

BRITISH DAIRYING

July 2024 Vol 30, No.9

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- Are supply chain shocks the new norm?

STAFFING SPECIAL

- Taking learnings from the Netherlands

FARM STORY

- How funding has enabled a family invest for the future

MASTITIS CONTROL

- Putting the focus on lactating cows

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Engaging with MPs and the public is key, both individually and through events like Open Farm Sunday

Open dialogue is key

The second lowest electoral turnout since 1918 – although Labour must have been delighted with its landslide victory, it seems as much through disgruntlement with the Tories as a bold endorsement of Labour policies. Indeed, when it comes to farming votes, there was a startling lack of detail on any agricultural policies. So does that leave us in limbo, or does it simply mean a continuation of what's gone before? Bar a little tinkering around the edges, it may well be the latter.

Farming organisations queued up to offer their congratulations, and, quite rightly, will continue to work with whichever party is in power to try and fight farming's corner. NFU President Tom Bradshaw met with Defra Secretary Steve Barclay on his first day in office and urged all MPs – both urban and rural – to visit a local farm to hear about how investment in agriculture can benefit all.

That echoes a call from Shropshire farmer George Lester in our Political Comment section a few months ago – for all farmers to invite their local MP out for a visit, so they can hear first-hand about the challenges and opportunities you face. Only through open dialogue can we educate and influence; whether that's MPs, consumers, or schoolchildren. There's even free training available through the AHDB for hosting school visits – take a look on pp42-43.

As Charlotte Lawder writes in the Gold Cup comment, the recent Open Farm Sunday was a wonderful opportunity to engage with the public and tell our story. And one-to-one visits with MPs will be just as powerful.

In recent years, British Dairying has organised several face-to-face meetings between farmers and those in Westminster, and will continue to do so, to tell the incredibly positive story that is British dairy farming. We've got your back.

It's good to feel supported – and it's a common theme that comes up in discussions around staff development and retention. Continuously training and empowering staff, getting them involved in decision-making, and sometimes getting them off-farm to see how others do things, will all help to create a happy, motivated and skilled team. And in return, they will support you and help develop the business – they'll have your back too. You can pick up more tips in our staffing special (pp59-60).

Outside of silage making, now is a slightly quieter time of year for many dairy farmers, so it's a good opportunity to look ahead and make some of those plans together. Our autumn / winter outlook (pp54-58) considers some of the likely challenges and opportunities ahead – locked-in inflation and market volatility are two key themes. So is a potential shortage of good-quality forage after the dismal spring and summer (see our focus on forage, pp20-30).

That may feel like a lot more challenge than opportunity, but proactive planning and collaboration will help. And as Chris Walkland explains (p15), there is a lot of positive investment going on in the sector, so for those processors and farmers who work together there is a bright future ahead.

Olivia Cooper

Managing Editor

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Denmark announces carbon tax on farming

Denmark is to levy what will be Europe's first carbon tax on farming.

The announcement comes after five months of negotiation, culminating in the Danish government signing the Green Tripartite Agreement, together with several other parties including Agriculture and Food and the Nature Conservation Association.

Jenny Brunton, Senior European Policy Adviser at the British Agriculture Bureau said that from 2030, the climate tax will be 300DKK (£34) per tonne of CO₂e, increasing to 750DKK (£85) by 2035.

However, a tax break of 60% will be applied to the average emissions from different types of livestock, so providing an economic advantage to climate-efficient farmers. After the tax break, the effective cost will be 120DKK (£14) in 2030, and 300DKK (£34) in 2035.

Some of the money raised will be channelled back into the sector via 'green initiatives'. These include setting aside 250,000ha for new



The carbon tax is expected to slash 1.8m tonnes of agricultural emissions

forests and restoring 140,000ha of low-lying peatlands, plus further land conversion and strategic land purchases focused on nitrogen reduction.

The expectation is that this will enable two-thirds of Danish waters to meet the EU Water Framework Directive goals by 2027.

Denmark is a significant exporter of pork and dairy products, and agriculture is expected to account for

46% of emissions by 2030, said Ms Brunton. The carbon tax is expected to slash 1.8m tonnes of that in its first year, enabling Denmark to meet its target of cutting 70% of its total emissions by that year.

Arla Foods' Chief Executive, Peder Tuborgh, among others, responded to the announcement by saying the country's climate goals can be achieved by voluntary measures. "It is crucial for us that farmers

who genuinely do everything they can to reduce their emissions are not subjected to a tax now or in the future," he said. "Therefore, it is essential that the tax is solely based on emissions for which there are means to eliminate." Throughout the process, we have said that Arla, Arla's farmers, and the Danish people fundamentally want the same thing - to have high-quality Danish food with a low climate footprint. Our farmers are already engaged in the green transition.

"Arla has created a financial sustainability model to support our farmers in reducing their climate footprint," he added. "The more climate and sustainability measures they implement, the more they are paid for their milk. "Over the past two years, we have reduced nearly 1m tonnes of CO₂e through our own initiatives. This is a significant portion of the shortfall that the entire Danish agriculture sector needs to deliver by 2030."

Genetic gains accelerated



UK dairy farmers are credited with leading the adoption of sexed semen

Dairy farmers are increasingly using dairy sexed semen, leading to a rise in the volume of beef semen used on the rest of the national dairy herd.

AHDB's latest figures, from a survey of breeding companies, reveal that for the first time, beef semen sales to dairy farms are now higher than dairy.

The data relates to the 12 months to April this year and puts the sales of sexed at 84% of all dairy semen, up from 76% in 2023. Holstein semen comprised 88% of total dairy sales, while beef sales were at 52% of all semen sold to dairy farms.

This scenario presents excellent opportunities for dairy farmers to selectively breed only their elite

females for replacements, further accelerating genetic progress within the herd. AHDB advises farmers to use tools like genomic evaluations and the Herd Genetic Report to identify those females.

The beef supply chain is now impacted by the number of beef crosses from the dairy sector, but the genetic gains in dairy herd efficiency are filtering through in their offspring. Marco Winters, AHDB Head of Animal Genetics, said: "UK dairy farmers are leading the world in the adoption of sexed semen, and should be commended on their progressive attitude to adopting modern technologies to improve herd efficiencies."

Genomic profit potential

A widening gap in genetic merit is opening up between herds that genomic test their heifers and those that don't. Marco Winters, Head of Animal Genetics at AHDB, said it represents a massive difference in profit potential between the best and worst herds. AHDB's latest analysis has identified a £193 difference in the average profitable lifetime index (PLI) between the most and least engaged herds.

