

University of Maryland Gets Milking Robot

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Maryland's Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES) has obtained exclusive North American research and development rights to a prototype robotic milking system developed by the Dutch company Gascoigne-Melotte.

Dr. Robert Kennedy, MAES director, and Mr. Harry Gschwindt, representing the governor's office and the Maryland Department of Economic and Employment Development, signed a letter of intent with Gascoigne-Melotte Jan. 15 in the Netherlands.

Maryland Gov. William Donald Schaefer officially signed the agreement with Mr. Martin Olde Monnikhof, agriculture attache for The Royal Netherlands ambassador for trade promotion and export enhancement, at the annual Maryland Agricultural Dinner, Feb. 1 at Martin's West near Baltimore.

"This agreement initiates a MAES program into state-of-the-art robotics research," said Kennedy. "Although this equipment is designed to be used in the dairy industry, the technology - includ-

ing software, hardware expert systems and biosensors - can eventually be used to benefit other agricultural industries.

"The prototype robotic milking system is a fully automated milking and feeding system that can provide immediate milk production and dairy cow nutritional information without human intervention," Kennedy added.

"This equipment will also facilitate current MAES animal nutrition and behavior research, and we anticipate its use by MAES scientists studying biosensors and expert systems. We also have begun the process of recruiting scientists in the area of robotics."

Gascoigne-Melotte, an international milking equipment and dairy automation manufacturer based in the Netherlands, is supplying MAES with a computerized feeding (ID-2000), milk yield recording and herd information (MR-2000), and management system (MR-2000), and the prototype robotic milking system.

The ID-2000 and MR-2000 are both "stand alone" electronic systems; the FM-2000 integrates the



Robotic milking devices eliminate the need for manual labor, according to researchers. This machine hooks onto the cow's teats all by itself.

entire dairy operation via a personal computer.

After 5 years of development by Gascoigne-Melotte, the pro-

prototype robotic milker is currently being used on a farm at the Dutch experiment station "Waiboerhoeve." Besides "Waiboerhoeve" research, MAES will be the only location in the world where a robotic milking system is in use. MAES, Gascoigne-Melotte and "Waiboerhoeve" will collaborate on several research aspects of robotics and software design.

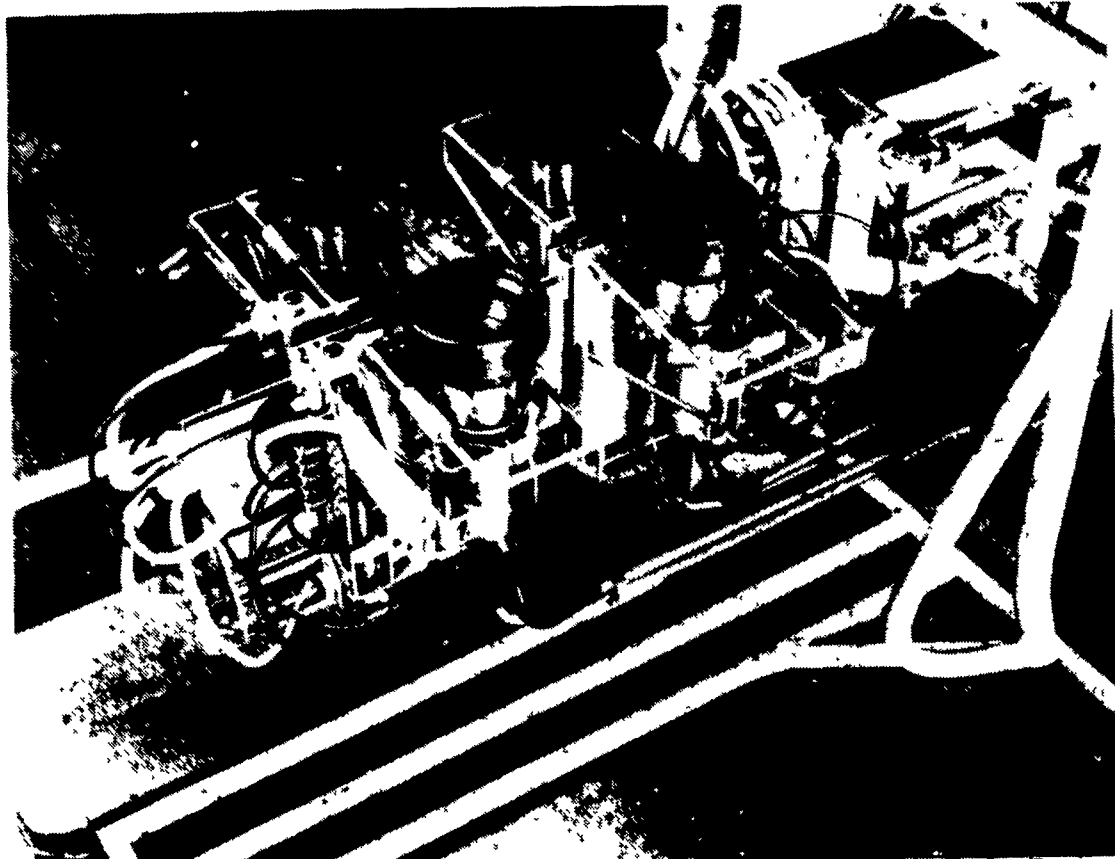
The ID-2000 feeding system being received by MAES uses transponders, small passive transmitters, to identify each cow and make necessary adjustments in feed supply. The MR-2000 system records actual milk yield, and tracks herd information for each animal.

The FM-2000 provides interpretation of the MR-2000 and ID-2000 data, herd status and planning.

The milk yield recording and herd management system comes to MAES after the recent signing of the agreement. This equipment will considerably reduce the time required to get data to MAES researchers.

The prototype robotic milker is expected to be operational by Nov. 1 at the Clarksville Facility of MAES' Central Maryland Research and Education Center.

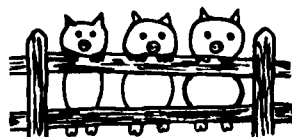
Gascoigne-Melotte is represented in the United States by Clay Equipment Corporation of Cedar Falls, Iowa.



A closer look at the robotic milking machine shows the wires and hoses used to control the device automatically.

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