

Milk records are not just about maximising a cow's yield – her records are also invaluable for improving other areas of herd management

Milking the records to yield their full value

Efficiency is the buzz word. And in the dairy sector that means squeezing more out of herd data. NMR's south and east business manager Nicci Chamberlin believes many producers could make their milk records work a lot harder.

text **Karen Wright**

Producers could 'cash in' on their NMR data and take advantage of extended – and free – 'add-ons'. So says NMR's south and east business manager Nicci Chamberlin.

Aware that the pressure on milk prices is forcing many producers to look carefully at inputs, she is keen to point out that there are NMR service options that could really have an impact on herd efficiency, and on profitability. "A key example is text messaging that is used by 50% of

NMR customers. And it could be used by many more too. They would see great benefits in their routine daily management almost immediately."

Text alert

A simple registration gives producers access to a text as soon as the herd's records are processed – usually 24 hours after recording. "It's the nod to let producers know their results can be viewed either in full on the NMR Herd



Nicci Chamberlin : "Producers can 'cash in' on their data and see great benefits"

Companion website or see the key highlights on Pocket Companion, using their smart phone or tablet.

"Producers can also see their recent NML payment testing results and any disease monitoring data on Herd Companion or Pocket Companion. And for those more technology minded users, the NMR 'app' can be installed as a short cut route into these details.



Essex unit opts for value-added data

Andrew Mallinson's pedigree Holstein herd celebrates its 70th anniversary this year. The Harwich-based Roydonwich herd was established by his father in 1945 as part of the 142-hectare mixed dairy and arable unit at Roydon Hall, Ramsey. He's a firm supporter of management services that can save time – and preferably money – and improve herd efficiency.

"Total Herd Recording is an example, and it works well for us," says Andrew, who uses 100% dairy sires and registers all his female youngstock. "It is cost-effective and it certainly helps to even out the cash flow. Although we calve cows all year round, we have a definite peak in spring to late summer. Without THR I'd have bigger bills at this time of year."

Andrew gets an invoice for registrations from HUK based on milking cow numbers from his NMR data.

"I appreciate this collaboration between the organisations, particularly when it

benefits the producer. At the same time, I am still able to take advantage of the wide range of NMR options."

And Andrew certainly does this – as well as John's disease testing through NMR, he now takes advantage of text messaging and Pocket Companion to access the latest milk records.

Andrew finds himself either 'hands-on' with the cows or, increasingly, involved in representing his region on the Dairy Crest Direct Forum as it evolves into the UK's first DPO (dairy producer organisation).

"I can find myself travelling quite a bit, but whether I'm on the farm or 150 miles away I have access to my latest NMR records, NML bulk milk data and disease test results on my mobile phone, through Pocket Companion," he adds.

"And if I see a cow bulling, I can immediately access her records to see if she's due for service. There are many other uses of the data too –



Andrew Mallinson

I keep finding new rankings and options." He often ranks cows by age, calving date and stage of lactation using the Pocket Companion. "I can do this anywhere – it's really useful ahead of the four-weekly vet visit."

Not put off by technology, but eager to progress the herd, Andrew is now using iReports. "This gives us current data, presented in a way that meets our needs at specific times and for specific herd management activities."

"There's little doubt that the immediate access to current herd and cow data brings management benefits," adds Nicci Chamberlin. "Even those waiting for paper records can expect a 48-hour turnaround so they have the information available as soon as possible post recording. It means the vet or nutritionist

can work with current data – be it for forward planning or for problem solving."

User-friendly reports

And taking this a step forward, Ms Chamberlin encourages producers to use NMR iReports. "Once producers start using iReports, which are all available via the internet on the Herd Companion web site, there's no turning back. They bring massive benefits to producers – partly because they are so user-friendly and also because they can sort, filter and group information in numerous ways. They are incredibly flexible."

And for those who prefer to work electronically and use a paperless system, there's an option to switch off the paper reports and save around £85 a year.

Appreciating that this might seem, at first, a step too far for some producers, NMR runs workshops on iReports.

"It's an eye-opener for most – just how easy they are to use and the 'arrangement' of information," says NMR trainer Cath Smith. "Producers are always impressed with the flexibility – they can look at animals by age, by sire and even an individual animal's lactation progress can be scrutinised."

"A quick date change to the previous year will show the data for the same parameters giving a speedy year on year comparison. It's an electronic – and well-organised – filing cabinet. And if the producer 'makes

a mess' the report returns to standard when it's next opened."

NMR continues to develop its iReports and most recently it has added a farm assurance report that is automatically populated from the NMR records. "This is a huge timesaver and it's free."

Perhaps an additional service that pedigree breeders may not be aware of is Total Herd Recording (THR). Available to Holstein UK and the Jersey Cattle Society members, and soon to be introduced for Ayrshire Cattle Society members, THR streamlines calf registrations.

Management advantages

NMR automatically sends a data file containing the total number of cows in the milking herd to the breed society, who in turn will charge the producer a monthly fee based on this, rather than charge per registration.

The producer and the breed society have more even cash flows – it's a win-win for all parties. Prices are around 25p or 26p per cow per month, depending on whether or not a paper registration document is required.

"These additional services require no further input, but offer great management advantages," adds Ms Chamberlin. "It's a very tangible means of producers making their records work harder and it can save time and money while improving herd efficiency." |

