

Southland dairy farmer says Lely Juno feed pusher makes sense, saves dollars

Southland dairy farmer Alfons Zeestraten keeps a close eye on the inputs and outputs of his operation. He says the numbers tell him his Lely Juno feed pushers boosted milk production and cut costs to such an extent that they paid for themselves in a single year.

The Zeestraten family and their 11 staff milk 2000 cows on three farms near Winton.

Each farm carries about 650 cows. Two of the farms have rotary milking sheds, one has a Herringbone shed, and all of them have a wintering barn.

“The cows are indoors for about 90 days a year,” Alfons says. “During that time we prepare a silage mix for them, and we use the Juno pusher to ensure they have access to feed at all times.

“We programme the feed pusher to make a circuit every 90 minutes. Without the Juno we would either have to move the feed by hand or with a tractor and implement.

“Not only does it place the silage in front of the cows around the clock, it encourages them to eat more because it has a sound that they recognise. When they consume more they produce more, so we gain through both lower costs and higher output.”

Alfons and wife Gea came to Southland from Holland 13 years ago specifically to go dairy farming. Today two of their children, Stefan (21) and Susanne (19), work in the family business while youngest son Leon (10) is still at school.

From a dairy background, the Zeestratens have adopted some European techniques. They use free stall barns to maintain the health and production of their herd during the coldest part of the year, and two years ago they bought their three Lely Juno feed pushers.

The Juno automatically drives itself around the feeding alley by following the feeding rail. It contains a 500kg concrete block that gives it the mass necessary to push the forage towards the rail without disturbing the cows.

The Juno requires no additional facilities, and the Zeestratens did not have to modify their barns at all to accommodate theirs. It took Lely Center™ Invercargill less than a day to install

and programme them.

“We have programmed the Juno to make 16 passes in 24 hours. It runs off a 12 volt battery, and after every pass it returns to its charger.

“We have even programmed it so twice a day it parks itself outside the barn. This allows the silage wagon to enter the barn to unload the feed. If the tractor driver needs to feed out at a different time we can manually steer walk the Juno or steer it by remote control out of the way.”

With the Lely Juno, cows receive an equal mixture day and night. Because it constantly makes passes, low ranking cows can also access fresh feed after high ranking cows have eaten their ration.

The Zeestratens grow their own grass and a small amount of cereal for pit silage. They supplement it with grain and minerals to prepare the cows’ winter ration.

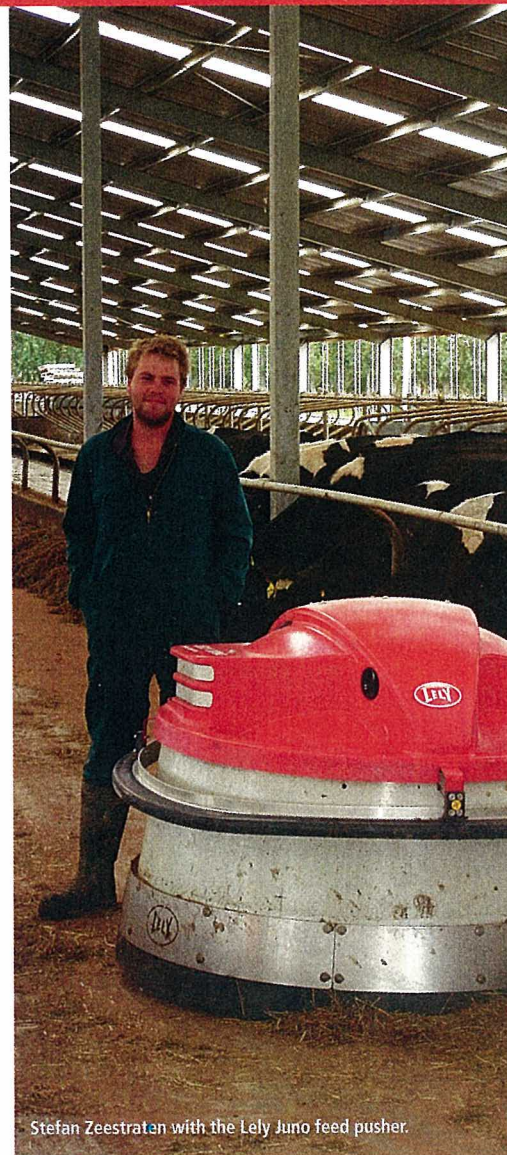
Since adding the feed pusher to the operation, the Zeestratens’ cows have increased production by approximately 0.1 kg per day. Alfons estimates this amounts to an additional 10 kg of milk solids per head.

If you multiply that by 650 cows over the 90 days they are in the barns, and add in the savings in terms of labour, fuel, and machine time, the numbers show each Juno paid for itself in a year.

This past winter Southland had a massive snowfall. It did not phase the Zeestratens’ animals, however, because they were tucked up nice and warm in their barns. While Alfons has no intention of housing his herd in the barn year-round, he is considering moving them indoors during the daytime of the hottest summer days.

“Using the barns ticks all the four boxes of good farming. It enhances the welfare of our animals, it is sustainable for the environment, it creates good working conditions, and it boosts profitability,” he says.

The family says the Juno has paid for itself in a single year.



Stefan Zeestraten with the Lely Juno feed pusher.