The number of animals tested has now risen to 100,000 head/year, or roughly 20% of the dairy heifer calves born in the recorded herd. This is projected to increase by around 15% in 2024, and represents uptake across the Holstein, Friesian, Ayrshire, Jersey and Guernsey breeds. "This tells us that genomic testing of females is no longer considered to be for the elite, as it may have been in the early days," said Mr Winters. Producers genotyping 75-100% of their dairy heifers had an average PLI across their 2023 calf crop of £430. This compares with £237 for herds testing 0-25% of their calves. "Improving genetics is probably the cheapest and most sustainable way of making long-term improvements to any herd. And when you're using a genetic index which has been developed specifically to increase profitability, this feeds

straight through to a farm's bottom line," explained Mr Winters. "The theoretical value of this difference is around £19,300 for a typical, 175-head, herd. However, analysis of actual farm business accounts has revealed the advantage to be over £50,000."

One of the reasons why it is making so much difference might be unexpected; and that is misidentified parentage. "It's surprising how many animals have been misidentified, often assigned the wrong sire, and sometimes even the wrong dam," he noted. "In fact, around 17% of calves have their sires updated when the genotypes are analysed."

"While dam misidentification runs at a lower proportion, it is still an issue, because if farmers think they are breeding from their best heifers, this may not be the case." The analysis also highlights several other factors, including female fertility, fat percentage and maintenance costs. "The genetic benefits seen in the top herds are not only a consequence of heifer genomic testing," warned Mr Winters. "It is just one tool with which these farmers are probably engaged, and they are likely to be generally more switched on to genetics, and potentially making better genetic selections."

New Zealand support aimed at UK farmers

New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE), a government agency responsible for promoting economic development and trade, has launched a campaign to help British farmers transition to environmentally-based support payments.

The campaign is aimed at raising awareness of the innovative New Zealand agritech sector and the support it can lend UK farmers at this time. At the heart of the campaign are five in-depth, downloadable guides covering a range of topics including dairying, animal health and genetics,

farm business management, livestock management, and pasture and machinery. They contain insights from industry experts and provide advice on how to build efficiency and resilience into a farm business, plus information on the latest technologies and case studies.

Joe Nelson, Trade Commissioner at NZTE, said: "With the transition from basic payments to environmentally-led support payments, it is likely that British farmers will need to take significant strides in becoming more efficient and profitable, to ensure they are viable in the long-term.

"Thankfully, a major precedent already exists that demonstrates life after subsidies is not only possible but can actually help farm businesses to become more successful, profitable and sustainable.

This is the story of New Zealand agriculture, which receives no government funding at all, yet is buoyant, successful, and efficient, and one of the largest exporters of agricultural products in the world."



NZ campaign could help UK farmers transition to new payment structures

Brendan O'Connell, Chief Executive of Agritech New Zealand, said farmer mindset is an extremely important factor in adopting new technologies. And this could be one area where UK farmers could learn from their Kiwi counterparts.

"Farmers in New Zealand have a very pragmatic attitude," he said. "They have a high tolerance to try something new if it will make their

business more productive and profitable. The first 12–15% to adopt it are the trail blazers, but after that we have the persuadables. These represent 30–40% of the market. They're open to tech if it is fit for purpose and once they see something works, they will invest."

The guides are available at: www.nzte.govt.nz/page/new-zealand-agritech-in-uk-and-europe.



Joe Nelson, NZ Trade and Enterprise



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BVD testing in Wales now compulsory

This month saw the start of the compulsory phase of an industry-led bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) eradication programme in Wales.

The legislation, introduced by the Welsh Government, requires farmers to annually screen their herds for BVD by testing a small number of cattle, and to isolate persistently infected animals from the rest of the herd for the remainder of their lives.

Cattle keepers have until July 1, 2025, to complete their annual herd test, and the government says these measures will support the industry-led approach to stopping the spread of the disease.

Cabinet Secretary Huw Irranca-Davies said: "I understand the serious



Welsh farmers must annually screen their herds for bovine viral diarrhoea

impact of BVD, not just on animal health and welfare, but also on production, and the economic costs of this disease to farm businesses.

The eradication of BVD in Wales is a long-standing commitment, and I fully support industry and government working together to achieve this outcome."

Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Dr Richard Irvine, said: "Eliminating BVD can reduce costs and the carbon footprint of your herd. Maintaining a BVD-free status strengthens the health and welfare of our cattle and can reduce antibiotic usage. Embarking on this next phase of the eradication programme is really important."

BVDFree England scheme set to close

The BVDFree England scheme will close at the end of July, to help simplify the offering of bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) eradication schemes in England.

The Board took the decision as later this year the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway will be introducing a new voluntary BVD eradication scheme. The new scheme will build on the progress achieved by previous voluntary

schemes and will include further financial support for those herds receiving positive or inconclusive test results. There will also be a strong biosecurity aspect.

BVD certification schemes will continue to be provided through the Premium Cattle Health scheme, Certifarm, and HiHealth Herdcare.

The Independent Chair of BVDFree England, Bill Mellor, said that, in the eight years since its

launch, the scheme had registered over 6,950 holdings, covering nearly 50% of beef and dairy breeding cattle in England.

"In that time one key objective was to prove to government the appetite to control the disease, and prove the concept of BVD eradication. The scheme has successfully achieved this and, thanks to the Animal Health and Pathway, the journey doesn't stop here."

Rural policing crisis



Rural crime has increased by 32% since 2011, compared to a 24% rise in towns and cities, according to the CLA. And it claims the capability of rural police forces to deal with it is in crisis.

Common rural crimes like fly-tipping, poaching and machinery theft do not have their own tags on police databases, and many rural areas in England and Wales have no dedicated rural officers, no ringfenced police funding, and lack basic equipment. That's according to freedom of information responses the CLA received from 36 police forces.

Victoria Vyvyan, CLA President, said: "All forces need a rural crime equipment pack, including torches. We can't expect police officers to tackle crime in the dark. And rural crime will remain unseen without proper tagging systems, backed by central funding and co-ordination."

Where forces do have rural crime units, they represent a small proportion of the overall force. The CLA is now calling on political parties to develop a fixed Service Level Agreement, with appropriate and ringfenced resources, to protect rural communities from crime. "People living in the countryside feel treated like second class citizens by law enforcement. They need assurances that this cannot go on."

