

Alerting farmers

Dumping milk is a thing of the past for a Waikato farmer -

SONITA CHANDAR reports.

Sitting down to dinner after a long day on the farm, Waikato farmer Bryan Holmes didn't hear his cellphone go off.

He was looking forward to putting his feet up but the smart technology installed in his cowshed was trying to get his attention.

Before starting the afternoon milking, a staff member had forgotten to turn on the milk chilling unit and although the Halo monitoring system had been sending alerts to Holmes' cellphone, he had missed them.

"It wasn't until I received a phone call from the Halo technician who was monitoring the systems after hours to say there was a problem with the milk temperature that I looked at

“Without the system, no one would have gone back to the shed to check if things were okay. The beauty of it is I got the alerts and so did Janish and the other staff member. Even if all of us had missed them, Halo provided that back-up service and alerted us personally.”

my phone and saw all the missed alerts,” Holmes says.

He headed off to the cowshed, turned the unit on and was returning home when his staff

member rang to say “he had gotten an alert and realised he had left the chiller off”.

Half a world away, his farm manager, Janish Schreedharan, was in India on holiday. When he returned he also mentioned the alerts from Halo.

“He told me he had been sent the alerts as well and had kept an eye on what was happening on the farm thousands of miles away.”

Janish said he knew that when the alert switched off we had been to the shed and switched the chiller on.”

He says the Halo Milk Monitoring Solution by TagIt “has proven to be worth its weight in gold” as they managed to save the vat holding 5000 litres of milk.

The Halo-Milk Monitoring Solution saved Bryan Holmes from having to dump 5000 litres of milk after a staff member forgot to turn on the milk chiller on before milking. Pictured Bryan Holmes and farm manager Janish Schreedharan.

“We invested in a Centrus rotary platform. It's quiet, light, extremely strong and durable. We love it.”

Robert (Father) and Verena Beckett, Rofongaro, Waikato

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"The beauty of it is I got the alerts and so did Janish and the other staff member. Even if all of us had missed them, Halo provided that back-up service and alerted us personally."

He says the system works perfectly and in the 18 months since they installed it, that night in mid-January was the first time there had been an incident.

"It has given us peace of mind. 'We can go home and not worry about things. That is why we put the system in.'"

He knows all too well the sinking feeling of arriving at the cowshed to find the vat load of milk has spoiled and has to be dumped because of breakdowns or forgetting to turn the chiller on.

"In the past, we have had to dump a few loads of milk for one reason or another."

"Our vat holds 16,000 litres worth about \$10,000. That is a lot of money and milk to be pouring down the drain."

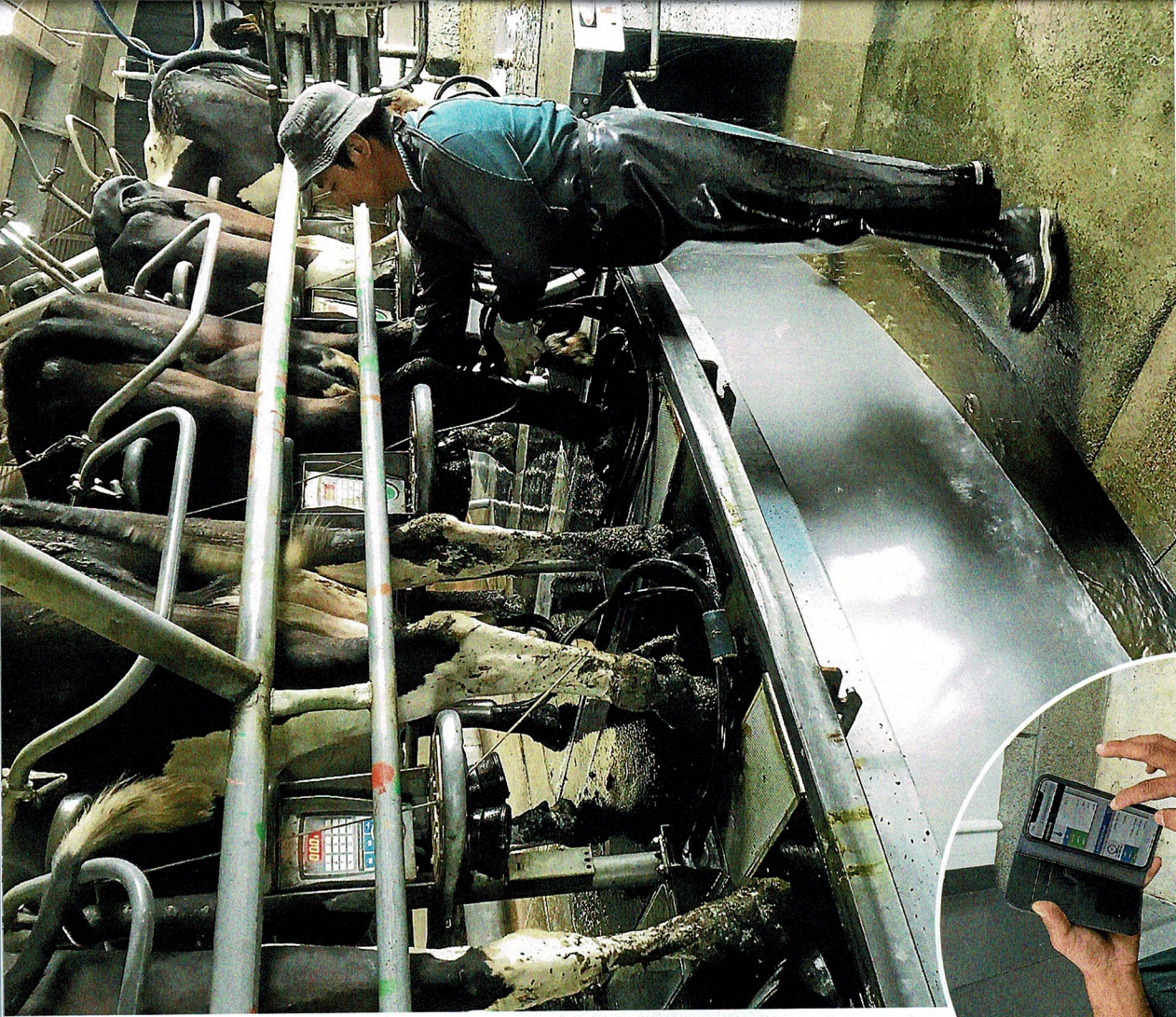
Holmes is an equity partner on the family farm at Matamata where they milk 750 cows on 205ha. He has been working on the farm for the past 10 years.

