

Quicken the milking routine without compromising milk or udder hygiene

Cut cross contamination

We take a look at two of the latest pieces of parlour 'add-on' kit that promise to help improve teat condition, udder health and milk hygiene quality, while at same time save money and reduce the number of hours you spend in the pit.

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A flushing system that cleans liners between each cow milking has helped one producer to reduce both cell count and mastitis levels in his herd – and save time in the milking parlour.

Ben Beddoes, who milks his 170-cow MRI herd at Churchstoke in the Welsh Borders, installed the Airwash system – supplied by Shropshire-based company Dairy Spares – in his 12:24 swing-over parlour in 2010 and he hasn't looked back since. "For us, it really has been the solution to

tackling mastitis caused by cross contamination," he says. "I used to wash the clusters by hand after each cow with water and paracetic acid. And it worked to an extent, but it was a big job and very time consuming – adding at least an hour to total milking time each day. And it was also only as good as the man doing the job," he adds.

Removing the cross contamination issue has seen the herd's mastitis cases fall by a third and somatic cell count has also fallen from 194,000 cells/ml to 133,000 cells/ml – surpassing the 150,000 cells/

target that Ben set. "It's phenomenal. And we recorded a SCC of 74,000 cells/ml a few weeks ago – the lowest we've ever seen in our herd. We're getting the best price that we can for our milk because the quality couldn't be any better."

Cases of mastitis have also fallen and are still decreasing on a weekly basis. To date, Ben is seeing 33 fewer cases of mastitis each year and this has dramatically reduced his vet costs. "The cost of one case in our herd tends to be around £200, so the reduction we've seen is equivalent to £6,600. This saving means that the system has almost paid for itself already."

Before investing in Airwash, which can be installed in any parlour and to existing clusters, Ben had looked at different existing flushing systems. Some would have been cheaper to install, but didn't work if the cluster units were upside down. They had to be turned before cleaning. "But with this system that's not necessary because it can flush the

cluster clean whatever position it's in. Airwash is also different as it just flushes the vital part of the cluster – the liners – compared to some other systems that flush the whole cluster. This saves water. It uses between 400-500 ml of water and chemical solution for each cow. "And when the whole cluster is flushed, a lot of milk fat goes on the floor, making it slippery," says Ben.

Ben's vet, Oli Hodgkinson, says that the system has also improved herd fertility since the higher the somatic cell count, the less fertile the cows tend to be.

"The calving index was 4.31 in 2010 and now it's down below 4. Improved somatic cell counts combined with other changes to herd management have led to this index reduction. The extra profit linked with this improvement is around £49,500 per year," says Ben.

Ben said he would not hesitate to recommend the system to other producers. "It hasn't complicated the milking routine – quite the opposite in fact. And it's doing the job that I wanted too, and more. It's proved extremely cost effective."

The only downside is that because the system is installed on the liner so has to be reset every time the liners are changed – in Ben's case four times a year. "It's a big job, but it is worth the effort. Once you get used to doing it it's fine.

"And the installation time is nothing compared to what I save every day when milking and treating mastitis cases."



Automatic wash: the Airwash system flushes the liners clean between each individual cow milking