

Farmers' verdict: Automatic feeders

When investing in automatic milk feeders, genuine farmer feedback makes all the difference. British Dairying and Kingshay reveal the results from our second 'Tried and Tested' review. So, what do they show?

Making the right choice when it comes to dairy farming equipment isn't just about cost, it is about confidence. "Knowing that other farmers have had positive experiences with a product helps build trust," explains Sarah Bolt, Technical Knowledge Exchange Manager at Kingshay. "It reassures farmers that they are not taking a leap in the dark and that they are making a smart, informed decision."

For years, Kingshay's Tried and Tested reports have been a go-to resource for farmers seeking clear, unbiased insights. Often likened to the 'Which? Magazine' of the dairy world, these reports dig deep into real world performance through comprehensive farmer surveys.

From evaluating cow wearable technology (see British Dairying May 2025 pp28 to 30) to reviewing calf jackets and hoof blocks, this evidence-led approach continues to support farmers in making well-founded choices that suit their specific needs.

The second British Dairying / Kingshay Tried and Tested survey focused on automatic milk feeders for calves. And 28 farmers, representing a variety of herd sizes and farming

systems, provided in-depth feedback. Their responses offer a valuable and practical insight into how automatic milk feeders are currently being used in calf-rearing operations, along with candid evaluations of satisfaction, reliability, ease of use, and perceptions of performance and health outcomes.

User experience

There are approximately 17 automatic milk feeder models from 10 different brands currently available in the UK market. Of these, 10 systems were evaluated in this survey, offering a wide range of user experiences across various farming operations. The most-reviewed system was Forster Technik, followed by CalfExpert by Holm & Laue, and Urban Alma Pro.

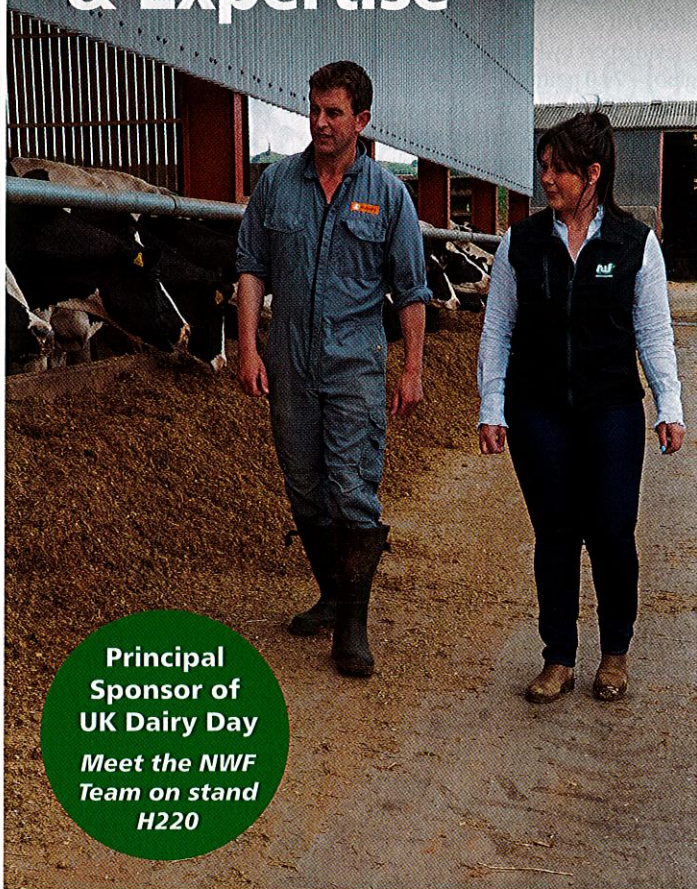
This broad dataset enables meaningful comparisons between leading systems. To ensure the rankings remain accurate and reliable, only systems with three or more reviews were included in the final leaderboard. However, feedback for systems with fewer responses is still available in the data table for those interested in a more detailed view.

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The survey took in farmers' views of automatic milk feeders for calves

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Based on the survey results, the following systems came out on top:

- Urban Alma Pro – 71.3 points out of 100
- CalfExpert by Holm & Laue (Calf Igloo) – 71.0 points
- Forster Technik – 69.8 points

All three brands performed strongly, with results indicating high levels of farmer satisfaction and no single brand significantly outperforming the others. Notably, 86% of respondents said they would recommend their feeder system to others, and 82% rated their system as either good or very good value for money. These are strong endorsements for the current range of automatic calf milk feeders on the market.

