

# Going big

10 milking robots  
bring big  
labour savings

Grazing Guernseys  
benefit from  
automation



*Bright farming is yours by choice.*





Ian Tossell, Lely Center Yeovil General Manager

# Hello!

At Lely Center Yeovil, we pride ourselves in providing the very best customer care and tailor-made solutions to meet your specific needs. Whether you're a small or large herd, with new or existing buildings, housed all year round or grazing, we're here to help.

**At last, things seem to be looking up. The sun is shining, everyone appears to be catching up with silage making and we're hopeful that we should be able to see you all soon at The Dairy Show.**

This year's event will be a much needed relief after more than 12 months of restrictions. We look forward to welcoming you onto our stand for a chat and a coffee on 6 October at The Royal Bath & West Showground.

In this booklet, we meet a number of our customers; each with their own unique set-ups and business drivers. Whatever your system, our specialist team will help guide you every step of the way, from identifying the best technology for your farm, through to project co-ordination, barn design and farm management support. We also have 11 professionally certified technicians located throughout our area to ensure local support and backup, 24/7.

On pages 4-6, we meet one of our Dairy XL customers in Herefordshire. At Lely, we have a specialist team to help address the unique challenges faced by farms of 500 or more cows. We work to share best practice, designs and processes between customers throughout the world who are looking to integrate farm automation products into their businesses.

So if you're looking to discuss your next move and how dairy automation might fit into your system, please get in contact or come and see us in October.

Until next time...



Rosie Sage and Dave Paull believe the automated milking system has benefited grassland management.

## THE ABC OF GRAZING SUCCESS

**Grazing cows on milking robots has proved a revelation for Rosie Sage and Dave Paull, allowing them to graze more efficiently and optimise individual cow performance.**

Having initially ruled out robots as purely suited to housed dairy systems, a trip to visit robotic grazing herds in Ireland proved a "light bulb moment."

"We realised you could graze cows and not only that, your buildings didn't need to be in the middle of the farm," Rosie explains. Around the same time, the Rural Development Grant became available and their herdsman decided to leave to take up a share farming opportunity. As a result, in 2018 they decided to install three Lely A4 Astronauts and a Grazeway gate.

### Improved efficiencies

The robotic system proved attractive as it meant they could target feed individuals through the robot. Their existing 16:32 swingover only enabled them to feed flat rate. This proved "very inefficient" on a system where spring and autumn block calving cows are run as one. "Every cow is an individual now. It's just fantastic," adds Rosie. "You're maximising the potential of every cow." Consequently, milk yields have increased by about 1,000 litres a cow a year, whilst fat and protein percentages have remained steady.

### Grazing

The grazing platform has reduced slightly as cows can no longer graze across a road. This means cow numbers have been reduced by about 30 head.

Lely advised Rosie and Dave on how to split the grazing platform into an ABC system with three eight hour grazing blocks. Depending on the time of day, the Grazeway gate will automatically draft cows one of three ways towards pasture. Cows learn when the gate changes to send them to a new block and head back to the gate. If cows come back to the Grazeway within five hours of milking, they can go to a new break. If they haven't been milked for more than five hours, they will be sent to the robot first.

Tracks have proved fundamental to success. This allows grass allocations to be accessed at different points, preventing cows from walking over previously grazed ground and thus

protecting soils and regrowth. Both Dave and Rosie think the set-up has benefited grass management. "I think we grow more grass because of the way we graze with the robots; probably 10 to 15% more," Dave says.

Rosie adds: "We're probably tighter and better as it's a way of making them move. It has to be right or they won't come home." Paddocks will sometime be pre-mowed to help residuals or post-mowed for dock control.



## Meet the team



Lely Center Yeovil covers: Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, West Sussex, Surrey, Berkshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Monmouthshire and Herefordshire and surrounding areas.

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### Farm facts

- Overton Farm, Bab Cary, Somerset
- Organic farm run by Rosie Sage and Dave Paull - 130ha (321 acres) total area farmed
- 180 Guernsey cows calving in spring and autumn blocks
- 305 day yields of 5,500 litres per cow at 4.9% fat and 3.6% protein
- Most of milk bought by Berkley Farm Dairy
- Around 20-25% processed on site and made into raw milk, yoghurt and cream, primarily sold through farmer's markets under the Hurdlebrook name
- 180,000 cells/ml average somatic cell counts
- Five cases of mastitis per 100 cows
- 2.2 average robot visits during grazing.



# GOING

# BIG: 10 MILKING ROBOTS SOLVE LABOUR ISSUES

Robotic milking has solved labour issues and helped herd performance, says Fred and Rosie Simcock.

**The fact 530 cows can be milked using eight hours of labour per day on three times a day milking is the stand out benefit of moving to robotic milking at Woofield Farm near Ledbury.**

Prior to installing the 10 Lely Astronauts, milking at the same frequency through a 25:50 swingover was taking at least 4.5 hours per milking for two people, equating to about 27 hours of labour per day. At the same time dairy farmers Fred and Rosie Simcock and Farm Manager, James Price had the constant worry of staff not turning up for milking.

