

App takes the stress out of herd management

Dairy farmer: Allen Hook

Region: NSW

Topic: HerdData

Accurate and up-to-date paper work is crucial for all dairy farmers. But, as a farm manager, Allen Hook says the ability to keep precise records is what keeps him in a job.

Allen manages a herd of 300 mostly Jersey-Friesian cross cows at Oxley Island in New South Wales.

“When you manage a herd you have to have your paperwork perfect,” he said. “You won’t get a managing job if you don’t have the data at your fingertips and make the right decisions.”

Calving three times a year, including more than 200 in February and March; a drop in November and another in the middle of the year; correct and up-to-date herd records have been the key to running a smooth operation.

That’s where DataGene’s HerdData app fits into the business.

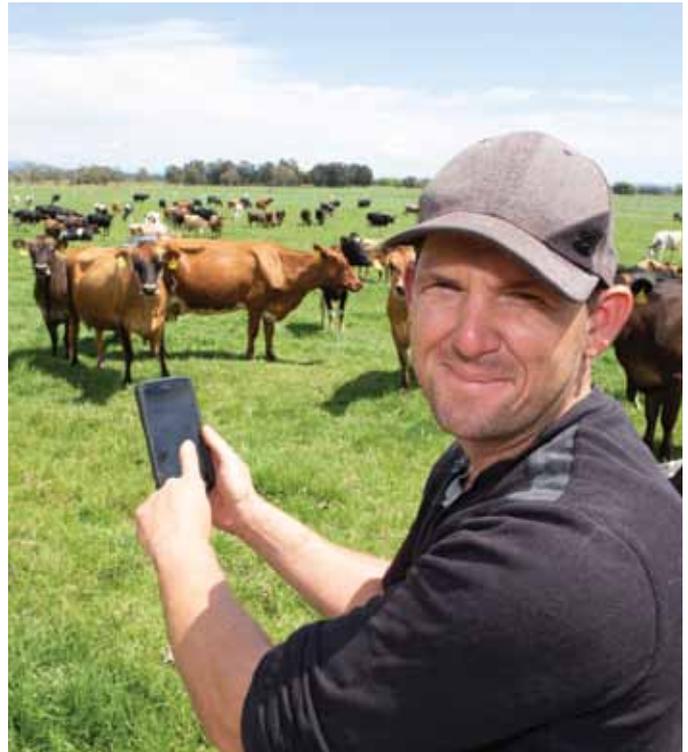
Allen first downloaded the app last year when he worked at another farm. He was interested in finding an easier way to record herd data but also a system that meant these records could be accessed quickly.

HerdData is an app for mobile devices that makes it easy to enter and access herd records and also synchronises data with herd management software.

A few months into Allen’s new management role at Oxley Island, HerdData is again proving its worth.

Herd recording has become easier thanks to the app, saving Allen time and stress in searching back through paperwork. “It keeps your paperwork up to date. You are actually doing the paperwork on the app, the app is the paperwork.”

“If I didn’t have this, I would have had to sit down for hours trying to work out what cows were in the herd, what has been dried-off and what has calved. With the app you are doing it on the spot, every day, it is in your pocket and it is just done.”



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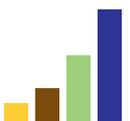
This organised method helps during joining and pregnancy testing, with Allen’s approach even attracting praise from the vet as the accurate records leave little room for error.

The “massive batch calving” in February/March means joining is tight. Artificial insemination (AI) runs across six weeks with records kept about each joining, as well as heat observations and other health concerns.

These records are then printed out and used by the vet during pregnancy testing.

Allen said one of the most useful functions of the app is the “bull team” section. “The app has the whole bull directory in Australia – when you add that bull to the bull team it gives you all the details of that bull. When you AI a cow, you go to the bull team and it’s easy to record the one you’ve used,” he said.

Transition cow management is also easier with HerdData, thanks to calving and dry-off date notifications.



“In the settings you can select your dry-off period and it will notify you when you want to dry them off,” Allen said. “At the moment, it is set at 56 days but you can set it to anything you like.”

The Oxley Island herd produces about 28 litres a cow a day with 3.8 per cent milk fat and 3.67% protein.

The herd has a bulk milk cell count of about 70,000 cells/mL and maintaining this premium milk quality level is a high priority for the Norco suppliers. HerdData helps deliver top quality milk by assisting the management of potential issues by providing quick access to accurate data on individual cows.

“We look at the cows that have repeat cases of mastitis and because you can look up that individual cow it gives you her history, cell count, lactations and production, you can make the important call to cull her if she is a repeat offender and if she’s not performing where she should be,” he said.

Information about drug administration is also stored in the app via the drug cupboard function. Allen said he uses this to keep track of milk and meat withhold periods.

Allen said the thorough historical database of the entire herd, plus all the young stock on the property, helps with future breeding decisions.

Heifer calves are given a number and immediately linked to their mother as the calving information is entered straight into the app via a mobile phone down the paddock. Bull calves are sold and this is also recorded in the app. Allen said the app acted as a “big pedigree book” with dam and sire information attached to the calf. “With the app we can look back and make better calls to have better bloodlines,” he said.

It is really, really good and it makes my life easier and keeps me in a job,” he said of the app. “If I didn’t have the programs I have, I wouldn’t be able to have the job I have.”

HerdData registrations start at \$99 a year for one to two mobile devices.



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