

# Achieving goals using monitoring technology

**A fourth-generation farmer at Waikuku, North Canterbury, Alastair Robinson is making use of high performance technology to achieve goals on his farm.**

The property has been in the family for almost 100 years and is home to a Royal Oak Holstein Friesian stud, milking 900 cows at the peak and 750 over winter.

Alastair has been on the farm full time since 1993 and has grown the operation by taking opportunities to purchase neighbouring properties and lease blocks as they came to the market. He says his strategy was purely to be in a position to take any opportunities as they arose – and he has also had a little bit of luck. Alastair has three main goals for the farm over the next 2-3 years. Firstly, he is aiming to have a lower percentage of empties and carryovers. He is also aiming to have more accurate mating records for drying cows off at suitable times to allow for recovery. Lastly, he is aiming to decrease the number of wasted straws each year. He has chosen a cow monitoring system, SenseTime™ by Allflex, to assist him in reaching his management goals. The SenseTime system delivers actionable information on the reproductive, health, nutritional and wellbeing status of individual cows and groups. Primarily purchased for mating, Alastair planned to fit 200 SenseTime collars a month and had a total of 425 collars on when the Allflex team caught up with him in July. He started



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with the empty cows he is mating for autumn and the early autumn covers that he is starting to mate now.

Alastair says the SenseTime system is already having an impact on heat detection and insemination accuracy.

“It has been really helpful and accurate so far, the collars have picked up cows that staff have missed, including one silent heat.”

The SenseTime system also fits with his current automations and in-shed feeding facilities in his 70-bail rotary shed.

“As our mating is spread throughout the year, the focus does shift from staff to a certain degree,” he says.

“We also were really keen to see if we could pick up sick cows sooner and have a better chance of successfully treating them. We were getting about 1-2 cows per milking that the staff had missed for mating but this morning we had four picked up, which was great.”

The farm uses pedigree straws at approximately \$40 per straw. If cows

are inseminated on a false heat, the cost of wasted straws and heat patches can add up very quickly.

“We won’t see the full benefit until we have them on longer but I can easily see it saving us \$20-\$30 per cow per year,” Alastair says.

They currently use the system twice a day, after each milking, by monitoring the heat graphs for specific cows. “We monitor the cow’s optimum mating window and if she is a little early, we hold off inseminating until the next milking,” Alastair says. “It is great, I feel confident we are inseminating at the right time and are not missing any.”

Alastair says he is really looking forward to getting the collars on his springers and fresh cows. “You can’t always be down in the paddock, so it will be good to know when they’ve started calving.”

**For further information, contact your Farmlands Technical Field Officer or the friendly team at your local Farmlands store.**

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