This is now a thing of the past. Labour efficiencies have also improved. It translates into big financial savings; today, there's five full time staff, compared to seven full time and three part time previously.

"We're saving two full-time staff at £20,000 each, plus night milkers, which is another £40,000," Fred explains.

The system also provides much greater flexibility as staff are not tied to fixed milking times. This means the team can more easily break away to do other tasks such as maize drilling and silage making.

Fred and Rosie contemplated installing a rotary parlour, however after Lely Center Yeovil General Manager, Ian Tossell took them to see robotic systems in action, they quickly changed their minds; not just because of the labour benefits.

"We didn't think robots could work with the existing sheds, cow numbers and how far we needed to pump milk," recalls Fred. "We then saw two farms with seven robots each. . . They proved that robots could work with our buildings."

Fred and Rosie were also struck by how calm the robotic set-ups were. "The cows were so quiet and so clean and I stood there and I kept thinking, this is just a dream," says Fred.

### Shed design

As a result, Fred and the team started working with Lely Center Yeovil's Project Coordinator, Alistair Cumings and Ian to adapt the existing buildings to work with the robots. James approached Lely with a list of requirements which majored on cow welfare and providing plenty of lying space.

Like many units, all of the sheds were joined onto each other, whilst feed space per cow was a challenge. At that time, all of the cows were fed out of troughs which meant feeding could only happen at milking and the troughs had to be manually cleaned.

Alistair and Ian were able to redesign the shed so all cows could be yoked and fed along feed passages, with the ration automatically pushed up by Lely Junos (see page 6). By doing this, and covering an additional area, feed space per cow has nearly doubled. This would not have been possible if a rotary parlour had been installed, as it would have taken up more room. The cows would have

also been pushed up for milking more. All of the feed surfaces have now been coated in epoxy resin which provides a smooth, 'lickable' surface that encourages feed intakes.

Fred believes the cow welfare on the new system is "fantastic" because cows are not under pressure. This is also helped by the addition of 600 EASYFIX cubicles and mats, which provides the herd with access to 10% more cubicles than they need. These cubicles include a flexible rubber loop for added cow comfort. "Just going to EASYFIX cubicles, we have not lost a cow in a cubicle," Fred comments.

James adds: "It's a much quieter environment, definitely and animal welfare is so much better. It's much more enjoyable. It's less stressful and I don't have to worry about people not turning up."

### Herd performance

The robots were installed in stages, with four going in in August 2019 and the tenth one up and running in December 2020. Around 180 heifers are milked on a group of three robots, two robots service a group of 110 cows, and the remaining five robots have 55-58 cows on each.

Since all of the cows have moved onto robots, total milk production has risen 3,000 litres in the last four months. Challenges with TB means the herd is currently made up of 40% heifers. As a result, there's huge scope for production figures to improve even further. In fact, the herd is on track to produce average 305 day yields of 12,500 litres per cow.

At £1.3m, with a 40% productivity grant, Fred recognises that the robotic system cost more than the £800,000 it would have cost to put a rotary parlour

in. However he sees it as a worthwhile investment to maximise cow potential and future-proof the farm. "I think the investment in the long term is definitely right. The cow welfare is the best," he says. ▶ [Continued on page 6.](#)



### Farm facts

- Woofield Farm, Coddington, Herefordshire
- 352ha (870 acres) total plus 53ha (130 acres) rented. Including 101ha (250 acres) wheat, 142ha (350 maize), 142ha grass
- Family partnership between Fred and Rosie Simcock
- 600 cow Holstein herd milked through 10 Lely A5 Astronauts
- 305 day yields of 11,600 litres per cow at 3.9% fat and 3.3% protein
- Housed and calving all year round
- Milk sold on a liquid contract to Muller
- Averaging three robot visits per day
- Grass and maize silage diet plus a blend. Up to 12kg per head per day also fed through the robots
- Feed rate of 0.33kg/litre
- 215,000 cells/ml average somatic cell counts
- 27 cases of mastitis per 100 cows.

**"The Discoveries are the best part. It's absolutely fantastic; there's no scraping and no pushing cows."  
- Fred Simcock."**

# 10

Lely A5 Astronauts

## 8 hours

the amount of labour needed per day to milk 530 cows

## 36 litres

per cow per day average

### GOING BIG

# 3

Lely Junos automatic feed pushers

## 30%

more dry matter intakes noticed on dry cows from pushing up feed with the Juno

## 1-2 hour

saving in time from hand shovelling feed in troughs previously

## 1 litre

per cow per day increase likely to be attributed to better feed availability

# 6

Lely Discovery 120 Collectors automatic slurry vacuums

## 45p

per day. The electrical costs for running each Lely Discovery 120 Collector

## £3

per day to run all six, versus about £60/day for fuel and labour for tractor scraping



## GETTING CALVES OFF TO A FLYING START

*Calf rearing is less labour intensive and heifers and beef calves are getting off to a flying start thanks to the introduction of a two station Lely Calm automatic milk feeder at Westover Farm in Langport.*

Mother and daughter team, Olive and Melanie Pocock installed the automatic milk feeders in one of two polytunnels used for calf rearing about four years ago. Since then, they've seen numerous benefits:

### 1. The ability to feed higher milk volumes safely

Calves are fed little and often meaning they can consume higher total milk volumes than would be practical on a manual feeding system. It also enables them to eat more concentrate. Calves receive an average 10-12 litres of milk per head per day, compared to 8 litres on the twice daily manual feeding system.

