

Three feeds a day with robotic milking

Research and farmer experience has confirmed that a 3-way grazing system works better on farms with automatic milking systems (AMS) than the traditional approach of offering cows two fresh pasture breaks a day.

FutureDairy researcher, Nicolas Lyons, found that offering feed in three allocations every 24 hours increased average milk production by 20%, increased milking frequency by 42% and improved AMS unit utilisation by 17%.

Experience on commercial AMS farms supports these findings, with all pasture-based Australian AMS farmers currently using a 3-way grazing system.

Dr Kendra Kerrisk, FutureDairy project leader said a 3-way grazing system was relatively easy to manage, as long as the laneways and farm layout were designed for it.

“It is really important that farmers who are planning an AMS, design the farm layout to allow for 3-way grazing. It is not particularly expensive, or difficult to include at the design stage but it’s much harder if you have to go back afterwards and rearrange the farm layout,” Dr Kerrisk said.

Three-way grazing could include three fresh breaks of pasture a day, or two pasture breaks and a feedpad with a loafing area.

Dr Kerrisk explained that 3-way grazing is central to motivating cows to move regularly and voluntarily around the farm, taking themselves to the dairy to be milked, and walking back to the paddock afterwards.

“The labour, lifestyle and management benefits associated with an AMS are best achieved if cows move on their own. Researchers around the world have tried a variety of ways to motivate cows to move around the farm, and there’s no doubt, food is the most reliable incentive,” she said.

Cows in an AMS are just as well fed as cows in a conventional system, where they typically have access to two fresh paddocks a day. The only difference is that AMS cows are offered their daily feed allowance in three smaller ‘portions’ each day.

Trials conducted by Mr Lyons found that offering cows feed in three fresh portions a day meant they visited the dairy and were milked more often, and there were fewer cows who went for an extended period (18 hours or more) between milkings.

This resulted in more milking sessions per hour and more evenly distributed cow flow through the AMS units during the day and night. The combined effect was a large increase in operational efficiency of the AMS units.

These gains occurred in cows at all stages of lactation. In contrast, in a 2-way grazing system, milking frequency tended to drop off towards late lactation.

“More frequent movement of cows allows the farm manager to be more selective about which cows are drafted for milking and when this occurs,” Dr Kerrisk said.

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Caption: FutureDairy researcher, Nicolas Lyons, found that a 3-way grazing system works better on farms with



automatic milking systems (AMS) than the traditional approach of offering cows two fresh pasture breaks a day.