

DHI and Robotic Milking

Combined, the information makes a powerful herd management package.

It was 15 years ago that the first DHI sampling on a Canadian robotic farm took place. Like anything new, it's had challenges along the way, but we have learned, adapted and DHI testing in Robotic systems is now routine. Today, 450 robotic farms in Canada (including 27 in BC) representing 50,000 cows are on DHI. Sure, sample collection is different and unique, but much of the rest of the process is similar to any other farms.

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Yes, Robotic systems provide milk weights info and a large amount of other data, but similar to electronic parlours and other on farm recording 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, Johne's, Leukosis, BVD, contagious Mastitis, pregnancy testing, the recent Ketosis test, or calculated information such as BCAs, lactation totals, lifetime production, rankings and benchmarking or the ability to participate in AI incentive programs, genetic evaluation and official breed programs, DHI has lots to offer and brings high value and payback to robotic herds.



CanWest provides routine DHI testing services to 5 different brands of robotic milking systems.

Nobody can predict how popular and widely adopted robotic milking will become on Canadian farms, but it will likely play a significant role in our industry. We're pleased to count a large number of robotic farms as our customers and to be part of their herd management solution, today and into the future.

ROBOTIC HERDS SEE VALUE IN DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF DHI SERVICES

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Roger Wikkerink, Wikkerink Farms

Roger Wikkerink and family, of Wikkerink Farms in Norwich, Ontario was one of the early adopters of robotic milking. Roger states, "In 2002 when we moved from BC to Ontario, we decided to go with robotic milking. Right from the start DHI testing was part of our plans. You need the components and SCC data to get the full picture.

Also, we test for Milk Urea Nitrogen (MUN) regularly which is another tool to help keep our nutrition on track. DHI is a complement to the info we have on farm. We really like the benchmarking that we can do with DHI including the annual Herd Management Score".

"DHI information is in a condensed format instantly benchmarking and helping us have more confidence in our management decisions.

Jeff Nonay, Lakeside Dairy

Jeff Nonay of Lakeside Dairy just north of Edmonton, farms with his sister Stephanie and father David. They expanded to a new barn and 3 robots in September 2010. "For us DHI is a cost efficient way to collect data on our cows. The production and component information as well as health monitoring, both SCC and Mastitis 4, is in a condensed format instantly benchmarking and helping us have more confidence in our management decisions. The data is reviewed and discussed among Lakeside employees as well as our Vet and Nutritionist."

Jeff adds, "Participation in genetic improvement programs is also important. The value is not always seen in the short term operation of the farm; however it's important for long term success. Herd Manager Tony makes all the bull selection decisions for the dairy and information from genetic improvement programs has allowed us to focus on working with the best cows in our herd and push the dairy forward."

Whether it is for herd management decisions or longer term genetic improvement, DHI continues to be an integral part of the success of dairy operations, even as they make a transition to modern robotic milking systems.

World Renowned Researcher a Big DHI Fan

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Dr. Herman Barkema, of the University of Calgary, and world renowned researcher is a big fan of DHI services and sees it as essential for the future success of the Canadian dairy industry. He states "It is really important for robotic herds to be on DHI. For herd management and milk quality, it's a must. I know that robotic systems provide a large amount of data right there on farm, but that data is not the full picture.

Further, mastitis and disease testing available from DHI can really add value." Dr. Barkema concludes, "As an industry, we should not underestimate the value of a strong national records database. It has been at the core of research projects and advancements and it must continue strong."

Robotic Herds and Industry Improvement

Whether receiving AI incentives, contributing to sire proofs or official cow indexes and Publishable lactation records, all those opportunities are there for robotic herds.

Paul Meyer, Sales Manager for Westgen comments that "Our Young Sire incentive programs are available to robotic herds, just like any other herds. Benefits are available if they are on DHI." He adds "We've also put some effort in having a sire lineup that appeals to the unique needs of robotic herds. Our 'robot ready' sires are a good example of that. 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."

Brian Van Doormaal, General Manager of Canadian Dairy Network (CDN) concurs. "Many robotic herds receive official cow indexes from CDN and have Publishable lactation records recognized by breed associations. A few adjustments have been made to accommodate the way robotic data is collected at the farm, but overall it is essentially the same programs and process as any other herds."

As herds make a change towards robotic milking they can rest assured that Industry Programs are evolving and continue to be available for their participation.