Robotic milking and mastitis control

As an unbiased party, vets can help farmers make the right decision over whether to invest in a milking robot

Robots are becoming a more common way of milking cows. Farmers like robots because the process improves their quality of life and makes it easier to attract employees; they provide great data that allows farmers to improve performance and the robots give a consistent milking performance whenever the cow wants to be milked.

In the last decade, we have learnt so much more about robots and their technology has improved exponentially. Milk quality and mastitis levels have improved significantly. It is important that vets understand robots and how they function in relation to mastitis and milk quality.

Many farmers struggle to get truly independent advice. This is one of our strengths: we are independent; we don’t sell milking equipment and are able to offer an unbiased opinion to support our farmers.

There are so many questions that need answering for those who are thinking of moving from conventional to robotic milking; some examples include:

**Do you like working with cows?**
If you install robots, you still need to work with your cows; all you are doing is eliminating the chore of milking twice daily.

**Do you have strong management skills?**
All the robot will do is harvest the milk. It is up to the farmer to ensure that everything is working correctly and to maximum efficiency.

**Do you like technology?**
Farm staff should enjoy using the robot computer to get the greatest benefit from the system.

**Does it make economic sense?**
A milking robot is a big investment and the sums must add up.

Can you fit robots to your existing barns or should you build a greenfield site?
Some farmers have successfully placed robots into existing sheds; however, for others, this has proved unsuccessful.

Then there is a question about what type of robot the farmer should go for. Each will have unique selling points, and advantages and disadvantages over each other. A vital consideration is whether the dealer has skilled technicians for repairs, maintenance and support. We know that if a robot breaks down for a long time, things can get really out of control and the farmer can end up in a situation that is extremely difficult to manage.

A decision has to be made as to whether cows will be housed all year round or if cows will be grazing at certain times of the year. This can have big implications in terms of design of the facility and decision making.

**PETER EDMONDSON**
OWNER, UDDERWISE

Peter Edmondson, FRCVS, runs UdderWise, a mastitis consultancy offering troubleshooting, training and advisory services for farmers and vets. He is known for his practical approaches and runs a range of mastitis seminars giving vets problem-solving skills.

**These two robots are empty. Is this good or bad?**

**This is the Lely dashboard. What are some of the KPIs?**