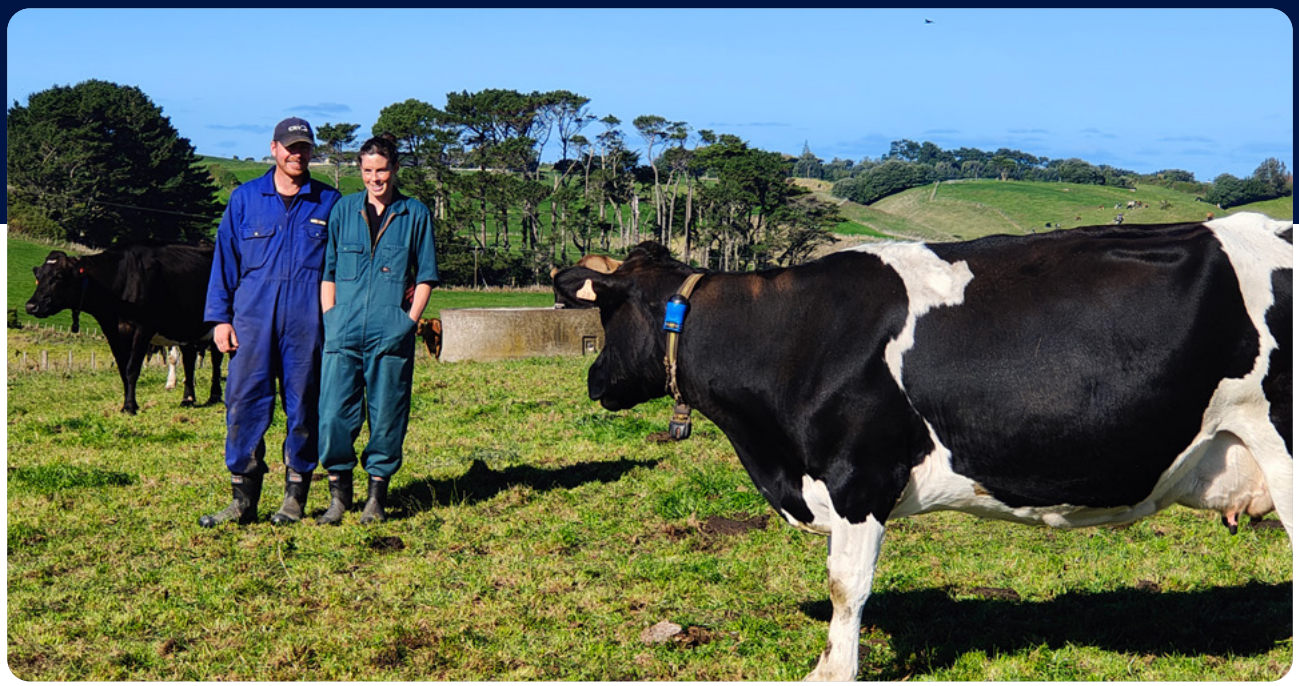
The move has been a game changer for their business



Farmers	Location	Farm Size	Herd Size
Owen and Hollie Clegg	South Taranaki	110ha	340 cows

South Taranaki dairy farmers Hollie and Owen Clegg were early adopters of wearable technology for their cows and say the move has been a game changer for their business.

They fitted SenseHub® Dairy collars to one of two herds they owned just before mating six seasons ago so they could monitor cow performance and staff well-being on one property, while they concentrated on farming their other herd on another farm nearby.

The couple are now in their first season on a new property which is leased, but they continue to run the other herd in a 50-50 sharemilking contract using employed staff.

On their lease farm, the Cleggs are milking 340 cows on a 110ha platform through a 50-bale rotary dairy shed and have another 40ha of gullies and hills where they will finish 50 cattle each year. There is also a 150ha sand dune run-off where all their young stock is run, creating a closed operation which allows them to winter cows either at the run-off or on the platform.

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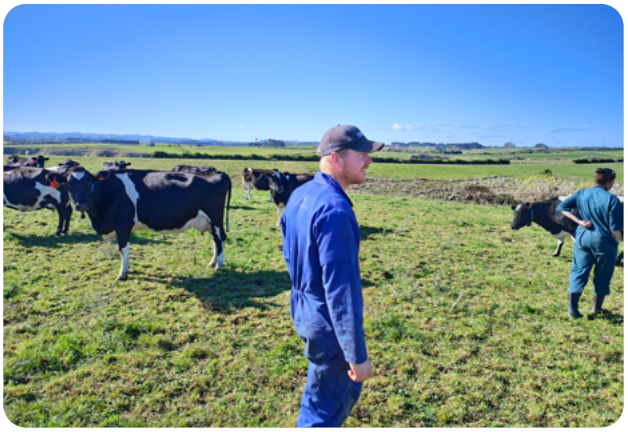
Adding the SenseHub Dairy collars to their other herd provided extra peace of mind for them as herd owners and employers.

