

Using activity and rumination collars to monitor each cow's health and fertility status enables Olly Reed to detect to the subtlest of cow signals and take pre-emptive action

Rumination monitoring improves cow performance at Devon dairy

BACKGROUND

Olly Reed farms with his parents, Andrew and Wendy, at France Farm, Cullompton. In November 2016 they constructed a new dairy unit on greenfield land adjacent to the farm's old buildings. 160 cows are housed there all year round and milked by three Lely robots.

"The aim of the investment was to modernise the farm's housing and milking facilities and to make the entire system easier to manage," says Olly.

"We had a choice of installing a large herringbone parlour and milking three times a day, or installing robots and letting the cows decide when and how often to be milked. With reliable labour becoming increasingly difficult to find, it was an easy decision to make."

CHALLENGES

Still, monitoring heat and health with a small staff remained an issue. Previously, a small number of activity-only tags were shared across the herd. "Only cows not in calf were fitted with a collar," Olly explains. "As soon as each cow was back in calf, the collar would be taken off and put onto the next dry cow. It was a system which worked well in terms of helping us to observe quiet and silent heats, but it didn't allow us to build up a complete picture of how each cow was performing throughout her subsequent pregnancy and lactation."

AT A GLANCE

Company: France Farm
Location: Cullompton, Devon, England
Herd size: 160 dairy cows

Challenges

- Gathering yield and reproductive data throughout the production cycle

System

- Allflex Heatime® Pro System with HRLDn tags for real-time heat detection and health monitoring

Benefits

- Effective observation and management of herd health and fertility, by a small team
- Tight 370-day calving interval
- Alerts the farmer to yield limiting factors such as silage quality
- Reduces losses from health and lameness issues, and increases cow longevity

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SYSTEM

At the same time as the robots were installed, Olly also upgraded the herd's heat detection collars. "We're now using the Heatime Pro System from Allflex, with each cow fitted with her own collar that she wears all year round to monitor activity and rumination."

Each collar is fitted with a tag that detects subtle movements associated with rumination and heat activity. The system maintains round-the clock contact with all the farm's dairy livestock, including dry cows at pasture and bulling heifers housed 500 metres away from the main dairy unit.

"It's a really powerful system and one which fits perfectly with our robotic system," Olly explains. "My first job each morning is to interrogate the latest health and heat reports on my phone and to assess which, if any, cows need medical attention or are ready to be served. If any cows have moved out of their 'normal' rumination or activity parameters, I'll receive an automatic alert so that I can take the appropriate action."



A Heatime™ HRLDn tag sits high on the left-hand side of the cow's neck where it detects subtle movements associated with rumination and heat activity.

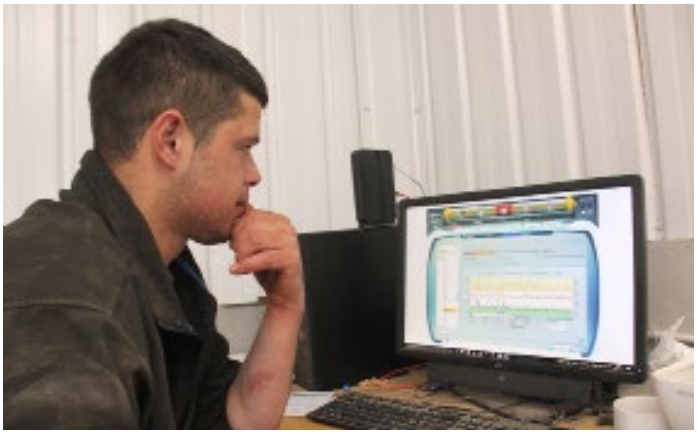
BENEFITS

The Heatime Pro System learns each individual cow's activity parameters and enables even the faintest of heats to be detected. "We have a better understanding of each cow's health, heat and stress parameters and can act pre-emptively to combat problems such as lameness, mastitis and poor fertility," Olly continues. "We're currently detecting 70-80% of heats which has enabled us to tighten our calving interval to 370 days. The cows are healthy and happy and as a result are giving an average of more than 10,000 litres per lactation, despite our tight calving interval."

"The systems we have in place are already helping us to react more quickly to each cow's individual needs and to prevent minor health issues escalating into bigger problems. That has helped to increase productivity and extend cow longevity, which in turn makes the entire dairy enterprise easier to manage and more profitable."



Allflex Heatime™ monitoring provides insight into how cows react to ration changes and feed quality.



Easily interpretable data makes it easy for Olly to make informed herd management decisions.

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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.

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