Temperatures driving Bluetongue risk

Average daily temperatures are now consistently above 12°C, meaning Bluetongue virus (BTV) transmission is now possible in high-risk areas.

At the time of writing, there were no live cases of BTV-3 in the UK, where it is a notifiable disease. But Chris Sanders, Research Fellow at the Pirbright Institute, said: "With the warmer temperatures, we know that the activity of biting midges that spread the virus has increased."

"It is now warm enough that if a midge were to come into contact with BTV-3, local virus transmission between midges and ruminants in the UK would be possible."

Bluetongue cases are being monitored on the Continent, and the extent of BTV-3 transmission in nearby European countries, alongside meteorological factors, will determine whether infected biting midges are blown over from northern Europe.



Warmer temperatures have increased the activity of biting midges

The high-risk counties are Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Kent and East Sussex. Farmers should keep up

to date via the Ruminant Health & Welfare Bluetongue hub, or call the Bluetongue hotline: 024 7771 0386.

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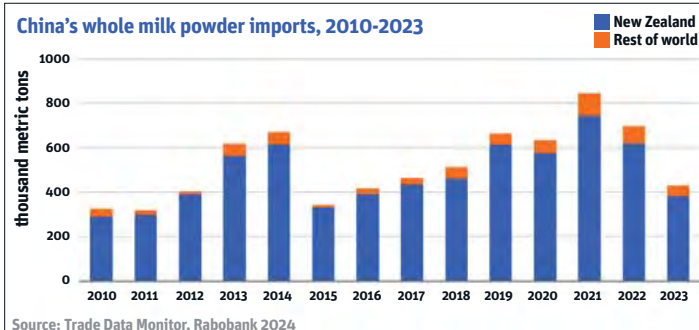
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China causes upset to global milk trade with self-sufficiency growth

China's growing self-sufficiency in dairy production is having a profound influence on global dairy trade, a new Rabobank report has highlighted.

New Zealand is the primary dairy exporter to China. It's now having to find alternative markets for almost 1.3m tonnes of milk in the form of whole and skimmed milk powder (SMP), milk fat and cheese. So there is a global knock-on effect.

The report noted China's "monumental achievement" in self-sufficiency in milk production, which has grown by 11m tonnes from 2018 to 2023. China's whole milk powder (WMP) imports plunged from an average of 670,000t/year between 2018 and 2022 to just 430,000t in 2023. Mary Ledman, Global Strategist for Dairy at



China's whole milk powder (WMP) imports plunged in 2023 to 430,000t

Rabobank, described the global dairy sector as a row of dominoes. "If China's demand falls, it triggers a chain reaction. This has inevitably intensified competition among the existing dairy-exporting regions and led to lower-than-average global milk powder prices," she said.

Although New Zealand accounts for less than 3% of world cow milk production, it represents more than 25% of global dairy trade. It must now find alternative markets for 6% of its annual milk production.

New Zealand's WMP exports peaked in 2021 due to China's robust

demand, which then dropped. Its answer was to adjust its export strategy by increasing exports of SMP, butterfat, and cheese, so offsetting a 255,000t fall in WMP exports between 2021 and 2023.

It also multiplied its WMP imports to Algeria, which is the world's second-largest WMP importer, traditionally supplied by European exporters.

The only positive news for exporters is that China's growing dairy production offers sales opportunities for companies involved with animal health, genetics, nutrition, manure management, and milking and processing equipment.

Ms Ledman doubted that China would become a net dairy exporter, but said key dairy exporting regions will need to adapt to changing market dynamics.

New Pembrokeshire creamery launched

Pembrokeshire Creamery has now officially launched its new milk processing facility, part of its mission to bring 'fully Welsh' milk to Welsh consumers. The dairy is the only liquid milk facility in Wales accredited to the 'Brand Reputation through Compliance Global Standard'. This means it is the only facility able to supply major retailers in Wales with Welsh milk. The creamery has created around 80 new jobs and is currently bottling more than 900,000 litres per week and when it reaches full capacity, will be able to supply around 2m litres of milk a week.

It has recently announced deals to supply own-branded milk to Asda and Lidl stores across Wales. To date, almost £20m has been invested in the site and the company recently announced plans for the development of a second milk processing line and automated trolley fillers. At the heart of Pembrokeshire Creamery's mission lies a commitment to source 100% of its milk from Welsh cows, reducing food miles, and supporting local farming communities. The ultimate goal is to be the leading supplier of Welsh milk.



New creamery's mission is to bring 'fully' Welsh milk to Welsh consumers

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Free training for regen dairying

A free online training course for farmers wanting to get into regenerative dairy farming has been launched by the Regen Dairy Project.

It is a collaborative effort led by FAI Farms and Farmwel and supported by several global food companies. But it is farmer-led, working with regenerative dairy farmers around the world to provide easily implemented, practical training.

The aim is to give a practical vision for a productive and profitable global dairy sector which also restores its relationship with nature.

"This project has enabled us to work closely with farmers around the world, understanding their journeys towards regenerative dairy," said Øistein Thorsen, CEO of FAI Farms. "The Regen Dairy Project is working to clearly identify what successful regenerative dairying looks like from a farmers' perspective. These learnings have been critical in helping us design the course to enable farmers to be in the driving seat for successful adoption."

The free course is available at regendairy.org/training-courses.

Initiative for new dairy sector entrants



Further speakers have been announced for the Progressive Dairy Operators Conference, hosted by Kite Consulting and British Dairying ahead of the Cream Awards on September 5.

Matt Ryan and Mel Shipley from Oxbury Bank will be giving an insight into how young people can enter the dairy sector with the help of its Next Gen initiative.

Matt and Alex Scott, of Four Quarters Farming, used the scheme

to create a more sustainable future. "It helped us change the way of working, focusing on home breeding our replacements and genetics to improve herd health and performance," said Matt.

"The guidance has been invaluable; and supporting the younger generation is important for the future of farming."

For more information and tickets to the Kenilworth conference contact enquiries@kiteconsulting.com.

Study probes farm succession

Research by a finance and investment company has revealed almost nine in 10 UK farmers have a succession plan in place. Some 99% of respondents agreed that harmony exists between the different family generations running the farm. Most (73%) anticipated that the current generation would retire between 60 and 65 years of age. Just 8% expected them to retire before 60. However, 14% believed that the current generation would remain involved until 70. While 2% said they would retire aged 70–75, some 3% admitted that they didn't envisage ever retiring.

