

Producer's Experiences with Robotics on Larger Dairy Operations

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Automatic milking systems have been increasing in popularity around the world. In the last few years, we have seen the rapid expansion of this technology in the US and Canada. This trend is expected to continue over the next 10 years. Larger farms with more than 1,000 cows are adopting this technology. This panel will feature four farms that have adopted this technology. Each farm will provide a brief description of their operation and then answer a few questions about their experiences with automated milking. In addition, they will address some key issues they have faced as they have transitioned from conventional milking to automated milking.

Groshek Dairy is located near Amherst Junction, WI. They added a DeLaval robot milking barn in 2014. The new barn contains 4 robotic milking units and has capacity for 240 cows. This herd currently has a daily average of 90 lbs. of milk per cow. Keith Groshek will join the discussion and describe his 2-year long planning process to develop the plans for the current facility. He carefully consider both free-flow and guided or milk first barn designs. He settled on the milk first design as he felt it was a better fit for the flexibility in time management he desired for family and other activities. After considerable evaluation, he chose to build a new facility rather than attempt to remodel existing facilities. While it was a difficult decision, building a correctly designed barn offers many advantages for cow comfort and cow flow.

Halarda Farms is located near Elm Creek, Manitoba, and includes about 4,500 acres and an 850 cow dairy. They transitioned to a Lely Automatic Milking System in 2009 with an original 8 units and later added six more units. Today, the 14 Lely robots milk 800 cows each day. The Borst family has worked hard to organize their labor and procedures to keep the many areas of their operation working smoothly and efficiently. Nearly everything is done based on a set schedule with specific areas of responsibility for employees with the flexibility to move labor to address seasonal needs of various portions of the operation. Anton Borst will share their experience with the robotic milking system, how it has changed their herd management and how it has given them flexibility with labor.

Located near Dorchester, WI, JTP Farms transitioned from a remodeled stanchion barn with small freestalls with mattresses and a double-four flat barn parlor to a new facility featuring DeLaval Voluntarily Milking Systems in 2012. During the first two years of operating the new facility, daily per cow production moved from 72 pounds per cow to over 100 pounds. The current herd of 247 cows has responded to the premium the farm has placed on cow comfort and animal welfare as they designed the new facility. Jake Peissig will join us in our discussion and share his experience as he transitioned from older facilities into the current facility.

Swisslane Farms, located near Alto, Michigan has been home to the Oesch family for a century. Over the years, many changes have occurred as the farm grew from 91 acres to the current farm of 5,000 acres and 2,150 cows. Currently, 1,650 cows are milked 3X in a double 16 parallel parlor. A robotic milking facility, SwissLane 2 was added in 2011. It contains 8 Lely Automatic Milking Systems which milk 500 cows each day. Thomas Oech, Jr. will join us in our discussion on managing cows in a robotic milking facility.

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