

# New Technology Highlighted At Lancaster Dairy Days

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*Lancaster Farming Staff*  
 (Lancaster Co.) — Infrared technology and robotic milkers were two of the topics discussed during the first session of Lancaster County Dairy Days, held this Tuesday at the Lancaster County Farm & Home Center.

250 people attended the six-hour meeting, and 23 companies exhibited during the day. The meeting focused on new technology and management practices that can help farmers survive and thrive in the 21st century.

Tuesday's speakers included Leon Russler, Lancaster County Extension Agent; Brad Hilty, owner and chief consultant of PLS Agri-Management Associates; Dr. Ken Bailey, Penn State University dairy marketing specialist; and Brian Reed, DVM, Agricultural Veterinary Associates.

Lancaster County Dairy Extension Agent Glen Shirk led the meeting and showed two videos from the Dairy Stakeholders Association before the morning and afternoon sessions began. The two videos included Milk: It Does The Economy Good and Harnessing The Forces.

This article focuses on both Russler's and Reed's presentation, while additional articles will review discussions led by Hilty and Bailey.

In 1999, facing the worst drought in years, many farmers were forced to drill new wells. The first step in drilling a new well is finding the well, which can be difficult. Russler re-

viewed infrared photography and its capabilities to detect water sources in fields.

The infrared photograph can either be taken by a satellite or an aircraft. Russler recommended taking the picture from an aircraft because you can get a better picture of a smaller area.

Russler showed several pictures of farms taken with infrared technology this summer. The areas that appeared red on the photo identified where the plant cover was the greenest. Breaks in the red indicated areas where the bedrock neared the surface.

"The redder circles in the field wouldn't be a good place to build a foundation for your new barn," said Russler. That's because the red circles point to potential future sinkholes.

"If you live in Lancaster County, you can go to the GIS department and ask them to take the photo images," said Russler. "If you're drilling a well, the infrared photograph is a good thing to start with."

The Geographic Information System (GIS) office will provide an infrared photograph of any farm in Lancaster County for free.

Reed introduced robotic milkers to the group. Robotic milkers have already been operating successfully for four to five years in Europe.

"Today I just want to expose farmers to the idea of a robotic milker," said Reed. "They're not for everyone, but they can and do work."



Speakers at this Tuesday's Lancaster County Dairy Days are from left Brian Reed, Dr. Ken Bailey, Brad Hilty, and Leon Russler with Lancaster County Dairy Extension Agent Glen Shirk.

According to Reed, more than 400 units were in operation in Europe as of six months ago. The first one in Canada was installed in March of 1999.

In the United States, the units are ready to go and waiting for approval from the Food & Drug Administration (FDA). Reed expects the first two models will begin operation in 2000. Those units include the Universal Pro-lion (also referred to as the AMS and the Miros) and the Lely Astronaut.

"Because of the service requirements, the companies will install pockets of robotic milkers so they don't have to travel miles and miles to service one milker," said Reed. Pennsylvania and Wisconsin are the two areas where the robotic milkers are first expected to appear.

The keys to making robotic milkers work on a dairy operation include the following: housing and feeding design must allow access to robot, automatic ID system is crucial, an ad-

vanced monitoring and computer system is necessary, and the farmer's management requirements must increase.

"The robotic milkers work best in smaller herds of between 60 and 120 cows," said Reed. "They'll work best in situation where the farm needs a new milking system anyway. They will work the worst in farms where the parlor efficiency is best, milking three times a day is already occurring, and the cur-

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