

Midwest Dairy School: Maximizing Robotic Milking Systems

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Summary and Implications

The Midwest Dairy School provides a one day learning opportunity for producers, industry, and potentially new dairy producers to network and engage in a current topic. With support from the dairy industry and business community, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, Northeast Iowa Community College, and Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation, this program has continued to provide valuable information. In 2014, 80 participants attended as well as 2 presenters and 6 panelists. Overall the participants and presenters felt that the event was useful. There was an increase in knowledge with each presentation. There was an increase of knowledge by 68% in “Where are Robotic Milking Systems Taking Us”, 52% in the “Q & A at the Robotic Milking Center”, 106% in “How are Robotic Dairies Feeding their Cows”, and 109% in the “Producer/Nutritionist Panel Discussion”.

Introduction

Milking and housing systems are key components to a dairy operation. In the Midwest, farms are still predominately small in size, family oriented, but plan to remain in the industry. As producers take a look at labor efficiency and some of the bottle necks on their operation, robotic milking systems have become a major player in the way producers can milk and house cows. They have allowed producers to become more flexible in their work schedule, which has improved quality of life, labor efficiency has improved as they are able to focus on other areas of the farm, and technology has allowed producers to manage cows individually. In the last 5 years, Iowa has seen a tremendous growth in these types of systems.

Materials and Methods

The Midwest Dairy School is held every year in November and takes place at the Northeast Iowa Dairy Foundation near NICC Campus in Calmar, IA. A current topic related to the dairy industry is offered every year. The school runs from 10 AM – 3 PM and draws participants from Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, and this year Illinois. In 2014, 80 participants attended as well as 2 presenters and 6 panelists.

The school for Maximizing Robotic Milking Systems provided more in-depth information on robotic milking systems, specifically with research and nutrition.

Marcia Endres, University of Minnesota Associate Professor and Extension Dairy Specialist, shared her findings from a research study on 52 dairy farms in

Minnesota and Wisconsin that use robotic milking systems. Jim Salfer, Dairy Extension Educator from University of Minnesota Extension shared an update on how robotic dairies are feeding their cows. Participants also had an opportunity to take part in a Q and A session while visiting an active robotic milking system at Iowa’s Robotic Dairy Center led by Larry Tranel, ISU Extension Dairy Specialist and Dave Lawstuen, NICC Dairy Science Instructor.

Program was enhanced by a panel of 4 producers and 2 nutritionists who shared their experiences and helped answer questions of those participating. They brought experiences of working with the four major robotic milking system brands, robotic feeding technology, and best management feeding strategies.

Results and Discussion

Overall the participants and presenters felt that the event was useful. There was an increase in knowledge with each presentation. There was an increase of knowledge by 68% in “Where are Robotic Milking Systems Taking Us”, 52% in the “Q & A at the Robotic Milking Center”, 106% in “How are Robotic Dairies Feeding their Cows”, and 109% in the “Producer/Nutritionist Panel Discussion”.

Participants walked away from the program with thoughts and ideas to implement in their own situation. Many participants are considering automatic milking systems and this program helped them learn the differences in robots, cost and benefits of using robots, as well as having the opportunity to see a robotic milking system in action. A dairy nutritionist helped them learn how cows are fed in a robotic system and how the PMR and pellets differ from a conventional TMR.

Acknowledgements

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