Sports campaign for milk benefits

The AHDB and British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) have launched a new campaign designed to highlight the benefits of milk to young students involved in sports.

'Milk Every Moment' is providing students with information on the role milk can play in a healthy, balanced diet, aiming to reintroduce them to the natural goodness of the product. The campaign promotes milk as an affordable, nutritional powerhouse and seeks to capture market share from energy drinks and milk alternatives.

Work experience goes virtual at TIAH

The Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH) has launched a new virtual work experience programme.

With more than seven hours of content including on-farm videos, interviews, and interactive tools, it is designed to provide young people with meaningful exposure to careers in farming.

"The programme is free for youngsters across the UK, overcoming some of the geographical and safety barriers involved on hands-on experience," said Stephen Jacob, Chief Executive at TIAH. "And with many colleges no longer requiring students to take on-site work experience, this programme will give agriculture high-quality representation."



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Local offsetting in Northumberland

A Northumberland mixed farmer has set up a scheme to help businesses and individuals in the area become more environmentally conscious and offset their carbon footprint locally.

Mike Dungait's own switch to regenerative farming has involved planting diverse crops to rejuvenate the soil and attract beneficial insects. Now, through his 'Green Acres' initiative, he wants to encourage similar actions locally, which will give visible results while providing carbon offsetting solutions.

Planting trees and hedges, cultivating bee hives, and maintaining



Mike Dungait is using regenerative farming to offset carbon locally

diverse grasslands allows others to offset their carbon footprint directly in Northumberland.

"Our premise is to do something local and visible," he said. "We want people to understand why looking after our environment is important and to see the tangible impact of their contributions."

The Green Acres system works by people paying a monthly subscription, with the basic package planting 17 trees/year and sequestering 60t of CO₂/year. It offers detailed information and metrics on how much carbon is offset through its programmes.

New UK Agricultural Director appointed at Arla



Paul Dover has lots of experience

Paul Dover has been officially appointed as Arla's new UK Agricultural Director, having temporarily filled the role during the recruitment process.

"Paul has a wealth of experience spanning more than 20 years in the

food and retail industry," said an Arla spokesperson. "Since joining Arla he has worked in several commercial roles with customers like Tesco, Co-op, Morrisons and M&S. Roles have included optimising investment plans across branded promotions and pricing, leading channel strategies, and delivering own label tenders."

Before joining Arla in 2016, Mr Dover spent 10 years at Asda in various commercial management roles, and more recently took up a position on the Dairy Sector Board for Red Tractor.

Bas Padberg, Managing Director at Arla Foods UK, said: "Paul has a unique combination of skills, relationships and experience that I believe make him the right person to lead the agricultural team and our farmers through this exciting period."

Applications open for dairy grants

The West Country Dairy Awards are now open for applications. More than £20,000 is available in grants to students living in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset or Somerset who are undertaking further education courses related to the dairy industry.

They can be students of all ages who can demonstrate commitment to dairying and show aptitude to 'add value' to the industry.

Applications close on July 31. For more information call 07583 468877.

Record year for Gold Cup qualifiers

A record number of dairy herds have already qualified for the 2024 NMR RABDF Gold Cup through milk recording channels and nominations.

This year, 1,217 dairy businesses recording with NMR and CIS have qualified for the prestigious award. The qualifying criteria for milk recorded herds is set at 100 cows or more with qualifying lactations in the herd, an average somatic cell count of 200,000/ml or less, or 250,000/ml or less for organic herds. There is a minimum profitable lifetime index specific to the breed or time of calving for block calving herds. The winner will be announced at Dairy-Tech in February 2025.

Love Cheese Live



Promoting dairy to the public

At the end of June, AB Dairy UK took a stand at the Love Cheese Live Food and Drink Festival in Staffordshire, one of the UK's largest events of its kind.

Head of Marketing at AB Dairy, Charlotte Walsh, said: "We focused on engaging with consumers and the next generation to present the real facts and excellence of dairy, as well as its health benefits. We also highlighted the range of careers in the industry and had a really positive response."



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Dairy climate resilience to cost £3.9bn

A major new report from Kite Consulting says UK dairy farms will need a huge level of investment to build resilience against the impact of climate change.

The 'Cost of Climate Resilience' report, which uses data from 850 UK dairy farms, estimates the cost at more than £3.9bn, with a large proportion required for increasing silage and slurry storage capacity. The estimated costs per farm are based on an average herd size of 236, housed for an average of 30 weeks.

"With the recent milk price sitting at, or below, the cost of production, farms have not been able to make the investments needed to build climate resilience into their business," said Kite's Becki Reay. "The resultant



Becki Reay at Kite Consulting

risk to the security of milk supply has been uncovered in this report.

"Farmers have simply not been able to afford to invest in silage and slurry storage capacity, or the extra land required to produce silage, that will help ensure milk production against the climate threats of drought and flood. The short-term impact during periods of extreme weather is that we will see production fall, and longer term others will leave the sector. The conversation around the cost of milk production and pricing needs to change, to reflect the position we are in."

The data shows 1,350t of additional silage storage is needed per farm to increase resilience to extreme weather. In addition, 85%

of dairy farms have less than the eight months of slurry storage deemed to make them resilient to extreme weather events. The report estimates that the cost of infrastructure and additional land required is £472,539 per average UK dairy farm, or an additional 2.4ppl/year for 10 years.

"The level of investment needed will have to come from the market," said Mrs Reay. "Farmers will use this money to make the investments needed to guarantee food supply in a volatile world."

"Consumers will need to see this extra cost as an insurance against extreme weather events and to ensure a resilient, sustainable British milk supply."

Industry to work with new government

Organisations were quick to offer a positive response to the new Labour Government, but were clear in their expectations and priorities they want to see on the agenda.

The NFU said it was looking forward to working with government to help deliver its missions for boosting national food security, contributing to economic growth and driving environmental benefits. President Tom Bradshaw described it as "a reset moment" for British agriculture.

"Labour's manifesto recognised that food security is national security, but it is business confidence which forms the foundation of this. With British farmers ambitious for the future, what they, and the public need, are practical policies that revitalise farm business confidence and deliver on our shared mission of food security," he added. "That's why, for Britain's farmers, the number one priority for the new Government must be to set an increased multi-year agriculture budget for the duration of the next Parliament."

In the coming weeks, the Union would be building on its strong



engagement with Labour ministers to date, to discuss essential policy solutions on key issues, he said.

