

BC DAIRY

Growing Forward with

Innovation

Before the Walls first embarked on their robotic journey, they were originally considering building a larger parlour. They did comparisons on the efficiency of both systems and decided robotic milking would benefit them the best. It also suited an anticipated lifestyle change for their families. Not that the Walls are working less, but a new drive-through barn, two Lely robots, Nedap heat detection system, feed pusher and JOZ hoof sprayer mean that everything is working better. "I don't feel like I spend less time at work," says Dan, "But I enjoy my work a lot more."

Farm Facts

- Owned by Dave and Rachel Wall
- Operated by their four sons, Matt, Steve, Dan and Tom
- Installed two Lely Astronaut A4 robots in August 2012
- 3.5 milking per day, BF 4.0-4.25%, P 3.1-3.3%
- SCC ranges from 90,000 to 130, 000
- Use bull breeding with focus on "good feet, straight backs, udders" – same parameters before their robot transition
- 85-95 milk cows and approximately the same number of replacements

Exterior picture of the new barn, with ventilation curtains.



D & R Wall Ltd.

By Kaitlyn Gisler

The decision to build the new barn, with 130 free stalls and conveniently located fresh and calving pens at the front, was a move motivated by the life of their old barn, which was near its end and too crowded. Their need for a newer barn and transitioning to robotics happened at the perfect time.

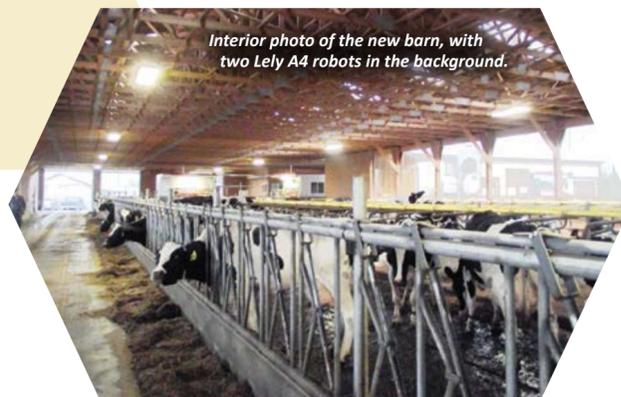
Matt Wall explained that they chose the Nedap Heat Detection system because it was an option with Lely robots. The system keeps a close watch on the herd by using Smartags that detect heat activity, or an absence of heats which helps to confirm that their barn bull is breeding. The system connects to a computer or smartphone, sending attention alerts while displaying a cow's activity via graphs and detailed tables.

Although the Lely A4s may have not saved the Walls much with manpower, the family can handle the workload themselves, and are not pressured to hire outside help to manage the farm, which is an appreciated alternative.

When considering which brand of robot to use, they preferred Lely's faster hook-up and reconnection time should the cup get kicked off. Moreover, the concept of robotic milking has changed a lot since they started, acknowledges Dan, but Lely regularly offers hardware and software updates to keep their robots up to speed with the newer models.

"Even if there is a better robot," says Dan, "We are still years and years ahead of where we were."

Interior photo of the new barn, with two Lely A4 robots in the background.



Advantages:

- The manual ventilation curtains have improved barn air-flow and overall freshness
- The JOZ hoof sprayer replaced the use of footbaths on the farm, and the Walls are happy with the results since there seems to be an improvement with their overall hoof health
- The Juno feed pusher has been an excellent addition to the farm, tending to the feed bunk much more often than the Walls originally had time for
- Reflecting back on their robots, Dan Wall surmises that the greatest advantage is the efficiency of the technology. Although they're harvesting milk 24/7, no one is heading into the barn at four in the morning. "The work isn't nearly as urgent as it was before. [Our] schedule isn't set in stone. You can adjust it and be as flexible as you want to be."

Challenges:

The initial decision to build a new barn, install robots, bring in a feed pusher and more is a big enough hurdle but the second half of the equation can be just as difficult: trusting that all this technology will do what was promised.

"I think originally I found it very hard to believe that the milking could happen as well as it did," says Dan, "Knowing that the machine will get it done and realizing you can let the cows go on their own schedule and that you don't always have to be in the herd pushing them."

Recommendations:

- Remember that the cows will also have their own new schedule and will be figuring out this new routine alongside you
- You have to have faith and know that your cows are going to get milked – it's just a big adjustment – but they will get comfortable with [the changes] sooner than later. In the grand scheme of things, it really doesn't take that long.



Rick, Richie, John and Doug Dekker love how their new facilities are working for them.

Visitors to Northbank Dairy Farms are greeted by attractive new facilities, which include a new barn, dairy, and milking parlour. The major decision when building was whether to go with a milking parlour or robotics. The efficient double-15 DeLaval stainless steel Endurance parlour incorporates the Herd Navigator system and uses an Usher crowd gate and sort gate. Cow comfort is of utmost importance, so Y2K head to head free stalls with foam mats for bedding, measuring 17 feet in length, were installed. The ventilation system uses Cyclone fans and Roll-O-Matic curtains and includes a five foot curtain at roof peak.

Farm Facts:

- Northbank Dairy is operated by Rich and Teresa Dekker, and their sons and their wives, Richie and Ashley and Doug and Ashley.
- 195 milking cows with a total of close to 400 head.
- Farm 368 acres with 268 owned and the rest leased.
- 100 acres planted to corn, the rest in grass.
- Close to 50% of herd is pure-bred, but the whole herd is registered with Holstein Canada, with plans to be 100% purebred in the near future.
- Huge improvement can be seen as over 80% of first classifications are Good Plus.
- Herd average on 195 cows: 10,500kg with BCAs of M-233, F-228, P-230.

Northbank Dairy Farms Ltd.

By Gary Booy

The barn and parlour facilities were old and wearing down and the sons were young and growing up, which created the opportune time for a critical decision concerning the farming future for the Dekker family of Northbank Dairy Farms in Dewdney. The original 40-acre farm in Dewdney was bought in 1959 by dad John while the present farm was bought in 1978, bringing Rick and his brothers John and Ron into the operation. In 2011, Rick bought out the brothers, and today he and sons Richie and Doug, along with strategic help from Teresa, Ashley and Ashley, operate the traditional family dairy farm. Yes, two daughters-in-law for Rick and Teresa both named Ashley, often referred to as Ash and Lee. Theirs is a true family operation with one milker, who has been employed for 11 years, and also part-time help from brother John. The ability to grow and expand without the limitations of a robotic system was one of the major reasons for choosing the milking parlour over robotics. The family is still getting used to the new facilities, as it was only a week before the Farm Tours in January that it became operational.

Advantages:

- Cow comfort – standing time in the holding area down dramatically.
- Milking time reduced by 1 1/2 hours each milking.
- A lot less walking for cows to reach parlour compared to old facilities.
- Older buildings refurbished to accommodate young stock which were being raised on another farm.
- On a recent very warm day, the ventilation system—including roof peak curtain—worked to perfection, allowing so much more air movement, vital for cow comfort.
- A renewed positive environment for both the cows and their caretakers for many years to come.

Challenges:

Having only used the new facilities for just over three months at the time of the interview, the family is still experiencing the positive effects of the new operation, and no notable challenges have diminished that attitude. Yet, they realize they will need a full year of working in the system to fully observe all the advantages and challenges, including utilizing the award-winning Herd Navigator system.

Recommendations:

- The search for new ideas is endless, but do not digress. You can never look at enough places.
- Help the contractors when you can, such as keeping the work site as clean as possible, to help the whole process run more smoothly.
- Research, research, research! Ask for advice when needed, and who knows? You might come a little under budget, as the Dekkers unbelievably did!

