

Gold standard support and ongoing training

You're in safe hands. That's the phrase that farmers want to hear when they've invested time and money in new technology to monitor their dairy cow herd.

Always delivering gold standard service is the reason MSD Animal Health has developed its own complete package of support and training for its farmer customers to guide them through the installation and ongoing use of its SenseHub technology.

National Training Manager Steph Voice has been working with cow monitoring technology in different capacities for about eight years and joined Allflex in April 2020. She is based at the company's Palmerston North office and manages the training team of eight full time staff and several contractors across the country.

MSD Animal Health is the market leader in the cow monitoring market in New Zealand, a position built on the quality of its technology plus the training and after-sales support they offer their clients.

"That after-sales support is our biggest point of difference in the market I believe. It's not just the

training our teams provides to farmers, but the technical side as well," Steph says.

New trainers take a minimum of two months to learn the basic role required to start helping farmers, but Steph says it is another six to eight months before they are fully proficient.

"Our aim is to train our trainers so they help our clients use the data from our collars to generate the best return on investment they can," she says.

Training a trainer is not a 'tick-the-box' exercise. When fully trained, each trainer has full knowledge of how to use the software, but also understands what the data is showing so they can work with their farmer clients, their vet, consultant or nutritionist, to help them make the best decisions for them.

"We get quite invested in the clients' success and see the improvements in profitability and reduction in stress levels when the collars are fitted to their herd."



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“What I really like to hear is not only did they achieve their best herd mating result, but they also tell me they went away on school camp with their kids over mating.”

Steph says some customers are wary of the technology and wait until the training is underway before they start using it. Others leap in the moment the collars start collecting data.

A typical new install starts with the sales consultant completing a comprehensive site survey, including deciding on the best location for collar readers. Once the paperwork is signed, MSD Animal Health contracts a local dealer to handle the hardware installation.

“They are highly trained at installing the hardware.

We use specialists, rural electricians and engineers, to install the readers and equipment at the right points and also any drafting gates required.”

The installation of the computer hub at the shed is overseen by one of the 12-strong technical team which includes people experienced in software, robotics and milking intelligence. This team also



oversees the whole installation process to ensure it meets the high standard required.

After some initial guidance by the farm’s regional salesperson, the collars are normally fitted by the farm staff. Once in place, the trainer assigned to the property connects with the farm owner and gains access to the herd recording information.

“We use a special reader to match up each herd collar with the cow’s EID tag. The trainer then creates

the database in conjunction with the herd recording records, and that is uploaded for the client to use.”

Once the installation is completed, the trainer ensures the system has been properly commissioned and visits the farm within two weeks to start training the farm owner and their staff.

“Each client gets up to four training sessions. Some don’t need all four, but others do. We try to tailor it

to each individual farmer and always at the pace each farmer can handle.”

“We’ve worked with farmers typing with one finger through to others that can’t wait to get into the software to see what it’s telling them.”

Steph says the software is very robust, a reassuring fact for clients who fear they might create a problem.

“You can’t break it. There’s nothing that can’t be undone again so we encourage people to try it out,” she says.

Getting started can be daunting when farmers have limited experience with software technology but having the support systems and access to the 0800 after-service freephone means they are never left guessing what to do next.

Steph says farmers only need to provide four facts about a cow to start using the data collected by the SenseHub collars. They are calving date, mating

date, pregnancy diagnosis and dry-off date.

“If a farmer can tell the system those four things, it will do heat detection for you and it will tell you when a cow is in distress or declining in rumination activity. These are all things that a farmer can’t always see visually.”

MSD Animal Health also runs regional discussion groups pre-calving and pre-mating to allow farmers

to connect with others using the same technology and share their knowledge, and customers can also attend an annual National Summit which moves between islands each year.

A team of six technical staff operate the New Zealand-based service desk during normal business hours, with an emergency on-call service for after hours and public holidays.

Farmers can call if they have a problem and know it will be answered by someone who understands them and, if necessary, can investigate the situation by logging into the farm’s SenseHub collar system.

Customers also received written service manuals for all the technology systems, for farmers and veterinarians to use. Vets and farmer customers are encouraged to self-learn, using the online resources available to them.

Jo Holter is the Veterinary Technical and After Sales Manager who’s team includes the training team, the service desk and the veterinary technical team.

She says having a small team of experienced vets engaging with rural vets from a technology perspective is unique to the SenseHub business. A rural professional has also been recruited to help support and engage with farm consultants and nutritionists.

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Vets are beginning to embrace cow monitoring technologies and adapting their role to take advantage of earlier intervention when the collars signal health alerts.

“For vets, it’s really a no-brainer to engage in the data their clients are gathering. The collars are not a diagnostic tool, they are telling you that rumination has slowed or stopped so a farmer still needs that vet advice to help her.”

“Our cow monitoring technology is just another tool in the toolbox for the farmer and their vet to create a better health outcome. That opportunity to intervene earlier when an animal is flagged as in distress is better on the animal and the farmer as well,” Jo says.