

VMS Plus+

The future of dairy farming

When Sjack Snepvangers took over Millstream farm from his parents in 2012, they were using a 40-year old herringbone parlour system to milk 120 cows. Between working the land and milking the cows there was little time to do anything else.

With a young family and an eye for business Sjack and his wife Miranda wanted to free up time in the barn to expand their business. The Snepvangers began looking at the available options and robotic milking became a very clear choice. The next step was determining the level of automation and which supplier to go with.

"We knew about DeLaval but this is the first time we have milking equipment from them on the farm," says Sjack. "One of the main reasons for switching was that after discussions with other farmers we felt confident that DeLaval could deliver what we wanted and would back it up with high quality service. This was particularly important as we were new to robotic milking and knew there would be teething problems."

The Snepvangers' new DeLaval VMS Plus+ barn includes automated climate control, bedding distribution and manure cleaning systems, advanced milk testing, diversion, cooling and heat recovery solutions, Herd Navigator (a state-of-the-art herd and health detection system) and, at the heart of the barn, three DeLaval VMS Supra+ robot milking stations. All these are connected to and powered by DeLaval DelPro Farm Manager.

They are also using DeLaval swinging cow brushes and DeLaval detergents to ensure the farm maintains a high level of hygiene and keep their herd healthy and strong.

The VMS Plus+ barn is fresh and clean, the cows calmly walk into the VMS stations and the Snepvangers have recently added an automatic feed pusher to the set-up.

"We have much more time now," says Miranda. "Sjack can work the land while I tend to

many of the things that need to be done in the barn."

In 2013 Sjack started up a second farm in the Eastern European country of Moldova with 230 cows. The Millstream farm has also grown from 120 cows to 180 cows since the VMS Plus+ barn was built and thanks to the new system, the average milk yield has risen from 31kg per cow/day to 36kg per cow/day.

"When a cow voluntarily enters a VMS the robot detects if the cow is ready to be milked," says Sjack.

"If it is, the robot cleans the teats, attaches the liners, milks the cow and gives it some nutritious feed. If not, it is simply not milked and with no feed forthcoming it leaves the VMS and the next cow can enter. It's completely automatic. It's knowing and experiencing things like this that gives you the confidence to start new businesses and partnerships while running a farm, even if it's a little unusual to have different farms in two countries."

In the farm office is DeLaval DelPro – the 'brains' of the operation.

"Cow specific information such as milk yield, energy balance, and health status is readily available. And if we receive a notification that a cow requires special attention we can instruct the VMS sort gates to guide her out of the robot directly into the treatment area behind the VMS stations," says Sjack.

"From an operational perspective we can get an overview of anything from number of recent alarms to milk tank levels and herd performance and milk quality reports. It's all at our fingertips"

It's obvious that the investment in VMS robot milking has changed the lives of the Snepvangers for the better. Sjack regularly watches a live stream of the barn in Moldova on his smartphone.

"Technology is the way forward for farmers. I began my journey in 2012 with VMS, who knows where it will end," adds Sjack. ■

Optimat

The future of dairy farming

Efficient feeding

DeLaval's automatic feeding solution Optimat can contribute to an increase of up to five litres of milk produced per cow daily and reduce feed wastage by more than 50%.

Feeding is often the biggest expense on any dairy farm. The related labour costs and the feed itself amount to up to 70% of any farms' production costs. Making feeding methods more efficient does not just save costs, it increases milk yields. DeLaval is constantly updating its solutions to fit those requirements and with the latest inclusion of Optimat to its feeding solutions is coming a long way in contributing to this.

Frequent feeding

Automatic feeding solutions allow you to provide the exact measurements ensuring every cow gets the right quality of fresh feed frequently throughout the day, resulting in less stressed cows, fed at the right amount and producing more milk as a result.

"We have farms with 60 cows and others with 600 cows using our Optimat automatic feeding system," says Beata Kruba-Wroblewska, Feeding Systems Assortment Manager at DeLaval, "and they all see benefits in feeding efficiency."

