

## FUTUREDAIRY ANNOUNCES PARTNER FARM

Retreat Creek – the farm owned by western Victorian dairy farmers, John and Clare Cotton – will become a partner farm for the FutureDairy project when the family installs Australia's second robotic rotary automatic milking system (AMS).

The robotic rotary was developed for the automatic milking of larger, grazing herds by dairy equipment company DeLaval in collaboration with the FutureDairy team.

The Cottons who currently milk in a 50 unit rotary dairy, expect to be milking in their robotic rotary towards the end of this year or early next year. Once they have adapted their farming system to automatic milking, they plan to expand the year-round calving herd from the current 550 cows to 600-800 cows.

As a partner farm, the Cottons will co-operate with the FutureDairy team to monitor the system performance, especially when the technology is operating towards its technical capacity (600-800 cows). The research partnership has been generated to enable FutureDairy to conduct research within a commercial farm setting, so that specific findings are applicable to a large scale pasture-based operation with cows milking themselves voluntarily.

FutureDairy project leader, Associate Professor Kendra Kerrisk, said that the robotic rotary had been proven under commercial conditions at Gala Farm in Tasmania but the ability of the system to perform with larger herds – up to 800 cows – remained uncharted territory.

“The robotic technology for milking cows is well proven. But its success in grazing herds depends very much on adapting farm management practices to encourage cows to move on their own from the paddock to the dairy and around the farm,” Assoc Prof Kerrisk said.

The FutureDairy team has developed management guidelines for AMS based on research and experience with commercial farmers using AMS box units.

“Our work with the Cottons, and also our experiences with the Dornaufs at Gala Farm will enable us to develop guidelines for achieving the optimum performance from the robotic rotary under Australian conditions.”

The Cottons were selected as FutureDairy's robotic partner farm through a process which saw 30 applicants respond to an invitation to express interest.

“When we visited the six short-listed farms we were extremely inspired by the farmers and their businesses,” she said.

“We are delighted to be working with the Cottons. The family has a history of trying new things and being involved in industry initiatives.”

Retreat Creek is very well suited to the robotic rotary and an expanded herd size of 600-800 cows. The existing infrastructure – such as the feed pad, laneways and farm layout can be easily adapted for voluntary cow movement around the farm.

Once operating smoothly, the Cottons will host field days and other scheduled visits to share their experiences. The FutureDairy team will report on findings to industry. Retreat Creek will be closed to the public during the construction and adjustment period.

FutureDairy's major sponsors for the research partnership with Retreat Creek are Dairy Australia, DeLaval and the University of Sydney.

*For more information, contact Associate Professor Kendra Kerrisk, FutureDairy project leader ph 0428 101 372, email [kendra.kerrisk@sydney.edu.au](mailto:kendra.kerrisk@sydney.edu.au) or [www.futuredairy.com.au](http://www.futuredairy.com.au)*