

"Heifers are the future of our farm. They carry the most advanced genetics and the highest genetic value: missing a heat means missing an opportunity."

Genetics-driven performance: How Sabbiona Holstein improves heifer fertility with Active Tag




Società Agricola Sabbiona di Ciserani Francesco, Lorenzo e Ireneo, known as **Sabbiona Holstein**, is one of the **most renowned dairy breeding operations in the international Holstein genetics industry**. Today, the farm manages a herd of approximately 1,400 animals, including 650 milking cows, and is **recognized** by breeders and industry professionals **worldwide** for its achievements in **genetic improvement** and the **production of high-value animals**.

Over the years, the **herd has grown steadily**. Since the farm was established in 1973, Sabbiona has embraced innovation by introducing tools and technologies that have helped accelerate genetic progress and improve reproductive efficiency. The adoption of **sexed semen, genomic testing, and herd monitoring systems** has played a **key role in this growth journey**.

For a farm that has built its reputation on genetics, **heifers represent** far more than replacement animals. They are the **genetic foundation of the herd and the cows that will shape its future for years to come**.

"Heifers are a fundamental part of our business because they are the future of our farm; they are tomorrow's cows. They carry more modern, more advanced genetics, with increasingly higher genetic value."

AT A GLANCE

-  **Farm:** Sabbiona Holstein
-  **Location:** Brembio (LO), Italy
-  **Herd size:** 1.400 dairy cows
-  **Cows in milk:** 650 cows

CHALLENGES

- Identifying the optimal time for heifer insemination
- Maximizing the genetic potential of future replacement cows
- Reducing uncertainty in heat detection
- Supporting reproductive decisions with reliable, timely data

DATAMARS LIVESTOCK SYSTEMS

Active Tag collars

BENEFITS

- Reduced number of inseminations required to achieve pregnancy
- Greater confidence in the use of sexed semen
- Automatic alerts on animal activity and health
- Greater peace of mind in day-to-day herd management

For this reason, **reproduction management is strategically important**. Identifying the optimal time for insemination means maximizing the genetic potential of each heifer, while missing a heat can result in lost time, reduced efficiency, and missed opportunities.

As the operation continued to grow, relying solely on visual observation was no longer enough. Sabbiona needed a **solution that could identify heats more accurately, reduce uncertainty, and support day-to-day decisions with reliable, timely data**.

"We no longer wanted to rely on guesswork. We wanted to be certain that an animal was in heat and inseminate her at exactly the right time, because that translates into more pregnancies with fewer interventions."

About a year ago, the farm decided to implement Datamars Livestock's **Active Tag** system, using **collars on heifers ready for insemination**. The decision was also influenced by the long-standing relationship with Semex, a trusted partner of the farm, and by the positive reputation of the solution.



"We had always heard good things about Datamars Livestock, even though we had no direct experience with the system. Thanks to our partnership with Semex, we trusted their recommendation. The solution has fully met our expectations, and from the very beginning we saw how it could help us manage our heifers more effectively."

In addition to heat detection, Active Tag provides insights into animal activity, health, and rumination, giving the team a **more complete view of the herd**. However, for Sabbiona, the real value of the system lies in its ability to identify the right breeding moment, improving reproductive performance and helping the farm maximize the genetic potential of its animals.

As the months went by, the **results became increasingly evident**. More accurate heat detection **improved reproductive efficiency in heifers and enabled the farm to use sexed semen with greater confidence** - an essential tool for an operation focused on continuous genetic progress.

In particular, **the average number of inseminations required to achieve a pregnancy decreased significantly**. Today, Sabbiona records approximately **1.3 – 1.4 services per pregnancy**, compared to **1.6 – 1.7 services per pregnancy before implementing the system**.



"One of the main benefits has been the dramatic reduction in the number of inseminations required to achieve a pregnancy. Today, we can make greater use of sexed semen because we know with confidence that the animal is in heat and that it is a strong heat event, based on the activity graph."

The benefits extend beyond reproduction. Having **real-time information** readily available has also **simplified day-to-day herd management**. Every morning, the team can immediately identify animals that require attention and receive health alerts, allowing them to **respond quickly whenever necessary**.

"You no longer need someone constantly watching for heats. It saves time, and if an animal is not doing well, you receive a notification through the app. That gives you much greater peace of mind."

The system's reliability became increasingly clear over time, as **Active Tag's alerts consistently matched what the team observed in the barn and as pregnancy results continued to improve**.

"A few months after introducing the system, when the pregnancies started coming in, we realized it was truly making a difference. But even from the beginning, we could see that the animals were actually in heat whenever the system flagged them, and that's when we knew it was 100% reliable."

For a farm of Sabbiona Holstein's size and ambitions, **access to reliable data is now essential** for maintaining high genetic standards and continuing to grow. **Technology** does not replace the experience of the farmer; it supports it by **enabling faster, more accurate, and more informed decisions**.

"Today, it's essential. A modern large-scale farm must rely on data, information, and reports. If you want to run an efficient operation and continue growing, these technologies are no longer optional."

Looking ahead, Sabbiona Holstein will continue investing in innovation and in improving its replacement heifer facilities, with the goal of making heifer management even more efficient and maximizing the genetic value of the herd. By combining advanced genetics with reliable data, the farm is building the future of its operation one informed decision at a time.



For more information:

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