



Keeping cows under cover

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Patetonga farmers Peter and Mandy Paterson introduced a Herdhome to their farming system to ensure they were environmentally compliant. And the payback has exceeded their expectations according to Peter, pictured.

Milking on a peat platform north of Morrinsville in the Waikato, their original two sawdust standoff pads had been picked up by the Waikato Regional Council during a helicopter surveillance flight.

The Patersons had been looking seriously at an irrigation system to grow more feed after some horrendous droughts, then because of the pressure from council, decided to invest in a Herdhome.

They built the 200-cow shelter last year and 18 months on the benefits have been considerable.

They've not only dropped cow numbers by 10 but also increased production. Milking on a 79.5ha effective platform, they now milk 215 cows and production has moved up from 85,000kg milksolids (MS) to 89,999kg MS with the Herdhome for just one third of the season, to 102,000kg MS in the first full season with the shelter.

The Herdhome has solved the compliance problem of standing the cows off paddocks during wet periods, but it's also used every

day during the year, not just on wet days, which has given the Patersons more control over their grass residuals.

"Where the Herdhome comes in, if you want to grow grass it's about residuals, not over-grazing," Peter said.

"We control our residuals by what time we take the cows off the paddock. It's the old story, grass grows grass. We grew an extra tonne of grass/ha last year – granted it was a good season."

In the second round last season they noticed they were getting short of grass.

"The cows were chewing the grass right down," Mandy said.

They pulled them off at 10am into the Herdhome and brought in 20t of palm kernel to fill the gap.

"By pulling them off early and leaving that extra leaf of grass, within about 10 days we turned the farm around. It didn't take long to fix the problem."

Three weeks later they had started to shut up silage paddocks when nobody else was, Peter said.

The effluent is caught underneath the slats of the Herdhome and once a month the liquid is vacuum sucked out and sprayed over the pasture. Once a year contractors are brought in to spread the solid effluent onto maize paddocks.

"We had a 25t/ha crop which was quite impressive. It was one of the best crops in the area by a long way.

"The value of the effluent was tested and the nutrient value was phenomenal, because there's no water."

Because of the clear roof the effluent doesn't stink even though it sits there for a year, Peter said. And the Herdhome is a pleasant environment year-round.

Popular place

During winter, cows go onto paddocks after milking and come back into the Herdhome about 1pm, while in summer they go to the paddock after milking and come in between 10 and 11am. The key is to ensure the cows are in the Herdhome before the temperature gets too high, Peter said, as they won't be able to cool down once they're hot.

The cows don't want to go out in the

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afternoons during summer – they're happy where they are.

"With the shade cloth, the temperature is about 10degC less than outside. I'd be happy to sit in there with a box of beer.

"The cows are happy – their stress levels and somatic cell counts (SCC) have dropped dramatically."

The herd SCC average has dropped by 150,000, from 250,000 to 100,000.

The stress level applies to Peter and

Mandy too, who can now relax on winter nights knowing they are not losing calves in the drains which Mandy said they were "sick of".

"It's nice when you're lying in bed in a storm and you know all the girls are tucked up in the Herdhome."

There's no having to go down the back of the farm to check the springers in the middle of the night. They're easy to spot when the cows are feeding in the Herdhome, with all their rear ends facing the middle. It takes a simple walk down the line to spot the springers and draft

them out.

All the little things add up, Peter said.

"When the cows are warm, they're not using energy to keep warm so they keep their bodyweight. You use less fuel, there's less wear and tear on your races. It's quicker because the cows are right there, you don't damage your paddocks, you get 98% feed utilisation. "It's the Rolls Royce of shelters."



Moving the cows into their HerdHome shelter.