

THE ORGANIZATION OF A NATIONAL PROGRAM TO REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF MASTITIS¹

R. W. METZGER

*Dairyman's League Cooperative Association, Inc.
Syracuse, N. Y.*

Mastitis is undoubtedly the most prevalent and costly disease of dairy cattle. It is of greater economic importance to the dairy industry than any other cattle disease with which we are confronted. Yet, there has been no country-wide organized program to combat mastitis, to study it, and to bring it under control.

According to the figures published in 1954 by the Agricultural Research Service in its report on "Losses in Agriculture," it was estimated that mastitis cost the dairy industry nearly 1/4 of a billion dollars, or 1/3 of the total dairy cattle losses in this country. Further analysis of mastitis loss estimates indicate that animal loss was 12% of total cattle disease losses and milk loss amounted to 71% of milk losses caused by all cattle diseases. That was 7 years ago. Today the figures are higher.

If we also take into consideration the cost of antibiotics, veterinary treatment, and the intangible losses in sales as a result of poor quality and possible adverse publicity, these figures would undoubtedly be even greater. While accurate figures are not available, present day estimates indicate that total losses from mastitis reach close to one half billion dollars.

In addition to the economic importance which alone should stimulate all segments of the industry to do more about research and control of mastitis, a number of problems dealing with regulatory policy as well as public health aspects of the disease exist:

1. All regulatory agencies require that milk shall be procured from disease-free animals and that abnormal milk shall be excluded. Mastitis, in its broad sense, is an inflammation of the udder and as such is a symptomatic condition resulting in the production of abnormal milk. As a physiologic disorder of the mammary gland, associated with various infective organisms, it may be classed as a disease transmissible from animal to animal. Since its incidence is extremely high, strict enforcement of existing regulations would have a tremendous impact on the dairy industry in loss of available milk supplies.

2. Unlike diseases where the causative agent is specific, such as tuberculosis and brucellosis, and can be more readily identified and controlled, mastitis has

multi-character and form and is less readily controlled.

3. Treatment without proper methods and preventive measures is not the answer to mastitis control. It is apparent that extensive use of antibiotics has not solved the mastitis picture and has created public health problems relative to acceptability of milk.

4. The regulatory sanitarian recognizes the failure of existing procedures, whatever they may be, to satisfactorily correct a problem which has existed over a long period of years.

Bearing these factors in mind the Executive Board of the International Association of Milk and Food Sanitarians had for some time considered the overall problem of the lack of progress in the control of mastitis. It was decided that the best efforts of the country should be marshalled toward a concerted action in getting preventive measures into greater use. In an initial attempt to consolidate action on a united front, the Board appointed a special committee to organize an invitational meeting for the purpose of presenting a review of the problem to interested dairy leaders in order to develop uniform national action toward control of this costly disease.

The original group, known as the Mastitis Action Committee, was composed of representatives of the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Milk Producers Federation, U. S. Department of Agriculture, U. S. Public Health Service, Dairy Trade Publications, Dairy Trade Associations and member of the Farm Methods Committee of the IAMFS.

This committee developed a conference program designed to establish an appraisal of:

1. The economic impact of mastitis on both producer and processor.
2. The public health aspect.
3. The status of research in terms of what is known and what needs to be known; and
4. Regulatory problems.

Over 200 representatives of producer, processor, regulatory, educational, medical and other interested segments of the dairy industry attended and participated in the work sessions of the October 29th Mastitis Action Conference for the purpose of developing a continuing organization to correlate available research and educational information and develop it

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into further useful material for use by industry groups; to encourage and give direction to further research on mastitis; to aid in the development of an effective regulatory control program; and to evaluate present programs and procedures and promote the development of local area voluntary control programs.

The best minds and talents available cooperated in discussing the respective areas of the mastitis picture covering the economic, bacteriologic, epidemiologic, research and educational, as well as the regulatory and control aspects of this disease. A very clear picture, establishing the need for action, was presented and resulted in a realization of the enormity of the task with which we are faced. All of the conferees were urged to participate in one or another of the five work sessions which were set up to develop a summary of:

1. Research problems and needs.
2. Educational problems and needs.
3. Regulatory problems and needs.
4. Means of developing the structure of a permanent organization to promote mastitis control; and
5. Recommendations for means of support of such an organization.

