

TECHNOLOGY TO ASSIST WITH CALVING

Calving cows adds extra work and stress in any dairy operation. The demands are intense in seasonal or split calving systems where large numbers of cows calve over brief periods. In year round calving systems, it's an on-going chore.

Dr Cameron Clark from the FutureDairy team will give a sneak preview of some technologies that could take the sting out of calving at this year's Dairy Research Foundation's symposium.

One example is the use of a rumination monitor to predict the day of calving by comparing day-to-day rumination levels. The monitors are commercially available for heat detection; FutureDairy's work could add in a calving prediction mode, which would make them multifunctional.

Another example is the use of an accelerometer to monitor cow activity. The FutureDairy team is investigating ways of monitoring activity levels to alert farmers to cows with calving difficulty or post calving health issues.

The team has also investigated the use of weatherproof CCTV cameras in the maternity paddock for remote monitoring of cows close to calving. A small number of Australian farmers are already using CCTV cameras in maternity sheds or calving pads to monitor calving progress from a home PC or mobile phone. The FutureDairy team is looking at their application for paddock calvings and the potential to use a process called 'machine learning' to enable the cameras to send an alert if a cow is having difficulty calving.

To hear more about advances in technology for application on dairy farms, register for the Dairy Research Foundation Symposium.

Diary date: Dairy Research Foundation Symposium, 19-20 June, Hunter Valley. For more information: www.drfsymposium.com, email esther@estherprice.com.au or phone 1800 177 636.



Technology such as weatherproof CCTV cameras (pictured) and collars to monitor rumination and cow activity could be used to monitor calving and alert the farmer when a cow needs attention, such as calving assistance or treatment for post-calving health issues.