



# Pilot Herd Case Study

Ferg's White Clover Dairy is owned by Russell Ferg and has been in the Ferg family for over 60 years - since his father, Leo, bought the farm. A parlor and freestall barn were built in 1998, with further expansions made in 2001 and again in 2008. Currently, there are 470 cows milking with a rolling herd average of 25,500 pounds of milk. Sally Griswold is the herd manager and handles the day-to-day management of the milking herd. She started at the dairy as a milker and has been with the farm for 10 years.

## Premises Registration

The farm first completed premises registration in 2005. The main dairy houses all of the cows and calves up to four months of age.



In addition to the main dairy site, heifers are housed at separate locations, about a mile up the road at the original farm, which maintain individual premises registrations. Weaned calves are first moved at four months of age and are transferred to different farms six times before they calve.

The dairy has been tagging newborn calves with 840 tags for nearly a year; two visual tags and one RFID tag. Any tagging catch-up is done when heifers are moved into the transition pen prior to calving. The dairy won its first RFID reader by entering a contest at World Dairy Expo. Following that show, Sally saw a link for more information from the Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium in an industry e-newsletter and contacted Robert Fourdraine, WLIC's chief operating officer.

## Identification System

PCDART is used for herd management while DeLaval ALPRO™ records milk weights in the parlor. The farm has one Allflex wand, with accompanying Palm computer, which are used to supply detailed health history during veterinary checks, hoof trimming, or other herd work.

“Having the information available cowside is critical,” Sally explained. “In the past, if we saw a cow limping, we had no way of knowing if she was just recovering from a recent trimming job or was injured and went lame. The RFID and Palm have saved us tremendous time locating

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*– Sally Griswold,  
Ferg's White Clover Dairy  
Herd Manager*

## Top 3 advantages of current system

1. **Data accuracy**

2. **Time and labor savings**

3. **Peace of mind**

cows that need their feet looked at.” The Allflex wand also is used to sort and track the movements of young heifers and steers. “We don’t even use visible ear tags on the steers because the wand and RFID tags do a great job locating these animals for us,” said Sally.

Initial equipment set-up took four to five hours for the wand and Palm computer. Sally said the biggest challenge they experienced was interfacing the Palm computer with PCDART. “Although a lifesaver now, in the beginning the equipment was more complicated than I expected,” she said.

“If I had to do all of this again, I would recommend that a quick start guide for conducting simple tasks, such as preparing cow treatment lists, be created.” She also said that having an on-call technician available to troubleshoot is very helpful and will make the set-up process easier.

### Values Gained

- **Quicker Herd Checks** – Having each cow’s health history available, cowside, allows for more immediate treatment decisions, along with the ability to record these treatments, thus improving accuracy and saving time.
- **Labor Savings** – The Allflex wand and Palm do all of the work now. Time is no longer wasted searching for cows or writing up their treatments on paper and later recording them in the computer.

- **Data Accuracy** – Cows are scanned with the wand, and herd health tasks and treatments are recorded cowside via the Palm during herd checks, allowing data to be posted to the computer quickly and accurately.
- **Point of Origin** – Due to the movement of young calves and heifers off the farm, Sally finds the inventory tracking features of the equipment are very useful and says it gives her peace of mind knowing that all of the animals on and off the farm are accounted for.

### Future Outlook

Russell Ferg sees both a need for unified animal ID and ways the technology can improve efficiencies on his operation. “I anticipate we’ll continue to participate in the national ID program

and expect that with everything going on in the world, it’ll become a require-

ment sooner or later,” he said. “I think we, as producers, need to do everything we can to ensure food safety, and this is one key way we can help.”



Sally agreed, and says that implementing RFID technology into the herd is just one more opportunity for them to stay ahead of the game. “RFID technology just makes our job easier. There are so many things to get done in one day, and it helps speed up the process,” said Sally. “I would recommend RFID technology to any dairy producer.”

In the near future, the Fergs would like to have an RFID reader installed in their parlor to read the cows’ ear tags as they enter, as a way to obtain more accurate milk records.