"We think the investment is well worth it for the results...If a calf is well grown, you limit health issues and it helps ensure the heifers calve in at a good size," says Melanie.

### 2. Better growth rates

Calves average growth rates of 700-

800g per day up until weaning. This is putting heifers on track to calve in at 24 months old and beef calves are well grown, ready for sale.

About 70% of beef calves are kept to 12 months and sold at market. The remainder are sold to Blade at under four weeks old.

"For us the milk programme on the machine works well for both beef and heifers, enabling us to group calves according to age, not variety, which works well on a relatively small unit," says Melanie.

### 3. Early warnings

The machine flags up if a calf hasn't fed. This means the team can quickly check the calf in questions to identify if there are any problems and treat if necessary.

### 4. Less labour

"The feeder really has made a labour intensive job so much less time consuming and physical," Melanie says. "There's really no way we'd go back to manual feeding. We do a single weekly drop of milk powder to the station area and fill the feeder up daily; amazingly it does the rest."

*The Lely Calm has made a labour intensive job much less time consuming and physical, says Melanie Pocock.*



### Milk feeding programme

- Bottle-fed colostrum for about seven days, then transferred onto automatic milk feeders
- Heifers and beef calves run in same group. Max 20 calves per feeding station
- For the first 10 days, the machine delivers 2 litres of milk per feed up to an unlimited amount with a two hour gap between feeds
- 2.5 litres per feed from day 10-25 and 3 litres per feed from day 25-35
- Machine then reduces milk feeding down to weaning (calves are fed over a total 10 weeks)
- Receive an ad-lib 17% rearer pellet, hay and a rock salt lick.

### Farm facts

- Westover Farm, Langport, Somerset
- Family farm run by the Pocock family and assistant herds-person, Dan Vigar
- 101ha (250 acres) including grass, maize and wheat
- 150 cow, all year round calving Holstein herd
- One Lely Astronaut A3 robot and one A4 robot
- 10,500 litres per cow per year at 4% fat and 3.2% protein
- 3,400 litres per cow per year from forage
- Sexed semen used on heifers and best cows. Rest served to Aberdeen Angus or British Blue.

# The automatic route to success



*The Lely Vector automatically mixes and delivers feed 24 hours a day.*

**Gloucestershire farmer, Mike King has embraced a raft of robot technology to help drive labour efficiencies and cow health and performance.**

## Two Lely A3 Next Astronauts

A shift to robotic milking 10 years ago highlighted the huge role robots could play in future-proofing the business. It made the job easier and provided better work life balance for Mike and his young family. Milk yields immediately jumped at least 15% and are currently 30% higher than before the robots were installed. The individual cow data available through the robots also proved a revelation. “The amount of information and care you can give the cows because of the robot is phenomenal,” Mike says.

## Lely Vector

Mike was the first farmer in the

South West to install the Lely Vector - a robotic feeding system which automatically mixes and delivers feed to cows 24 hours a day. The system has brought numerous benefits:

- Improved ration consistency
- 2.5-3 hours a day saving in labour
- Improved labour flexibility
- 1.8-2 litre a cow a day increase in yields
- Adapts well in grazing season if there's poor weather; automatically feeding more depending on how many cows choose to come inside.

## A Lely Grazeway gate

Depending on the season, cows have access to grazing through a Grazeway gate from around the end of March to December. Mike operates an A/B paddock system.

## A Lely Discovery 120 Collector

The slurry robot automatically travels around the shed, vacuuming slurry as it goes. It does a 15-30 minute route roughly every hour, which means the yards are cleaner.

It's also brought labour savings compared to tractor scraping: “In combination with the Vector, it's meant we can get rid of a tractor and the tractors we do have are doing less work,” Mike says.

## Lely Luna cow brushes

The addition of a Luna cow brush means cows can scratch to their heart's content, further helping cow welfare.

## Farm facts

- 103ha (255 acres)
- Run by Mike King with assistance from wife Gem and parents Richard and Kathy
- 110 Holstein Friesians
- Milk sold to First Milk. A proportion is sold raw through an on-site vending machine
- 10,500 litres per cow per year at 4% fat and 3.2% protein
- Robots mostly run off electricity from the farm's solar panels.

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