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LEARNING FROM PIONEERS

POSTMA DAIRIES IN CALIFORNIA AND ANCALI IN CHILE SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH MILKING ROBOTS

Greetings, dairy enthusiasts! We are excited to share with you the stories and experiences of two large dairies that transitioned from conventional to automatic milking systems (AMS). Pete Postma and Sons dairies was the first dairy in California to invest in milking robots. In the southern Hemisphere, a Chilean dairy farm owned by Agrícola Ancali became the largest robotic farm in the world after installing AMS units that milk 2000 cows/day (cont. page 3).

DAIRY TECH
NEWSLETTER

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UPDATE ON THE AMS PROJECT

BY FERNANDA FERREIRA

This newsletter is part of a collaboration between UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, UC Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the University of Minnesota. This project is funded by the California Dairy Research Foundation. Our objective is to identify opportunities and risks of implementing AMS in large dairies. We are reviewing research published on this topic for the last 20 years, and interviewing large dairy farmers that are currently milking all or part of their cows in milking robots. We had the opportunity to talk to many farmers, and in this issue of our newsletter, we will share the stories of Postma dairies in California, and the Ancali dairy in Chile. Stay tuned for the next updates!



YOU CAN COLLABORATE!

We need your help with this project!

We would love to hear from dairy farmers, veterinarians, nutritionists, robot dealers, or consultants who have been working with AMS. If you know a large dairy that has at least 7 AMS units or is implementing AMS, please contact us and learn how you can collaborate with us on this project.

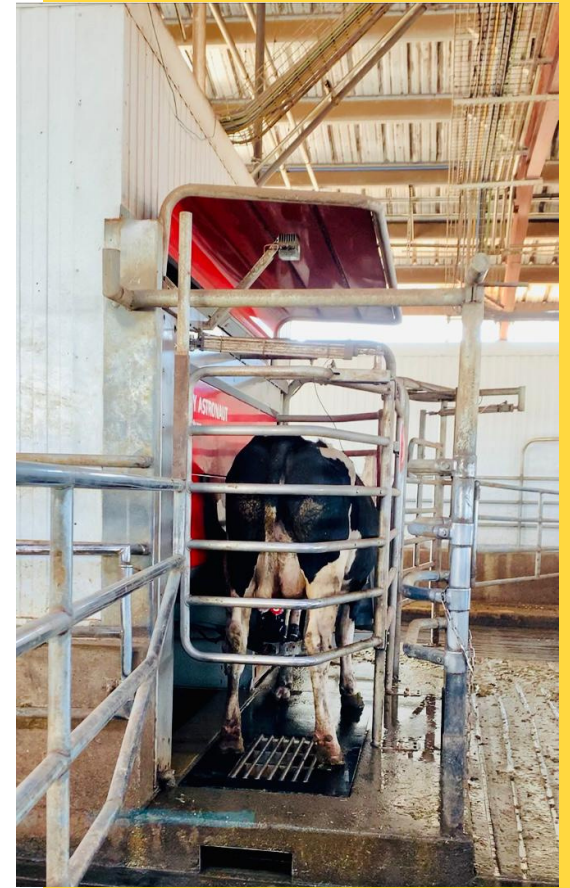
fcferreira@ucdavis.edu

POSTMA DAIRIES - FIRST ROBOTS INSTALLED IN CA

BY CAMILA LAGE

The Postma Dairies, located in Modesto, California, are owned and managed by Pete Postma and his sons, Jonathon and Jack Postma. In November 2020, we visited the dairy and talked to Jonathon about their story. We also learned about the challenges they faced during the transitioning process and their satisfaction with their current AMS.

The Postmas began looking into milking robots after deciding on investing in a new milking barn. They discussed their ideas with representatives of milking robots and traveled all over the country to visit farms with different robotic systems. They decided to work with Lely and had their first AMS installed in 2017. This was the first milking robot installed in California. In 2018, they were already milking 600 cows in 10 robots, and expanding the herd milked on the AMS is part of their plans.



