



*Phil Brooke used SenseTime™ during his conversion to organic production and herd expansion, to build his farm a more stable and profitable future.*

## Nicholson Farm improves dairy management and productivity with SenseHub™

### BACKGROUND

Pressure on labour and the need to meet performance criteria and make a living, have encouraged one Herefordshire-based dairy farmer to grab technology by the horns. So much so that Phil Brooke of Nicholson Farm in Leominster has upgraded to the latest activity monitoring system and invested in robotic milking.

During the past few years, Phil, a fourth-generation farmer, has replaced the 75-hectare dairy farm's sheds and parlour with new housing and cubicles for the 140-cow Holstein herd. As part of the new set-up, he added three robotic milkers in 2015 and in July 2017 he replaced his eight-year-old Allflex Heatime™ with the next generation SenseHub solution and cSense Flex neck tags. "The move from Heatime to SenseHub has been a massive leap," says Phil.

### CHALLENGES

Since setting up the new unit, Phil has also converted to organic milk production. With the commitment to a high-tech system, Phil decided that producing high-quality milk that met the organic criteria – and secured him a better price – was the way to go. He explains that before making this decision, "It was a fairly stressful time and under our milk contract, we were experiencing the worst of the volatility."

### AT A GLANCE

**Company:** Nicholson Farm  
**Location:** Leominster, Herefordshire, England  
**Herd size:** 140 dairy cows

#### Challenges

- Producing higher quality, higher value milk
- Managing the expansion of a closed herd

#### System

- SenseHub cow monitoring solution with cSense™ Flex neck tags

#### Benefits

- Effective management of herd health and fertility
- Reduced somatic cell counts
- Increased yield to 9,200 kg of milk at 3.8% fat and 3.2% protein
- Able to adjust poor-performing feed rations, before they impact production
- Access to herd data on PC, tablet or mobile phone, for real-time insights and remote management

There were also expansion issues that needed addressing. "We're expanding the herd with homebred replacements – we're strictly closed herd – and we've capacity for 240 cows," he adds. "We've got the system and technology in place to manage a herd of this size proactively."

## SYSTEM

The upgrade to SenseHub has been a positive move. "Now I get movement information and eating and rumination patterns, again against the cow's norm, on my mobile phone or tablet. So, I don't even need to be on the farm," says Phil. "I can call my relief milker and tell her which cow needs inseminating or any cow to keep an eye on, perhaps because her intake or ruminating pattern has changed."

SenseHub is much more than just a heat-detection system, according to Emma Eastham, Product Manager at NMR, the local distributor of SenseHub and other Allflex solutions. "It's been developed as an all-round heat, health and wellness system," she says. "It allows a lot more activity to be monitored, compared to older systems, such as eating, rumination and activity. Monitoring these three daily activities gives us a real insight into the cow's health and wellbeing." She adds: "Monitoring eating as well as rumination provides us with a much clearer insight into the cow's health, as a fall in both is a clear sign that she is unwell."

SenseHub is the first cow monitoring system that offers a choice of neck tags or intelligent ear tags. It has a control box that acts as its own data server and antenna, which can communicate with up to 1000 tags. "The control box links to the cloud and this means that users can view data via different devices such as tablets, PCs and mobile phones," says Emma. "It also links with herd management software. And we've also made sure its flexibility is extended to payment plans so there's a scheme to suit all herd management systems."

Phil admits that he spends longer in front of the screen now. "You can't be a technophobe," he adds. "But then much of farming is going that way, so it cannot be ignored." He gets NMR records and data from Crystal parlour software and from SenseHub.

## BENEFITS

Phil is already reaping the benefits of the new SenseHub solution in his high-production herd, which is currently yielding 9,200 kg of milk at 3.8% fat and 3.2% protein. "The rumination data is extremely useful. Information comes through quickly – it's updated every 20 minutes – and the algorithms in the program automatically pick out poorly cows and highlight these under 'Cows to inspect' or 'Cow distress' headings."

There have also been a couple of 'flags' in the rumination data that have enabled Phil to pre-empt possible mastitis issues. He adds that the combination of SenseHub and the robotic milkers is contributing to improved health and welfare of the herd, and that somatic cell counts are certainly improving.

The herd's vet, Matt Pugh, is also a supporter of SenseHub as a means of improving cow health and welfare. "We're able to work together and take full advantage of this new tool," he says. "We'll also use the whole herd rumination data to flag up changes in feed quality of the ration, so we can tweak the diet before it impacts on production."



### About Allflex Livestock Intelligence

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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.

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### About NMR

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National Milk Records (NMR) is the leading supplier of milk recording services in the UK, providing management information on individual cows' performance in terms of milk quality, yield, and fertility. NMR recording services reach the cows that produce 60% of the UK's milk. Since its formation in 1943, NMR has grown and developed into an integrated service provider working for both farmers and milk providers. It also acts as an independent source of data for advisors such as vets, farm consultants and breed societies. Additionally, NMR is the Great Britain market leader in the provision and support of dairy software. Allflex work in partnership with a number of agents who sell SenseHub in the UK and Ireland including NMR