"We knew that on-heat cows were getting detected by the collars, and the data indicated that sick cows were being picked up too," Hollie says.

New staff not proficient at heat detection were still able to work in the shed at mating time without missing any cows that were ready for mating.



"The collars just had our back, especially at mating time which is a really important time of year. If that goes wrong, it has a lasting effect on us for several years until we can correct it."

Having collars allowed their team to have regular time off, even over the critical spring period when calving then mating workloads spike and often restrict breaks.

"If we got a distress alert on our phone and our worker was off for instance, it was like sweet, we'll shoot around there, we'll see what that cow's up to, and figure it out ourselves," Hollie says.

"The collars meant we had backup, even though we didn't live on farm,"

Choosing SenseHub Dairy collars and auto-drafting technology was easy, they say.

The scope of information generated from the SenseHub Dairy collars is broader than some other wearable technologies on the market, and the support staff were superb to deal with from initial discussion to full installation and after-sales service.

"The SenseHub Dairy Sales Specialists were really good and gave us great advice. We got on well with them and the support was amazing. You can ring them up at four o'clock in the morning and someone's there with the answers to fix whatever's wrong."

A good example was a power outage early one morning in the middle of mating at their other farm. Their herd manager called the support desk at 4am and by 4.30am they were operational again.

"And if you aren't sure about something, you can just call and arrange for someone to come out and give you a training session," Owen says.

The initial support was delivered at their level of understanding and an annual check-up also ensures herd owners are up-to-date with the latest developments.

Some challenges are easy to deal with through a phone call but, if necessary, the support technicians can access the dairy shed computer to trouble shoot any issues.

Their SenseHub Dairy system includes a SenseHub Dairy Intelligate® auto-drafting gate installed on their lease farm which allows them to draft two ways.

"By the time we're starting artificial breeding, the collars do all that work for us over the 10 weeks of mating we do here," Hollie says.

"This season we've had a couple days with about 30 odd animals on and we just let the automatic drafting do all that work for us.

"You're not sitting up on the platform waiting for the cow to come around to draft her manually or putting her in the system," she says.

Mistakes are easy to make when you are manually selecting cows, but the collars virtually eliminate the risk of drafting the wrong animal.

They have installed a new computer at the lease farm shed after previously relying solely on the mobile phone application.

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"With the computer there in the shed, it is easier to see more of the detail on each cow and we have found we look at it even more than before."

With collars in place, for the first time last season they were able to use rumination data to successfully transition cows between calving and entering the twice-a-day milking mob.

