



Case study

Stuart and Sarah Crosthwaite, NE Vic

Looking at labour differently

Stuart and Sarah Crosthwaite wanted to re-consider the management of labour in their milking shed. CowTime's Shorter Milking Secrets gave them the confidence to try a completely different approach which led to improved lifestyle and labour productivity.

Stuart and Sarah dairy in north east Victoria, at Kergunyah South, half an hour south of Albury-Wodonga. Leasing the property from Stuart's parents, the couple milk a 300-cow, spring calving herd. The dairy is a 30-unit double up herringbone with automatic cup removers.

"It's an old shed that has been modified and improved progressively over the years. It therefore has limitations," said Stuart.

Keen to milk and operate the farm as efficiently as possible, the couple made some minor improvements to the dairy when they took over the property about two years ago. "We've modified the dairy entry and installed individual head stalls to improve cow flow and added some basic automation. We are now happy with the dairy and are focussing on pasture improvement and farm development," he said.

Stuart suspected slow cows were the next issue to address so jumped at the opportunity to test-run CowTime's Shorter Milking Secrets. "I had timed the cows and I knew some rows were through in eight minutes while others were taking up to 20 minutes," he said. The slow cows were only average producers. The high producing cows were milked out in less than eight minutes.

CowTime's calculations confirmed that the cups need not stay on the cows any longer than eight minutes (the herd's Maximum Milk Out Time).

"These days we don't wait. When most of a row is finished, we open the gates and remove the cups off any slow cows," said Stuart.

"Knowing CowTime's recommendations were based on research conducted at Ellinbank, Vic and Elliott, Tasmania gave us the confidence to give it a go.

It also led Stuart to re-think the way labour was used in the dairy. "We usually had two people in the dairy, which was a bit of an overkill but it was a bit much for a single operator," he said.

As a compromise most of the milking is now done by a single operator, with a second person joining towards the end of milking. "That makes finishing off and cleaning up much faster and takes the sting out of the process," said Stuart. At the same time, someone gets a bit of a sleep in and the evening chores get done by the person who would previously have been the second milker.

Taking the cups off early means the milking routine is more efficient so that milking time is about the same under the new single-operator system. "Our actual milking time hasn't changed much - the big gains have been in labour productivity across the farm and lifestyle," said Stuart.

The secret's out

Find out the secret to saving time in your dairy. Attend *Shorter Milking Secrets*, CowTime's 2007 Shed Shake-up, coming to your region soon.

Shorter Milking Secrets involve little or no cost but challenge current milking routines and practices. Everyone will go home with ideas to put into practice at the next milking, their herd's Maximum Milk Out Time and a timer to get started.

For more information phone CowTime on 03 5624 2221. CowTime is proudly supported by Dairy Australia and DPI Vic. Your Dairy Services levy making milking easier.

→ Shorter Milking Secrets

- Cups on accounts for about 80% of the time a cow spends in the dairy so the trick is to maximise cluster throughput
- Removing the cups early from slow milking cows cuts milking time without compromising production or milk quality; The trick is to know your herd's Maximum Milk Out Time.

(based on research conducted by the National Milk Harvesting Centre, Ellinbank)

