

## The Empire State Milk Quality Council? (Oh, 'Super' Milk, I've heard of that!)

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This is the first of eight articles the Empire State Milk Quality Council (ESMQC) is supporting along with Quality Milk Production Services and Dairy One. We are excited to partner with these two organizations to provide two more articles focusing on milk quality in 2012.

To start the year, we wanted to reintroduce everyone to the ESMQC, based in New York. Milk quality has been a focus of New York farms for many years with programs like Quality Milk Production Services at Cornell University and the development of initiatives like the ESMQC. In the mid-1970s, a group of dairy industry people started as the Empire State Mastitis Council, a not-for-profit organization modeled after the National Mastitis Council. The Council began with the goal of improving the quality of the milk produced on New York dairies. The council recognized achieving this goal benefits everyone in the milk production chain:

- **For producers**, it increases cow productivity, health and farm profitability. It decreases the use of antibiotics and the risk of antibiotic residue.
- **For handlers**, quality milk increases finished product yield, quality and shelf life.



The council's education goal is achieved through seminars, materials, articles and speaker luncheons.

- For consumers, they can be assured of quality milk, thereby increasing confidence in and demand for dairy products.

The council is made up of volunteer dairy community members, including veterinarians, educators, dairy producers, state agency employees and employees of other dairy-related businesses. Funding is received from many contributors from all aspects of the dairy industry in New York and the Northeast. The majority of their donations support the “Super” Milk program. In addition, the council has a goal of education, utilizing seminars, materials, articles and speaker luncheons over the years. We are grateful for the contributors and their generous donations. The council would not exist without their support.

The council is best known for the ‘Super’ Milk program and award signs. Many of us look for the simple blue signs signifying that a farm focuses on their milk quality and the impression their farmstead leaves in the minds of the consumers driving by. This program depends on milk inspectors nominating farms that have a bulk tank somatic cell count (BTSCC) of 250,000 cells/ml or less for 10 of 12 months, and an exemplary farmstead.

In March, the nominations are due for farms that qualified the previous year. Kerry Case, a long-term council member employed at QMPS who has been implementing the “Super” Milk program for many years, collects the nominations. She inputs the data and orders the proper signs for each farm. In May, the signs are distributed and farms can update their displays.

The first year a farm receives ‘Super’ Milk designation it get the big blue sign. Each consecutive year the farm receives a small year sign, until they reach the milestones of 5, 10, 15 or 20 consecutive years, which each have special signs.

“Super” Milk celebrated the first consecutive 20-year winners in 2010. Thirty-eight farms qualified for this amazing accomplishment! We now have more than 1,600 farms which have received “Super” Milk, and the numbers are growing. Larry Bertram, a partner at Hi-Hope Farm LLC, which is a 21-year “Super” Milk winner, states, “It can be done.” We asked many of the 20-year winners last year, “What is your secret?” and many stated the secret to their success was to keep the cows clean.

Another focus of the ESMQC is to support the lowering of the BTSCC for shipment to 400,000 cells/ml. This is in keeping with our mission and would benefit cows, producers and consumers. Supporting this proposal through education and recognition of farms producing milk of higher quality will continue to be important for the council. See our website to read our full statement on this initiative.

The ESMQC hopes to be an example for other states to start their own milk quality promotion programs. More and more consumers are demanding information about the way we produce milk and the quality of that product. We are dedicated to the education, promotion and recognition of quality milk throughout all facets of the New York dairy industry. Partnering with QMPS and Dairy One for these articles is a step we are taking to further our goals.