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RFID TECHNOLOGY HELPS FARMERS IDENTIFY SICK COWS

 SPORT & FITNESS

Even as RFID is allowing [water-park patrons to share photos on Facebook](#) in Washington state, it's also helping UK farmers keep tabs on their cows and get an earlier sense for when they're sick. That latter effort is part of a new project being tested out at the UK's [Newcastle University](#), designed to track the feeding behavior of each individual animal and alert farmers to any change that might indicate the cow is unwell. As part of Newcastle University's efforts to improve animal welfare on farms and research ways in which agriculture can become more sustainable, animals at the University's Cockle Park farm in Northumberland are being fitted with RFID-equipped ear tags. Those tags are then used to "clock" each animal in when it approaches the feeding trough — equipped with short-range antennae — and to measure the duration of time spent there. Pedometers also fitted on the cows, meanwhile, allow the Newcastle team to measure posture, thereby relaying information about how active the animal is and how much time it spends lying down. The bottom line: Animals that feed too infrequently or for too short a time — or that spend an inordinate amount of time lying down — can be checked for other symptoms of illness. Newcastle professor Ilias Kyriazakis explains: "Modern farming systems have minimized the contact between the animal and its keeper, so we need to constantly look for ways to re-address the balance. What we are trying to do here at Newcastle is find ways to detect early infection or deterioration of an individual — regardless of the size of the herd — so the farmer can intervene at an early stage." The benefits of applying the latest technological innovations are by no means limited to particular industries, and when it comes to agriculture there's still plenty of work to be done to help improve crop and animal management. Tech-savvy entrepreneurs: Be inspired! Spotted by: Katherine Noyes

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