

# Case Study: Pam Malcolm

## Laboratory tests for pregnancy diagnosis in dairy cows

### About Pam

Pam Malcolm has been running Paringa Holsteins, the stud established by her father, since 1982. She milks 200 cows on 700 acres in a split-calving system, employing two young workers. Dairy is her passion: she loves milking and breeding cows. It is important to Pam to reduce stress on her cows and keep them well fed. Pam believes that as Holsteins have been bred to produce more and more milk, it is very important to keep nutrition up to them. She has a mixer wagon and feed pad in her feeding system and she uses a dairy nutritionist to formulate the dairy cow rations.



*Pam Malcolm uses the IDEXX test to confirm the meticulous records she keeps on all her cows*

Pam read about the IDEXX milk pregnancy test in a newsletter from her herd improvement company and now routinely uses it to confirm pregnancies before drying off. She simply identifies which cows should be pregnancy tested on her herd test sheet and the results are usually sent through the next day. Pam will pregnancy test between 1 and 12 'suspicious' cows at each of the monthly herd tests, at a cost of about \$4.50 per test.

This is Pam's only method of pregnancy diagnosis for milking cows. She believes that heat detection is very important and through a combination of meticulous observation and record keeping, she is pretty sure that she knows which cows are in calf. However she does need to be certain that she is not drying off cows that may not be in calf. Pam will select cows for the milk pregnancy test mainly if they are giving a lot of milk towards the end of lactation, suggesting that they might not be in calf. She will also test cows that have been problematic to get in calf, as she likes to confirm the situation with these cows too.

As an example, Pam's top milk cow had produced 16,000 litres in her last lactation and was still producing 40 litres per day in her ninth herd test of the year. This cow could easily milk for another 6-7 months at 30-40 litres per day. Drying this cow off without a confirmed pregnancy would mean a significant loss of income and it would still cost to feed the cow.

The test results report cows as either pregnant, not pregnant or re-test, although in Pam's experience she hasn't had to re-test many cows. This may be because she only tests cows that should be at least 60 days pregnant. The IDEXX test is most accurate after 60 days from insemination. Any cows that are not pregnant at testing and which have not been seen cycling are put into a synchrony program to get them joined. Pam also uses the vet to occasionally pregnancy test dry cows and to check out any problem cows that are too good to cull.

In fact, Pam is full of praise for her vet but finds that calling him out to pregnancy test just a few cows is too expensive. It is another job to do on the farm and holding the cows back upsets them, resulting in a drop in milk production.

Pam says that the main reason she uses the milk pregnancy test is the ease of it. She has found it to be very accurate, and there is less stress on the cow and on the people. As Pam says, 'the cow doesn't even know she is being pregnancy tested.'

**'The cow doesn't even know she is being pregnancy tested.'**



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