



Introducing heifers to robotic milkers prior to calving - Part 2

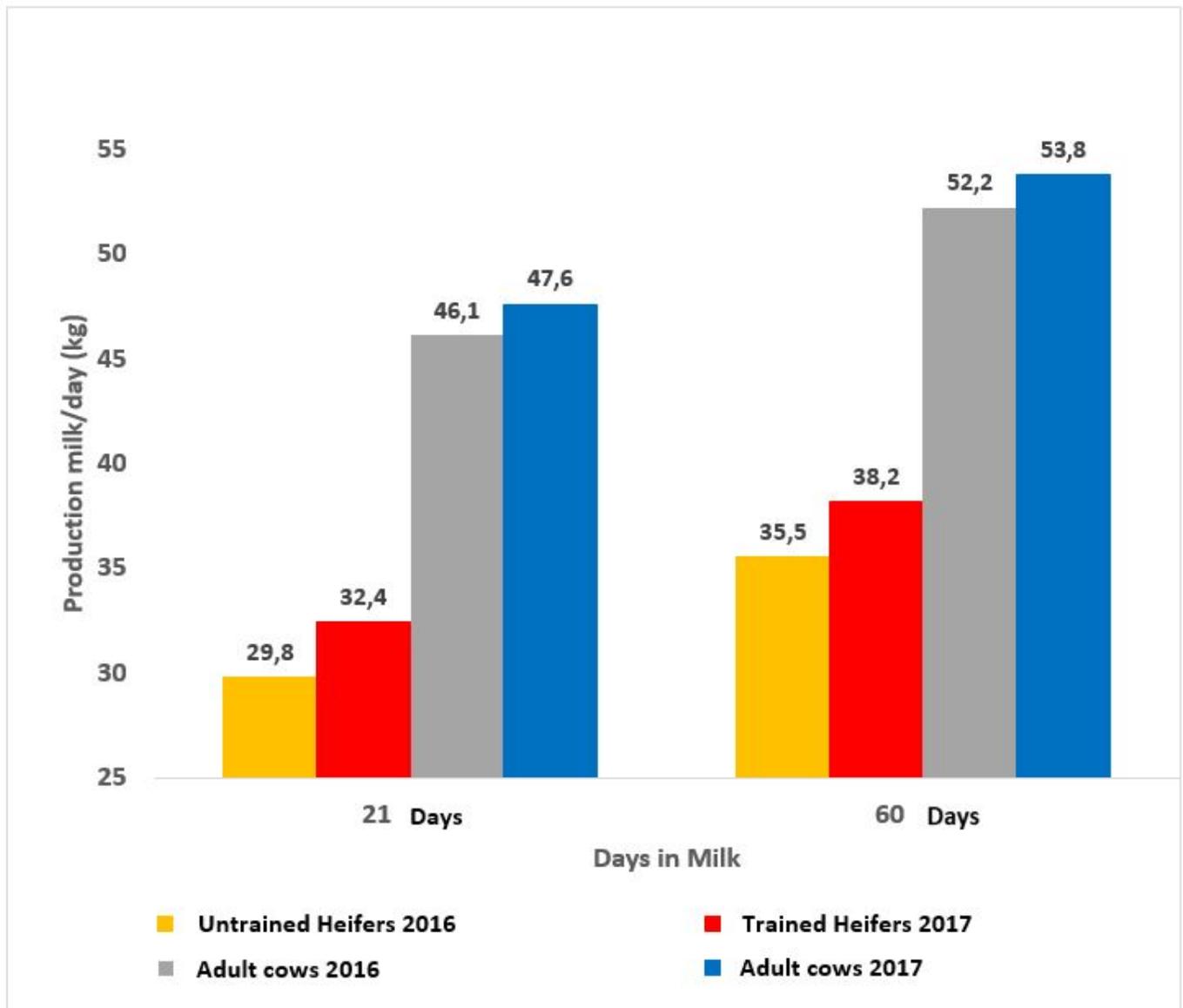
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In my [previous article](#), we established a link between training heifers on a robot before calving and an increased number of milkings for primiparous cows at the start of lactation (graph 1). More milkings is one thing, but does more milkings necessarily mean more milk production?

Do trained heifers produce more milk?

The same study by J. M. Siewert and his associates at the University of Minnesota (2019) also made further comparisons. The data from 2016, a period during which the heifers had not been trained on the robot before calving, was compared to the data from May to November 2017, where all of the heifers had been trained. Data was also compiled for the same periods from cows on their second lactation or more to provide a basis for comparison. Production was compared at 21 and 60 days in milk for all groups. These production results are illustrated in Graph 1 below.

Graph 1. The Effect of Pre-calving Robot Training for Heifers on Milk Production.



According to the results illustrated in Graph 1, the findings are comparable at 21 days in milk and at 60 days in milk. In fact, primiparous milk production showed significant improvement in the trained animals, with an average of + 2.6 kg of milk. Adult cows in the second year of testing also showed an increase of 1.5 kg, on average.

We can therefore conclude that introducing heifers to robotic milkers pre-calving is a strategy that is worth the effort. Findings show an average gain of 1.1 kg above the average increase for adult cows. If we

extrapolate, this means training can result in an additional 250 – 300 kg on a heifer's annual production.

Helpful tips for heifer training

Yes, training heifers on the robot before calving is profitable, but it is important to do it BEFORE the calving preparation period begins. Bringing the animal to the robot daily could run the risk of reducing ration intake. You will not need to serve a lot of concentrates; 1-2 kg per day is plenty.

A feeding station behind the robot to distribute concentrates to cows in the pre-calving period can also be convenient to help heifers get used to receiving concentrates from a distributor before calving. In this case, you can introduce the heifers a few days in advance in the pre-calving cow group to get used to the feeding station.

In summary

Pre-calving robot training for heifers can bring about the following results:

- Increase in the number of milkings
- Increase in milk production
- Less heifers that fall behind and need to be driven through the robot
- Improved labour efficiency

It is well worth the time!



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A graduate in agronomy from Université Laval, Gervais has over 22 years of experience in dairy cattle feeding before joining our team. As an expert in dairy production - milking robots, he actively contributes as a consultant and author to the advancement of the dairy production industry.