

FARMER FEEDBACK

SCOTT MURPHY



470 COWS



WAIKATO



“By combining my Herd-i body condition scoring data with the information I already have, I can make these incredibly important decisions with a lot more confidence.”

Source: Scott Murphy

Originally from the UK, Scott Murphy has built a career in New Zealand's dairy industry over the past 20 years. Now based near Waharoa in the Waikato, he operates a 470-cow Friesian crossbred herd on 150 effective hectares in a system 2, mostly grass-based farming system. Last season marked a major milestone when he purchased the herd and transitioned into a 50/50 sharemilking arrangement on the same farm he had been contract milking on for several years.

Day-to-day operations are run by Scott alongside one full-time staff member, with a strong emphasis on efficiency, consistency, and timely decision-making. In a low-input, pasture-focused system, where margins are tightly linked to performance and timing, having clear, reliable information to guide decisions has become increasingly important.

For Scott, that is where Herd-i has started to play a growing role in his farming toolkit. Early on in his use of the technology, Scott describes it as something he was still getting his head around, particularly around how best to

integrate different streams of information into his decision-making process. Like many farmers adopting new data tools, the early stages involved a period of learning and adjustment. As he became more familiar with the system, Scott began thinking differently about how he could use the information going forward, particularly around key seasonal events. For me, the biggest focus for this season has been dry-off decisions,” he says. “Being able to see which cows have dropped condition and make those calls earlier.”

Scott has taken a practical, data-driven approach to making the most of the information available to him he uses each cow's Herd-i body condition score to guide his dry-off decisions with greater precision. Factoring in the general rule of thumb that it takes around 30 days to achieve a one-point increase in body condition score, Scott can map out a clear, individualised plan for each cow.

This approach removes much of the guesswork and replaces it with an evidence-based process.

This ensures cows are dried off at the right time to both protect condition and maximise days in milk where possible, without compromising the start to next season.

In a grass-based system where feed is carefully managed, dry-off decisions become especially critical. Each call carries real weight, as identifying cows that are no longer maintaining condition or contributing efficiently allows feed to be redirected where it will deliver the greatest return.

“If a cow has dropped condition over summer, you can start thinking about whether she should be dried off earlier,” Scott explains. “Rather than pushing her on when she's not really benefiting from it.”

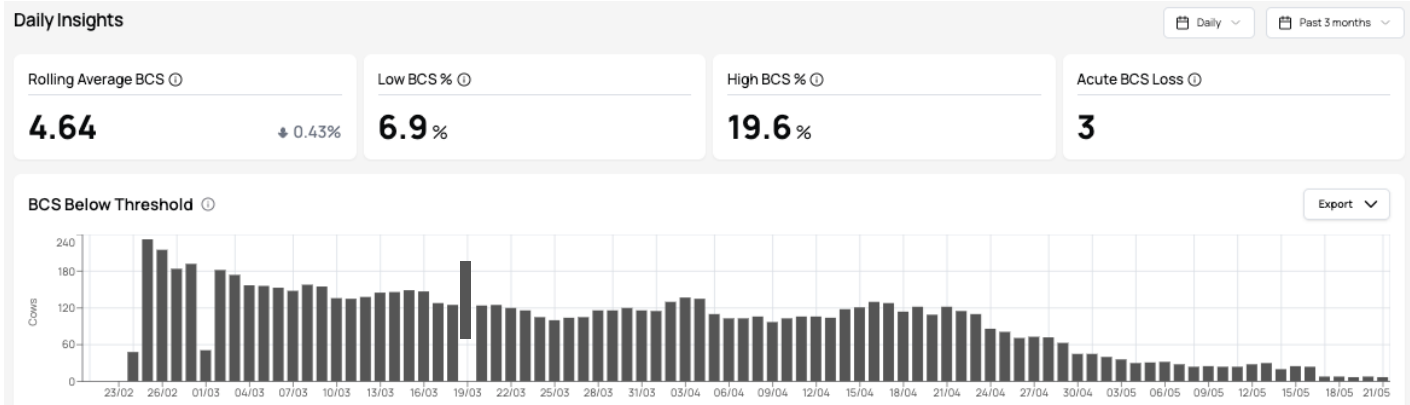
With a limited-input, grass-based system, Scott notes that day-to-day intervention at an individual cow level is more constrained than in some other systems, particularly when it comes to feeding without separating animals into separate mobs. Therefore, tools that provide clearer visibility of what is happening at individual cow levels have become especially useful.

He adds that while day-to-day individual intervention is limited, the key value comes from timing.

“You can look back at the Herd-i videos and go, that's the one we flagged,” he says. “It just helps confirm you're making the right call.”



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“Over calving it’s good to identify those cows that lose condition more quickly and then have the data to act promptly so we can give them the best chance of recovery leading into mating.” Being able to identify those cows earlier, rather than relying purely on visual observation, is something Scott sees as a key advantage.

“And so, by combining my Herd-i body condition scoring data with the information I already have, I can make these incredibly important decisions with a lot more confidence.”

He also notes that this approach can help maximise days in milk for cows that are performing well, while ensuring others are not being overfed unnecessarily.

“You can end up feeding cows that don’t really need it,” he says. “Whereas you could be putting that feed into cows that are struggling to gain condition or are underperforming.”

While still early in his journey with Herd-i, Scott already sees it as a valuable addition to his farming operation, particularly in terms of supporting confidence in decision-making and providing another layer of insight into herd performance. “Ultimately it just helps you make better calls,” he says. “And in this system, that’s what it comes down to.”

Another key benefit Scott has identified is the ability to validate what he is seeing on farm with additional layers of data, particularly when it comes to body condition and cow health trends.

“There were a few cows that were struggling for whatever reason,” he explains. “And you could see that on our wearables CowManager as well.” He also notes that having multiple data points helps build confidence in decision-making, especially when different systems align. This cross-referencing between systems has been particularly useful in identifying cows that may not stand out immediately in the shed but are beginning to show subtle changes.

He also highlights the value of video alongside data, particularly when trying to understand behavioural changes or physical condition.

That combination of visual confirmation and data insight has helped Scott make more confident decisions about which cows require attention “You can look back at the Herd-i videos and go, that’s the one we flagged,” he says. “It just helps confirm you’re making the right call.”

Scott explains that Herd-i is also useful for identifying behavioural changes such as; “cows coming into milking at a completely different time than usual, such as in the last row when she’s usually in the first row as each day’s reading is time stamped.”

For Scott, the motivation to bring technology like Herd-i into his system goes beyond production alone. As a husband and father to a young family, having confidence in the day-to-day running of the farm matters just as much as the results themselves.

Tools that support clearer, data-driven decisions, especially during high-pressure periods like calving, mating, and dry-off, help remove uncertainty and reduce the mental load that often comes with those calls.

Looking ahead, that peace of mind is where he sees even greater value. By having reliable information at both his and his team’s fingertips, Scott knows the right decisions are being made, even when he’s not there.

Over time, it’s a shift that will give him the confidence to step off-farm and spend more time with his family, knowing his staff have everything they need to keep things on track and ensure nothing slips through the cracks.

