

Swapping scheme saves time and helps to improve udder health and teat condition

Liners changed – without pain

Is it time that you let an exchange scheme take the strain when it comes to changing liners? We spoke to two producers who are enjoying the benefits of a hassle-free service that also offers a trouble-shooting inspection to aid parlour cleaning performance.

text Rachael Porter

The words 'changing liners' is enough to make most producers grimace and maybe feel a little guilty as it's a job that's long overdue.

Some will even shudder at the thought of the best part of a day spent in a cold parlour, wrestling with clusters, grazing their knuckles and muttering the occasional expletive. Little wonder then that, costs aside, producers tend to change their liners less frequently than they really should.

And it was with this in mind that Milkrite's product manager Paul Hunt pursued the idea of setting up a cluster exchange scheme to not only help producers save time and hassle when changing liners but also to ensure that it's a job that's done more regularly.

"We offer a managed system – from start to finish. And a survey among our customers highlighted that it was the time saving aspect of the scheme that they like the most. But that's only part of it," he says.

There's also the cluster inspection service. The old clusters are labelled up and sent back to Milkrite, who then split them open and 'grade' what they find. Any signs of parlour problems – for example maybe the clusters or individual liners show signs that the parlour isn't being washed at the correct temperature – are flagged up with the producer. "The old liners tell them what the problem is and where it is, if it's just one milking unit or the whole parlour that's not washing properly."

To date 400 producers, from across the

UK and Northern Ireland, are signed up to the scheme.

"The price of the scheme varies from unit to unit, but all will agree that it's money well spent. When you're working with a £2,000 animal, you can't scrimp on liners. Changing them regularly and ensuring that they're milked out quickly and easily – with no slippage – has udder health and milk quality benefits," says Mr Hunt.

And when you think of the time saved on changing liners, and the broken cluster components that are replaced for free as part of the package, not to mention the trouble-shooting feedback on the old liners, it's an investment that soon pays for itself.

"We do have an app that we use to show the benefits of using the scheme to prospective customers – the savings soon add up. Time is money, so the labour saving is considerable and preventing just one case of mastitis and improving teat condition across the herd are also significant cost saving benefits."

Time saving

Rob Prichard has seen those benefits for himself. He runs a 200-cow herd at Llanishen on the Welsh Borders, in partnership with his father Clive, and he was one of the first producers to join the scheme.

"The catalyst for me was the sheer amount of time that it took to change the liners on all the clusters in our 16:32 herringbone parlour," he says.

"It was a horrible job and very time



Paul Hunt

consuming – no one wanted to do it – and the new liners would just sit there waiting. It was one of those things we were all guilty of putting off for as long as we could."

But not any more. It's now an easy job, taking less than an hour. "The boxes with the new clusters, already fitted with fresh liners, arrive in the morning. We get on and do the job that day – it's a matter of detaching and re-attaching three pipes per cluster to change them. We mark up the old clusters, so we know where they were in the parlour, and put them back in the boxes. And then we make a phone call for them to be picked up. That's it – job done for another three months."

Rob says the liners are now changed four times a year: "But we used to change them just twice a year, which wasn't often enough. Liners ideally need changing after about 2,500 milkings."

So far they've had no problems reported back about the old liners through the liner inspection service. But Rob says it's good to know that if there was a problem he'd be able to pin point where it was and sort it out quickly and easily.

Liner performance

He's also impressed with how well the triangular liners perform. "There's very little liner slip and, as a result, the cows milk out quickly and quietly. They seem much happier in the parlour and when you look at their teat condition you can see why."

The triangular liners mean that the teats are kept dry during milking – their design draws milk away from the teat end.

"For me it's great value for money. It saves time, ensures that liners are changed when they should be, it flags up any parlour problems and our cows' teat condition is excellent."

"It's quick, easy and hassle free – we certainly don't miss the old system."

Russell Churchouse and his father John have been using the Cluster exchange scheme for two years. They run a 280-cow herd near Shepton Mallet, in



Quick change: swapping whole clusters, rather than individual liners, saves time



Liner inspection: scheme flags up problems with individual units or the parlour

Somerset, and found out about the scheme during the visit to the Dairy Show. "We were in the process of installing a new parlour and were looking around for some clusters when we saw the details about the scheme."

Russell worked out that, once he'd factored in the time required to order and replace liners for their 24:48 herringbone parlour, the scheme represented good value for money.

"It would take a day to do a job like that – now it takes just an hour. And it's a job that anyone is happy to do – it's not difficult."

Russell also likes the peace of mind that comes with knowing that the old liners will go back and be split open to detect any parlour problems. "We've had no issues reported so far, which is obviously good. But even if there was a problem, such as a cluster not washing properly or a liner being pinched, we'd be able to get to the root of it quickly."

His liners are changed every six months – the herd is run on a low-input system, with calving in February and March. The average SCC for the herd is 60,000 cells per ml and in 2012 there were fewer than 25 cases of mastitis per 100 cows. "We're expecting that figure to be even lower for 2013 as we've had fewer cases." Russell says that teat condition is good – thanks to the triangular liners. "The cows milk out well and the milk is kept away from the teat end. It all contributes to protecting and maintaining good udder health.

"I'm certainly pleased with the liners and the scheme." |