

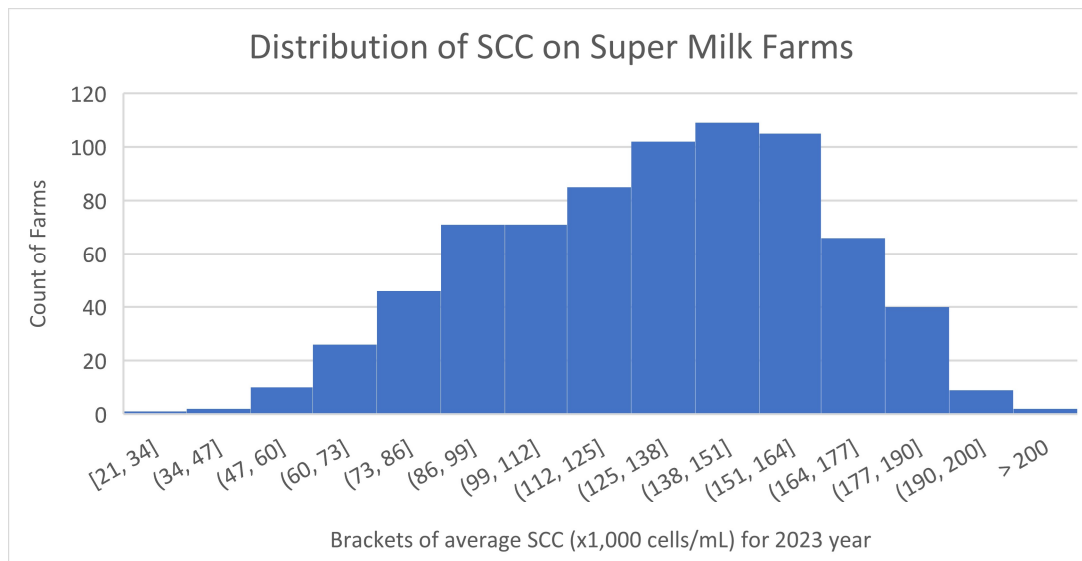
Empire State Milk Quality Council (ESMQC) has big changes after its 35th year!

The Super Milk program recognizes NY dairies that consistently produce exceptionally high-quality milk—most easily observed by the blue “Super Milk” signs adorning their barns. Currently, to qualify, New York farms must 1) be nominated by a certified milk inspector and 2) maintain average cell counts of equal to or less than 200,000 cells per milliliter in at least 10 of the 12 months per calendar year.

As we complete our 35th year of the Super Milk program, next summer we look forward to exciting ways to honor those that reliably achieve great milk quality year after year. As national quality has improved, ESMQC, which includes farmers, equipment experts, veterinarians, certified milk inspectors, nutritionist, milk quality extension experts, and industry professionals is faced with the question of ‘What is “Super” Milk?’ Accordingly, during the May meeting, the executive board unanimously voted to lower the somatic cell count (SCC) threshold needed to qualify for this award. This amendment comes approximately 10 years after an initial change in 2015 when the 250,000 cells/mL cutoff was decreased by 50,000.

Farms that have earned a Super Milk award for the entirety of the program or who are targeting a full decade’s worth of hard work (10th, 20th, or 30th awards) will continue to have opportunity to earn the award under the original requirements for the remainder of the 2024 year.

Starting 2025, in addition to nomination, farms will need to maintain average monthly counts $\leq 150,000$ cells/mL for at least 9 of 12 months. For 2026, this will graduate to 10 of 12 months. The group evaluated 2023 milk quality data for the nominated NY farms to determine current trends and overall impact. Assessment of SCC numbers indicated that over 2/3 of the nominees that provided information would continue to qualify for an award if the threshold were to change (Figure 1). In 2024, 908 farms earned a Super Milk award for 2023 quality; approximately 20% of awarded farms had cell counts $\leq 100,000$ cells/mL which qualified them for the Super Milk 100 Gold Star Award. Farms that have received the award for over 30 years range in cell count from 54,000 to 154,000 cells/mL and maintain bacterial counts at or below 8,000 colony forming units per milliliter.



The change also comes after consideration of overall improvement in national milk quality over the past 10 years. The USDA has reported that across the four Federal Milk Marketing Orders in 2022 50% of all farm bulk tanks had SCC<200,000 cells/mL. Additionally, more than 50% of total milk shipped has consistently had counts below 200,000 cells/mL since 2012; more recently 67.4% of milk has met this qualification (USDA-APHIS, 2022). Finally, the current national average from DHI submitting herds for 2023 (8,947 farms; 3.8 million cows) was 181,000 cells/mL with the NY farms landing “above average” with a 2023 average of 175,000 cells/mL (Progressive Dairy, 2024). With NY state ranking fifth largest in 2023 for milk produced from its more than 3,000 farms, ESMQC must help drive positive change by 1) incentivizing farms to improve and 2) awarding those able to commit to better-than-average quality.

The Super Milk 100 award will remain unchanged: Those farms that can maintain cell counts 100,000 or less for at least 10/12 months will continue to receive a star decal for their sign.

As encouragement and guidance for NY farms moving forward, the National Mastitis Council states the following as the most important targets for controlling SCC: maintenance of a clean, dry and comfortable environment, proper maintenance and use of milking equipment, proper milking procedures, appropriate management of mastitis cases (including culling chronically infected cows), maintaining biosecurity for contagious pathogens, effective dry cow management, and good record keeping/review/monitoring of udder health practices (NMC, 2020).

Those interested in knowing more about the qualifications of the program, awarded farms, or if your organization is interested in sponsorship, please visit www.supermilkny.org. If your dairy could benefit from milk quality troubleshooting, the following are resources that could assist:

- Your herd veterinarian
- Your Cooperative’s field staff
- Your certified milk inspector
- Quality Milk Production Services <https://www.vet.cornell.edu/animal-health-diagnostic-center/programs/quality-milk-production-services>
- Dairy One (www.dairyone.com)
- NYSCHAP (www.vet.cornell.edu/animal-health-diagnostic-center/programs/nyschap)
- National Mastitis Council (www.nmconline.org)

NMC: recommended mastitis control program (2020) [NMC checklist NA FINAL with revision.indd \(nmconline.org\)](#)

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Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health. (2022). Determining U.S. Milk Quality Using Bulk-Tank Somatic Cell Counts. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/dashboards/tableau/determining-us-milk-quality>.

DHI counts: [In Focus: National DHI test-day somatic cell count averages 181,000 | Ag Proud](#)