SenseHub® Dairy collars deliver less staff pressure and boost herd performance

Farmer	Location	Farm Size	Herd Size
Hayden Goble	Tataraimaka, Taranaki	200ha (effective)	565 cows at peak

SenseHub® Dairy cow collars have improved herd performance and reduced workload for Taranaki dairy farmer Hayden Goble and his three staff.

He's now approaching his fifth season since fitting collars to the 565 cows on his 200ha property which is run as a System 4 operation, feeding cows on pasture, maize, palm kernel and other feed inputs.

The herd is expected to finish the 2024-25 season with production of just under 500kg milk solids per cow, slightly down on their usual 550kg per cow, reflecting a tough spring, but well up on the national average of 400kg per cow.

Hayden and his wife Bridget are in their eighth season on the property and are equity partners in the business with Hayden's parents Kevin and Diane.

One of the immediate improvements after fitting the collars was a lift in the herd's six-week in-calf rate to 75% through improved heat detection in the first two seasons.

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"The last couple of seasons we've had challenging springs and our six week in-calf rate has come back a little on that, but the conception rates have been excellent," he says.

"We've had 61% conception rate this year, compared to being always in the low fifties before fitting the collars. They just mean we're getting the timing of that insemination right and that is key to the conception rate improvement," he says.

Hayden says the collars have also helped reduce the significant pressure on both himself and his staff over mating time.

"That's huge for us. It gone from a long slog from the start of calving right through to the end of mating."

"Once we hit the end of calving, you can just breathe. It doesn't matter who is milking, as long as they can read the graphs, they're able to do the job, and I know it's consistent."

For Hayden, that means he can take time off over mating and not worry about how well the team on farm are doing with selection of on-heat cows each day.

"I'm not worried that someone's not doing the job right and I can check up on it if I'm away. Yeah, it's been brilliant," he says.

Having the SenseHub Dairy collars fitted also allows Hayden and his staff to go to a regular roster once calving finishes.

"There's only two people needed on farm. We don't have three tied up so we can start having full weekends off," he says.

He also feels having the data available to all the team through the mobile phone app gives them more buy-in to the overall operation.

"That is a real positive I've noticed within the team, especially with all the rumination data. I get them to keep an eye on and the team is picking up health issues as well as me, which is nice."

Being able to intervene earlier than before the collars were fitted to assess cows that are showing reduced rumination means treatment costs and success rates are usually improved too.

"You're not the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff anymore."

He says it avoids staff finding a cow in trouble in the paddock because her rumination data has triggered an early alert, allowing treatment the night before.

"Staff can see her going down in the rumination before they go home the night before, pull her out and give her a bag straight away. You've got data behind it to back up your decision making," he says.

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The collars monitor the cows behaviour, present the data to the farmer in a way they understand and the farmer still needs to turn those insights into operational gains by taking action.

Hayden is also finding his staff are more engaged in the overall health of the herd because they are aware of any issues through the data and alerts displayed on their mobile phones.

Rumination data is also proving helpful in managing herd performance at critical points in the season, such as when feed hardens off in late spring or summer and quality drops.

"Seeing all the rumination data means we can pick up on that quality dropping and adjust what we're feeding," he says.

"It's all about being proactive, making those decisions a bit earlier, and not waiting for the tanker to tell you that you're down a thousand litres today. You can see that coming 12 hours before you see it in the vat," he says.

Hayden says the initial driver behind installing the collars was to reduce one labour input in the shed each milking during mating and doing pre-mating heat checks. But it quickly became apparent that the package of benefits was much bigger than just the saving in one labour unit.

"We can have 50-60 cows each day in the middle of AB and I can do that number with one person if I have to now that we have SenseHub Dairy collars on the cows."

"But you also get big savings through pre-mating heat data and if you've done pre-mating checks, you will know how much time it takes to do and then you're straight into mating on top of that so there's a fatigue risk for the staff and me."

"There's all the early intervention benefits and I also like getting the pregnancy data coming through on cows that are likely to be pregnant before you've even done a pregnancy test."

The data and reports have eliminated the need for pre-mating heat checks and also simplified the selection of cows for sexed semen.

"Now, it's literally a couple hours on that computer and you're sorting out all the cows to mate to sexed semen, the pre-mating heats are all there for you," he says.

"There's also that peace of mind with staff so you are not waking up at five o'clock in the morning, when you're supposed to be having a sleep in, and wondering whether they're doing the job properly."

The rumination data generated by the collars also helped Hayden pinpoint a heat stress issue during the summer months.

"We found that our cows go into heat stress at about 11am at anything above 21 degrees even though that's not really that hot. They'll stop eating, so now we have a policy that they'll come off pasture at 10.30am in the summer and go into our covered feed pad to get their supplement," he says.

"The data just drops back down to normal, it's quite incredible. That's been a big thing for us, just to keep those cows eating through the heat of the day and under there until milking time in the afternoon and then you'll see a bit of a spike as they come into the milking yard before they head back down again as it cools in the evening.

Last mating, they used some sexed semen but stopped to save on costs when the spring proved a challenging one for dairy farmers in the region.

"We have such a nice herd anyway so there wasn't that need to drive the genetic gain over the season anyway. We will look at it in the future because we know that with better heat detection from the data, it allows us to get the most out of that high-value semen."

Hayden is impressed with the scope of the data available on each cow in his herd through the SenseHub Dairy technology and says the reports are presented in a simple format which makes them easy to understand and use.

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"If anyone is new on farm, they get an initial run through the system so they know what to look for, and then it's easy to teach them on the job. They also know that I'm available on the phone if they have a problem, they can't solve themselves."

Each day, Hayden or his staff in charge are checking the reports for health and rumination plus their collar maintenance report.

"My staff soon get to understand if ruminations are dropping down below 450, which is my cutoff, there's something wrong with that cow."

Hayden's parents also have oversight on how the herd is tracking on production and in-calf rates too, through accessing the data and reports produced by the SenseHub Dairy collars.

Fitting the collars was easy and the back-up service has been exceptional from day one, including initial training sessions on the farm for Hayden and his second-in-charge staff member at the time.

"You've got their support desk number to ring them and there's a website and the manual to refer to as well, so all the support is there."

He's enjoyed attending some of the regular events with other farmers who have fitted collars to their herds, where insights and knowledge is shared to build on the benefits.

Based on the benefits achieved from fitting the SenseHub Dairy collar, the Gobles have fitted them to the herds on two of their other dairy farms.

Another big plus for all the family's farms is not having to run bull mobs to tail up after artificial insemination is finished.

"We now go with 10 weeks all AB and used short gestation bulls over the last three weeks to tighten everything up. That's been a big one to have no bulls on the farms."

Hayden says the collars are very robust and require minimal maintenance.

"We just replace or tighten up the odd strap and that's usually done at herd testing. We've only replaced five collars the whole time we've had them on our cows."

Looking ahead, Hayden is focused on building their equity share in the property and maintaining a good work-life balance. His wife Bridget works nearly full time off the farm and they have three young children, but the SenseHub Dairy collars allow them to enjoy more family time than ever before.