Spanish laboratory provides immediate results on milk quality with BlackBerry solution

Since 1991 LILA Asturias, a professional laboratory based in the northern Spanish province of Asturias, has been analysing milk samples on behalf of Spanish dairy farmers and the companies that buy their milk. LILA Asturias works with dairy farmers from all over Asturias and beyond and provides daily microbiological and chemical-physical analysis services.

THE CHALLENGE

Dairy farmers generate their income according to the amount of milk they supply to the dairy industry. But it’s not all about quantity. The quality of the end-product is paramount and has a significant impact on the way farmers and dairy companies do business.

Farmers must provide samples, on average, six times a month and once received by LILA Asturias, the samples undergo analysis for a range of variables, including bacteria, fat, protein and somatic cells. The very geography of Asturias and other rural areas in Spain meant that LILA’s interaction with the dairy farmers was based on written communication, with comprehensive analysis of the samples being delivered in hard copy, by post.

Analysing the milk samples takes around 24 hours but getting the results to the dairy farmer would take considerably longer, as results were usually sent by post once every six weeks. To try and combat the delays, LILA had implemented a mobile text system that provided a basic indication of the results but the laboratory recognised that it wasn’t a perfect solution.

The limited format of the SMS messages meant that the farmers would still have to wait for the full report to determine an accurate quality measurement. The delay in receiving the comprehensive information meant that farmers could not take immediate action to improve the milk quality. Also, the results delivered by SMS didn’t meet the requirements of the UNE-ISO 17025 standard, the regulatory requirements by which LILA implements its system of analysis.

THE SOLUTION

The LILA Comunidad Virtual project aims to improve communication between LILA and dairy farmers through the implementation of innovative technological solutions. As part of the project, LILA Asturias was keen to find a way of providing the comprehensive results of its analyses in real time, creating a smoother and more immediate communications channel between the organisations and the farmers.

With this objective, LILA Asturias worked with carrier Movistar to develop a mobile application that would meet this need.
After the application was developed it was rolled out as part of the BlackBerry® solution, which LILA selected as the best solution available to provide real-time data to the farmers. “We chose the BlackBerry solution due to its reliability, strength and user-friendliness,” confirms Alberto Meana, Assistant Director at LILA Asturias.

It has provided 1800 of its affiliated dairy farmers with a BlackBerry® smartphone and they now receive a full report of LILA’s most recent tests on their milk samples directly to the device.

With the BlackBerry solution, barely 24 hours after the samples reach the laboratory and the tests are carried out, the farmer receives the results and can use his BlackBerry smartphone to access an updated web-based overview throughout the month. Moreover, the farmers can also evaluate the average milk quality that will define the rates paid by dairy companies.

As part of the project, BlackBerry smartphones have also been distributed to dairy technicians and vets – important contributors within the dairy sector supply chain. When they also receive the results they too can take action along with the dairy farmers to try and limit the effects and reasons for poor quality on the average monthly milk yield.

LILA ASTURIAS BENEFITS

Approximately 3,500 samples are analysed daily at LILA Asturias and the implementation of the BlackBerry solution has meant that the results of all of these tests reach the key stakeholders of the dairy sector without delay.

Whereas previously farmers would receive the full results once every six weeks, they now receive them as soon as they have been issued by the laboratory. Furthermore, the results are more comprehensive than with the previous SMS-based system and can also be compared with previous results, so that farmers can evaluate the evolution of the quality of their milk. “This new solution is not just about time: it’s also about the quality of the information,” says José Antonio Miyar, Director of LILA. “Before, it took 72 hours to discover the absolute value and averages were obtained at the end of the month. Now, within 24 hours the farmer has all the information on his BlackBerry smartphone. This means that the farmer can improve the quality of the milk and therefore his income.”

Issuing lab results with the BlackBerry solution also fulfils LILA’s certification requirements, as the format in which they are sent is recognised under the UNE-ISO 17025 standard.

Everyone is benefitting from the BlackBerry solution from LILA Asturias, not only due to its pioneering nature but also thanks to the deployment to all stakeholders. “Everyone who is involved in the production process now receives the information in real time so that optimum decisions can be made,” confirms Miyar.

José Antonio Miyar
Director
LILA Asturias

Industry:
Manufacturing & Technology
Region: Spain
Email Platform:
Microsoft Exchange

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