

Automatic milking in rotary parlours

Revolving robot

A robot developed for use in rotary parlours is making light work of twice-daily milking on one Swedish unit. Read on to find out more about how this innovative technology is freeing up time to spend on other vital areas of dairy management.

text **Rachael Porter**

It may be a test phase, but it feels like the real thing for Stefan and Karin Löwenborg. A robot – DeLaval's AMR system – has been milking their 300-cow herd since April 2010 on their farm in southern Sweden. And since they began milking their herd using the industry's first revolutionary automatic milking rotary they are now thinking about expanding cow numbers towards 500.

"This piece of kit means that the repetitive days of standing on concrete in the pit for several hours are gone. Dairying is now a more desirable occupation on our unit. At least we'd like to think so," says Stefan. He's also impressed by the possibility of increasing cow numbers to up to 800 milkers with no extra investment in the parlour.

"Our AMR installation is capable of milking up to 90 cows per hour and can operate for nine hours at a time, twice a day. And this comes without the need to hire new employees and make further financial investments,"

he adds. "We developed the system with large-scale producers' needs in mind," says DeLaval's Andrew Turner. "That's why the AMR is all about keeping costs down and working as effectively as possible. It 'frees up' producers to focus their time and energy on their own personal and business priorities rather than being confined by daily milking routines," he adds.

Looking for UK farm

And the company's Bob Ellis agrees: "This lack of confinement also allows producers with large herds to have a life – it can hugely improve their lifestyle. It also removes the stress of finding and keeping good reliable staff to milk the herd.

"The only manual task required twice a day is to move the herd to the collecting yard prior to milking – the robot does the rest. The herdsman or manager is then free to get on with other vital husbandry and management tasks and is only called back to the parlour if there are any problems."

He adds that the system is compatible with most, but not all, DeLaval rotary parlours and that the company is looking for a farm in the UK to pilot an AMR. "So if you think you may be interested, give us a call."

Karin Löwenborg would certainly urge producers with a compatible parlour to give it a whirl. She thinks that the robot can also be a good way to attract and keep quality labour. "People who want to work on a dairy farm are interested in the animals, so if you offer them the opportunity to focus on that aspect of the job instead of making them milk all day your unit becomes a more attractive workplace," she says. "And it's also a fun job for those who enjoy working with technology and computers."

While there have been some challenges with the system along the way, since it is still a test installation, Stefan praises the help he has received from the company's service technicians. "They have really been very supportive," he said. "They can change components quickly if something isn't working properly."

The Odensviholm installation has been part of a 'pilot phase', which is now close to the final stages of development and the first stages of commercialisation.

"The robotic rotary is not just an innovative piece of equipment – it represents a completely new management system. We are focusing on making sure that the upcoming commercial installations can reap the benefits from this technology," adds Andrew Turner.

"We're certainly reaping the rewards," says Stefan. "We've got our lives back. And during the next few months, as we focus on areas of management that we've been unable to really concentrate on before, those business rewards will grow." |

Revolving revolution: automatic milking in rotary parlours is now possible

