

How one producer upgraded in stages for optimum results

Aiming to future-proof his expanding herd and upgrade an ageing rotary parlour, Jason Mitchell turned to robotic milking. But he kept the rotary to enable growth in stages, as Gareth Jones from Robotic Milking Systems reports.

In 2017, Jason Mitchell and his Herd Manager Pauric McKenna had reached a crossroads with their 20-year-old rotary parlour at Greenville Dairies, near Newton Stewart, Co. Armagh. They decided to look at robotic milking and, having considered various manufacturers, opted for DeLaval because of its guided system with pre-selection.

"We just don't have the time to collect cows at the end of the day," explains Pauric. "This system ticked all of the boxes for us." The herd had grown to 850 Holstein cows in milk, so the duo decided to convert to robots in stages, with a proportion of the herd still being milked through the conventional parlour.

In 2017, local dealer Albert J Jones installed six DeLaval Classics to milk 300 of the highest-yielding cows.

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The results were good, with each robot producing up to 2,200 litres/day, so in 2019 they installed a further two machines – this time the new VMS V300 series. These include quarter conductivity measurement, activity and rumination monitoring, and optional cell count analysis. The difference in performance was significant, as incomplete milkings dropped from 3% to 1%. This, combined with an improved attachment speed, boosted the output per robot to 2,600 litres/day



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on the new machines. "Last year we decided that we wanted to push on again," explains Pauric. "We costed up part-exchanging our seven-year-old Classics for new V300s."

The maths stacked up for us with the increased output per machine and a good offer from DeLaval. So, we part-exchanged them in December last year and added an additional machine in February this year."

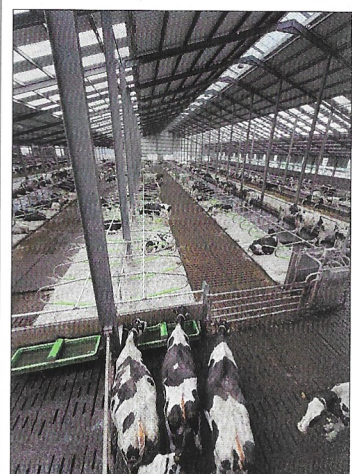
The nine robots are now milking up to 500 cows, producing an average of 45 litres/day or 2,600 litres/robot per day. All cows are milked conventionally for up to 10 days before joining one of the robotic groups and then return to the parlour when their yields drop to around 30 litres/day. "We use the robots to maximise the output from all cows in early to mid-lactation," explains

Pauric. "With all late lactation cows returning to the parlour, we link both systems to Uniform Agri so all the data is retained for each cow's full lactation."

All groups are fed for maintenance plus 35 litres, and then fed to yield in the robots up to a maximum of 10kg/cow per day. "We were feeding up to 12kg in the robots. But we are challenging the highest yielders to eat more on the feed fence now and it seems to be working."

Building work is now under way to allow for the installation of three more VMS V300s early next year. This will take us up to 12 machines," continues Pauric. "That will milk up to a maximum of 700 cows in the herd, leaving us with 150 to go through the parlour. This will be a good balance for us and the parlour

will just be used to give us flexibility and to optimise the performance from the robots."



Groups are fed to yield in the robots

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