



Robotic Herds See Value in Different Aspects of DHI Services

As is often the case, certain features of DHI appeals to some herds, while others see higher value elsewhere. Like most herds, somatic cell count (SCC) testing tends to be near the top of what herds like most from DHI, but many other aspects are valued.

“You need the components and SCC data to get the full picture.”

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”.

“With DHI we can benchmark and see what our strengths and weaknesses are over all farms, not just robot farms.”

Steve Oosterhof, JOBO Farms

Steve Oosterhof of JOBO Farms in North Augusta, Ontario, dairy farms with his dad, uncle and families. They moved from a tie stall barn to a new robotic barn in April 2012, and continue to see value in DHI. Steve comments, “The robot program offers some good information, but some of the things we like only comes from DHI, such as Standard Milk, % SCC herd contribution, BCAs, Milk Value reports and benchmarking.” He adds, “With DHI we can benchmark and see what our strengths and weaknesses are over all farms, not just robot farms.”

Steve concludes, “We like our cows and genetics, so that’s also a big reason for DHI. The breed and sire evaluations need this information.”

“DHI is the language and format that my vet and nutritionist work with, so it was important to continue with that.”

Frank Louwagie, Hillmanor Farms

Frank and Heather Louwagie of Hillmanor Farms in Mitchell, Ontario converted to 3 milking robots in August 2013. Frank comments, “With all the changes that were involved, the best way I felt to track cow performance and spot problematic trends was to keep the constant of DHI.”

He adds, “DHI is the language and format that my vet and nutritionist work with, so it was important to continue with that.” The farm uses Dairy Comp 305 software to manage the herd. “I am very comfortable with the data entry and interface between Dairy Comp and my robot software. The software support from DHI has been awesome”.

“We test monthly and it’s been a good investment to complement the on farm data we already have.”

Kent Fraser, Carlmar Holsteins

Kent Fraser and family of Carl Fraser & Sons Carlmar Holsteins in Eastern Ontario, converted to robotic milking in early 2013 and use many of the DHI services including MUN and some of the disease tests. Kent comments, “We have a lot of info on farm including what Herd Navigator provides, but we’ve continued DHI testing all along. We test monthly and it’s been a good investment to complement the on farm data we already have.”

He adds, “As producers we also need to continue our participation in industry programs in order to maintain our strong breed and genetic progress.”

“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.