PRESS RELEASE

4th IFCN Global Dairy Tech Briefing 2026

KIEL, 21ST OF JANUARY 2026

IFCN DAIRY RESEARCH NETWORK & PROGRESSIVE DAIRY HIGHLIGHT EFFICIENCY-DRIVEN TECHNOLOGY TRENDS AT GLOBAL DAIRY TECH BRIEFING

The IFCN Dairy Research Network, in collaboration with Progressive Dairy, successfully hosted the Global Dairy Tech Briefing 2026, a high-level webinar bringing together global experts, technology specialists, and dairy farmers to assess the real-world impact of technology on dairy farm profitability and resilience.

Against the backdrop of rising production costs, labor shortages, and increasing market volatility, the event focused on a central question: Which technologies truly deliver value on dairy farms today – and which are still hype?

Cost Pressure Shifts Technology Priorities

Opening the briefing, IFCN highlighted that **global dairy farm production costs have increased by 22% over the past five years**, fundamentally reshaping investment decisions. Rather than expanding herd size, farmers are increasingly prioritizing **efficiency, reliability, and sustainability on existing operations**.

Global milk production grew by **2.6% in 2025**, driven by strong growth in the US and Europe, particularly Eastern Europe. For 2026, milk prices are expected to face short-term pressure in the first quarter, followed by a recovery in the second half of the year.

From Innovation to Implementation: What Farmers Are Adopting

A key message from the panel was clear: **technology adoption is no longer about novelty, but about return on investment**.

Technologies gaining traction include:

- Robotic milking systems, driven by labor shortages & improved work-life balance
- Rumen boluses and sensor technologies for proactive herd health management
- AI-powered camera systems for behavior, locomotion, and health monitoring
- Feed efficiency and ration optimization software
- Investments in cow & worker comfort, including ventilation & climate-controlled barns

In contrast, technologies without proven reliability or immediate economic benefit, such as methane-inhibiting feed additives in some regions, continue to see limited adoption.

Automation, Not "Robots"

The discussion emphasized that **automation**, rather than humanoid robotics, defines the current phase of dairy technology. While robotic milking has become mainstream in many regions, automated feeding systems remain rare due to their complexity, cost, and the **zero-tolerance requirement for system failure**.

Panelists agreed that technology will **not replace people on dairy farms**, but will make existing labor more efficient by shifting human effort from manual monitoring to decision-making and problem-solving.

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Data Integration and the Role of AI

Despite increasing technology adoption, many farms struggle with **fragmented data systems and underutilized tools**. Farmers expressed a strong demand for integrated solutions that provide **simple, intuitive access to all farm data**.

Looking ahead, **2026 is expected to mark a turning point for AI in dairy farming**, particularly through natural-language interfaces that allow farmers to interact with herd management systems conversationally, rather than through complex dashboards or command lines.

AI's most immediate value lies in:

- Unlocking insights from existing equipment and **right data**
- Acting as a "memory bank" for farm decisions and outcomes
- Supporting faster, better-informed management decisions

Smaller farms are expected to benefit first from AI-driven decision support, while larger operations will see growing value as AI models entire farm ecosystems.

Often Overlooked, High-Impact Areas: Water and Calves

The panel also highlighted **water quality** as a frequently underestimated but critical nutrient, with significant performance gains achievable through improved hygiene and treatment systems.

In calf rearing, **post-weaning nutrition** was identified as one of the highest-return investments in dairy farming, directly influencing lifetime productivity. However, panelists stressed that advanced digital technologies only deliver value once **foundational infrastructure** is in place.

Key Takeaway

The Global Dairy Tech Briefing 2026 made one thing clear: **The future of dairy farming will driven by not using more technology, but better-integrated, reliable, and economically viable technology.**

Farms that succeed will be those that fully leverage existing systems, invest step by step, and focus relentlessly on efficiency, people, and animal well-being.

About: IFCN is a global dairy research and consultancy network based in Kiel, Germany. Founded in 2000, it now brings together more than 100 researchers and provides expertise in the form of data services to more than 120 companies in the global dairy supply chain. Clients use IFCN's fact-based analyses to manage risk and adapt to the rapidly changing industry landscape. In addition, the focus is on exchange with industry peers at numerous networking events.

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