



"With the Heatime monitoring we're getting more cows in calf. That saves the costs of buying-in cows and enables us to grow our herd through internal natural growth to where we want it to be."

Gearoid Murphy, Co-owner, Rea Farm

Rea Farm Saves Time, Reduces Calving Interval and Expands Herd with Allflex Heatime® HR System

BACKGROUND

Rea Farm in Skibbereen, Ireland, was purchased by Gearoid Murphy's grandfather in the early 1940s. Today Gearoid works the farm alongside his father Gerard. Until a few years ago they had 90 cows, and recently expanded to 160. All milking cows are on kept on the home farm, whilst dry stock is on a rental farm about three miles away.

CHALLENGES

Rea Farm relies on natural heats, only using ov-synch hormones at year's end when working with bulls. With this approach, accurate heat detection is vital to productivity.

With the goal of naturally expanding his herd in mind, Gearoid realised manual detection was not an accurate enough method, especially after noticing how many cows would go into heat at night, when unobserved.

He decided to invest in an electronic monitoring solution to make heat detection easier, less time consuming, and more accurate.

AT A GLANCE

Company: Rea Farm

Location: Skibbereen, County Cork, Ireland

Herd size: 160 milking cows

Challenges

- Improve heat detection accuracy, and reduce time spent on heat detection tasks
- Reduce calving interval
- Expand herd through natural growth
- Identify health issues early on to reduce impact on productivity
- Adjust TMR to make up for variations in grass grazing diet

System

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

Benefits

- More accurate spotting of cows in heat thanks to combined rumination and activity monitoring
- Heat observation reduced from 2 hours, to just 10-15 minutes per day
- Calving interval reduced from 392 to 383 days
- €13,700 in savings over one year, due to Heatime system's benefits to calving interval and milk productivity
- Herd has naturally expanded from 90 to 160
- Cows with mastitis or womb infection are identified earlier, speeding up initiation of treatment
- TMR ingredients are adjusted based on rumination changes, to optimise milk production

SYSTEM

To properly contend with the farm's heat spotting challenges, Rea Farm began using the Allflex Heatime HR System in November 2012. Gearoid chose the Allflex system based on recommendations and on research from several American trials.

The system's combination of activity and rumination monitoring was crucial. "You need the rumination working in-hand with the activity to accurately see what's going on," says Gearoid "By seeing the rumination and activity together you can be absolutely certain that the cow's in heat."

From the beginning, 120 cows were equipped with Heatime HR neck collar tags. The tags are read by the IR readers placed near the entrance to the milking shed, so that individual cow data is updated in the system twice a day. The Allflex Heatime terminal is located at the back of the milking parlor.

BENEFITS

The Allflex Heatime HR System is now an integral part of Rea Farm's daily routine. "Normally I look at it in the morning and evening and after each milking, checking the health and heat reports, checking if a cow is in heat and when the [AI] service is optimal," says Gearoid.

This is a huge time saver for Gearoid, who prior to installing the system would manually check the cows in three half-hour stints throughout the day. What was once a 1.5 to 2 hour daily job has been reduced to just 10-15 minutes. "We don't have to devote massive amounts of time to heat detection. The system catches the cows that go to dairy [go into heat] in the night. It takes out the guesswork."

The Allflex Heatime HR System's heat detection accuracy is also allowing Gearoid more freedom. "It's very hard to get someone who's good at the job. I wouldn't trust too many people to do the heat detection on their own, but you can trust the Heatime System to do it."

As a result, the farm's calving interval is now down by nine days – from 392 to 383 days – enabling Rea Farm to grow its herd naturally. **"All of our growth is internal natural growth, not purchases. It would have been hard to expand from 90 to 160 without the Heatime System."**

The system has been beneficial in keeping the cows healthy, especially in terms of catching mastitis. "When we see a health report, we check the cow and do a full check over. Has she eaten? Does she look full? Are there signs of mastitis? If we see something in the health report, we'll keep her in observation. If she seems to be getting better it means it'll probably all blow over; and if she doesn't get better, then we'll call the vet."

The Allflex Heatime HR System is also helping Gearoid's team catch womb infections early on. "If a cow has a womb infection you will see it in the Heatime System. We would catch most of them on our own, but the system gives us a second opinion – it confirms our own findings."

This brings both immediate and long-term benefits. "With a womb infection, her milk will be down and she will be in pain. And you probably won't get her in calf the next year. If you catch it early, you have a better chance of getting her in calf the next year."

The Allflex Heatime HR System has also helped Gearoid make effective dietary changes on the herd level, to compensate for variations in the cows' grass grazing diet. "Rumination can vary from 530 to 380 minutes, which is a huge range in a herd of cows. I try to keep it in the high 400s for optimum milk production, so we'll change the TMR ingredients to bring it back to where we want it."

As for using the system, according to Gearoid, it couldn't be easier. "Training is very straightforward. There are just two lists – heat and health – and anyone who can work a smartphone can work the Heatime terminal. It's that easy."



About Allflex Livestock Intelligence

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. Merck Animal Health is dedicated to preserving and improving the health, well-being and performance of animals and the people who care for them.

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Suc_IRE1_A4_Eng_May 19