"I WAS TRYING TO SEE 10 YEARS DOWN THE ROAD"

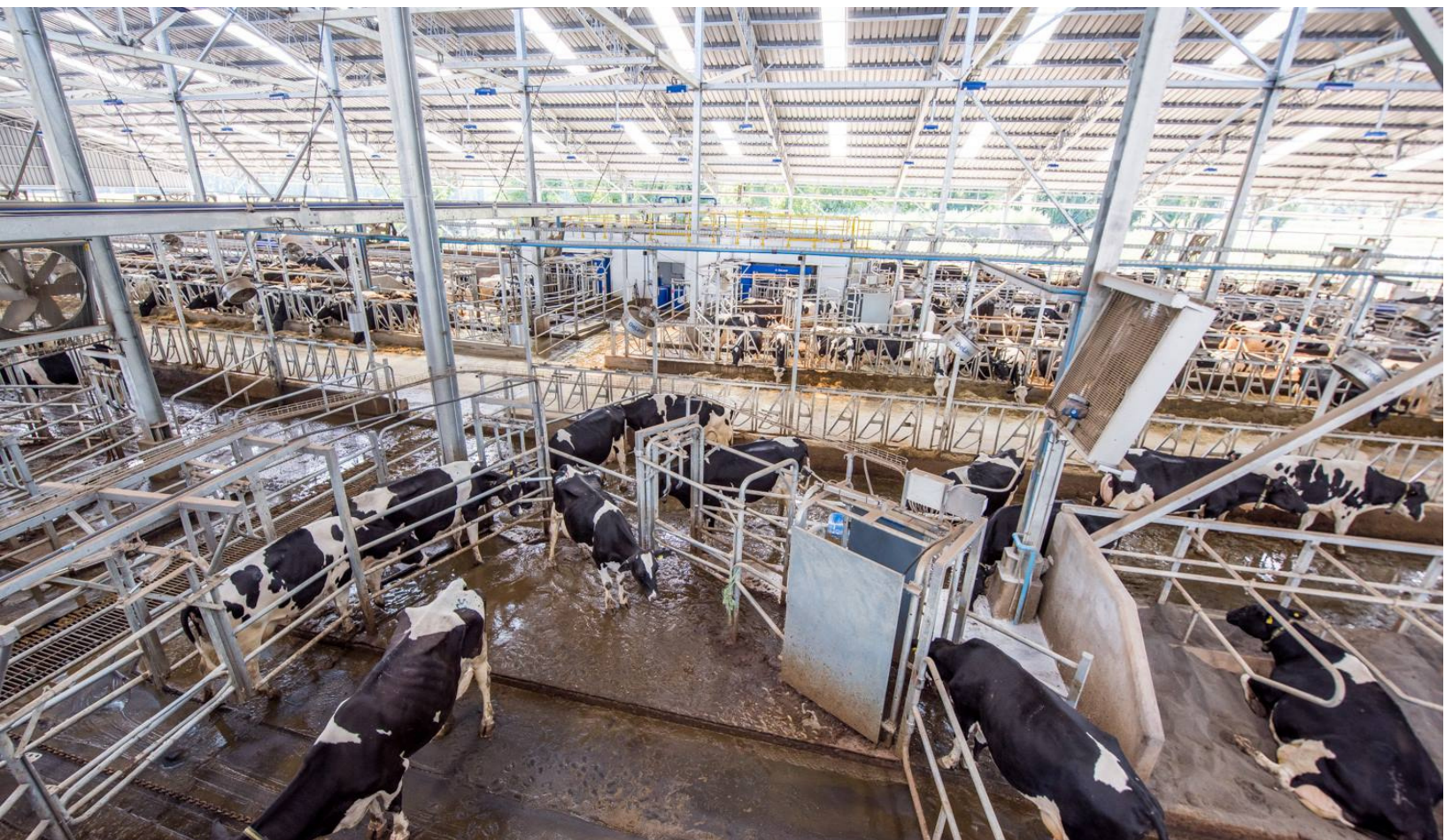
According to Jon, the main reason why he decided to work with AMS was the improvement in cow welfare. While visiting farms, he could see how happier, less stressed, and more productive the cows were. He believes that the increase in cow longevity is an important aspect of milking robots. We asked Jon about his experience with labor-savings, and how well their employees adapted to the new system. Although Postma Dairies still have cows being milked in a herrinbone parlor and some of their employees work for both systems, he believes that a full robotic farm milking 1,200 cows could be managed by 4 full-time employees, which is 1 person/300 cows. He also thinks everyone can learn how to work with robots and no special skills would be required. Just a calm and respectful person is necessary to optimize the cow management in the robot barn.

