



John Driver: samplers must be organised and methodical



Joy Spencer and John Driver: team work



Jane Moss is one of NMR's first area co-ordinators



Richard Lynham and Jane Moss: queries dealt with at convenient time

This summer sees the introduction of NMR's new recording system. The most significant overhaul in the service since computers were introduced for recorders in 1996, it brings many benefits to producers and the dairy industry.

NMR's new recording system, Thor (Total Herd On-line Recording) will be introduced this summer and be rolled out across the UK during the next 12 months. It will go hand in hand with a more flexible field structure.

A major software development, in which NMR has invested £1 million, Thor brings improved service operation on farm, better data quality and more flexibility in data collection.

"One major change will be the replacement of data discs sent to producers a few days after recording," says NMR's project manager Emma Corr. "Instead, NMR field staff will get all the details on line and straight onto their PC. This saves time and hassle for the producer and means that the most up-to-date information is available to the milk recorder."

And NMR staff will have new modern laptops and top quality, yet compact, bubble jet printers that can be powered from a car or the farm office.

"An important part of Thor is the improved data quality," adds Mrs Corr. "It is designed to raise questions on the data at the point of entry on farm, which can be dealt with there and then. Consequently, producers will see an improvement both with reports left on farm at the time of recording, such as action

lists and persistency reports, and in the reports they get back from the NMR processing office."

And, as an on-line system, there's no delay in the data getting back to the NMR office. "In areas with 3G connections the data can be sent straight from the farm to the NMR office, or the NMR staff will do this as soon as they get back to their home offices. The results should be in the NMR processing centre within a few hours of recording."

Looking ahead, the flexibility of Thor means that it can be used to collect more on farm data such as health events and calving details. "The health issue is very topical and there are many aspects that can be developed," adds Mrs Corr. "It is important, that as the country's main recording organisation and as a key player world wide, NMR has a new system that could be used to collect a wide range of data from our cows that both the producer and the industry will require in the future."

Field flexibility

Part and parcel of NMR's latest developments is a re-shaping of the field structure. Changes in the demographics of dairy farms, larger but fewer herds coupled with the limited availability of milk recorders in some areas, has fuelled the development of a more flexible structure.

Some areas – generally where the farms are more spread out geographically or where there are a larger proportion of average and smaller units – will continue with the milk recorder visits. These milk recorders will get additional training as the new Thor software is rolled out, and their producers will reap the advantages.

In other areas, where there are a larger proportion of big herds or staff availability is more limited, NMR has adopted a two-pronged system for the monthly recording whereby samplers – up to four on some units working in shifts – take samples and weigh the milk. A simpler job than recording, they do not input data, but they must ensure all cows are sampled correctly.

These samplers work with an area co-ordinator who will look after 40 or 50 farms and will follow the samplers on farm to process the data. They will discuss any discrepancies, sort out problems and provide reports. The area co-ordinator team will look after a third of NMR's producers.

"This two-pronged approach was initially trialled in a few areas around the country," says national field manager Jonathan Davies. "It doesn't add cost to NMR operations or to customers' fees because it makes more efficient use of time. The samplers will spend a third less time on the farm."

A team of three samplers – Joy Spencer and John Driver and area co-ordinator Jane Moss – are the team from NMR carrying out milk recording on Oakey Farm, Moreton Valance near Gloucester.

And Richard Lynham, herd manager for Rob Warren, has nothing but praise for the new system. He likes the commitment from his samplers, he knows that no stone is left unturned and yet there are no interruptions during milking.

Around 425 Holsteins pass through the rotary parlour at Oakey Farm twice a day. Joy and John arrive just before milking to find all the sample pots on the farm and labelled up. After two busy hours keeping pace with the machine and being, they say, organised

and methodical, and assuming no cows have gone astray, they're ready for home – Joy to her horses and John to enjoy his semi retirement.

No multi-tasking

Later in the day Jane will arrive to sort out the 'paper work' – not that there's much paper to be seen. "Richard knows when I'll be there – it's arranged at a time to suit him so he's free to answer any questions and look at the latest figures. It brings a big part of the processing office to the farm – if we need to contact the office too, we can do," says Jane.

"Joy and John just get on with their job, which is great during milking when we're flat out. There's no need for me to multi-task," says Richard. Jane is the one who bothers me with questions, but it's good to get it all sorted out in one go."

And Richard really appreciates this when the records come back. Oakey is a flying herd and recording data is important, particularly for production and health management.

Calving is year round and milk is sold to Cotteswold Dairy on a liquid contract. The plan is to increase yields from their current average of 8,500kg and keep cell counts and herd health well under control. Richard works closely with his vet Chris Watson and both rely heavily on NMR data within the InterHerd program.

"This recording system fits into our management system very well –we've got a big herd and there's a lot of data. It works efficiently and for us it's been a good move all round."

Karen Wright

Producer and industry benefits all part of new generation of recording systems

Going live – on-line recording