CASE STUDY

Ben and Kim Hart

At a glance
Ben and Kim Hart
Location: Greenhills Farm, Waimate
Livestock breed: Friesian cross
Herd size: 550 herd size
Shed type: 60 Bale Rotary shed – 18 months old

Challenges
- Catching distressed cows early, before they get too sick.
- Maintaining and improving good animal health whilst improving efficiencies.

Benefits
- Being able to run two farms and two sheds, taking pressure off the first shed.
- Access to the latest and most accurate information on individual cows.
- Milking metres, pulsators, in-shed feed system and auto cup removers designed with simplicity and low maintenance.

Located in the rolling country of Waimate, Ben Hart is the fourth generation to farm Greenhills Farm. Traditionally a sheep and beef farm, Ben converted his family block pastures slowly 15 years ago. Converting the pastures and installing central pivot irrigation 5 years ago meant the farm was suitable to graze milking cows. This allowed Ben to lease the land to the Van T'Klooster 1,200 cow neighbouring dairy farm that he has been share milking on for the past 15 years. Adding his land meant an additional 600 cows could be milked in the neighbours' cow shed. "The plan was always to convert the pastures, fence paddocks, build races and install irrigation first, with the dream of one day building our own cowshed", Ben notes.

In August 2018, Ben's new shed was finished and ready to milk the first of the 600 cows that had calved. Since that day Ben has been running two farms and two sheds, with help from a fantastic Filipino team. "The new shed certainly took a lot of pressure off the other shed, but it did mean I was running two separate dairy farms", admits Ben. Running a dairy farm operation of this size wouldn't be for everyone but it's a challenge that Ben and wife Kim have certainly revelled in.

Around two and a half years ago, after months of planning and visiting various cow sheds, the scary yet exciting decision was made to build the 60bale rotary shed on the home farm. Ben remembers sitting around his kitchen table with the team of people who were going to help him build the shed. "There was a lot of planning between us, the local builder, the plant provider and Allflex who were supplying the automation hardware and

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smart data to run the shed. I knew I had a good team of people all willing to work together", Ben recalls.

"We chose Allflex for our milking automation hardware and software as our herd already had Allflex monitoring collars on them". Ben explains. Ben was impressed and familiar with the cow collars and the Heatime Pro data flow system. "I wanted seamless integration and to work with good people who knew me and our farm", Ben recalls. They installed Allflex milking control metres, pulsators and an automatic in-shed feeding system all controlled by the Allflex Dataflow software system, which seamlessly integrated with the Allflex cow collar monitoring system.

Since the shed has been in operation Ben and his team have noticed that day to day decision making on the farm has become a lot easier. "My team can now access the latest and most accurate information on an individual cow. With a few clicks they can see how much that cow milked out that morning, what and how much it ate, and whether its rumination levels have dropped. This is the ultimate for maintaining good animal health. "We are catching the cows early, before they get too sick, meaning less days recovering and more days in milk", Ben explains. The cows that show signs of distress are automatically drafted out after milking so the team can look at them and compare it with the information that Dataflow is giving them. "We get a deeper and much better picture of what is happening, often much earlier than when we would normally notice visual signs of distress", describes Ben.

When Ben and Kim started planning their new cow shed they quickly identified that to get the most out of their land and herd size they had to start focusing more on milking efficiency and less on expanding herd and land size, as land expansion was not an option. Maintaining and improving good animal health were priorities for both Ben and Kim all whilst improving efficiencies. The Allflex milk metres, pulsators and auto in-shed feed system, drafting gate and weigh scales all powered by the Dataflow system "ticked all those boxes and we also felt really comfortable working with them [Allflex] again", explains Ben.

"The automatic in- shed feed system treats the cows as individuals not as a herd so we can calibrate the feed according to cow breed, size, time of day and time of year", explains Bens. Not only has the Allflex Milking Automation gear and data intelligence considerable improved farm efficiencies and cow health, Ben has also gained a little more work life balance. Ben AI's for 9 weeks now and no longer must tail up with bulls. Allflex cow collars detect the optimal time to inseminate, each morning those cows are automatically drafted via Allflex draft gate out ready for the AI technician. "I no longer have to be in the shed every morning manually identifying cows on heat and then drafting them out". Ben explains.

Ben would not hesitate in recommending the Allflex Milking Automation. "It's been one of the best decisions we have every made, especially for what it's done for this farm in particular"... ."The seamless integration between the Allflex collars and the in shed milking automation has been a gamechanger". Ben reflects. Allflex designed their milking metres, pulsators, in-shed feed system and auto cup removers with simplicity and low maintenance in mind. With much fewer moving parts to others on the market, Allflex Milking Automation gear is much easier to maintain which means breakdowns are not an issue.

Ben says there were three main reasons why he chose Allflex Milking Automation. The first reason was that he had worked with Allflex before. He knows they are an established, trusted New Zealand agri-tech company that understands New Zealand farmers. Secondly, he already had the Allflex cow collars on his herd and wanted seamless integration across all systems. Thirdly, but probably the most important was the customer service and tech support that Allflex have provided him and his team over the years. He knew he could trust and rely on the Allflex tech and support team's knowledge. "They are always just a phone call away", says Ben.

Next year marks a huge milestone for the Harts. Ben will leave the neighbours share-milking job, purchase the 600 cows and become a standalone dairy farm on his own family farm. "I look forward to having more time to focus on my own farm and diving a little deeper into the data collection side of things. Analysing that data will help improve our family operation." Ben explains. Ben has always worked extremely hard with a focus on the bigger picture, and always knew it would be a step by step process to get to this point.

The drive to continually get better [not bigger] at what they do is very much the focus for the next 3 to 5 years. As the years go on, they are gathering an accurate history of each individual animal, so, spending more time looking at and analysing the data to improve their breeding is what excites Ben. Knowing Allflex is well established, expanding and continually investing in R&D indicates to Ben that Allflex will certainly be part of the team he will continue to work with over the coming years.

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