

Live data puts producers' fingers on the pulse

# Managing cows 'in the moment'

Making herd decisions based on real-time data is paving the way towards improved herd management. And, with new links between dairy management software and NMR's Herd Companion, this data will simultaneously update action lists and management reports allowing all parties involved in the management of the herd to sing from the same hymn sheet.

text **Karen Wright**

**N**ew data links, to and from Herd Companion, are adding value to cow and herd data on dairy units. So says NMR's software training manager Cath Smith. "It's 'big data' in the dairy sector.

Herd Companion acts as a hub. It can collate, update and analyse information and it can pass the latest data on to nominated vets and advisers.

"The great advantage, now, is that the

NMR database is synchronised with the producers', vets' and advisers' systems – either Herd Companion, InterHerd+ or Uniform, depending on those being used." And she adds that links with other dairy management systems will follow.

"This synchronising of data all happens automatically. And when it comes to milk quality data following the NMR recording, the on-farm and third-party Uniform and InterHerd+ systems are updated via Herd Companion – the link works to and from the on-farm system."

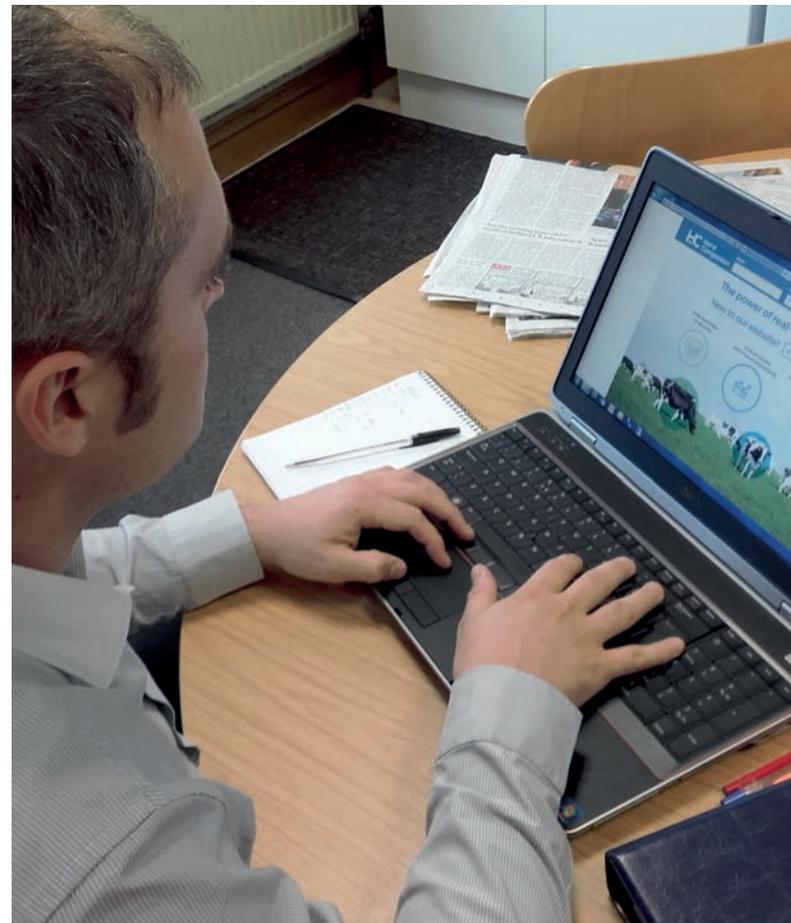
The latest development that enables Herd Companion to link directly with software systems, like Uniform and InterHerd+, means that NMR records and these management systems are updated with new events automatically.

Also, producers can add event information directly on to Herd Companion, as it happens. "So calvings, insemination data, mastitis and lameness data can be added. As the event is added, so the i-reports and action lists are updated simultaneously for use on farm.

"And what is even more significant is that Herd Companion can automatically pass the updated information – either

*Event data is entered and simultaneously updates NMR reports and dairy management systems*

*Events can be entered on to Herd Companion on farm, 24/7. NMR reports and management systems are automatically updated*



## Input of farm data rises

NMR introduced on-farm data entry to Herd Companion in September 2017. Since then it has seen a steady increase in participants with entries made for 500 herds on a regular basis; mainly by producers, but also by vets and advisers.