All three systems received strong ratings for their feeding programmes, with Forster Technik slightly ahead at 4.6/5, followed by CalfExpert at 4.5 and Urban Alma Pro at 4.0. However, when specific feeding-related features were considered, like automated feeding and weaning programmes, and the ability to design calf-specific feeding curves, the rankings shifted. Urban Alma Pro took the lead, largely due to its higher score in the customisation of feeding curves, an area where it



Some 82% of respondents observed an overall improvement in calf health

outperformed both Forster Technik and CalfExpert.

In terms of data access and accuracy, Urban Alma Pro again came out on top, scoring 4.7/5 for ease of viewing data and 4.3 for accuracy. This suggests a particularly user-friendly interface. However,

its score dropped when it came to ease of cleaning, particularly external cleaning, where CalfExpert and Forster Technik performed more consistently.

One common weakness across all three systems was the availability and usability of the online platforms and

mobile apps. Mobile app ratings were particularly low for both Urban Alma Pro and Forster Technik, indicating room for significant improvement in digital functionality.

Indeed, 50% of users reported not using the device website, and up to 43% didn't use the mobile app, suggesting an area for potential training.

Despite some variability in individual features, overall



Urban Alma Pro
CalfExpert by Holm & Laue
Forster Technik

- Best rated "Value for money" - Forster Technik
- Best rated "Feeding related features" - Urban Alma Pro
- Best rated "Ease to view and accuracy of data" - Urban Alma Pro
- Best rated "Ease of cleaning" - CalfExpert
- Best rated "Website & App" - CalfExpert
- Best rated "Technical support & training provided" - Urban Alma Pro & Forster Technik

*Best rated product where 3 or more reviews were received

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recommendation scores were strong. Forster Technik received the highest rating at 4.6/5, indicating a high level of trust and satisfaction among users. Ratings for value for money, technical support, and training were also positive across the board, with Urban Alma Pro slightly ahead in overall satisfaction.

The data highlights that while all three systems offer solid core functionality, differences emerge in areas like cleaning ease, mobile usability, and feeding programme customisation. These factors could influence purchasing decisions depending on farm priorities and technical preferences.

"Computerised calf feeders offer a range of benefits, particularly in improving labour efficiency and calf performance," says Sarah. "By reducing the need for manual feeding, these systems free up valuable time for essential tasks like health monitoring and weighing, ultimately supporting better rearing outcomes." So how did this play out in the survey?

Labour efficiency

Some 93% of farmers reported improved time efficiency after installing an automatic milk feeder. Notably, 61% cited a significant improvement across all calf-rearing tasks.

Calf health

When it came to calf health, 82% of respondents observed an overall improvement. However, when examining specific health issues, the impact was more variable:

- 61% reported a reduction in respiratory disease incidence, while 7% noted a worsening.
- 68% saw improvements in scours, though 14% experienced an increase in cases.

Growth rates

Growth performance was one of the most consistently positive outcomes reported.

- 89% of farmers observed improved growth rates in their calves, and notably, none reported any decline.
- This improvement may be linked

IMPACT since using their automatic milk feeder, farmers reported...

Moderate improvement in:

- Time efficiency feeding calves
- Labour / time for all calf rearing duties
- Better feeding consistency
- Growth rates

A little improvement in:

- Incidence of scour
- Incidence of respiratory disease
- Overall calf health

to enhanced feeding consistency, a crucial factor in successful calf rearing. In fact, 93% of respondents noted improvements in feeding consistency after installing an automatic milk feeder.

"While automatic milk feeder systems are valued for reliability and consistency, digital integration and disease prevention remain underperforming areas," says Sarah. "Continued support, training, and improvements in user interfaces and mobile features could unlock even greater benefits, particularly in calf health and data usability."

Win £100 by sharing your views

We invite all farmers to take part in the next Tried and Tested survey – fly control.

Whatever you use for controlling flies, we want to hear from you! "Your insights will contribute to a review that helps farmers across the industry make informed choices," explains Sarah.

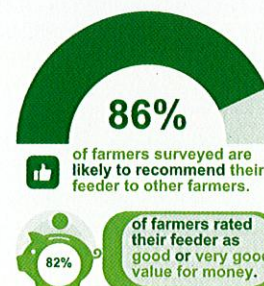
"By sharing your experiences, you'll help build a vital, independent resource for the whole dairy community, providing honest, evidence-based detail, grounded in everyday farming reality."

To take part in this Tried and Tested report, please visit bit.ly/BDTriedAndTested.

Everyone completing a survey will be entered into a prize draw to win a £100 Amazon voucher and can receive a copy of the full report, normally reserved for Kingshay members. The lucky winner of the £100 voucher for the automatic milk feeder survey was Richard Calver, Somerset – congratulations!



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