The technology enabling an ‘absolute transformation’ of the dairy industry

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With help from a government loan scheme, dairy farmers – like Andrew Le Gallais – are able to modernise how their farms operate. Alasdair Crosby went to see the future of the industry in action

WITNESS the effects of the reintroduction of the Agricultural Loan Scheme: dairy farmers have been able to invest in their own future, making the future of the entire dairy farming sector more viable.

A prime example is dairy farmer and former chair of the Jersey Milk Marketing Board, Andrew Le Gallais, who has been able to invest heavily in the future continuance of his own dairy business.

Recently, he invited members of the dairy industry and the two States Members most closely associated with the agricultural industry, Deputies Kirsten Morel and Steve Luce, to view a newly completed, very modern milking parlour.

He told them: “The aim has been to fit the most advanced dairy equipment into a streamlined working environment, to improve productivity significantly and to improve the monitoring of cow health and operator wellbeing.

“Such a long-term investment in the dairy farming industry takes time to materialise, but that does not prevent it from being a commitment to improved productivity and enhanced animal health. This will continue to secure a strong contribution to local food security, enhanced biodiversity in our countryside and above all, the perpetuation of our pedigree Jersey cow in her Island home.

“This is what government and our Island receives from a unique sector of our economy, in return for the reintroduction of the Agricultural Loan Scheme.”

On a tour of the new parlour, time and time again the practical results of the new parlour are demonstrated by Andrew’s use of the word “ergonomics” and by a significant saving of man-hours for the farm staff.

In relation to the milking parlour: “Our previous milking parlour wasn’t nearly as long. It held eight cows on either side; this one holds 14 cows either side. Before, it was taking us over three hours for two operators to milk the cows; now it takes them a fraction over two hours.

“It’s a huge difference and knocks a lot of time off each milking, and over the year, a saving of almost 1,500 hours. That’s a lot of hours and a lot of money saved. In the time saved, we can do much else. I knew this would make a big difference to the working day – and it has.”

Then, in relation to a new suspended floor in the dairy pit: “It is in two sections

to allow for independent adjustment for the two operators in the parlour. The floor is adjusted by the operation of two pairs of hydraulic rams controlled by an electric pump. It works in a similar manner to the action of a trolley jack, levering the floor up or down. The floor is made up of strong plastic tiles, which allow for a slight spring in the step of the operator.

“The two decks mean you can have a tall person on one deck and a short person on another, making for optimal convenience and comfort for the operators. They are very common in Denmark, where they take convenience and comfort very seriously, whereas in the UK, it has been more a case of ‘stiff upper lip; just put another pair of socks on and don’t complain’.”

The principle is to have a streamlined parlour and less clutter. There is tubular lighting – all LED – but the lighting in the pit has a slightly orange hue to it to give a warmer light, so the operator doesn’t have a glare in his eyes. The light on the walls is a slightly more powerful one: it shines down into the mangers so the cows can see what they are eating.

It is fantastic! It has helped farming turn a corner and there's a real buzz everywhere

Andrew Le Gallais

The automatic dipping and flushing system that has been installed has been a game-changer, according to Andrew. It saves time with automated teat dipping and cluster flushing and with much faster milking.

It automatically dips teats with disinfectant and flushes the liners with sanitising water immediately after milking is finished.

“It is the installation of this equipment that is making perhaps the greatest contribution to improved cow flow through the parlour. It is enormously labour saving. There is none of this rushing to put on teat cups, then having to come back to teat spray and then open a gate.”

A GEA (the initials stand for a German company with rather a long name) milk meter has been installed. This is a high-precision device used to measure, monitor and analyse milk yield per cow, “in real time” during the milking process. It supports herd management by tracking individual cow productivity, controlling the automatic cluster removal, ensuring consistent milk flow and detecting early signs of mastitis.

“A huge amount of information is generated by this piece of equipment. It is reassuring to know that most problems can be remotely diagnosed.”

There is a specific system to segregate cows when needed. A segregation gate was finally positioned after a lot of tying gates and frames together to see what would work best for cow flow. The cows can either exit to the left back into the cattle barn, or right into collecting pens.

“Our automatic segregation system allows cows to be separated as they leave the parlour, having been entered into the computer and it’s a pretty accurate system.

“Previously, we had to go up the steps, outside, open a gate, let the cow in, shut the gate... The saving of time and motion is called ergonomics, isn’t it?

“If we have a lot of cows to check over (we are vaccinating cows now more often, and testing them) we can bring them into the collecting yard, drop a gate, separate them or divert them.

“The computerised system recognises a cow’s transponder (an electronic, wearable device tag that acts as a unique digital identifier for each cow) and a gate can close immediately behind her. Cameras will see which way she has gone and react accordingly.”

“The cows’ health is monitored very carefully. We check their activity, when to breed them and their rumination, which is linked to their digestion and thus to the overall health status of the cows.

“We know when a particular cow eats, when she ruminates and their activity.

There is a huge amount of information available, the sorts of things that are not easy to see without this technology.

“[Previously,] we might only have seen something was wrong when we saw a cow lying down in her cubicle and not able to get up. But with this technology, we are alerted to any problems long before then.

“Let’s say we had a virus; we would most probably be alerted to that long before we saw the consequences.

“The metabolism of the cows is very accurately monitored. It lists the time and date that each cow is milked. The time they went through the milking parlour, the amount of milk they gave and the change in amount from day to day. It shows the amount of feed they are allocated, relating to the amount of milk they gave.

“We can also monitor relief milkers at the weekend and how long they take. It is a very complete system and bespoke programme, that is being improved all the time. It is always being updated.

“We used to have three different systems that didn’t tell us a fraction of what we have here. I always knew, when we replaced the parlour, that while the equipment was important, this programme, and the possibility of improving it, was a key element of it.”

The investment must have been considerable?

“Very, very considerable,” he replied. “For the Le Gallais family, this represents a very long-term investment which will keep on giving for decades to come.

“The investment has delivered value and our ability to invest is all down to the reintroduction of the Agricultural Loan Scheme.

“It enables the absolute transformation of the dairy industry – and the growing industry. It is fantastic! It has helped farming turn a corner and there’s a real buzz everywhere.”

This article first appeared in the Jersey Evening Post on Monday 9th February 2026.

You can find out more about the Agricultural Loan Fund **here.**