

Title: “New Technology, New Possibilities: How to Introduce Artificial Intelligence to Your Farm”

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“New technology, new possibilities: How to introduce artificial intelligence to your farm”

In the world of agriculture, AI has become a staple term known by producers as artificial insemination. However, a new type of AI is entering the conversation. Artificial intelligence is an emerging technology that is making its way into several industries, including the dairy and cattle industries. Dairy producers have frequently been progressive, taking on and embracing new technology to better their operations, but what place does this new AI technology hold in the ever-progressing industry?

Shari van de Pol is a blend of computer engineer and large animal vet who presents some of the potential AI can hold for producers in the dairy and cattle industries. She is the founder and CEO of CATTLEytics, an ag-tech company whose mission is to use technology, especially AI, to help farmers make better data-driven decisions and do more with what they already have.

Dairy producers can use AI for data analytics. Data can be a powerful asset to producers, yet some producers may find themselves with more information than they know what to do with.

“You can have all the information in the world, if you’re not actually making any changes, what’s the point?” van de Pol says.

Producers can analyze and interpret large amounts of data with AI to inform their decisions, van de Pol says. AI can advise producers on nutrition and feed rations, breeding schedules and outcomes, disease diagnosis and treatment, all important elements to a healthy and productive herd.

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Not only can AI benefit cattle management, but it has also shown promise in helping producers with employee management. van de Pol explains that AI technology can be used to help develop onboarding processes, protocols, and trainings for employees. Producers can use AI to assist in creating employee work schedules and even translate information into another language within the context of their operation.

AI can apply to all farms and producers, not just large-scale operations. van de Pol even suggests that it can be a leveler for smaller dairies, helping to bring them onto the same playing field as the larger operations in the industry.

A producer must make several decisions every day. van de Pol says AI can simplify making some of those decisions by utilizing programs such as ChatGPT, Copilot, or Perplexity. These systems are capable of generating ideas and suggestions using large sets of data, making connections within and between those sets, building pattern recognition, comparing decision styles, and weighing opinions together. Though not making decisions for producers, AI assists producers in their decision-making processes and operations.

Even with the assistance of AI, van de Pol says producers still need to trust the experts and professionals in the agriculture industry, such as nutritionists or veterinarians, because there are still limitations to this technology. However, AI can help producers fill in the gaps and give them some ideas.

Despite its potential, producers may be hesitant to implement AI on their farms. AI on farms is not the imagery of robots taking over the world that may be associated with such technological advances, but it is a tool producers can utilize on their operations. Many companies know AI is coming, and as a result, they are learning how they can implement that technology into their company. AI is coming onto farms via these companies; however, van de Pol says that producers don't need to wait to implement and benefit from this emerging technology. Producers can learn to use AI and become familiar with it on their own as well.

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Just as many have become comfortable with and learned to use search engines such as Google, van de Pol says producers can develop a similar familiarity with AI platforms. She says that one of the big hurdles is just trying the technology out and becoming familiar with it.

The learning process does not have to be a difficult one. van de Pol encourages producers to start by simply opening their browser and using a platform such as ChatGPT. Ask the program a question. See what the results are and what the advice is. If something doesn't seem quite right, don't give up. Challenge it again. Ask the platform to refine its answer. Producers can ask the platform to provide an answer in the context of dairy or in the voice of the top expert in the field of their question. Learning how to ask the right questions is a key component in utilizing AI for success. To start implementing AI into their operation, producers can start by just picking one aspect of their operation they'd like to work on and then ask AI for ideas.

"Just start small. You don't need to adopt everything at once," van de Pol says.

She also suggests producers get involved and get connected by looking for companies that understand both the industry and tech. Producers need to find people who understand their industry and can make the technology work for them.

So, what place can this new type of AI hold in the dairy industry? Although the technology may be unfamiliar, producers can become familiar with AI through practice, by starting simple. Producers hold the power to make it an effective tool for their operations. AI can analyze data, make connections, and offer suggestions based on producer input. Producers can use AI as a tool to advance their farm, assisting them in making decisions concerning their herd, employees, and operation.

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