in the trough all day.

On our farm and on yours too, all troughs should be cleaned out at least six monthly. How? You pump all the water out, bucket the last of it out, run some more water in, rinse the trough until the water is clean. Some farmers put a little copper sulphate in with the refilling water to sterilize the trough and water.

In The Pipelines

These can also be full of sludge and iron deposits etc, slowing the water flow to the back of the farm.

We used to get a bottle of compressed air and take the ballcock off at the last trough, connect the compressed air up by the water pump and blow all the rubbish out the far end. It worked a treat. We had to do this three times a year on our dry stock farm at Cambridge, The farm had a slow flowing gravity fed system, which blocked up very quickly with iron deposits.

When blowing out the lines it is important not to put too much pressure through the line, maximizing out at 100 psi, otherwise you are going to start blowing fittings off everywhere.

SUMMARY

Along with all the other things we have to think about, is clean water for our stock and for the milk plant. Look at your source, your pipes, your storage, your milk plant, and your troughs.

Clean water is a must on all farms, and will reduce expensive milk down-grades. The stock will do better, and you will reduce your risks by having a clean water policy. Remember that we and stock for that matter, are 90% water. Could you drink your cows water at a push?

These are the opinions of Don Fraser of Fraser Farm Finance. Any decisions made should not be based on this article alone and appropriate professional assistance should be sought.

Don Fraser is the Principal of Fraser Farm Finance and a consultant to the Farming Industry. Contact him on 0800 777 675 or 021 777 675.