

Regional Development Australia Limestone Coast

RDA BOARD MEMBERS SEE ROBOTS MILKING COWS

The first dairy farm in South Australia to be equipped with robotic milking stalls was set up back in 2009 by the Crosby family South West of Lucindale. Just before Christmas, Board members of Regional Development Australia Limestone (RDALC) Coast paid a visit to see this technology of the future.

Bill Crosby and his father, Doug milk around 150 cows, and most of the time it all happens without human intervention. No early mornings, no being tied to the farm seven days a week, and no need to wear gumboots every morning and evening.

It took quite a few months to train the first batch of cows to regularly enter the two Lely milking stalls, drawn in by the promise of a feed of tasty dairy meal. Once in the stall, a computer reads the identification details for each cow from her collar, gives her a tailored measure of feed, notes whether she has mastitis in any of her quarters, or whether she's just calved and needs to have her colostrum separated from the main milk vat.

The robot arm already knows the configuration of her teats, and starts by washing them with a pair of rotating brushes. Lasers are then used for accurately placing the teat-cups. If something goes wrong as it occasionally does, then the computer calls the family on the phone and tells them what needs to be fixed. Most times it's easily handled on-farm by Bill or Doug.

According to Bill Crosby, the \$700,000 investment in the technology has paid off, as it allows him to do off-farm work as an electrician and gives the family a much better lifestyle.

Since the Crosbys helped pioneer Robotic milking in Australia, a number of other farms in the Limestone Coast region have also installed these high-tech milking stalls.

Dairy farming in the Limestone Coast is projected to undergo a major expansion over the next few years, driven largely by demand from Asian markets. Already we're seeing significant investment in export milk processing facilities near Penola by the Midfield Group, with another local plant likely to be established in future by overseas interests.

Robotic Dairy technology will play an important role in the conversion of farms from grazing and cropping activities to dairy production. For farmers like the Crosbys, it means they can tap into these growing markets, without having to employ extra labour or change their lifestyle too dramatically.



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RDALC Chair Richard Vickery is convinced high-tech dairy farming has a great future in the region. "With our reliable water supply, mild climate and now local investment in processing, the Limestone Coast is seen as prime location for boosting milk production. Using the latest technology, we can produce premium quality milk products cheaper than just about anywhere else in the world."

ENDS

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List of RDALC Board Members

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Mr Alan Richardson, Deputy Chair

Ms Ann Aldersey – Community representative

Mr Lew Parsons – Community representative

Mr Mark Edwards – Community representative

Mr Scott Whicker – Community representative

Assoc Professor Judy Nagy – Community representative

Mayor Erika Vickery – LCLGA representative

Mayor Andrew Lee – LCLGA representative

Mayor Richard Sage – LCLGA representative



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