Most everyone in attendance contributed in some manner toward the organization of a national program through the recommendations which were drawn up by the various task groups and unanimously agreed upon at the business session of the conference.

As to the future of the program it was decided that a National Committee on Mastitis Action should be established, composed of from one to three representatives from a list of appropriate organizations. Although an initial list of such organizations was prepared, it was decided that membership on the national committee would be open to official representatives of any appropriate organization or association interested in the program.

The functions of the committee were to be:

1. To develop a continuing body to attack the problem of mastitis on a nation-wide basis.
2. To coordinate and promote research.
3. To coordinate, advise, and foster various efforts in the field of mastitis.
4. To promote educational programs.

The need for more research in specific areas of the mastitis syndrome was recognized and the requirements for adequate and reliable research data have been spelled out.

From the standpoint of education it was proposed that the national group appoint a subcommittee to develop basic subject matter, that is not controversial, for distribution on a national basis for use by all groups, on a state, county, or local level, desiring to educate the producer and develop a mastitis control

program. Several good state programs are in effect which may serve as a source of experience for the type of educational material that will stimulate the greatest interest at the farm level.

It was also recommended that each state be encouraged by the national committee to appoint a state mastitis advisory committee comprised of representatives of all groups interested in the dairy industry. Such a group should develop a program suited to the special needs of the state and would make use of the basic educational material developed by the National Mastitis Action Committee.

The regulatory officials were in unanimous agreement that there is a need for uniform regulatory action in mastitis control. This group recommended that regulations be developed which will require that herds qualifying for the production of milk for human consumption shall be under an approved mastitis control program. In order to implement the development of a program of this type it was agreed that an effective test procedure to detect the presence of mastitic milk, and active industry participation, are necessary pre-requisites.

In the discussion on ways and means of support for a continuing program it was the unanimous recommendation that the National Mastitis Action program be a voluntary one, financed by producer groups, processor groups, equipment and supply organizations and any other interested associations. Representatives of such groups who were present, although not pledging their own organizations at that time, did express confidence of whole-hearted support for raising from within the industry the funds necessary to get the program under way.

To complete the development of the national program, the Farm Methods Committee of the International Milk Sanitarians Association was delegated the work of getting the new organization started by calling together a group of representatives from appropriate organizations to develop the permanent committee which would formulate its own plan and methods of action and determine its own plan for financing.

A meeting was called by the Farm Methods Committee for January 20, 1961 in Chicago for the purpose of carrying out the recommendations which were adopted at the original conference.

Delegates from eleven organizations associated with the dairy industry attended and expressed their willingness to become a part of the permanent group. Two other associations signified their intention to cooperate but were not represented at the meeting and several others were listed to receive invitations to participate in the work of the continuing committee.

Recognizing the position of governmental agencies in a project of this type, it was decided to invite the various branches of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to participate on a consultant basis rather than as a part of the policy making body. To date we have definite appointees from the Federal Extension Service, Agricultural Research Service, and U. S. Public Health Service as government consultants to the committee.

The structure of the permanent committee now consists of a Chairman, Executive Secretary, and Treasurer. Standing committees on finance, research, by-laws, education, and programs and procedures have been appointed. It was decided that the Executive Committee would be composed of the three officers and a designated representative of each of the stand-

ing committees. By unanimous vote it was agreed that the name of the permanent committee be: "The National Mastitis Action Committee" and that it be incorporated in Illinois as a non-profit organization.

The national mastitis effort is on its way with a fairly successful start. We must, however, caution those who in their enthusiasm anticipate immediate results, that we are dealing with an insidious disease which the industry has at best only managed to live with for many years. In the words of Bill Knox, in his keynote speech at the Chicago conference, "may we counsel tolerance and patience. Tolerance because there will be divergent views, many of them sincerely held. Patience because its lack leads to instability of the organization and its work."

The success of this program depends upon active participation and support of all who are interested.