

Tail Docking Dairy Cattle

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Tail docking is becoming increasingly popular among Canadian dairy producers. Several disadvantages, such as impaired fly control, are thought to be outweighed by cleanliness and udder health benefits. Our study investigated the effect of tail docking on cow cleanliness, SCC, and incidence of mastitis in a commercial herd. The herd was housed in a free-stall barn cleaned with a flush system. Half of 500 cows were docked and scored for cleanliness over a 60 day period. The back, the area next to the tail, and udders were all scored for cleanliness. SCC was measured twice during the study by normal DHI procedure. Incidence of mastitis was determined by number of animals treated with antibiotics by the on-farm veterinarian. No cleanliness or health differences were found between docked and undocked animals. However, the herd cleanliness varied over time (in both docked and undocked animals) and there was some indication that some cows are dirtier than others (regardless of tail status). These findings indicate that there are factors, like season and individual cows, that may be important in maintaining a clean herd. Tail docking offered no health or cleanliness benefits in this flushed free-stall barn.