Monitoring Udder Health in Robotic Milked Herds

Dr. Ann Godkin, Veterinarian, OMAFRA

Welcome to this edition of our Catalyst newsletter, which is dedicated to the topic of Robotic Milk and mastitis.

It was 15 years ago that the first DHI sampling on a Canadian robotic dairy was conducted. We thought if it was possible, it could have great benefits for the operator, management and the cows on the farm. Today, 450 robotic farms in Canada, representing 50,000 cows, are on DHI.

Robotic milkers provide milk yields into a large and a number of other data, but similar to electronic parlours and other on farm systems, DHI services is a great complement to the on farm information, which when combined together make a very powerful management information package.

Whether it is lab services such as fat, protein, SCC, MUN, Johnes’ Leukosis, BVD, contagious mastitis and pregnancy testing or calculated information such as BCA, lactation totals, lifetime production, nutrition and benchmarking or yet again the ability to participate in AI incentive programs, genetic evaluation and official trials programs, DHI has lots to offer and brings high value and payback to robotic herds.

Not only can you predict how productive and widely adopted robotic milking will become on Canadian farms, but it will likely play a significant role in our herd management. We’re pleased to bring you the results from this year’s survey of robotic dairy managers.

As an industry, we should not underestimate the value of a strong national records database.

Dr. Herman Barkema

World Renowned Researcher a Big DHI Fan

Further, mastitis and disease testing available from DHI can be diverted from the bulk tank, so milk sold will not contain the affected milk. (milk not for human consumption) is kept out of the bulk tank.

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Robotic Herds See Value in Different Aspects of DHI Services

As is often the case, certain features of DHI services appear to have more appeal to some herds, while others see higher value in other aspects. One such feature is the use of herd metrics to evaluate herd performance. Some herds use this tool to monitor the health and productivity of their cows, while others use it to track their costs and profitability. Still, others use it to make decisions about herd management, such as when to cull or move the herd to a different location.

Some herds also use DHI services to evaluate the milk production of individual cows, while others use it to evaluate the performance of the entire herd. In this way, DHI can be used as a tool for both short-term and long-term decision-making.

Chairman’s Comments

Lars Vanderseth of Dairy Vision Consulting provides nutritional and advisory services to many robotic herds in Ontario. He can be reached at Lars@dairy-vision.com

As consultants visiting dairy farms, it is logical that the farms we have high value in DHI services. We in turn should not be simply patting a farmer on the back and saying “Great job”. We need to ask ourselves what the farmer is doing differently when it comes to DHI and Dairy Comp. We should be able to see in the barn, and vice-versa.

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Robotic Herds and Industry Improvement

Whether receiving AI incentives, contributing to sire proofs or official core indexes and Publishable lactation records, all those opportunities are there for robotic herds. Paul Meyer, Sales Manager for Westgen comments that “As herds make a change towards robotic milking they are on DHI.” He adds “We’ve also put some effort in helping in a way that appeals to the unique needs of robotic herds.”

“With ongoing data from robotic herds being on DHI, we can continue to make improvements and target genetic solutions that are specific to their needs.”

CanWest Dairy Compishes you and your family a happy holiday season, and a prosperous and happy new year!