



Cow monitoring system saves Stephen Mast time, improves herd performance and provides solid ROI

December 17, 2024 – What started as a search into robotic milkers led Stephen Mast, a third-generation owner of Calori-D Dairy, to the CowManager monitoring system. “We liked the monitoring aspects of the robots and being able to get data on health and rumination,” says the Denair, Calif., dairy producer. “However, we realized we could have all the benefits of a cow monitoring system at a small fraction of the price of robots.”

Mast first put in CowManager ear sensors in his 1,300-cow milking herd in December 2022, and after seeing the early results, he added them to the breeding-age heifers a year later. Mast gives praise for the time and labor savings the cow monitoring system provides him and his team and says his favorite feature is knowing what to expect from his cows before he even arrives at the dairy in the morning, whether it’s a list of potential sick cows, fresh cows to keep an eye on, or cows to breed.

Mast uses CowManager’s Health and Fertility modules, saying both provide a solid return on investment. “The health module finds sick cows; it identifies them sooner, allowing us to treat them sooner or make the decision to cull them,” says Mast. “Just finding one sick cow sooner gives us time to help her before she gets really sick or lame or even dies on the farm. That early detection pays for the entire subscription for the month. The module allows us to be proactive about treating cows. Sometimes just giving a cow a probiotic supplement takes care of her stomachache and helps her get back on track quicker which saves us money.”

In addition to the milking herd, CowManager has made a big difference in the fresh cow pen too. “I’m able to look at the list of fresh cows and know the status of each one,” states Mast. “I look at their activity and rumination time; how much they are eating. If a fresh cow isn’t eating enough, we’ll leave her in the hospital pen for another day and determine if she needs to be treated to get her to where she needs to be.”

Mast says another big benefit is not getting nearly as many calls in the middle of the night for a cow that has gone down and cannot get up. Before leaving the dairy for the evening, he’s able to identify cows that may be struggling with a postpartum disease and provide them with appropriate calcium supplements. That saves a lot of calls at midnight. “Being able to be proactive, especially with the fresh cows, has made a huge difference,” Mast adds.

CowManager also helps with dry cows. Mast said the system recently caught a dry cow that had come down with a nasty case of *E. coli*. Before CowManager, he admits that they might not have caught the hard quarter until it was too late. CowManager alerted them of the issue and probably saved the cow and her calf.

All the health benefits and early detection have led to the following: 20% less mastitis cases, 15% less lameness, 30% less postpartum diseases, and a 20% lower mortality rate in heifers 12 months or older. Mast figures the reductions add up to a yearly savings of \$32,939. He broke down that total into the following savings by category:



- \$6,529 - Drugs
- \$2,866 - Veterinarian
- \$9,483 - Lost milk
- \$753 - Labor
- \$1,909 - Discarded milk
- \$1,345 - Mortality
- \$6,815 - Days open
- \$3,240 - Culling

Add those reductions in cost to milk quality and performance benefits and the system pays for itself. Those performance benefits include an average 6-pound increase in milk production per cow, lower somatic cell count, and more fat-corrected milk. Mast has also seen a big boost in net merit index number. These differences represent about \$668,000 in added revenue.

On the reproduction side, Mast said his goal with CowManager was to speed up the breeding process and decrease time that cows are locked up. Mast gave an example of how CowManager has helped: "Let's say you lock up 800 cows in preparation for the breeder, however the breeder gets to your operation a little late. Out of the 800 cows, he has to find the six cows he has to breed that day. All the cows remain in the headlocks while he searches. With CowManager, I can look at my list and know whether a pen has cows in it that need to be bred. If there aren't any cows on the list, I can let the entire pen go. Those cows only need to be locked up for 20 minutes while we clean the stalls vs an hour waiting for the breeder to finish. Our lock-up time has gone way down. It means less standing time and less stress for the cows. They now get to go do what they need to do, which is eat and rest."

Another benefit, Mast says he no longer needs to go around tail chalking. Instead, CowManager puts together a list of cows in heat. "I know that CowManager finds the cows, especially the ones that wouldn't have been caught with just conventional tail chalk. I don't have to put as many cows on the OvSynch program. CowManager finds those cows, helps us get them bred and I can cut way down on the number of shots I have to give."

Since putting in CowManager, Calori-D hasn't had a single open cow when they palpated prior to drying off. The system helps the team find cows that lose their calf after being palpated pregnant. It shows the team that she has come back in heat even though she is no longer in the breeding pen. "Having that info about which cows are truly open is another huge bonus and adds up in major cost savings," says Mast.

Based on fertility goals, the dairy is seeing an estimated \$32,611 total annual return using CowManager. This includes a 50% reduction in labor needed for finding cows in heat, an 80% reduction in tail chalk, a 2% improvement in pregnancy rate (from 25% to 27%), and a big reduction in hormone intervention. He figures that the improved pregnancy rate adds up to more than \$20,000 in savings per year alone.

For more information on CowManager, contact your CowManager Specialist at Select Sires and visit CowManager.com.

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About CowManager

At CowManager, we believe a successful dairy producer is a prepared dairy producer. With our revolutionary cow monitoring ear sensors, we ensure they're always ahead, prepared for what's coming, with actionable insights. We believe in working together to help producers reach their goals, whatever their ambitions are. Whether they have 20 or 20,000 cows, with CowManager they'll have eyes on all of them. In the United States, CowManager is distributed and supported by Select Sires Inc.