

Kiwi Electronics Innovation Snapped up by Scandinavian Farmers

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High tech alarm and communications products developed by Christchurch company EDAC Electronics are changing the face of farming in New Zealand and overseas.

The latest innovation from EDAC Electronics, being developed with research and development funding from Technology New Zealand, is a hardware communication system that will allow automatic monitoring of grain levels in silos on Norwegian farms.

The new hardware platform and software configuration utility is a significant advance on EDAC's existing telephone-based autodialing platform.

Project manager Henry Bettle says the breakthrough technology will enable a PC to talk to a Voice-Tel dialler and send an automatic alert to the truck driver when grain levels need replenishing.

"That's hugely important in the northern hemisphere where animals are grain-fed and barn-reared rather than put out to pasture to eat grass. We have found niche markets through modifying or refining New Zealand's world-famous agri-technology to suit other farming systems," Henry Bettle said.

EDAC Electronics first began eyeing the Scandinavian market last year, after it was approached by a Norwegian company producing fire alarm systems for use on farms and other remote locations.

"The company canvassed the world trying to find a partner to produce a voice-alarm dialler that would work in conjunction with its fire alarm panels," Henry Bettle said. "We saw the opportunity, responded quickly and have already shipped more than 3000 units over there. Our Norwegian customer has great faith in our ability to deliver and is now seeking further agri-tech alarm and real-time data communication products for Scandinavia."

Once the new product is available, EDAC Electronics expects to be shipping more than 10,000 units to Scandinavia over the following three years.

Technology New Zealand, the government's R & D funding agency, has invested nearly \$100,000 in the latest research project through its Grants for Private Sector Research & Development scheme.

Henry Bettle says the company's ability to respond quickly to the needs of its overseas client was due in part to the funding from Technology New Zealand.

"With the support from Technology New Zealand we were able to devote staff time solely to the project and achieve our goals in a timeframe that allowed us to make the most of this window of opportunity."

Two stages of the four-stage R & D project have been successfully completed and EDAC now has highly efficient PC-based software to update information to the dialler remotely.

In stage three of the project the new technology will be applied to develop the silo-monitoring device with the final stage investigating the development of a milk temperature monitoring device for the dairy industry.

Henry Bettle says this would automatically provide tanker drivers with milk temperature data via email to a Palm Pilot or pocket PC. The readings could be immediately conveyed to the dairy factory, to identify milk at risk of spoiling.

The new platform will also deliver significant improvements to EDAC's existing range of auto-dialler products.

For example, Henry Bettle says, owners of properties with our alarms installed will be able to go to their home computer and instruct the alarm to send alert messages to any chosen location.

"That represents huge peace of mind if you are going to be away from your normal phone number."

The technology will also lead to improvements in other Agritech products from EDAC Electronics including its remote monitoring frost warning systems and irrigation and pump control products, which were showcased at the recent Mystery Creek Fielddays.

EDAC Electronics, which is based in Riccarton, is on a growth spiral with turnover forecast to increase by 45% in the coming financial year mainly due to exports.