Flushed with tim e-saving success

Cut milking time – and costs – with out cutting milking routine corners

An automatic teat dipping and cluster flushing system can save time in the parlour without compromising on milking routine quality. We reveal the results of a time-and-motion study and speak to a relief milker about his experiences with the time-saving device.

	minutes
Farm A	25
Farm B	45
Farm C	15
Farm D	17
Farm E	62

Table 1: Saving in milking time directly attributable to ADF

Labour is tight and time is precious on many dairy units, but when it comes to the milking routine cutting corners to reduce milking time can prove costly. There is one tool available to producers, however, that promises to save a considerable amount of time in the parlour without compromising the quality – and efficiency – of the milking routine.

ADF – an automatic teat dipping and cluster flushing system – has proved popular among UK producers since its launch at the Dairy Event in 2005. And it's not just udder health and milk quality benefits that are winning admiration from those already using it.

"We're getting a lot of feed back on how much time the system is shaving off milking times and how it's contributing to a more relaxed atmosphere in the

Stress-free milking

Cliff Longlands has milked 113 different dairy herds – about 34,000 cows – in the UK and France during the past seven years. He's a relief milker, working up to 70 hours a week both here and on the other side of the channel. And he's a big fan of the ADF system.

"I've milked three herds in the UK with the automatic teat dipping and cluster flushing system – all relatively large herds with 280, 1,000 and 320 cows respectively – and it really does save a lot of time."

He's milking a 280-cow herd, based at Sevenoaks, through a 24:24 parlour

with the system at the moment. "And there's no way I could do a thorough job on my own without it. It leaves you with so much extra time to do other things in the parlour that are just as vital to good herd management as milking," says Cliff.

"I can spend time checking feet and spot cows that seem under the weather or are on heat. Fore milking to aid mastitis detection is important too. I'm not rushing around trying to do two jobs at once – the atmosphere in the parlour is a lot more relaxed for the cows and it allows me to get on and do a proper job," he adds.

parlour – good news for both the cows and the operator," says ADF's James Duke.

Right time

"It automates something that needs to be done thoroughly at each and every milking – and at the right time."

In conjunction with The Dairy Group, a time-and-motion study was recently carried out on dairy units using the ADF system and it seems that, where it's installed, it saves more time than just that that's attributable to the action of teat dipping and cluster flushing.

"The reduction in overall milking time was greater than the sum of the time directly associated with teat dipping and cluster flushing," says milking technology specialist Ian Ohnstad, who led The Dairy Group's study.

"For example, if it takes 30 minutes each

milking to dip teats and flush clusters by hand, then you'd expect automating the process to reduce milking time by 30 minutes. but we actually saw a greater reduction in milking time on all the farms we studied." (See Table 1).

"It goes further than saving time too, as the ADF allows the milker to focus on the cows and do everything that needs to be done at the right time," adds Mr Duke.

Udder preparation

"Udder preparation, for example, is more timely – occurring shortly after the cow comes into the parlour – and it's more thorough. The operator is not distracted by a row of cows behind them that need dipping before they can leave the parlour – it's already done. On average, we've seen three-hour milking times reduced to two hours."

The study, carried out across five herds, revealed that cow entry time was halved: "Cow are being 'managed' on their way into the parlour and it seems that, following on from this, the rest of the milking routine is far more efficient and certainly less stressful. The operator is not torn between two jobs the whole time."

Teat dip usage is also more 'efficient' – there's less waste as the product is put exactly where it needs to be, in the right amount at the right time.

"This is one of those instances where a machine is actually better than a human operator and this is particularly good news since a good quality teat dip is expensive – about 2.5p per cow dip. The

ADF reduces this figure to just 0.8p per cow dip," adds Mr Duke.

And the bigger the parlour the more noticeable the effect of installing the ADF system on reducing milking time. One-man bands are finding the system particularly useful – in many instances it allows them to milk alone more easily and economically without the need to employ a second milker, which can prove expensive.

"The system also allows them to install larger parlours and milk more cows than previously, with the confidence that they can still cope in the parlour without any additional labour and the costs and problems that can be associated with that."

Ian Ohnstad agrees: "One operator carrying out a thorough milking routine is unlikely to be able to efficiently utilise more than 18 milking units.

"There's little doubt that automating teat disinfection and cluster flushing could increase this figure, but what's not currently known is exactly by how much."
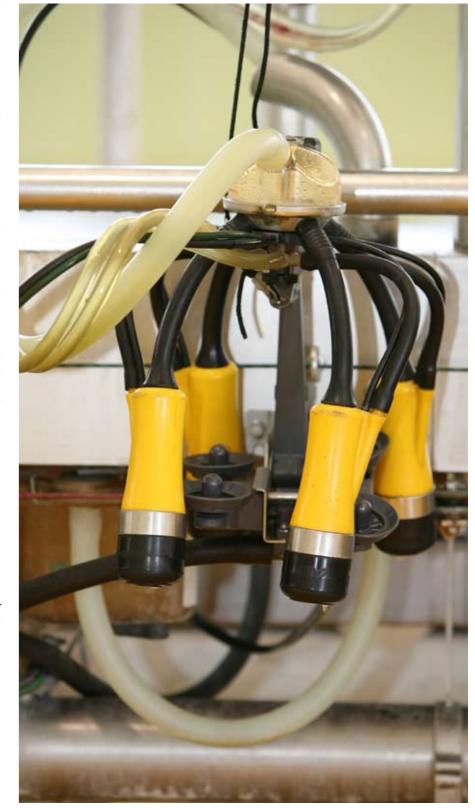
Regular checks

And he stresses, as with any automated system, that producers should check the ADF regularly to ensure that it's providing good teat coverage and flushing clusters effectively.

"As with any machinery or automatic equipment, there is a tendency to press the button and forget about it. Operators still have a responsibility to check that the ADF, just like any other piece of equipment in the parlour, is working correctly. So check the teats of dipped cows regularly."

"It's an invaluable tool – for saving time, money and udder health, but like any machine it should be monitored carefully," adds Mr Duke.

Rachael Porter

The bigger the milking set up the more noticebale the effect of the ADF system