



"If a cow is getting sick we can catch it about a day earlier than we used to, before seeing it in lower milk production. If we put her on medication, we'll know much faster if she's getting better or not."

Joel Sutter, Herd Manager, Fertile Ridge Dairy

Fertile Ridge Dairy cuts labor and drug costs and improves reproduction with Allflex activity and rumination monitoring system

BACKGROUND

Fertile Ridge Dairy, founded in 1903, is a dairy, forage and grain farm located 20 miles southwest of Madison, Wisconsin. Four generations of the Sutter family have owned and managed the farm, milking about 80 cows until 2002, and then rapidly expanding it, first to 400 and, in more recent years, to approximately 600 milking cows.

CHALLENGES

As the herd continued to grow, the Fertile Ridge team continued to rely on visual observation to identify cows in heat. Joel Sutter, Herd Manager at Fertile Ridge, recalls: "The time and labor we put in trying to visually pick out the animals were very high, but we were still missing some. Also, because so many cows did not show visual signs of heat, we were spending huge amounts on drugs and hormones on ov-synching; we wanted to move away from that." Sutter was also hoping to identify sick cows earlier, to enable more timely intervention and reduce the impact of health events on milk production.

AT A GLANCE

Company: Fertile Ridge Dairy

Location: Mount Horeb, WI

URL: www.fertileridge.com

Herd size: 600 milking cows

Challenges

- Reduce time-consuming, labor-intensive visual observation of cows.
- Improve identification of cows in heat and raise breeding rates.
- Identify sick cows earlier.
- Reduce spending on hormones and medication.
- Monitor ration changes' effects.

System

- Allflex Heatime® HR Tag with rumination, heat detection and cow identification functionality.

Benefits

- Dramatically reduced visual observation requirements – Saves 1.5-2 man-hours per day.
- Synchronization rate now 10% vs. 40% – Monthly drug cost savings fully cover the Allflex system cost.
- Faster identification of sick or ailing animals – Enables earlier mitigating action.
- Closer monitoring of the effects of nutrition changes – Enables more timely adjustments.
- Increased peace of mind regarding cows' health, wellbeing and estrus cycle status – Enables fewer cows being unnecessarily culled.

SYSTEM

Fertile Ridge looked for a technology solution to help it streamline and improve its heat identification process. In April 2012, the dairy's management team selected Allflex's new Heatime® HR Tag, equipping about 350 cows with the neck monitor. Sutter says: "Basic cow knowledge tells us that if a cow has good rumination, she has good stomach health. The rumination monitoring was the biggest reason we chose the HR Tag; but we also liked the idea that Allflex was continuing to develop and improve the system."

Sutter uses the Allflex system on a daily basis not only to identify cows in heat but also to identify sick animals. "I have it set up to send me emails three times a day, but I look at the computer sporadically all through the day, and then plan ahead," he says. On a weekly basis, group rumination reports are compared; and once a month, multiple reports together provide an overview of status and progress.

BENEFITS

The time and cost savings Fertile Ridge has achieved by using the HR Tag have been truly dramatic. Sutter says: "On average I'm saving 1.5 to two hours a day. It's made my life a lot easier. It's much more accurate, so we're catching more animals in heat and breeding more of them." Additionally: "We used to ov-synch about 40% of animals and now it's down to about 10%."

The Allflex system is also helping Fertile Ridge better manage overall cow health. "If a cow is getting sick we can catch it about a day earlier than we used to, before seeing it in lower milk production. If we put her on medication, we'll know much faster if she's getting better or not."

Even subtle changes in a cow's wellbeing can be recognized, enabling preventive action. "We can identify animals that are not necessarily sick, but are just a bit 'off' and might need a bit of extra TLC," says Sutter. "On a month-to-month basis, we're saving in drug costs what we're paying for the technology. I wish I had started with this system sooner!" In addition, Sutter looks at group rumination reports to evaluate the effect of changes in feed.

He is then able to quickly make decisions about adjustments, instead of waiting to see the effect in milk production.

Taken together, all these benefits add up to more than just cost and time savings. "The biggest thing is peace of mind," says Sutter. "It just gives you so much confidence. There's no more guessing. Now I'm breeding a cow and I know the timing is right."



www.allflex.global | info@scrdairy.com

Allflex Livestock Intelligence, part of MSD Animal Health, is the world leader in the design, development, manufacturing and delivery of solutions for animal identification, monitoring and traceability. Our solutions empower farmers to act in a timely manner, to safeguard their animals' health, while achieving optimal production outcomes for a healthy food supply.

Through its commitment to the Science of Healthier Animals®, MSD Animal Health offers veterinarians, farmers, pet owners and governments one of the widest ranges of veterinary pharmaceuticals, vaccines and health management solutions and services. MSD Animal Health is dedicated to preserving and improving the health, well-being and performance of animals and the people who care for them.

Copyright© 2019 SCR Engineers Ltd., subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, New Jersey, U.S.A. The information contained herein is subject to change without notice. The only warranties for SCR's products and services are set forth in the express warranty statements accompanying such products and services. Nothing herein should be construed as constituting an additional warranty. SCR shall not be liable for technical or editorial errors or omissions contained herein.