

Lely Astronaut A3 Now In Illinois Dairies

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Gary Arentsen of Albers, Ill., was introduced to the Lely Astronaut A3 Robotic milking system by his first customers. Now his business, Arentsen Farm Sales & Service Inc. in Albers, Ill., is first such dealer for this equipment in the state of Illinois.

Presently, there are two dairies in Illinois using the system, although it previously was in use in Wisconsin, Minnesota and New York, among other areas.

"Since I grew up on a dairy farm and saw the amount of time required to run a successful operation, I find the biggest advantage of this technology is freedom not to not be "working" 24/7," Arentsen said. "When you add the extra time with the increased production, it would be hard not to consider looking at this option if it's time for some updating. Lely can assist with cash flow analysis specific to a particular operation with both current and future projections."

According to an online video at lely.com, Lely first introduced its milkers in 1992 and continually improved the system until the present model, the Astronaut A3. Lely is an international company with dealers all over the world. Thousands of units have been sold.

The cow enters the milking stall at her own free will. The box has a soft rubber floor that includes a scale to weight the cow each time she enters. Her portion is measured by the weight sensors in the floor. The identification system recognizes the cow through its transponder. A pre-determined ration of concentrates is given, teats are cleaned and teat cups attached after a scanner scans the cow's bag for exact location of each teat. After milking and feeding, the teat cups are removed from the teats in an animal friendly manner. The teats are sprayed and the teat cups are cleaned by rinsing.

"Basically, transponders will tell us anything the cow does," Kyle Johnson said. "It monitors

her movements throughout the day so if a cow is moving a lot there's a good chance she's in heat, and obviously she needs to be bred."

The system notices and records if the cow has a lame foot. A sensor monitors milk quality, and if there's a high somatic cell count, that's a good indicator she has mastitis.

"If she has mastitis then we'll treat the quarter of her bag where the mastitis is," Kyle added. "I'll program that in the computer and the machine automatically knows that milk cannot go into the tank, it will dump it."

Several features are unique to the Lely system. The robot arm is of robust construction. Even if a cow stands on it there would be no damage. The milking technique includes a four effect pulsation system and adjustments are regulated at the quarter level. The pulsation occurs as close to the udder as possible. The quality control feature detects the presence of any blood in the milk.

The computer's T4C software stores the data from every cow in the system. All of this can be retrieved on the computer screen in easy to understand graphics. A farmer can access data from any location, even while on vacation.

The space for the cow during milking offers optimum comfort with a soft rubber floor.

The A3 has become more user friendly. Mechanical components require less maintenance, and service engineers are always available.

"We recently had an open house to allow folks to come and see the system working and several of the older farmers said 'I think I was born 50 years too early - that is amazing,' Arentsen reported.

"This system may seem to good to be true but I have personally visited several operations and all with great results," he added. "If you're looking to upgrade your operation you should at least give it some serious thought. Please call me if you're interested in taking a personal tour or just to have preliminary discussions about future changes." △