



Joanne and Brian Harrison: "Daily results keeps on top of quality"

Life in the fast lane

Getting milk quality results early keeps herds ahead of the game



Adam Ball: "I rely increasingly on getting the latest results as soon as possible"

Modern technology is speeding up herd management and for the better. A mobile phone and the Internet are all it takes to get milk quality results 'hot of the press'. In this second part of the Herd Companion series we look at how this early access pays off.

It's 6.15am and Brian Harrison's mobile beeps with a text message while he's carrying out the first of three daily milkings. Yesterday's milk quality results have just arrived from NML for his 250-cow Holstein herd.

Back in for breakfast and Brian – with his wife Joanne who is equally involved in the running of the pedigree Lowhouse herd at Armathwaite in Cumbria – can switch on the computer and log on to the Herd Companion website. Under the Milk Quality Monitor section they can review these latest results, which arrived overnight, and compare them with past results. By the time they finish breakfast the Harrisons have a pretty good idea of whether their milk quality is up to scratch.

Pieced together with their monthly NMR test results for individual cows, also accessed for free off the Herd Companion website, they build up a picture of cow performance and have a fair idea of the culprits if there are any cell count problems.

"NMR results give us a good idea of who

Text message services

Here's how to get text notification of:

- Top 10 cell count cows – Free
- Latest NMR results now on Herd Companion – Free
- Bulk milk quality results from NML

- 1 Contact NMR on 0870 162 2547
- 2 Tell customer services which texting services you wish to receive
- 3 Give them your mobile phone number – that's it!

the high cell count cows might be and we need this information as soon as it is available," says Brian. "But we also need daily bulk test results to make sure we're on track – a lot can happen in a month and even in a week."

In November 2008 Brian and Joanne changed their milk buyer to Arla to better suit their production pattern. Average milk production stands at 12,245kg for the all-year-round calving herd, which is fed a grass and maize silage based TMR ration with out-of-parlour feeders adjusted to yield.

Top price

"To get the most out of our new contract, and to make sure we meet the top payment band criteria, we have to keep a sharp eye on quality and particularly cell counts," adds Brian, who admits that cell counts have had an erratic track record on the farm.

For these reasons, he is keen to keep using the daily testing service.

"There's no extra sampling for us as Arla takes a bulk milk sample each day anyway. And we can easily justify the £3 a day cost for these extra tests, particularly when you consider that we could knock a considerable amount off the milk cheque if we drop payment bands."

And time is of the essence.

"If cells are higher than expected we take a close look at suspect

cows and withdraw their milk while we carry out a California milk test. Likewise, if fats are out of line an adjustment to the ration can see levels back to normal in just a few days. It may mean adjusting components and there may even be a saving in feed costs if we're lucky!

"It's all a case of knowing what's going in the tank – the quicker we know, the better we can fine-tune our management."

Staffordshire-based producer Adam Ball also appreciates the value of getting

results that little bit quicker and takes advantage of the free NMR results service through Herd Companion.

Weekly routine

"I get my milk quality results weekly by text message, but I'm keen to get my hands on individual cow cell count results as soon as possible after the monthly recording," he says. "One of the main benefits is being able to just go on the Herd Companion website for these soon after recording and the chance to be notified by text as soon as they are

available is great – and both services are free which is even better!"

Adam does most of the milking of his 180 Holsteins at the Spond near Alton. Run using a traditional dairy system, the herd is autumn calving to suit management and to make the most of grazed grass.

He's recently installed a new parlour to improve the throughput of cows, having increased herd size from 120 during the past two years and with plans to get up to 200 soon.

At the same time, yields are on the up

and the target is a 9,000kg average. "We're expanding the herd and increasing yields. But we mustn't let this distract from herd health, and cell counts, are a vital part of this."

The herd's average cell count varies from 150,000cells/ml to 170,000cells/ml which is acceptable, but Adam sees this as no reason for complacency, particularly as cow numbers increase.

"There are always surprises – cows that we didn't know were offenders. Getting the results quickly and identifying the quarter then treating it means that we minimise waste milk and any spread of infection to other cows.

"Being able to look at the latest results and analyse current and past results for each cow is a real positive and something that I can see I will rely on increasingly," he adds.

Karen Wright

Herd companion for free

Here's how to access Herd Companion to see your latest NMR results and take advantage of the analysis of your herd's data:

- Contact NMR for your unique user code and password
- Use the Internet and log on to nmr.co.uk
- Click on the Herd Companion tab on the top right of the screen
- Enter your user code and password on the Herd Companion home page
- This will take you straight to your results where you will be able to view your latest NMR and NML results and simple analyses. NML results are freely available to all producers. Additional Herd Companion services are available.
- NMR Customer Services and area field managers can provide help and advice on Herd Companion



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