The NFU stressed the need for the environmental land management schemes to work for all farms, to set core standards for food imports and to adopt legislation to boost public procurement. Other issues include a fit-for-purpose Seasonal Workers Scheme, effective import controls, supply chain fairness, investment in infrastructure and flexibility in planning.

CLA President Victoria Vyvyan said: "The new Government must

listen to and learn from the rural community, as farmers and rural business owners can so often provide the solutions to the problems that government faces. We will work with Ministers constructively, and perhaps at times robustly, in pursuit of a strong rural economy."

With the right support, rural businesses could generate growth, creating good jobs and prosperity for every community. Closing the productivity gap between the rural economy and the national average could add £43bn to the UK's Gross Value Added, she said.

'Emotional' Willsbro hold successful sale

The Wills family held their Premier Herd Sale on July 2 after being awarded Holstein National Premier Herd 2023 by Holstein UK.

They opened the doors to Pawton Dairy near Wadebridge, Cornwall, where the 1,700 cows average over 14,800kg of milk.

"It was emotional being presented with the award, because we made it into the final seven two years ago – and then our Dad – Anthony – passed away two days after," said Mathew Wills.

"So when we won last year, it was emotional for lots of different reasons; it's an honour."

"The judge said all seven herds were extremely good, but in his words, we were 'world-class', which is a nice way to put it. Now it's time to pass the baton on; it's quite a big responsibility being the premier herd, and we haven't taken it lightly."

The family welcomed over 1,000 people to the farm for the open day, which culminated in a sale with 40 milking cows, 160 heifer calves and a selection of embryos going under the hammer.

And it was a four-month-old calf – Willsbro Lambda Nita 5991 ET, which topped the sale at 7,000 guineas.

So what does the future look like for this impressive herd? "Just keep improving, keep using genomics and picking the correct sires," said Mr Wills.

Scotland's new vet school now open to student applications

Scotland's first new vet school in more than a century is now taking applications from prospective students.

The School of Veterinary Medicine at Scotland's Rural College intends to register its first cohort of students

on to its Bachelor of Veterinary Science degree in Aberdeen in mid-October / early November.

Professor Caroline Argo, Dean of Veterinary Medicine, said: "The UK veterinary profession is failing to achieve self-sufficiency

in generating and retaining home-grown talent. This has serious ramifications for Scotland's farmers. We are seeking to address this by training the vets that are so essential for our food sector and mixed, rural practices."

Weather drives markets



Jamie Day

Feed market specialist

Cereal prices ended their three-month upwards rally in early June, shedding £30/t to fall to levels last seen in mid-April by the end of the month. Soyameal values have also fallen over the same period. Weather remains the primary market driver in all global regions, as the 2024 cereal harvests gets under way in the southern US states and European countries.

Domestically, a widening gap between old and new crop feed cereal prices reflects the estimated 15% fall in the UK winter wheat planted area following the wet autumn and spring. This disparity is also reflected in straw prices, which are rising as supplies are expected to be constrained due to the smaller crop. The British Association of Hay and Straw Merchants reports current big bale wheat straw values of £70-£120/t, depending on region, and £80-£125/t for barley straw at the end of June – a considerable increase from a year ago.

And the challenging weather may have affected silage quality – the UK's largest forage analyst, Trouw Nutrition GB, reports that the wet conditions delayed first cuts. Its early analyses (see p26) point to grass silages higher in fibre and lower in digestibility due to the later cuts – they may need more supplementation next winter.

Global expectations

In late June the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) released its monthly World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report, the first to predict planted areas for the US 2024 maize and soya crops. The June figures traditionally help to set the market tone for these crops. The latest WASDE surprised traders by increasing the US maize crop area to nearly 91.5m acres – over a million acres more than anticipated, and forecasting end-June maize stocks more than 10% higher than expected. As a result, the Chicago maize futures fell to a three-year low, with the nearby July 24 US contract at its lowest since 2020.

But the increase in maize plantings has come at the expense of the US soya area, which is predicted to fall by 0.7m acres to 86.1m acres. End-June soya stock projections tallied with market expectation, and the USDA figures saw 2024 soya futures positions harden by 0.8% in late June.

The USDA forecast for US wheat plantings is 0.42m acres below trade forecasts at 47.2m acres, although the stocks are marginally higher than markets predicted. But this was not enough to support wheat futures, with the Chicago, Paris and London exchanges all continuing to lose ground.

The London wheat futures had peaked at the end of May, with the July 2024 position at £201.25/t, November '24 at £216.6/t and the May '25 contract at £224.40/t. But the sharp falls over June saw the three positions end the month at £169.35/t, £198/t and £205.50/t respectively. Wheat prices in

the UK and Europe have followed the US market downwards, as reasonable weather conditions across much of the northern hemisphere point to at least average wheat yields as the combines start to roll. US winter and spring wheat crops are reported to be in the best condition since 2020, with this season's US carry-out stock at a four-year high.

Aggressively priced Russian wheat exports are adding to the pressure on global values. With consumers covered and export business still muted, there is little upside for UK values, with imported maize acting as a ceiling for values. Maize has been trading at £213-£216/t ex-store depending on region.

Weather dependent

UK cereal crops are still weather dependent as they ripen, and price movements will reflect that. But merchants predict a period of price stability, at least until yields and quality can be quantified. Spot UK wheat prices fell from an average £190/t to £176/t ex-farm over June. The barley market is subdued too, with values influenced by the feed wheat market. With little consistent demand from domestic buyers and a continued lack of competitiveness in export markets, feed barley has been trading at up to a £30/t discount to feed wheat. A smaller winter barley area has been offset by a rise in spring plantings, although some crops were late drilled due to the weather, so yield could be variable. Like the wheat crop, the market needs some hard yield and quality data to reach a consensus on new crop values. Physical barley values opened June at an average £172/t ex-farm and closed the month at £157/t.

Of the feed proteins, soya futures tightened at the end of June following the WASDE cut in area. But nearby availability is already difficult, with high river levels in the US delaying internal transport to export terminals. The longer-term uncertainty over EU and UK soya imports due to the potential impact of deforestation legislation from January 2025 remains. Importers are reluctant to book cargoes until the picture is clearer.

The developing US soyabean crop is rated 67% good/excellent; a four-year high, but much still depends on the weather between now and the October harvest. There is good availability from South American origins – Brazil is currently 64% sold and Argentina 28% sold. A lack of demand from China – the world's biggest soya importer – is also weighing on the market. Hi pro soya quotes fell from £412/t to £392/t ex-store over June, with November/December 2024 at £415/t ex-store. The EU and UK oilseed rape areas are down, with the WASDE report predicting world rapeseed production falling by 1.2m tonnes.

