



# Pilot Herd Case Study

Phil Milsna started MDS Dairy in 1998 after buying a small herd of dairy cattle and existing facilities located near Sparta, Wis. From this initial group, he increased the herd to 200 head of cattle. Ten years later, MDS Dairy has grown to seven farms housing 2,700 head of cattle, 1,400 of which are lactating. Managed by Phil and herd manager Jared Hemmersbach, MDS Dairy employs 25 people on the dairy, plus four full time crop and machinery employees who manage the 2,500 acres of tillable land.

MDS Dairy's main farm includes a double-20 parallel parlor which operates 24 hours per day. Cows are milked about 2.8 times per day. It also includes three sand-bedded free stall barns that house 1,000 cows each. Rolling herd average is 27,000 pounds and daily tank average is 83 pounds. Two other barns are used as pre-freshening and maternity barns. In the near future, MDS Dairy will add a rotary parlor and expand to 2,000 cows. The upcoming expansion also includes a new barn which will hold 350 springing heifers that will be completed by

February, 2009. Construction on an accompanying ten million gallon manure pit is already underway.

### Premises Registration

Premises registration for MDS Dairy occurred prior to Jared accepting the role of herd manager, but he has assumed full responsibility for renewing it for the main farm.

Seven farms make up MDS Dairy, all within 20 miles of each other. Besides the main farm, the six other farms are utilized for raising calves and heifers. Approximately 500 heifers are housed at one of the farms and once confirmed pregnant, are moved back to the main farm. The other five farms currently hold around 125 heifers each. Jared reports they are rotating cattle between farms about once every month or two as the calves grow into heifers and get closer to freshening, but movement between all the farms requires trucking cattle about every other week.

RFID technology was introduced to MDS Dairy in May, 2008. Employees tagged every newborn calf, along with first-calf heifers with RFID and management tags. Thus far Jared believes about 85 percent of the cattle have been tagged with daily progression to their goal of 100 percent.

### Identification System

Jared utilizes DairyComp 305 for record keeping at MDS Dairy, while Delaval's All Pro is used to track milk weights. Jared says that they are working on correlating the All Pro data with the Palm computer to make data collection more efficient.

Craig Walters of Valley Ag Software installed the DairyComp 305 system

*“Its no problem to switch the hand-held over to Spanish for the other employees to assist during pregnancy checking. Typically, I will ultrasound while one of the other employees enters the data into the hand-held computer.”*

*– Jared Hemmersbach,  
MDS Dairy,  
Farm Manager*



## Top 3 advantages of current system

1. Identification of the correct animal
2. Faster data entry, with less time spent entering after management task complete
3. DHIA milk testing correlation

needed at MDS Dairy to work with the reader equipment. The dairy uses one Palm and one reader, but recently invested in a second, longer reader to more easily scan cattle. Previously, two people were needed when collecting data with the smaller reader, one in front and one in back. With the longer reader, the person in back can easily scan the tag in a cow's ear.

On a typical herd check, Jared will ultrasound while one of the other employee enters the data into the Palm. Since many of MDS Dairy's employees are Hispanic, Jared especially values the Palm's unique ability to change languages, thus improving communication and efficiency between he and his co-workers. The greatest use of the RFID equipment is every Monday during herd health checks to watch for noticeable changes in milk production, as well as administer BST injections and dry cow tubes. Jared sees the new equipment playing an important role when performing artificial insemination (AI) in the future as well.

Besides their implementation during herd health checks, the RFID readers and Palm save Jared and the other MDS Dairy employees time by helping find cows faster and reducing the time spent entering data into the computer. When moving cattle from pen to pen, the Palm mounted on the wrist band allows Jared to enter the numbers cow-side. Though it required some time for Jared to teach the other employees how to use the equipment, both he and the herdsmen learned how to apply the technology quickly and efficiently.

### Values Gained

The cost of both readers, handheld, handheld software, installation and training was projected to be between \$4,000 and \$5,000, while DairyComp 305 service and update licensing run about \$500 per year. MDS Dairy utilizes Allflex

RFID and management tags, but this expense is reimbursed through the Alta Genetics Advantage program. Jared is happy with the efficiencies gained through the ID system and looks forward to other future benefits as the technology is implemented into other management tasks on the farm.

- **Efficient and Accurate Herd Checks**-Data recorded when performing injections and other tasks during herd health days is entered into the computer remotely. This reduces the time previously spent entering data after tasks were completed and fixing mistakes from hand entry.

- **Convenience and Versatility**-The reader and Palm are portable and durable. MDS Dairy employees appreciate the cow side data entry, especially when moving and locating specific cattle within such a large herd.

- **Progressive Technology**-MDS Dairy is constantly updating their facilities and increasing the number of cattle housed and milked at their farm. The RFID technology is easily incorporated into management changes and additional tasks as the dairy grows and evolves.



### Future Outlook

Jared Hemmersbach finds it easy to participate and support a uniform livestock identification system. He believes all animals should be identified by one system, not just in the United States, but all over the world. With the threat of drug residues and animal disease outbreaks affecting the food supply, Jared believes producers must take measures to safeguard their products. Incorporating an animal identification system helps protect the food supply and provide greater peace of mind for both farmers and consumers. Jared also sees a uniform animal identification system as a tool to better demonstrate the extensive protocols producers must incorporate to those critics of animal agriculture.

