



Computer technology: robotic milking and interactive mirrors

The cows that milk themselves.

Narrator

Neil Rowes is a dairy farmer in rural Oxfordshire.

Neil Rowes

This farm is an organic farm, and we have a herd of about a hundred brown Swiss cows. We also have a herd of suckler cows producing beef. And we grow about fifty acres of arable crops, which we use for straw and the grain to feed the cows.

Narrator

The dairying side of the farm is unique. Neil is the first farmer in the UK to use a computerised automatic milking system. Not with his herd confined in barns, but with them roaming free on rich pasture.

Neil Rowes

The cows have freedom to choose what they want to do with their time. They decide when they like to be in the field. When they want to be in the building. They choose what time of the day and how often they want to be milked. And as long as they conform to a few very basic standards, such as turning up for milking at least once a day, they are free to do whatever they like.

Neil Rowes

Soil Association research has indicated that people do feel organic farming is about going backwards in time. They have an image of milkmaids and cows being sort of lovingly looked after. But I think if the robot system, if it's run in a friendly way, is probably the more welfare friendly system that we've seen for milking cows. And certainly the biggest step forward in the last thirty years.