A comparison of profitability between farms that milk once or twice a day

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Abstract. To attract and retain quality staff, dairy farming must be competitive with industries offering conventional hours of work. Full lactation once-a-day (OAD) milking is one option that could help achieve this goal. This study analysed the profitability of milking OAD using data from commercial farms for the production seasons 2005/06 to 2015/16. Once-a-day herds were matched with herds milking twice-a-day (TAD) by district and herd size to create 927 OAD-TAD pairs. Milksolids (MS; fat kg + protein kg) per ha decreased by an average of 13% after adopting OAD, however, farm working expenses (FWE) per ha did not decrease, resulting in an increase in FWE per kg MS and a decrease in profitability per ha. Labour efficiency (cows/FTE) increased in the OAD herds by an average of only 6%. To investigate this result further, a sub-set of 33 OAD herds, with at least one season of pre-OAD data were grouped into quartiles based on their pre-OAD labour efficiency. The operating profit/ha of quartile one (lowest pre-OAD cows/FTE; least efficient) increased by 23% after adopting OAD, with quartile two, three and four decreasing by -1%, -10% and -32%. Quartile one herds had the largest increase in cows/FTE, highlighting the importance of labour efficiency and cost reduction to profit when OAD milking. Some herds in the top quartiles were able to increase cows/FTE. These results indicate that profitability can be maintained or increased after
adopting OAD. Whether the lifestyle benefits of OAD are retained when increasing labour
efficiency warrants further investigation.