One such farm is Karl Fredik Okkenhaug's in Norway. His herd of 70 cows is now fed eight times a day. Cow traffic has improved and milk production is up. Since implementing the new feeding system, milk production has increased by about five litres per cow. Scientific studies show that cows fed several times a day have a more stable rumen pH, which in turn leads to increased milk yield.

Less waste

Farms using automatic feeding can give their herd feed more fre-

quently during the day. If the feed is fresh, the cow is more likely to eat it abundantly. This results in higher milk yields but also in less waste. In fact, using a system like Optimat can reduce feed wastage by 50% and more.

Accurate feeding

Systems like Optimat also allow for providing exactly the right amount of feed to each group of cows no matter where in the lactation cycle they are.

Managing the recommendations of the FAO are easy with automatic feeding systems. Optimat for example, can be integrated with DeLaval DelPro Farm Manager where individual cows can be fed according to their needs with the help of concentrate feed stations making sure that each single cow gets the right feed. This will avoid under-feeding the high producing early lactation cows as well as over-feeding of the low producing cows at the end of lactation.

Time savings

Feeding is one of the most time-consuming tasks on a farm which is why so many dairy farmers feed just twice a day even if more frequent feeding will help increase milk yields.

Farmers using Optimat have been able to considerably decrease the number of hours spent on feeding.

Typically they go from 21 hours a week spent on feeding to just four hours a week on a 300 cow size farm. In addition, the work can be scheduled more efficiently, allowing more time for other farm activities. ■

Champion

The future of dairy farming

The Dejno family's choice

When Monica Dejno and her family decided to invest in a new parlour, they wanted something that was going to last.

"When you put that kind of investment in, you really want to get something that will work long term. And you don't want to start adding to it. It's easy to put in new software but the overall parlour is something that you want to just build and you want it to last."

Dejno runs a family farm of 300 milking cows with her husband, one of her sons and her parents-in-law in the heart of Wisconsin, USA. In their search for the perfect parlour, DeLaval Champion was the answer.



"I really like the Champion. It's heavy duty," she says. But it's the DeLaval's No Compromise Philosophy that Dejno enjoys.

The Champion is equipped with air cylinders to power the ALL EXIT function where all cows leave simultaneously and adjustable air bags for indexing. Dejno described the hydraulic cylinders that they had before as 'kind of a nightmare'.

DeLaval Champion has also been good for the cows. "Cow-flow in the Champion works great. There's little obstruction since there are no sequence gates in the floor and with its open bottom neck-rail, the cows come into the parlours in a natural way. They turn with ease and adapted easily to the parlour," says Dejno.

"It's just a very smooth-running system and it's a clean system. You do have systems where you can individually let cows out but

at the same time, there's a lot of pipework when you do that and we try to keep a very clean parlour. When you work with cows, the less you put in their way, the better it is for everyone."

The parlour change was made mainly due to an increase in herd size. They moved up from a double-12 parallel parlour to a double-16. The cows are milked twice a day and they are closely monitored using DeLaval's herd management software, Alpro. In time, they plan to upgrade to DeLaval Delpro.

The Dejno's are heavy users of the farm management software, monitoring milk yields, indicating

mastitis and other deviations in their cows. They see a lot of advantages using a parlour and management system from the one supplier, DeLaval.

"It's nice because now you can take all that information and keep it consistent instead of trying to

tie it in to different things. When it comes to the parlour side of the world and how well the cows are milking, slow rates etc, Alpro's got it. We see when we've got things that need to be addressed. If I didn't have this system, it would have been really hard to catch that."

In fact, the Dejno farm uses DeLaval throughout the entire farm including the teat dips and chemicals. The consistency of using products from one supplier is useful for Dejno, but she also likes dealing with the DeLaval team. "That's one of the nice things. I can only speak for us but I think we have a good working relationship."

Given the Dejno family's satisfaction with their current set-up, the partnership is destined to remain strong for the foreseeable future. ■