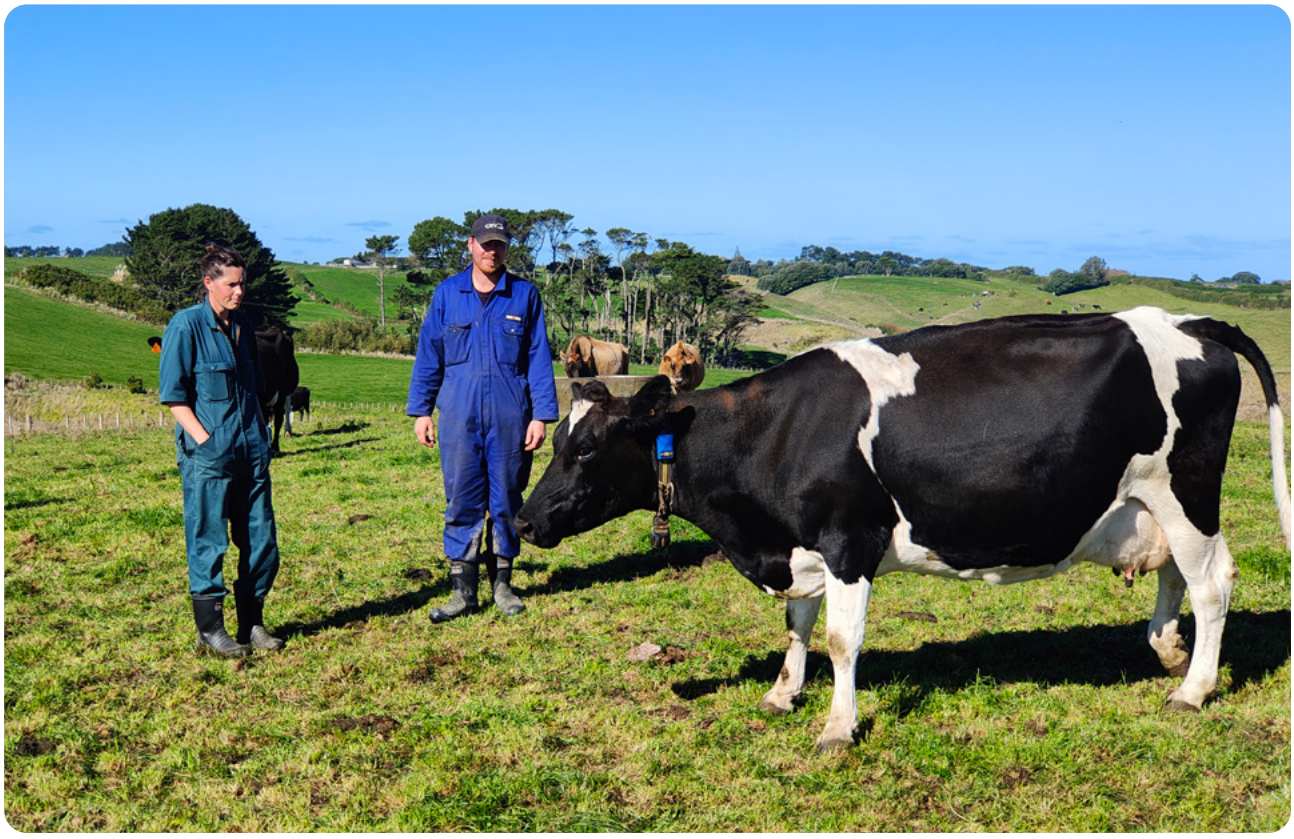
"We just set up automatic drafts and the cows stayed on once-a-day and didn't go into the main milking mob until they hit the rumination target," Owen says.

It highlighted the number of older cows and first-calving heifers that spent more time in the transition mob than their mixed age cows. Some heifers were in the transition mob for close to three weeks when they would normally have been moved into the twice-a-day herd after four days.

"Some of our heifers obviously needed up to three weeks to come right for whatever reason. Even if it's a straightforward calving, they needed time," Hollie says.

But it was the period leading into mating that highlighted the benefit of transitioning cows to twice-a-day using rumination data.

"We had ripper results for our submission rates and body condition score. They were really, really good, so that extra time out is what they needed and that's what you miss without having that collar information," Owen says.



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"In the past, we would have chucked them out, thinking they will be all good. They've calved, they'll be sweet. But this highlights that you don't actually know what your cows are going through," he says.

The Cleggs have always stuck to a short mating period and 100% use of artificial insemination, so they had to accept a higher empty rate of up to 18% in their earlier years of farming.

They did use tail paint in their first mating with collars, just to be certain the data was accurate for heat detection, but soon found it was picking up even short, sharp heats which would possibly be missed when just relying on tail paint.

"Without collars, you miss a lot of those little heats and so that would've easily been probably 2% of the empty rate you wouldn't see because they just have light heats which the collars pick up," Owen says.

Last mating, their cows recorded a 91 percent submission rate after the first three weeks of mating, with no intervention.

"We've got to that level before, but it's been with quite a bit of intervention," Hollie says.

Their herd's empty rate last mating dropped to less than 10%.

Not having to run bulls on the farm is another significant bonus, reducing any risk to staff handling them over mating.

Pre-set alert levels mean cows that dip in rumination can be proactively treated long before any issues would have been observed. Early intervention means their cows return to the milking herd faster, they say.

A good example is heat stress around afternoon milking time which the collars picked up. The Cleggs now plan to alleviate it with yard sprinklers to help lower cow temperature after they arrive at the shed.

The collars and automatic cup removers also mean that milking remains a one-person job for the entire season, freeing up time for other farm tasks like calf rearing, resetting the irrigator or putting up break fences.

"We're also saving time and money by not tail painting every second or third day too," Hollie says.

They are also mindful that the challenge of finding skilled farm staff is increasing, but Owen is confident that having technology in place like SenseHub Dairy collars will help attract talented staff. With two children of their own, family time is becoming more important than ever for the couple.

Owning a property like the one they currently lease is a future goal. In the meantime, farming at the leading edge, helped by clever technology, is their immediate plan.

"This property is basically our dream. It's the size we wanted, the scale we wanted and it's got young stock, dairy cows and it's got beef. It's got everything we wanted in it," Owen says.

"We will stay with SenseHub Dairy collars because it's just the support, the information, it's our system. It's just part of us now," Hollie says.