Table 1: Growth of on-farm data entry

|                            | Sept 2017 | Sept 2018 |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| number of services entered | 531       | 4,003     |
| number of calvings entered | 316       | 2,710     |
| total no of events entered | 1,048     | 4,975     |

originating from Uniform, InterHerd+ or through direct event entries – to the InterHerd + and Uniform systems being run by vets and advisers. There's no other system out there that allows all parties to seamlessly access the latest data."

Herd Companion is a web-based system that collates and analyses NMR records, inGENEious genetic reports and herd events. NML bulk milk quality results are also fed into Herd Companion daily or every other day, depending on farm collection frequency. This information is available to all producers whose bulk milk is tested through NML, which accounts for 98% of UK milk production. Herd Companion is also updated with bulk milk and individual disease test results such as those from HerdWise Johne's screenings. These results also pass seamlessly to the dairy management software systems or can be viewed on Herd Companion by all authorised parties.

### Live database

Dairy management consultant Sam Kelly, who works in the south west, is taking advantage of this real-time information. "Everyone involved in managing the herd can work from a live database," he says. "We're not looking at

*John Allwood: "One point of data entry avoids duplication and improves accuracy"*



an InterHerd+ report with event data that could be three or four weeks old, which was the case when our only updates followed the monthly recording. "This unique link that NMR has developed can improve herd management and it can certainly add value to the advice that I give on farm."

Monitoring trends and picking up anomalies in fertility and health data are key areas where Mr Kelly sees benefits. "I can soon see if a cow is out of sync – or if conception rates for a group of cows are falling away," adds Mr Kelly.

"A sudden dip in bulling activity might suggest issues with diet or management that need to be addressed urgently. Seeing any issues at such an early stage means that I can hopefully nip a problem in the bud. I can check the herd far more regularly and often I can pick up any issues from the office."

While you can't replace seeing cows on the farm, and remote cow management is not something Mr Kelly sees as an option, he does acknowledge that the live data links are a significant step forward in cow management.

"I can keep a far closer eye on the herd and on groups of cows, which is particularly valuable in larger herds," he adds. "It's the access to current data

*Sam Kelly: "NMR links improve my data and add value to my advice on farm"*



## Webinar

NMR's Cath Smith will host a Herd Companion Cell Count webinar on Monday December 17, 2018.

She will discuss how best to use the vital cell count information on Herd Companion including the Selective Dry Cow Therapy Tool, cell count trends and cell count key performance indicators.

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[www.nmr.co.uk/software/training-dates](http://www.nmr.co.uk/software/training-dates)

that allows us to fine tune diets and management immediately. This allows our herds to push forwards."

Cheshire-based producer John Allwood agrees. He has taken advantage of the single data entry on Uniform since it was introduced in August 2017. His Uniform system links with the Fullwood parlour software that helps to manage his 750-cow Holstein herd. Milk yields, from the three daily milkings, are automatically transferred to Uniform.

### Big step forward

"We add event information like calvings and services, and any lameness or mastitis cases, onto Uniform on a regular basis," says Mr Allwood. "The reports are immediately updated with real-time information. I've been using Uniform for the past 10 years, but this latest development is a big step forward."

"It's particularly valuable with the number of cows we're now managing. It's impossible to know 750 cows individually, but it's vital that we pick up trends or anomalies in individuals, or in groups of cows, as quickly as possible." And he sees the benefits of the real-time data on Uniform syncing immediately with the NMR database, updating his NMR records through Herd Companion, and the links that this sets up, such as to third parties like BCMS and to his vet's own computer appraisal system.

"What I really value, though, is having one point of data entry," he explains. "It reduces duplication and the risk of human error. We can now be far more confident that we are working from an accurate and up-to-date set of data."

Always keen to interrogate the herd data further, Mr Allwood believes that the improved links and use of real time data by all parties will lead to more in-depth reporting and more accurate cow management. |