

'You might have missed cows, but the machine doesn't!'

Late last year Nanneella farmers **Russ and Bec McMillan** put Dairyking MooMonitor+ collars on their 220 cow Bronte Park Holstein herd. Bronte Park is a leading Holstein breeder – they have ready sales for both heifers and bulls from the herd. This gives the farm three income streams – milk, heifers and bulls.

The MooMonitor+ system is unique as it was designed to work on pasture based animals and monitors their behaviour 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It monitors each cow's behaviour, measuring rumination, grazing, resting and restlessness. It identifies cows showing heat behaviour and those that are showing signs of being unwell – straight to your smartphone in real time. Russ bought his Dairyking MooMonitor+ allied with a Dairyking automatic drafting gate, so cows on heat are automatically drafted without anyone having to lift a finger. The MooMonitor+ identifies when a cow comes on heat and the Dairyking drafting gate can be set to draft the cow at the optimum time for AI.

With the first six months under the belt we had a chat to Russ about how he'd found the MooMonitor+ system.

"We milk 220 cows on 129ha, and we'd worked on our cows' body conditions scores and nutrition to ensure good fertility – but our heat detection was letting us down." Said Russ. "We used to use heat detections aids – mainly dye bomb type markers – but didn't get good results. The first round was generally ok, then it became blurry – there was extra work sticking on new patches and confusion over which cycle the cow was on. We certainly didn't get the results we expected (and hoped for) in the second and third rounds of AI, and ended up relying on bulls to mop up. The problem with this is our calving pattern drifted right out – from a 12 week period to a 16-18 week period. With split calving it meant our workload blew out – we were calving and calf feeding almost year round! Added to that, with about 40% of the herd covered by bulls the opportunities to sell heifers and bulls were limited."

"We aim to average 9,000 litres per cow per year" said Russ "and we're getting close to that. I'd say we're working our cows hard but not too hard. Working with our nutritionist I'd say we had our cows fed right for their yield, so then we started looking at how to fix our heat detection. We knew MooMonitor was sold by Genetics Australia, and knew their local rep Greg Tiller as he'd previously done some work with us on cow families."

"We had a look at other systems" Russ went on to say "but we liked that the MooMonitor+ system was developed on a pasture based breeding system in Ireland. We'd seen other people get good results with the previous MooMonitor



system, and knew the new MooMonitor+ system had some major improvements. We put it in well before the season, and it was good to see the cow information build up. We knew what cows were doing before we joined them – plus we were able to see how the MooMonitor+ was working by looking at the pregnancy test results on cows that had previously been through a fixed time AI program. The cows that MooMonitor+ said were cycling came up as not in calf, whereas the cows the MooMonitor+ showed were not cycling all came up as in calf. In this test it was 100% accurate. I am totally confident in the system. In fact I am so confident in the system I am going to increase the use of sexed semen from just the top 10% 'elite' animals to a large part of the herd, including two and three year old animals. It is about getting heifers, which I can use in the herd or sell."

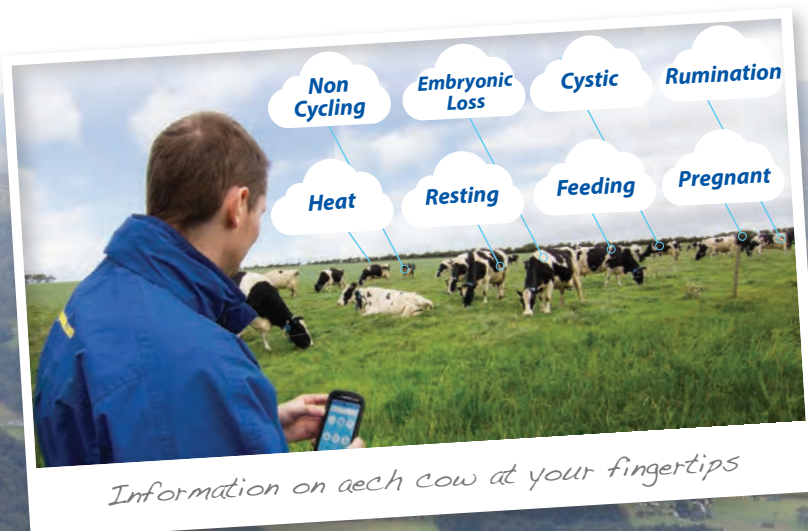


Russ is also experiencing a much better lifestyle, and looking forward to getting his calving pattern back. "I'm looking forward to a condensed calving" said Russ. "This will make life a lot easier, as we will have a break between calvings. With MooMonitor+ we are adding value to the herd, and I'm planning an embryo transfer program."

Many MooMonitor customers run embryo transfer (ET) programs, as they can track which cows are cycling properly and when they are cycling, to maximise the success of the transfer by timing it correctly.

Russ compared using MooMonitor+ to the use of a fixed time AI program (FTAI). "The cost is lower than using FTAI programs, and the results better – you get better conception rates working with naturally occurring heats." MooMonitor owners have found that not only do they get better conception rates with natural heats, they have the ability to join more often. For instance joining naturally on 21 day cycles, you have the opportunity to join three times in 43 days (on day 1, day 22 and day 43). On a FTAI you may well have only done one round in that time. A study in the USA comparing MooMonitor to FTAI found that the farms using MooMonitor had more cows in calf at 150 DIM (days in milk) than the farms using FTAI.

We asked Russ what he liked about MooMonitor+. "I really like the flexibility of the system" said Russ "and the ability to monitor the reproductive aspect of cows from calving onwards. Prior to having MooMonitor+ we weren't really sure if cows were cycling pre joining. It has given me the confidence to spend money on semen. I have peace of mind that I am on the right track with the cows' fertility, identifying cows which are not cycling or are cystic. This system gives me a lot of freedom, as I am able to check on cows in the paddock on my phone - the phone app is really good! I'm planning to do AI twice a day in the season, as the system gives me the ability know when the cow came on heat. I'll also be doing the younger cows a bit later than mature cows." (The conception rate research shows younger cows have better conception rates when AI'd later than mature animals).



We also asked Russ if there was anything he didn't like, and his main concern was data use on the internet – however he said that wasn't an issue as he was moving to a plan which covered all his data use at home and on the farm.

Russ went on to say "I love that the draft gate is automatic" he said "It drafts out cows on heat automatically based on time of coming on heat, but that's not all. I set cows I want to flush to draft, they get drafted, needled, let them go, job done."

"I'd highly recommend the system. You don't have to go to the paddock. During AI season you don't worry – you might have missed cows but the machine doesn't. I'm looking forward to the joining season this year!"



Russ McMillan put Dairyking MooMonitor+ collars on his 220 cow Bronte Park Holstein herd.



The Dairymaster sorting system automatically drafts cows in heat.



The Dairyking MooMonitor+ system is distributed by Genetics Australia 1800 039 047. Dairyking milking systems/feeding/drafting/backing gates are distributed by Daviesway 1800 666 269.



For more information call Dairyking Australia/NZ rep Julian Bentley 0408 105 823