THE VIEW OF A GIANT: AGRICOLA ANCALI - CHILE

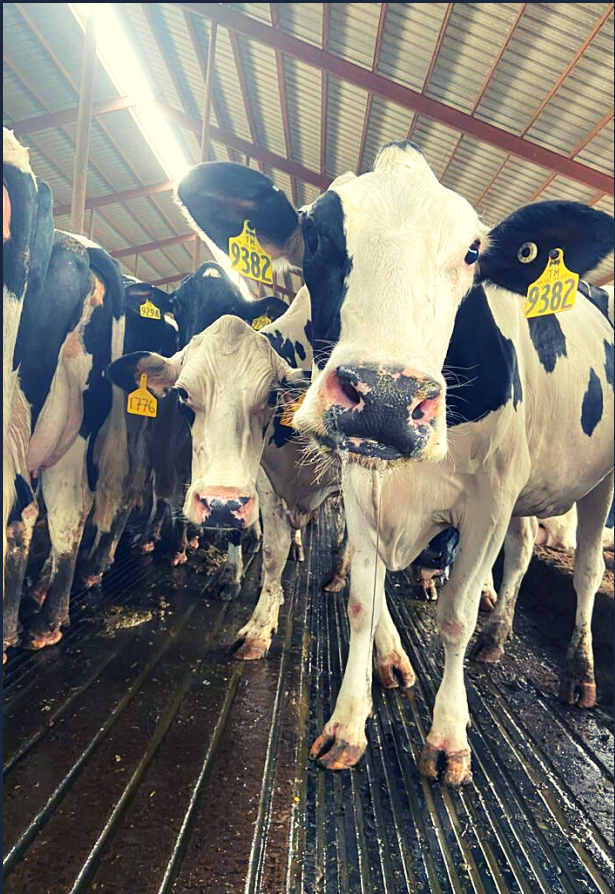
BY CAMILA LAGE

Starting in 2014, Agrícola Ancali gradually implemented their AMS project. With a production system very similar to the large dairies in California, their process of milking cows in AMS started with the installation of 16 DeLaval VMS milking 920 cows. In the first phase, they were able to observe a 10% increase in production (compared to their 3x milkings in a rotary parlor), with the additional perceived benefit of better animal welfare. They decided to expand the project, and currently, they milk 4,385 cows in 72 robots under a DeLaval guided flow system, becoming the largest robotic farm in the world. We had the opportunity to talk to Odrióm Escobar, herd manager of Ancali, who shared their story and farm routine with us. Odrióm highlighted that employee training was a key factor to make the system work properly. **Fun fact: Agrícola Ancali is located in a city called Los Ángeles, in Chile. With a free stall system aiming at maximum productivity and animal welfare, Odrióm believes their experience would be valuable to Californian producers thinking of transitioning to a milking robot system.**

**AGRICOLA ANCALI
CURRENTLY MILKS
4,385 COWS IN 72
ROBOTS AND IT IS
THE LARGEST
ROBOTIC FARM IN
THE WORLD**



Usually, the decision of adopting an AMS comes after the necessity of updating the milking parlor. The main factors guiding this decision are a possible decrease in labor, improving cow longevity and animal welfare, and increasing the level of technology on the farm. All of which are attractive to the new generation of dairy farmers. For instance, Odrióm (Ancali) reported a reduction of 40% in the number of full-time employees, but the process was gradual. Also, AMS allows farmers to grow the herd in modules, which facilitates expansion. Jon and Odrióm reported improvements in cow health and reproductive management and a reduction in culling rates. However, both acknowledge that working with AMS requires a mindset change from owners and employees. The benefits observed are due to a combination of improvements in the barn, management, and the use of robots. When asked if they would do something different if installing AMS today, more intensive employee training and slight changes in barn design were the two things both farmers mentioned. Overall, they are satisfied with their AMS and looking forward to adding new technologies to their dairies.



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