However, weather conditions in Canada point to a big crop there. The EU has recently agreed a 50% tariff on rapeseed imports from Russia and Belarus, which is also bullish for values. Rapemeal fell from £290/t to £264/t ex-store for July, with £276/t forecast for the November-April 2025 period. Soya hulls are quoted at £166/t ex-store and palm kernel at £184/t ex-store during June.



Planning to protect maize

By Ken Stroud,
Volac Business Manager
for Ecosyl

With uncertainty in the cereals market, can you guarantee being able to purchase cereal-based concentrates at a sensible price for this winter?

Being able to do this could be particularly important on farms where the quality of grass silage cuts has been disappointing.

Fortunately, if you're growing maize, it offers a cushion against unpredictable cereal concentrate prices – thanks to its high starch.

However, as well as managing maize properly in the field it's also crucial to manage it properly in the clamp.

Without attention to detail with conservation, significant amounts of maize dry matter (DM) go to waste. Worryingly, you may not even know it's occurring.

Invisible losses

There's often confusion about losses in maize silage. Many people are aware of losses when maize silage heats up. But even if you don't have problems with heating, far less obvious are the invisible losses from an inefficient fermentation.

While about half the losses in maize can come from heating, half can come from a poorer fermentation, caused by unwanted bacteria naturally present on the harvested crop.

Combined together, these losses typically reduce the DM tonnage of maize in the clamp by about 10%. This might not sound much, but the unwanted microbes that cause these losses feed on starches and sugars first, so the remaining DM is lower in feed value. And these are typical DM losses. They can easily reach 20% – or even 50% in the worst parts of the clamp.

Dual-acting

Added to this, it's often thought maize will ferment without an additive. While it can, by relying on bacteria present on the plant to carry out the fermentation you don't know whether it's being carried out by good ones or bad ones. So my advice would be to protect maize with a dual-acting additive, such as Ecocool, containing only good bacteria to improve fermentation and to keep the silage stable and cool for a good period of time.

An additive represents just a few percent of the total cost of producing maize silage – compared with fertiliser and sprays which might be as much as a third of that production cost.

You probably wouldn't dream of growing maize without fertilisers or sprays because you know it wouldn't yield well. So, if going to the expense of producing that yield and DM, why let some of it go to waste in the clamp? To me, it doesn't make sense.

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Managing extremes of grass

Charlotte Lawder joined the Bisterne Farms team six months ago, having briefly returned home to Shropshire after working in Western Australia on a 1000-cow farm. In this month's column she mulls on the changing weather and Open Farm Sunday.

What a difference a month makes! In May I had a catch up with my old farm from down under – which isn't too dissimilar to Bisterne – and I was reminded how different our climates are. While they had just had their first rain since September, our ground was just starting to dry up. Since then, mid-June has seen a change in weather which was good for the farm tan but not so good for our grass growth, which plummeted from 82 to 18kg/ha of dry matter/day over the space of four weeks.

After being told by George, for what felt like years, that 'this really is a dry farm' he was finally proven right, as evidenced by the increase in the number of bent pigtails (electric fencing posts). I am familiar with dry weather and dry ground from Australia, though of course they have management tools like irrigation systems – maybe this will be a thing of the future for UK dairy farmers?

To manage the grazing here, we do nothing groundbreaking (pun intended). I grass measure with a plate meter at the start of each week and do a second check before the weekend. I then write the grazing plan onto the whiteboard for all of the team to see, which shows the paddocks and the area allocated for each break. Cows get a new break after each milking.

When growth rates were higher in late May, having listened to the Dairy Edge podcast, we decided to lower the amount of cake fed in the parlour. This was soon reversed, with perhaps too much of the grazing platform skipped for silage and an unseasonably cold couple of weeks meaning pre-grazing covers for the milkers rapidly fell away. Next year, hopefully we will be able to capitalise more on grass as the cheapest feed and use less cake throughout the spring, while achieving good body



Charlotte Lawder has had her work cut out managing the grass this year, following the wet spring and dry June

condition and milk production. As luck, or quite possibly strategy, would have it, the recent reduction in grass growth rates has coincided with us beginning to dry off our autumn-calving cows. However, while this has been working, it has still not been quite enough, and demand is a little high. We noticed a slight drop in milk production in the spring-calving group as the grass has gone into its reproductive phase. Fortunately, we were able to reverse this by feeding them silage.

Silage surplus

For a variety of reasons we had an excess from last year, so it wasn't bought in specially for this. The spring group have also had a temporary increase in grass allocation, which has led to higher residuals.

Some of these are being tidied up by the in-calf R2s (10-month-old heifers and upwards) or dry cow group to avoid wastage. The addition of silage into the diet had the desired effect; milk is back to where we would like it and the grazing ground is looking better.

Two weeks after the dust had settled from the Gold Cup Open Day, we, like many others, hosted Open Farm Sunday (OFS), for the third consecutive year since Covid. So it was time to polish the farm again, though this time we had a better starting point!

Great weather and free Arla iced coffee (though hopefully not just that) saw approximately 3,000 members of the public through our gates. This was my first experience of working on OFS, and what a day!

Engaging with the public by showcasing a working farm is a great opportunity to educate them about food production; an important cause that I'm sure all farmers will agree is needed. The yard was manned by our young(ish) team of seven dairy staff, in our orange high-vis tops, as well as the estate owner Hallam; who was front-of-house, and many other helpers from the local community.

LIC, Crediton Milling and Synergy Farm Vets were there adding interest and providing more information about the dairy industry. I was stationed in our rotary parlour,

where questions varied from children asking if I had ever been pooped on to more technical questions by adults on their third visit to this farm. I strongly encourage any enthusiastic farmers to participate in OFS, it a fantastic opportunity to show off the great standard of British farming.

What's next?

So... what's next for us? Provided somatic cell counts remain low, we will aim to go to once-a-day milking for the autumn-calving group.

At the time of writing, we will continue to dry off, with all August-calving cows dry by July 1. The prep for calving has begun and will continue, and – like everyone else – we will continue to make silage. Some will go into our self-feed clamp and some into bales to be used for out-wintering and in the calving shed.

Things will start to pick up pace again as we come closer to calving, but at the moment we are in our quiet period; the sun is shining, the cows are happy and I think about how fortunate I am to work on this farm.

