

WHAT DOES BULK TANK CULTURE INVOLVE?

The essential first step in bulk tank culture is obtaining a good sample. The sample then needs to be stored correctly and transported rapidly to the laboratory for culture. Not all laboratories test the milk in the required manner – so only use a reputable lab, which uses a variety of specialized media for the growth and identification of different types of organisms.

The key steps to getting a good sample are:

- Agitate the tank for at least 5 minutes, to ensure that the milk is well mixed
- Collect the milk from the top of the tank using a sterile syringe or container. Wear a clean rectal sleeve to ensure that you don't drop manure off your arm into the tank or sample pot. Do not sample through the spigot or use a contaminated dipper cup to collect the milk.
- Collect one sample daily for 3 – 5 days and store frozen. This will ensure that a composite picture of hygiene is collected if there is more than one milker. It will also increase the chances of finding an organism like *Staphylococcus aureus* in the bulk tank, as it is excreted intermittently from infected cows.
- Keep sample syringes on ice during transport to the laboratory, so that the milk does not heat up. Warm samples will give false counts due to multiplication of bacteria in transit.

Samples will be cultured over the next 48 hours in the laboratory. A number of counts will be presented relating to milking and machine hygiene and mastitis pathogens on the farm.