



## Dairy

# CanWest DHI now offering a convenient test for mastitis

The DNA test can be done using the same milk sample currently used to test for somatic cell counts

**BY FRANCES ANDERSON**

*Ontario Farmer*

Mastitis testing will become as easy as taking a milk sample, thanks to a new service being offered by CanWest DHI.

"We're going to be the first DHI in the world to launch such a service," Richard Cantin told *Ontario Farmer* last week.

The PCR-DNA technology is used in Finland and Holland, but it's used by traditional animal health laboratories, as opposed to milk recording companies.

"Convenience" is the big advantage of using a DNA test for *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staph. A.) The test will be done using the same milk sample that DHI collects for SCC (somatic cell count) and composition testing.

Cantin said he expects milk producers will choose one of three approaches to testing: testing the whole herd, testing selected cows, such as newly purchased animals, or cows with clinical signs of mastitis, or testing samples that exceed a specified SCC threshold.

"We worked with five herds, making up close to 300 cows to validate the test," said Cantin, who is DHI's manager of marketing and customer services. They compared the

results of the DNA testing with the results of culturing samples and found that the DNA testing is more accurate, since there are some false negatives in cultured samples where there's no bacterial growth.

The other advantage of DNA testing is its speed. Because you don't have to wait for bacteria to grow, the samples can be tested within three or four hours of arriving in the lab, and producers will get a report the next day.

Because the testing is done by DHI, the report will include SCC, and production history, like days in milk, to "enhance" the results, said Cantin.

While DHI always recommends consulting with the veterinarian regarding herd

health management, most producers are fairly well aware of how to manage Staph A. when it's identified, Cantin said. This is a contagious form of mastitis and is most commonly spread through the milking routine.

"There's pretty high value in managing the cows to prevent this," milking infected cows last, for example.

The speed, convenience, and accuracy, come at a cost. DHI had not yet determined the price, but Cantin said "it's probably going to be in the \$25 to \$30 (a sample) range, which is typical for DNA tests."

This is a completely different test than DHI offers for *Johnes* and *Leucosis*, which are based on ELISA technology.

The DNA testing for mastitis requires the purchase of specialized equipment and changes to the laboratory to accommodate it, in mid to late December.

"Lab capacity is an issue with this type of test, so it will be a staged roll-out," said Cantin. The service will most likely be introduced region by region, as the lab can test only 200 milk samples for mastitis a day, out of the 8,000 to 10,000 milk samples it receives daily.

"We continue to look at other diseases that can be monitored through the DHI samples," said Cantin.

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