



# Three farms, one common management tool: Milk recording

**One farm uses a robotic milking system, the second, an automated carousel system, and the third, a milk line. All three base their herd management decisions on milk recording data, a tool that is key to their success.**

**Mario Séguin, agr.**  
Dairy Production Expert –  
Milk Recording and Data  
Management, Valacta

**Julie Baillargeon, agr., M.Sc.**  
Technology Transfer and  
Research Project Coordinator, R&D,  
Valacta

## FERME ÉRILIS, VICTORIAVILLE, CENTRE-DU-QUÉBEC

*79 lactating cows, free-stall housing, two robotic milkers*  
Éric Houle and Lise Normand operate their herd in an old tie-stall barn that was converted to free stalls for robotic milking ten years ago. In addition to using the information collected by the two robotic milkers at each milking, they also rely on milk recording, with 12 tests per year.



## FERME CARIBOU S E N C, TERREBONNE, LANAUDIÈRE

*145 lactating cows, free-stall housing, automated carousel system*

Brothers **Jasmin** and **Pascal Mathieu** take a holistic approach to running their operation, relying on a range of management tools, from group analysis to pedometers, using home-produced Excel spreadsheets to compare production costs. Needless to say, they also use milk recording, with ten tests per year.

## FERME BENLAUR, RIVIÈRE-OUELLE, BAS-ST-LAURENT

*59 lactating cows, tie-stall housing, milk line*

**Pascal Couturier** began farming with his uncle Gaétan Benoit in 2002. Since then, this enthusiastic breeder has quadrupled the farm's quota, which is now at 85 kg F/day, with 59 lactating cows, tested ten times per year. In 2016, he reached the 99th percentile ranking of the Herd Performance Index for the very first time!



## Questions

**What is your first reaction when you receive the reports from the latest milk test?**

**Érilis:** We look at the results for corrected milk, individual cow production and somatic cell count (SCC), as well as the Ketolab reports. The test gives us the tools to decide which cows to cull based on our production quota. We still print some of the reports and refer to them as needed.

**Caribou:** Milk recording is useful for the statistics, to see what's going on in the herd, Transition Cow Index™, urea, GestaLab, etc. Actually, I never look at the Valacta reports! Our dairy production advisor is the one who analyzes and interprets them for us. I always tell him to bring us something new, to try and bill us for as much time as possible, because that means he's working for us during that time! We also use the Valacta Mobile application on a daily basis, because we can look at the data anywhere, at any time, and get the information we need right away.

**Benlaur:** I take a close look at the SCC results and the cows with new infections. I also go over the herd summary and individual cow reports. For the rest, I know my Valacta advisor has a variety of reports and tools that he uses to prepare his visits.

**Can you share some examples that show how milk recording has been particularly beneficial to your operation?**

**Érilis:** At one point, our technician noted that our herd's protein levels were off target. We conveyed that information to the nutritionist, and after a few months of tweaking, the protein level rose from 3.1 to 3.3 per cent.

**Caribou:** Looking over the data and the problems in the barn with our advisor, we could see that there were some issues with the transition period. We implemented a protocol to keep the level of ketone bodies down. That's the element that has had the greatest impact.

**Benlaur:** For us, milk testing is essential for reproduction, among other things. The reproduction data for the herd is rigorously recorded by our technician, and we use many of the indicators from the LacT reports to improve aspects such as our service rate and conception rate. Because we monitor reproduction closely, with judicious support from our veterinarian and our advisor, our calving interval is under 400 days.

**Overall, do you think milk recording is a worthwhile investment?**

**Érilis:** It's worthwhile for us, and we find it gives us affordable access to the test results, which supplement the indicators from the robotic system software.

**Caribou:** The data that milk recording has given us is so valuable that it's actually priceless. Even though we're efficient, we still want to go further. To do that, we need both milk recording and our advisor's expertise.

**Benlaur:** It's hard to quantify the benefits because there are so many ways in which the test data helps us make a profit despite lower milk prices. I don't know how those who don't use milk recording can manage to be efficient in dairy production.