

Flushing devices save time and help to boost udder health

Wash and go

Attaching a freshly cleaned cluster to every cow could soon be the reality for more dairy producers with the introduction of two new low-cost cluster flushing systems. This would remove the need to run a separate mastitic and high cell count group through at the end of milking.

text Rachael Porter

Cluster washing after each cow was once a manual task, adding considerable time to the milking routine. But it was the best procedure for those trying to tackle a high cell count problem or keep the lid on rising cases of mastitis.

Cluster flushing systems made their debut around five years ago and some now also offer automatic teat dipping. One such system is TH White Group's Airwash Plus.

The company's first system, Airwash, was launched in 2007 and Wiltshire-based producer Gary Dalton was one of the first UK producers to install it. He milks his 220-cow herd through an auto tandem DeLaval parlour with Airwash Plus. This is the upgraded version of Airwash that also dips cows teats before the cluster is removed and flushed clean.

Clean clusters

He added the system to his parlour because he wanted to put a clean cluster and line on each cow.

"It was extremely impractical for me to run a separate high somatic cell count group through the parlour at the end of milking.

"It cost £7,000 – around a third of the cost of the leading system on the market. Price was a key driver for me and I also felt that this system would suit our parlour and unit much better."

Gary ran a trial before making the investment and employed a man to wash each unit with paracetic acid

by hand after each cow milking for a month.

"Within a month we saw a benefit of adding this to the milking routine, so we knew it was worth it."

Gary says that he's never had a rolling average cell count problems – it's always been between 120,000 cells/ml and 150,000 cells/ml – and that's impressive for a flying herd that's currently averaging 10,800 litres at 3.96% butterfat and 3.25% protein.

"But I do have high somatic cell count cows."

Chronic offenders

"I've always been really tough on keeping counts down, but have avoided any blips by being stringent and culling any chronic offenders."

Clinical mastitis cases were a bigger problem back in 2008, with new cases numbering between four and five a month, as well as repeats.

"After installing the Airwash, the number of new cases dropped to between two and three new cases a month and since upgrading to Airwash Plus six months ago there are months where I don't see more than one new case a month.

"Nearly all the mastitis I see now is environmental – either E Coli or Strep uberis – and when it flares up is very much dependent on the environment.

"If it's hot and humid then I get problems, but when it's dry the herd remains relatively mastitis free."

The system upgrade, to include teat dipping, was

very much a labour saving decision for Gary and the time saved shows that it was a wise move.

"Milking through a tandem can be very intense – there's so much to do and a lot of cow 'visits' and the upgrade means that milking is just a little more relaxed now – there's one less thing to do.

"One man milks the cows 70% of the time now."

Prior to the upgrade, parlour throughput was 55 cows per hour. But it's now 75 cows per hour.

Great news for Gary and his staff, since the herd is milked three times a day. "In fact I'd recommend the Airwash Plus to anyone with a sizeable herd who's looking to reduce milking time.

"For large herds where time can be critical then substantial time savings can be made," he says.

Milking time

Gary's not sure where he'd be without the system. "Prior to installing Airwash Plus we were contemplating a new parlour as milking was just taking too long.

"But we didn't have that kind of money to invest, so guess we'd have just had to soldier on.

"We're just extremely relieved now that we've saved two hours of milking time every day," he says.

"That's vital time that can be spent on herd management and other areas of the business." |

Low-cost cluster flushing system launched

Cluster Kleen, a low capital and quick-to-install cluster flushing system has been launched in the UK by Promar International. Suitable for a wide range of milking parlour types and sizes, the company says that it provides the effectiveness and convenience of automated systems but without the need for complex electronics and high capital costs.

The system, which tackles the problems of cross-contamination during milking, has been developed by Promar and draws on its experience in testing the operational efficiency of milking parlours.

"Cross contamination is a major cause of clinical mastitis and raised cell counts in many dairy herds, with the milking unit, particularly the liner, being one of the principal ways that bacteria are spread," explains the company's head of milking systems, Mark Scrivens.

"Effective cluster flushing can significantly reduce the spread of bacteria, particularly of Staph aureus, by reducing bacteria numbers by up to 96%."

The Cluster Kleen is quickly fitted with

minimal disruption to milking routines and is suitable for most configurations of herringbone parlours. It can also be adapted for abreast parlours. The kit, which is installed by trained Promar technicians, is designed to be fitted quickly and is easy to use.

"Until now the options for cluster flushing have been manual flushing of individual clusters using a bucket or investment in a fully automated system. Totally manual systems are unreliable and time consuming, adding time and inconvenience to milking without adequately tackling the problem," says Mr Scrivens.

"Fully automated systems can come with their associated high capital costs and these can be prohibitive to some producers who are looking to effectively tackle the problem of cross-contamination.

"We believe that this system fills the void in the market for low-cost but effective flushing of liners. It costs from just £200 per point installed, depending on parlour size and layout. "And with reduced cell counts and savings in milking times, a payback of 2:1 is easily achievable," he adds.

