

**M**ark Thomas is a registered dairy producer and fourth-generation owner of Maplebranch Farm in Middlebury, Indiana. He farms with his two brothers, and his son is working on the farm as well. The farm maintains a herd of 260 Jersey and Holstein cows, for both dairying and showing. Success depends on keeping the herd healthy and milk quality high. Mark says by focusing on those two areas it makes the herd easier to work with and more profitable. He shares the five things he finds most valuable to **herd health and milk quality**.

# 5 THINGS

## I can't do without

### 1 Fight Bac teat disinfectant

The brothers started using Fight Bac more than six years ago after learning about it at World Dairy Expo. They tried it on their high group for a month and saw big improvements in teat-end condition. "We started it on just one group to see if we could find a difference, and we could," Mark says. "The skin condition of the teats was so much better." From there, they used it on all cow groups and SCC level averages have dropped from 400,000 down to less than 190,000 now.

### 2 PCDart

Mark has been using PCDart for 11 years for herd recordkeeping. "I'd never go back to paper records," he says. The information from the farm's BouMatic parlor feeds directly into PCDart. Mark likes that he can easily access milk weights and somatic cell counts for individual cows. He can then find the cows that need attention and check them for infected quarters.

In addition, he can access the records on his Palm Pilot for vet checks and quickly download calf files for registration.

### 3 Calf-Star pasteurizer

Mark's 100-gallon pasteurizer allows the farm to feed pasteurized whole milk from treated and fresh cows to its 30 to 35 calves on milk. Calves are fed milk for 60 days before they are weaned. The pasteurizer saves milk from being poured down the drain and replaces expensive milk replacer. "Plus, we observe better growth and health results using the pasteurizer," he says.

### 4 My veterinarian

"Our veterinarian is one of the biggest assets to our dairy," Mark says. The farm relies on Dr. Ross Springer of Dairy Veterinary & Management Services in Goshen, Indiana, for routine maintenance. He performs vet checks every week on the milking herd and once a month on the heifers. Springer is also on call for calving and sick cow assistance. Most importantly, Mark values the open communication they have with their veterinarian. "He educates us on vaccines, new technology and general herd health," he says.

### 5 My wife

"My wife, Susan, is a big help in keeping computer records, accounting and paying bills," Mark says.

While employed full-time off the farm, Susan spends her evenings and weekends entering cattle information in PCDart, tracking the farm's finances on the computer and ensuring cattle registrations are up to date. She regularly shares the farm's breeding and veterinary expenses to help the farm in herd management decisions. She also mows lawn in the summer and drives tractor whenever needed.

"I couldn't keep the operation going and the herd healthy without her support," he says. **PD**