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Dairy is rocking and rolling



Chris Walkland

COMMENT

Dairy is dead. So goes the mantra of the antis. Oh yeah? Well if the processor goings-on over the past few months are anything to go by it's very much alive and not only kicking but rocking and rolling. I said last month that I couldn't remember a time when we've had so much investment from so many processors. And since then we've had even more! By any stretch of the imagination these past few weeks have been a remarkable and hugely positive time for the UK dairy industry. Quite what has stimulated this corporate splashing of the cash, I'm not sure, but it is very impressive – and should be welcomed.

I mentioned some last month, but I'll list them all now, to put them in context: First Milk with its acquisition of BV Dairy in Dorset; Arla with its major mozzarella mission in Devon; followed by Volac and its major investments in its current factories; Freshways with Milk & More, its new factory and then buying a bread business to expand its food service market presence; Pembrokeshire Creamery (formally opened this month), plus Dale Farms expansion.

And last month two more surprises – Muller wanting to acquire Yew Tree; and Ehrmann, one of Germany's dairy companies (which has largely passed me by), acquiring Trewithen Dairy. Against all of those were the fiasco that is Mona, and perhaps inevitably, the sad news Arla was closing its legendary Melton Mowbray Tuxford and Tebbit site. By my reckoning that's musical chairs from no less than 10 companies – so far!

Hugely positive

For sure, we have to welcome the acquisitions and investments, as most come with a commitment to modernise and expand, and that's hugely positive. Many companies will need a lot more milk – especially in the South West, which is already being shaken-up by the First Milk-Yeo Valley regenerative activity (and which saw a huge presence at Groundswell). Watch out, organic: I think your thunder is increasingly getting stolen.

Both the Arla-Volac and Muller-Yew Tree acquisitions will be subject to scrutiny by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). Both deals are approaching Phase One now, with yay or nay announcements not due for a few months. I hope both deals will be waved through.

The CMA is all about the impact of mergers and takeovers on consumers, so those close to each deal are optimistic. What is also positive is that Arla and Muller are going down different non-competitive routes (aside from their liquid businesses.) Arla is going big into mozzarella and whey and Muller isn't; Muller is going big into drying and Arla isn't (other than for that whey).

Of course, there will be Yew Tree farmers worried about what the future holds under Muller, which

has, in the past, given notice to small and outlying farmers. Muller makes no promises, but I think the vibes are positive: It will want lots of milk for its new factory and I can't see why it would invest millions in Yew Tree and then risk getting a bad reputation by giving notice to farmers.

That said, the fact remains that the days of smaller and more distant farms (to a factory) are increasingly coming to an end – not specifically because processors aren't interested in them but because of the standards required by them, and the sheer amount of investment needed to keep going these days in the face of new legislation (see later). While such small farms might not be given notice, it's not hard to envisage ever-higher transport charges that further challenge their viability.

Before I leave the subject of Yew Tree, though, a few words about the Woodcock family are in order. They have faced criticism over the past few months because of the price that ingredients contracts (which they offer) have been getting. Some farmers think the firm has been taking the mick, for want of one of the more polite expressions. But they really haven't. The reality is that the skimmed milk powder (SMP) price and the cream and spot milk prices have been very poor, and what they paid out is what they could afford to pay out. In fact, I know they subsidised the price to a degree. Of course farmers didn't like the price – the Woodcocks didn't like it either – but that was the market, and you can never beat the market long-term and win.

A lifeline to dairy

The reality is that the family has been a lifeline to a lot of dairy businesses over time by giving them a milk contract when not a single other firm would. They have kept a lot of families in milk, who would have had to have quit. They have also supported the milk price of every single dairy farmer in GB (if not the UK too), at times.

That's because this industry would have been in a real mess if the family hadn't invested in the drying capacity it had. We would not have been able to process all the milk, and milk prices for everyone would have crashed. Yew Tree saved the industry on some occasions, and from harder times on many more. Individual farmers and the industry as a whole have a lot to thank them for.

Assuming the take-over gets the nod from the CMA, Yew Tree farmers will be in the arms of a harder nosed German giant. But one that will have the capacity and desire to invest more than the Woodcocks will have done. And because of that I also think the farmers will be better off in the long-run, too. Parity of pricing for the Yew Tree farmers with Muller will be a fair way off, I'd say. But the acquisition might just be the start.

Now back to my comment about it being harder and harder for smaller farms (any farms?) to comply with new regulations coming down the line. Back in May I mentioned Kite was due out with a report highlighting the massive bill the industry faces over the next decade. That's now out – see news or 'The Cost of Climate resilience: Future proofing UK Dairy' on its website.

The total bill is estimated at £3.9bn, with 'a large proportion' required for modernising slurry lagoons and silage pits. Some 1,350t of additional silage storage is needed per farm to increase farm resilience to extreme weather. And 85% of dairy farms have less than the eight months of slurry storage deemed necessary to make them resilient to extreme weather events. The cost of capital infrastructure investments and additional land required isn't far off £500,000 per farm, equivalent to 2.4ppl, per year, for a decade.

Huge investment

It's an astonishing amount of money which the market will have to find, or else more and more farmers will decide that dairying isn't financially rocking and rolling for them, and that it's not worth them splashing their cash, even if it is for the processors.

History shows us that between 1994 and 2004 producer numbers dropped by 40%. Between 2004 and 2014 they fell 35%, and from 2014 to 2024 by 25%, with Staffordshire and Gloucestershire leading the table of percentage reductions in numbers for the major dairying counties, and Lancashire and Ceredigion at the foot of the table (England and Wales only). It is not unrealistic to assume numbers will drop by perhaps 20% (another 2,000) between now and 2034, and thus dropping overall numbers down to 8,000 or so.

As I said last month, and reiterate this month... processors investing in new factories and stainless steel had better also invest in their farmer relations too, else they might find they don't have much milk going through the shiny new factories they've built or bought. Which is one of the reasons why I'm more relaxed about Muller's likely treatment of Yew Tree's farmers than others are. Those farmers who stay in the game, invest and meet the required standards will be fine, I think.

