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# Making Herd Check Error-Proof with RFID

WLIC has been a long time provider of information about how electronic animal identification can benefit livestock producers. Producers are well aware of the value of animal identification for meeting traceability needs beyond the farm, however in this article we would like to focus your attention on the integration of electronic identification with routine herd check.

When you think of herd check, you usually cringe. It's the one day on the farm where things are bound

to go wrong whether it's the tractor breaking down, a cow going down, a parlor malfunction, or even just running behind by an hour, or three. Not only that, but the vet is on the way and you have about 20 minutes to be armed with clipboards, lists of the cows you need, pens and pencils, and of course get the cows locked up. While some of those problems can't be helped, eliminating some of the unnecessary paperwork and incorporating RFID technology into your herd check can increase your

efficiency on that already difficult day. And Chuck Ripp at Ripp's Dairy Valley LLC in Dane, Wisconsin, has done just that.

After getting started with free 840 RFID tags on a pilot program through Wisconsin Livestock Identification Consortium (WLIC), Ripp's decided to get their first RFID reader. While looking for the best way to avoid missing cows and getting a better ID record during herd check, the farm also decided to purchase a handheld



that would work with the RFID reader. “We really wanted to get more information out in the freestalls,” said Ripp.

Today, the Ripp’s are able to pre-load the RFID reader and handheld so that they have important herd health data right at their fingertips, even out in the freestall barn. At the scan of one of their Allflex 840 tags distributed by Holstein USA, Ripp is able to pull up data relevant to the herd check. When WLIC staff members visited the farm, the vet was out doing pregnancy checks so after Ripp scanned a tag, the handheld would pull up relevant data such as breeding date and if that cow needed to be pregnancy checked or not. Once the vet determined the status of the cow, Ripp was able to record if the cow was pregnant or not and if it was a bull or heifer via his handheld. At the end of the day, Ripp is able to easily upload all of the data back into DairyComp 305.



### **Main Benefits** seen by use of RFID during herd check at Ripp’s Dairy Valley, LLC:

1. “You don’t miss cows,” said Ripp. “And, the readers right there to tell you why you need that particular animal.” Ripp also noted that the handheld can identify if cows aren’t

in the pen they are supposed to be in, cross checking where the cow is scanned with what is pre-loaded in the handheld.

2. “Instead of taking papers and sorting through and recording everything by hand, I can just set the handheld in its cradle and everything is transferred into my computer,” said Ripp. “I can print out reports and instantly see how herd check went that day.”

### **Main Concerns** with RFID use during herd check:

1. “You have to make sure the battery is charged, and if it isn’t it will probably die and the handheld may freeze up,” said Ripp. He also noted that weather may cause issues when you’re working with high-tech equipment, but that you would have the same issues using a paper copy as well.

2. Another concern Ripp noted was that the equipment (handheld and reader) do get heavy after walking through and doing hundreds of animals.

As for the future of RFID technology at Ripp’s Dairy Valley LLC, Ripp says, “We will continue to put the tags in and hope that we can implement RFID in our parlor. Right now we need to have testing done in the parlor for interference.”

But Ripp also sees RFID in a much bigger industry-wide perspective. “I wish everyone were on the same page with this so we could gather animal movements,” said Ripp. “If we were ever to have a disease outbreak we could quickly quarantine effected animals and co-mingled animals rather than shut down an entire industry. I just hope something bad doesn’t have to happen before people realize this is a good thing.”



**For more information on implementing RFID in your herd visit [wiid.org](http://wiid.org).**