

'Revolution' offers radical change

Once-a-day (OAD) milking is a revolution, revered by some 'converts' as being the equal of the electric fence and herringbone dairy in its significance, says **Peter Gatley**, general manager genetics at *Livestock Improvement*, Newstead.

"OAD is a revolution in that it is fundamentally changing the lives of 400 to 500 dairyfarming families this spring," says Mr Gatley, whose estimate of OAD numbers is based on the 1000 attending recent OAD seminars, their positive response, and general feedback.



Peter Gatley

Last season 130 farmers were on OAD from calving onwards, the season before fewer than 30. "We can see interest in OAD ramping up rapidly. An increasing group of farmers report positive experiences," says Mr Gatley, adding that farmer experience carries more weight than science trial results, as evident at the seminars,

where audiences were especially interested in farmer panels.

"OAD is now being recognised as a valid commercial tool, and no longer seen as a 'cop-out'. The sceptics are getting quieter."

The seminar roadshow went to Hawera, Hamilton, Rotorua, Gore and Ashburton, and farmers in other regions are requesting the same – an extension being considered by *Dexcel* and *Livestock Improvement*, which promptly agreed to organising visits to Coromandel and at least one Northland venue.

Mr Gatley says OAD first grabbed his attention 2 years ago when trial results showed the *Dexcel* Jersey OAD herd equalled the Jersey twice-a-day (TAD) herd, and both were producing more than 1000kg/MS/ha.

"The light came on, and I was surprised that fewer than 30 farmers were prepared to try OAD in the season following those results." But now this new farming system, a byproduct of genetic gain in dairy cows, is gaining momentum.

There will be some herds (at the moment Jerseys and crossbreds), farms and farmers more suited to OAD than others.



Ted Coats explains his South Waikato farm's experience of OAD at Newstead's seminar.

Mr Gatley estimates that OAD herds (from calving on) could eventually account for 20% or more of the country's dairy farms (12,000 total). "In 5 years the number on OAD will be in the thousands," he predicts.

"It's only happening now because we've bred cows capable of high production on OAD milking. The cow of the 1970s couldn't do it." And the lower BW American Holstein influence was 'not up to the task'.

The shift to OAD coincides with a *Sire Proving Scheme* milestone. This is the year in which the LIC programme will graduate 300 bulls – up 28% from 235.

"Importantly the additional bulls are crossbreds (*KiviCross*). This dramatically increases the number of proven bulls carrying Jersey genes suited to OAD (up 67% from 90 to 150)."

OAD suits a variety of situations. The system is employed on:

- Larger farms where younger stock can be spared the long walk to the dairy twice-a-day.
- Merged farms where OAD is a viable alternative to building a new dairy for the bigger herd.
- Smaller farms where OAD enables the owner/manager to work in an off-farm job.

Many farms, especially those converted from sheep country in the South Island, have the difficulty of being able to employ enough dairy staff, or retain them. Farmers can see OAD as a way to bolster employment resources and staff retention. **D**



The Newstead audience is all concentration during the 3-hour presentation and discussions at the *Dexcel / Livestock Improvement* OAD seminar.