CASE STUDY

Cathy and Owen Copinga

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Location: Isla Bank
Herd Size: Approx. 650 Dairy Cows
Farm Size: 480ha
Herd Breakdown: 650 Holstein Friesians

Challenges

- Increase the efficiency of Identifying cows on heat
- Improve conception rates and retain cows wherever possible
- Achieve a better work-life balance without placing more pressure on their team or having a negative effect on their production

Benefits

- Improved breeding window accuracy
- Ability to tighten up the calving pattern
- Valuable health information for cows suffering from mastitis
- Removal of tail paint, scratches and bulls from the operation
- Reduced empty rates
- Lifestyle – manage mating plan remotely
- Improved sexed semen conception rates

Allflex ®

Livestock Intelligence™

MSD Animal Health Intelligence

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Cathy and Owen run spilt-calving on their Southland dairy farm. Their 650 Holstein Fresians allow them to supply Fonterra year-round. However, it also means they are calving for a total of 20 weeks a year and traditionally spend a lot on heat detection aids – such as tail paint or scratch off patches.

Identifying cows on heat was a time-consuming task for Owen and Cathy on their Southland dairy farm. The application of each "was another job someone had to do," explained Owen. With time already in short supply, daily applications were a constant struggle. "Sometimes the indicator would only be partly rubbed, making it hard to tell visually if a cow was on heat. Consequently, she would be inseminated when she may already be in-calf". Owen and Cathy fitted the collars in the wettest winter they had experienced in 20 years. Despite the poor growing conditions, the farm managed to lower its empty rates by 5%.

The collars monitored the herd's rumination and activity, allowing Cathy and Owen to know exactly what animals were sick or in heat - regardless of whether they are at home or at the back of the farm. The Allflex programme also automatically added cows which had not cycled 35 days after calving to an anoestrus group. "Last spring was probably the first time we

were able to proactively manage non-cycling cows because we had real-time, accurate information," proclaimed Owen.

The collars also ensured cows having silent heats were picked up. This has enabled Owen to do 100% artificial insemination and go bull-free for the first time. "The staff certainly do not miss having bulls around," he laughed.

"For a number of cows, there are no visual signs whatsoever that they're cycling, but when I put my hand inside the cow, I can feel that she's ready to be mated." The Allflex programme has also helped improve sexed semen conception rates.

"We use a lot of sexed semen, but it's vital that you get the timing of the insemination correct," explained Owen. "The [Allflex] system automatically colour-codes heats, so a farmer can easily tell how long it's been since a cow's had a standing heat." The programme is compatible with the Copinga's automated drafting software. This allowed Information from the collars to be downloaded as cows walked past antennas on the way to the milking shed. As the cows exit the 50-bale rotary, any with heat or health alerts are automatically drafted.

"We wanted some extra technology that could help us identify cows who were struggling shortly after calving, but who were undetectable to us."

Protocols have been put in place for staff to check cows drafted for a health alert. "We had a freshly-calved heifer in spring who triggered a health alert. We checked her milk and there were no visible signs of mastitis," he said. "However, when we examined the milk more closely, you could see she was developing mastitis. It enables us to treat the infection earlier".

The Copinga's have a big focus on animal health and nutrition. "We only had one cow go down with milk fever last spring," says Owen. "The collars helped us identify cows which needed a preventative bag of calcium borogluconate or dextrose. It would trigger an immediate response and the cow's rumination would be back to normal within 12 hours." The Allflex system even alerted the team to cows active outside of their usual times, such as breaking out on a crop at night. "We would not have picked up those problems that early without the help of the collars. They made a huge difference".