

# The Automatic Feeling

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are costly. About \$150,000 per milking box still appears to be a good figure for initial planning. Also, they seem to work best in a situation where the housing system is designed from the ground up, with automatic milking in mind. The upfront investment is not trivial.

• “Its just for the big or little guys, it will never work on a real farm.” This is a technology that both the “big” and “little” guys can “love to hate.” Not surprising, because it represents change and a whole new way of looking at keeping cows. It’s a different way of organizing the dairy enterprise.

• “I wouldn’t trust a machine to milk my cows.” If you are not sure another human can be trusted to milk your cows, you will have the same concern with automatic milking. Any system that is going to free up time and energy for other tasks in operating a dairy must work without constant oversight or checking. If you don’t think you could sleep at night while someone else milks your cows, the same is likely to be true with AMS. AM systems are de-

signed to function 24 hours a day. As one person observed, “If you spend all the time checking up on the robot you will kill yourself.”

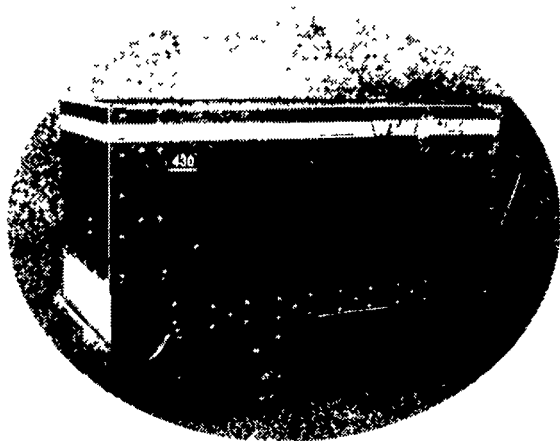
• “They won’t work with my cows” Cows that have udders that are difficult for you to milk will be difficult for the robot to milk. Also, you need to turn over to your cows the responsibility to come to be milked. As one speaker said, “These systems are more democratic, the cow decides when she will be milked.”

“What does this automatic milking really involve and how do I need to change my management and facilities?” If these systems are to be successful in Pennsylvania, farmers will need to evaluate them for what they can do and what they require. Don’t hesitate to learn more about this new approach to organizing a dairy.

Also, feel free to consider them a “gee wiz” thing to talk about or laugh about with the milk truck driver or at the feed store. They won’t be the first innovation that many people were sure would either fail or save the dairy industry, but they are definitely different. Time and the experience of those who choose to risk their resources on these systems will give us the answer. Isn’t that how its always been?.

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