When a new shed was built on the farm about eight years ago, the family looked to install a single system that would monitor everything from milk cooling, water and effluent systems but nothing was available at the time.

"There were other systems available but they were all standalone."

"When Halo came on the market it was exactly what we had been looking for to monitor the milk temperature in the two vats."

Halo is a separate system to the



Matamata farmer Bryan Holmes installed the Halo Milk Monitoring Solution by Tagit in his shed 18 months ago to monitor milk cooling. Pictured Farm assistant Allaine Chico in the cowshed.

milk chiller units but they are linked to run as one.

They have another module that monitors the water and lets them know what the levels are in the tanks, keep them up-to-date with the water meters and sends an alert if the water usage is high, indicating a broken pipe or trough.

"Full in-shed monitoring is something we will look at next," Holmes says.

"We are keen to add the module that monitors the effluent system. That will tell us where the spreader is on-farm, when it turns on and off, how

much has been pumped and exactly where it was spread on any given day down to the hour."

The Halo system is viewed on a dashboard on either a smartphone, tablet or computer and, as proven by his farm manager, can be monitored anywhere in the world.

Halo retains all records dating back to the day the system was installed.

"If Fonterra come back to us at any stage to say there was a problem with the milk

temperature, we can go back to the system and see the exact time the milk was collected and what the temperature was at pick-up on any given day."

Before installing the system,



Waikato farmer Bryan Holmes says the Halo Milk Monitoring Solution has given them peace of mind. He is able to view the dashboard on his smartphone or computer anywhere in the world.

they had only a single plate cooler which would not have complied with the new

regulations coming into force this year. This has now been upgraded to a chilled water double plate system. If there are any faults with this, the Halo milk monitoring solution will also alert them.

"Basically, we wanted to keep in line with the new Ministry for Primary Industries milk cooling standards and ensure we were on the ball with that."

"And having lost milk in the past, we wanted to avoid that. Milk loss is reasonably common if things are not done right. If we can't supply milk to Fonterra that is up to scratch, then we are not making any money."

The system allows them to set their own parameters for alerts to be sent and he has set his lower than the MPI standards.

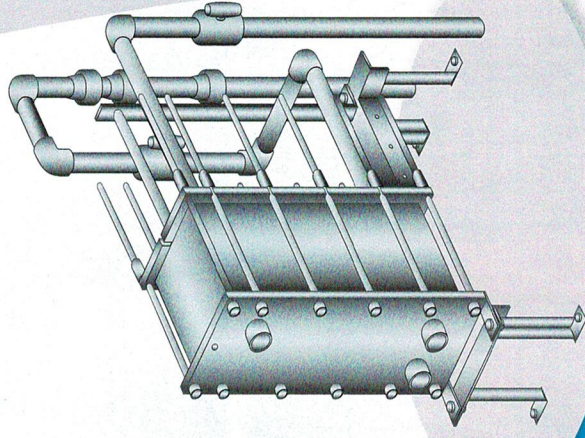
"It means we can be alerted early and address any faults or issues. It doesn't just monitor whether the milk chiller has been switched on, it lets us know if there has been a breakdown

of any kind in relation to milk temperature."

"The system also tracks the cooling of the milk, from what temperature it went into the vat and as it chills down to the correct temperature and if the milk is too hot at any stage."

"The bonus for us is that the system is solar-powered so if we lose power and a problem occurs such as the milk increasing in temperature, we will still receive alerts - as long as the cellphone network doesn't go down."

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