ROBOTS ARE COMING TO KIAMA

With increasing numbers of Australian dairy cows now being milked by robots, researchers are looking at a range of exciting ways to use robots on farm, and one that has already shown promise is the use of robots to herd cattle from the paddock to the dairy.

Delegates at the Dairy Research Foundation's symposium, to be held at Kiama on 4, 5 July will get a sneak peak of Rover, a prototype robot, in action.

Researchers from the University of Sydney's Dairy Science Group and the Australian Centre for Field Robotics, have used an unmanned ground vehicle (robot) to herd dairy cows out of the paddock.

Dairy researcher Associate Professor Kendra Kerrisk said the team was amazed at how easily the cows accepted the presence of the robot.

"They weren't at all fazed by it and the herding process was very calm and effective," Dr Kerrisk said.

"As well as saving labour, robotic herding would improve animal wellbeing by allowing cows to move to and from the dairy at their own pace."

The robot was developed by researchers at the University of Sydney's Australian Centre for Field Robotics for tree and fruit monitoring on tree-crop farms. It was used in the initial trial with very little modification for the dairy paddock.

We are keen to explore further opportunities with the Australian Centre for Field Robotics. They have a range of robotic technologies which could have exciting applications on dairy farms," Dr Kerrisk said.

"While the robot showed exciting potential for use on a dairy farm, it would need to be adapted to operate autonomously on the terrain of dairy farms and its programing would need be customised for dairy applications."

In addition to robotic herding, some of the possible applications include collecting pasture and animal data in the paddock; monitoring calving and alerting the manger if attention is needed and identifying and locating individual cows in the paddock.

"The research is in its very early stages but robotic technologies certainly have the potential to transform dairy farming, in terms of reducing repetitive work, increasing the accuracy of data that farmers collect and making data available that we currently can't capture.

"Robotic technologies will have a role in increasing the productivity, sustainability and competitiveness of Australia's dairy farms," Dr Kerrisk said.

To register for the Dairy Research Foundation Symposium visit www.drfsymposium.com.au or contact Esther Price Promotions, esther@estherprice.com.au or 1800 177 636.

For more information about Rover the robot, contact Associate Professor Kendra Kerrisk, ph 0428 101 372, email kendra.kerrisk@sydney.edu.au or www.futuredairy.com.au

Click here to receive a high res image by automatic email: sudrg-robotic-herding@monkscom.com.au

Cows at the University of Sydney's Corstophine farm were unfazed by the presence of a robot which herded the cows out of the paddock calmly and efficiently.

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