

# Jeff Peek

Technology has to become every farmer's best friend, says Waikato contract milker Jeff Peek.

## LOCATION

Maihihi, Waikato

## FARM SIZE

190ha effective

## HERD SIZE

575 Kiwi-cross cows milked at peak

## BENEFITS

- Less demand on labour over mating period
- Happier, healthier cows from closer monitoring
- Entry to milking mobs guided by cow rumination levels

Technology has to become every farmer's best friend, says Waikato contract milker Jeff Peek.

He and wife Jasmine are in their third season contract milking for farm owners Stephen and Penny Sanson at Maihihi, south-east of Otorohonga, milking 575 cows at peak on their 190ha (effective) unit.

Their first season produced stellar production of 228,000kg milksolids, but last season it dipped to

210,000kg because of a long period of very dry weather. Their 2022-23 season has been just as tricky to manage, but for different reasons.

"It's been very wet but I'm pleased to say our production looks on track to finish the season at about 225,000kg, thanks to some tweaks we've made to our system," Jeff says.

SenseHub Dairy technology and Allflex collars were installed in August 2021 and provided immediate benefits, particularly reduced pressure on staff at mating time and early detection of health issues in the herd.

The need for an extra labour unit in the shed during mating to pick cows on heat was eliminated when the collars went on.



“Instead of having to be on the stand in the shed for more than three hours at every morning milking selecting cows on heat over several weeks, I became a productive labour unit overnight.”

Jeff and his two full time staff now have regular sleep-ins and more time off during mating. A break away from the farm during mating last spring was a first for Jeff in many years of dairy farming.

“My wife and I were able to head south and do the Lake Dunstan cycle trail during mating last year.

That’s never been able to happen before,” he says.

“My eldest son also has a birthday during mating and in the past, I’ve never been able to be there when he wakes up and opens his presents in the morning. But having the collars has changed that.”

The 2021 mating period was particularly challenging because of the prolonged and unusually dry period the Waikato region endured that year. Jeff says the reproductive performance suffered, though he’s quick to acknowledge the SenseHub system and collars performed as expected.

“I can’t fault the collars for any of it. They did a fantastic job picking up the cows on heat each day. It was really just feeding that caused the lower six week in-calf rate that year.”

There was a dramatic improvement in the 2022 mating in spite of the wet cool conditions that



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prevailed leading into and through the mating period. Empty rate dropped by 7% on the 2021 result and the herd’s six week in-calf rate lifted by 10%. Conception rate rose by 5% too.

“We have the luxury of being later in the morning on the AI run so we get the opportunity to draft off cows showing on heat and then double-check them before our technician arrives.”

He operates a total artificial insemination policy with no bulls on the farm. Replacement heifers are produced from the first five weeks of mating, before another six week block of short gestation Kiwi-cross or beef semen is used. A bottom cut of 10% (on Breeding Worth) of cows go to beef bull semen.

After a second year of having the SenseHub Dairy technology in place, Jeff feels he’s now gaining extra value from the data and reports as his understanding and experience grows from using it.

“Just being able to drill into those reports in a lot more detail helped with feeding and getting on top of a lot of the health issues coming into mating last spring. When mating started, our cows were a lot healthier and happier than previous years and that showed in our results.”

SenseHub Dairy data also allows him to manage freshly calved cows more closely than just by checking them in the paddock. They are held close to the dairy shed and their rumination data is checked regularly so any health alerts are promptly investigated.

Jeff has introduced a once-a-day-mob comprising mainly first and second-calving cows and some older cows recovering from a difficult calving, ill health or lameness. About 40% of all cows are in this mob.



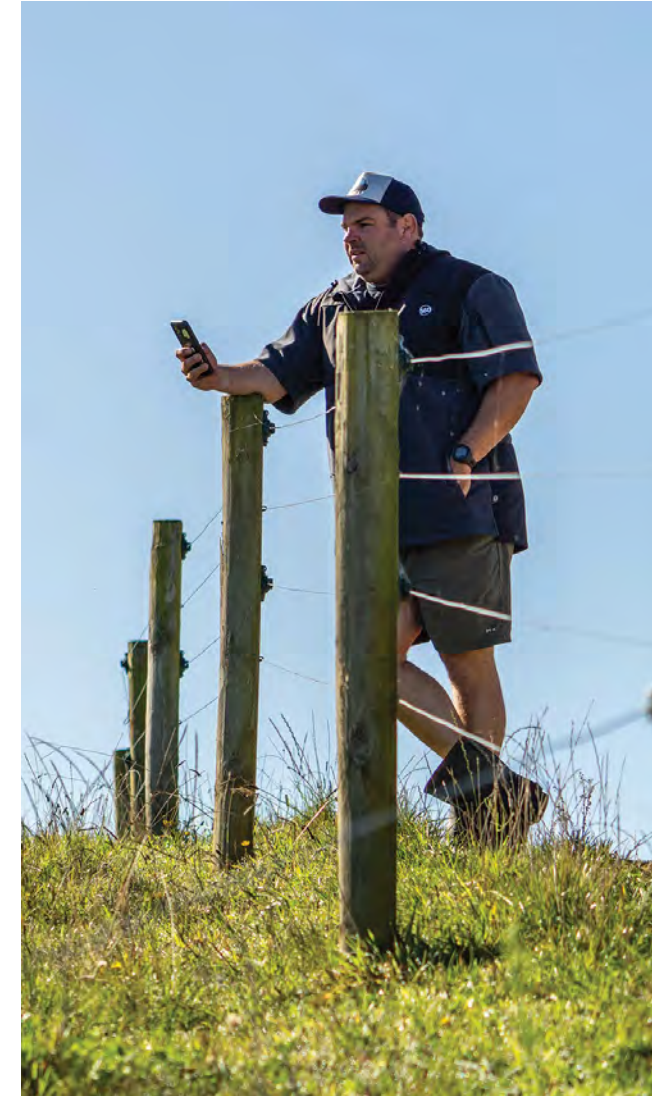
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Next calving, his plan is to more closely monitor each cow’s rumination data to help determine when it is ready to move from the freshly calved mob into one of the milking mobs.

The SenseHub Dairy data reports are increasingly being used by the farm’s vet who recently completed a training module with an MSD/Allflex Technical Vet Specialist.

Jeff says allowing their vet access to the system remotely when cows are showing health alerts is the obvious next step so he can intervene earlier and have a health report available on the animal before arriving at the farm to treat her.

He and his second-in-charge are both running the mobile phone app which provides access to the SenseHub Dairy reports any time of the day or night.



Jeff has no hesitation in recommending the technology and the ongoing training and support offered by the Allflex team. “I really can’t fault them; it’s been excellent all the way through.”

“If we do strike a problem, we know we can call the after service number and know we’ll get an answer from someone who understands what we’re after.”

The collars are simple to fit to each cow and Jeff says he’s only had an issue with one collar in the past two years.

“Our internal rotary was actually ideal for the collar fitting because all the cows are facing out and we got through the fitting really easily and smoothly. Our trainer couldn’t believe how well it went,” he says.