



Pilot Herd Case Study

Chris and Neal Burken started Bur-Crest Dairy in 2003. In the beginning, they rented the 32-acre farm in Galesville, Wis. and milked 29 Holsteins in an existing 64-cow tie-stall barn. In 2005, they purchased the farm and built a free-stall barn. Two years later, they converted their tie-stall barn to a DeLaval double eight parallel parlor where they are currently milking 250 cows, three times a day. Their herd averages around 25,500 pounds of milk with a daily tank average of 82 pounds per cow.

Premises Registration

Chris initially registered their premises online prior to the Wisconsin Livestock Premises Registration act taking effect in January 2006. Their veterinarian and the local sale barn have both requested their premises

identification number. Their milk plant also requests their premises identification number.

Bur-Crest Dairy introduced RFID technology in May 2008. To help with milk testing data collection, their cows wear RFID ear tags from AgSource. After realizing the value RFID technology brought to gathering milk samples, in terms of time and accuracy, Chris and Neal were interested in further exploring the advantages of utilizing RFID technology in their herd management practices.

In addition to tagging the cows, Chris and Neal identify all young calves with RFID tags and ear tags with visible management numbers that they order from the Holstein ID Tag Program offered by Holstein Association USA.



As newborns, the heifer calves are raised in separate hutches until weaning age when they are moved to loose housing with other heifers in their age group. As yearlings, heifers are on pasture or sent to one of five farms that house the yearling, breeding age and springing heifers for Bur-Crest Dairy.

“As our experience with RFID technology continues, we are finding new opportunities to utilize RFID technology within our herd management practices. As I look to expand my herd, RFID technology will help me manage the cows and their needs better.”

*– Neal Burken,
Bur-Crest Dairy
Owner and Manager*

Top 3 advantages of current system

1. DHIA milk testing correlation
2. Accuracy and efficiency of recording herd data
3. Time savings

Since heifer calves are moved on and off the dairy, individual identification helps Chris and Neal keep track of where their cattle are.

Identification System

Bur-Crest Dairy utilizes Dairy Comp 305, along with an Allflex RFID reader and handheld computer, for their herd management and data recording. Each animal's identification number is entered into the system at 4-6 months of age when animals are given their first vaccinations.

Bur-Crest Dairy started using the RFID reader and handheld computer in their milking parlor during milk testing. The AgSource technician use the reader to check RFID tags, and with the handheld, they record milk test data for each animal. As everyone became more familiar with using the RFID technology, Chris and Neal have noticed improved efficiencies, in both the time it took to sample milk and accuracy in recording the data.

With such improved efficiencies in the parlor, Chris and Neal started exploring additional opportunities for incorporating RFID technology. They now use the reader and handheld for conducting herd checks, administering treatments and dry cow tubes, and recording breeding information.

Both Chris and Neal agree that the greatest benefit of implementing RFID technology is that it greatly speeds up the process and shortens the time herd management tasks used to take using paper and pen. It also tightens the window for recording errors, not to mention the time it took to understand the written notes and enter them into the computer.

Values Gained

Bur-Crest Dairy's investment into the RFID reader and handheld computer was minimal, and overall, Chris and Neal have been pleased with the results of implementing the RFID technology.

- **Efficient Herd Health Task Management** – It used to be that milk sample collection prolonged milking chores. Now that their DHIA technician uses the reader to gather ear tag information and data for each cow, the process runs a lot smoother, and data is collected efficiently and accurately.

- **Data Accuracy** – Herd health data is recorded quickly and more efficiently during herd checks using the RFID reader and handheld, as opposed to their past data recording method of pen and paper.

- **Complete Identification** – Although it is possible for an animal to lose its visible ear tag, Chris and Neal haven't experienced any of the RFID tags falling out and agree that the RFID tag is a reliable source of identification.

- **Point of Origin** – Since the heifers are moved throughout several different locations in their first two years, it is important to Chris and Neal to know where their cattle are.



Future Outlook

Chris and Neal Burken anticipate another expansion in the near future, and that means more cattle. Neal says that a unified animal identification system offers many positive opportunities for producers to improve herd management and keep track of their cattle on and off the farm.

