

## RAISING CALVES FOR ROBOTIC MILKING

With 34 robotic dairies now operating in Australia and several more under construction, the FutureDairy team is often asked whether there's any difference in raising replacements for robotic milking.

FutureDairy project leader, Associate Professor Kendra Kerrisk, said that most dairy cows can be milked by robots although a few refinements to routine practices for raising replacements can better prepare cows for robotic milking.

"Practices worth reviewing include calf rearing, monitoring heifer growth rates and conformation, cow identification and breeding," she said.

While calf rearing practices are basically the same for conventional or robotic milking, removal of extra teats and disbudding are more important for calves that will be milked automatically because extra teats can slow down robotic cup attachment. Effective disbudding or dehorning is also important because a 'horn stump' on an individual cow can allow it to dominate other cows in an AMS and create unnecessary congestion at the dairy.

Assoc Prof Kerrisk said it was important to keep a close eye on calf and heifer growth rates and adjust their diet if needed as smaller heifers may be disadvantaged at the AMS holding yard if they find it challenging to hold their place in the queue.

"With voluntary milking 24 hours a day a timid heifer cannot simply wait for the last row or rotation as in a conventional milking system – now the cows keep coming and there is no end to the milking session."

If there are surplus replacements, Assoc Prof Kerrisk suggested assessing each calf's structure at weaning, and selling any calves that have particularly poor leg and foot conformation. "These animals are less likely to be assertive traffickers in a voluntary milking system."

The focus on cow identification is a little different with an AMS. The robots and drafting gates require electronic identification but visual ID is still needed for paddock observations. The FutureDairy team found collar numbers more useful than freeze branding.

Tail docking is not necessary for an AMS. However switch trimming is recommended, just before heifers enter the milking herd.

Most cows can be milked by robots so here's no need to make radical changes to your breeding objective.

"However you may consider some minor adjustments, such as increased attention to udder conformation, rear leg placement and milking speed," she said.

The above mentioned considerations will ensure the replacements you rear will have long, productive lives in an automatic milking system.



FutureDairy's major sponsors are Dairy Australia, DeLaval and the University of Sydney. [www.futuredairy.com.au](http://www.futuredairy.com.au)

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