

FARMERS will benefit from outcomes of a two-day workshop on herd recording at Echuca, Victoria, last month. It is well-recognised that dairy farmers who use herd recording have higher average production — between 10 and 35% — than farmers who do not herd-record.

Given this and the fact that herd recording services are inexpensive in Australia, it might be expected that all dairy farmers would take up herd recording. However, national statistics show only 50% of farmers access this valuable management tool.

Recent research shows one of the main reasons farmers do not herd-record for production and cell-count data is the inconvenience associated with herd recording day.

The National Herd Improvement Association (NHIA) convened a meeting of 35 of the nation's herd recording laboratories and herd improvement companies to discuss: "How do we make test day easier?"



Not surprisingly, each of the herd improvement companies has been working on many ways to make test day easier, but the ability to share their experiences at the workshop means improvements will develop faster and dairy farmers will enjoy the benefits.

NHIA general manager, Dr Christopher Braniff, (left) said most of the developments involved sample identification and data handling.

"Herd-improvement companies sell information and knowledge to farmers," Dr Braniff said. "These companies are using new technologies to improve the way information flows."

Topics covered over the two days included automatic animal identification using National Livestock Identification Scheme (NLIS) readers, sample identification using bar-coded milk vials and electronic milk recorders that measure milk volume on farm.

Dr Braniff said these advances allowed for herd recording with minimal additional labour units in the shed.

There were detailed presentations on in-line electronic milk meters. Three firms are trialling or using these meters that measure milk volumes on-farm and allow for a small sample to be submitted to the laboratory for component and cell-count tests.



Example of bar-code samples being placed at random into a sample crate. The laboratory equipment reads the bar code and matches the results with the cow ID.

Some farmers have also installed permanent in-line meters as a management tool. The Eli Milk Meter, manufactured in Victoria, allows for easy milk sampling. Other international manufacturers have various forms of sub-sampler from the inline meter. Farmers are encouraged to seek such functionality when choosing systems to install.