% decline in farmers - 2014 to 2023

Staffordshire	-34.3
Gloucestershire	-33.6
North-West Wales	-33.3
South Wales	-28.9
Wiltshire	-28.6
Somerset	-28.5
Cornwall and Scilly	-27.8
Dorset	-27.4
North Yorkshire	-27.0
Hereford and Worcester	-25.7
Cheshire	-25.7
Carmarthenshire	-24.9
Shropshire	-24.2
Powys	-23.9
Pembrokeshire	-23.0
Cumbria	-22.8
Derbyshire	-22.4
Devon	-22.1
North-East Wales	-21.6
Lancashire	-20.9
Ceredigion	-20.4

AHDB MILK PRICE LEAGUE TABLE

Milk price league - May 2024

	May price	Annual average
Müller M&I M&S*	43.41	44.16
Müller M&I Tesco*	41.49	42.20
Müller M&I Sainsbury's*	39.58	40.33
Müller M&I Co-op*	39.53	40.28
Dale Farm GB	39.88	39.64
Arla Manufacturing	38.22	39.06
Barber's Cheesemakers	39.02	39.02
First Milk Manufacture	38.85	38.81
Lactalis - Profile	38.83	38.74
Wyke Farms	38.21	38.69
Pattemores	38.49	38.49
Crediton Dairy	38.47	38.39
Wensleydale	38.36	38.36
Saputo Dairy UK - Profile	38.19	38.09
Lactalis	38.08	38.08
Leprino Foods	37.89	38.06
Saputo Dairy UK - Variable	36.19	38.03
Dale Farm NI	37.95	37.93
South Caernarfon	36.76	37.82
Belton Farm	37.16	37.16
Müller M&I Direct	36.17	36.92
Lactalis - Seasonal	31.08	36.90
Arla Direct Manuf.	35.84	36.75
Freshways	34.00	34.41

NOTES TO LEAGUE TABLE

Milk prices shown are the monthly price and the annual average price that would be paid on a contract for 12 months going forward if the present price schedule remained unchanged, according to AHDB calculations.

Prices listed in the Milk Price League Table are ranked according to estimated annual average price. Prices exclude capital retentions, administration charges, farmer group subscriptions, and VAT but include the AHDB Dairy levy and seasonality adjustments.

The prices in the league table are for a standard litre of milk, with 4.10% butterfat and 3.35% protein, for the annual delivery of 1.5m litres, with SCCs of 164,000 and Bactoscans of 26,000.

While the AHDB seeks to ensure that this information is accurate, no warranty is given and the AHDB accepts no liability caused in relation to information and opinions contained in or omitted from this document.

BONUSES NOT INCLUDED

1. Arla Manufacturing currently has a guaranteed minimum of 1.33ppl. This is not included in the milk price opposite.
2. First Milk manuf. member premium +0.50ppl and F/M manuf. Tesco cheese group +1.72p. Members may qualify for both premia.
3. Müller M&I Direct, direct premium 1.00p; this is not included in the league table price but Müller says almost all suppliers are eligible for it.
4. Müller M&I Sainsbury's pays a sustainability supplement of +0.54
5. South Caernarfon will pay a 13th payment of 0.25ppl.
5. Pattemores pays an extra 0.25ppl for thermoduric count below 250/ml.

None of these supplements are included in the milk prices league table; they are additional to them. Retailer price supplements are included where applicable.

* These prices reflect the milk supplied to the retailer.



Farmgate milk price changes	2023			2024						
	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL
Arla Sainsbury's*	0.34	-0.26	-0.14	0.08	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arla Tesco	-	-0.10	-	-	0.69	-	-	-0.60	-	-
Arla Direct Manuf.	-	-	-	0.76	2.52	-	0.84	0.01	0.43	0.43
Arla Manuf.	0.09	-	0.89	3.08	-	0.88	-0.04	0.43	0.44	0.81
Barber's Cheesemakers (1)	-1.60	-	-	1.00	1.00	-	0.50	0.50	1.00	1.00
Belton Farm	-0.75	-	-	1.00	-	-	1.00	-	1.00	1.00
Crediton Dairy	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.75	-	1.00	0.75
Dale Farm GB	-0.25	-0.71	-	0.44	0.55	0.62	0.62	0.18	0.82	-
Dale Farm NI	-	2.00	0.50	1.50	1.00	-	-	0.25	-	-
First Milk Manuf (2)	-	-0.85	-	-	1.00	1.00	0.75	0.75	-	0.80
Lactalis/Caledonian	-	-1.55	-	1.03	0.78	0.52	0.78	-	1.03	0.79
Leprino Foods	-	-	-	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	-	-	1.50
Müller Co-op	0.12	-0.29	-0.05	0.03	0.24	-	-	0.12	-	-
Müller M&S	-	-1.20	-	-	-	-	-0.70	-	-	-
Müller Direct	-	-0.50	-	-	-	-	1.00	-	0.50	1.00
Müller Sainsbury's	0.34	-0.26	-0.14	0.08	0.04	0.03	-0.63	-	0.02	0.20
Müller Tesco	-	-0.10	-	-	0.69	-	-	-0.60	-	-
Pattemores	-	-1.00	-	-	-	-	0.50	-	1.00	1.00
Payne's Dairies	-1.00	-	-	-	-	0.50	1.00	-	-	2.00
Saputo Dairy UK	-0.50	-1.50	-	1.00	-	1.50	-	-	1.50	0.50
South Caernarfon	-0.75	-	-	-	1.25	1.00	0.75	1.00	-	1.50
Wensleydale	-0.91	-0.25	0.15	1.21	0.36	0.48	0.53	0.16	0.89	1.01
Wyke Farms	-1.67	-	-	1.15	1.04	-	0.71	-	1.35	0.71

NOTES: Price changes are listed as reported by the processors but may not be fully reflected in the AHDB Dairy standard litre price. Prices listed above include the AHDB dairy levy and seasonality schedules. *No longer supplying this contract.

(1) As of July 2017 the Barber price is based on the 'assured contract', for milk supplied in excess of the base milk volume plus threshold, the price was equal to the AMPE set by AHDB Dairy for the month in which litres are supplied, less 2ppl.

(2) First Milk Manufacture Member Premium calculated on a pro-rata basis linked to a member's level of capital payments.

Weaker production

Following a weaker spring flush, attributed to the challenging weather conditions through the winter and spring months, GB milk deliveries were back 1.5% for the month of May. However, we have seen some recovery in volumes as we move into June and the weather improved.

The data shows the daily average for the week ending June 22 was up 0.3% on the same point of the previous year. This is the first time we've seen weekly deliveries up on the previous year's levels in this milk year. It is, however, important to note that we are annualising on levels lower than the historic average, as last June saw extreme heatwaves and drought.

Looking forward, the recently revised AHDB production forecast expects the 2024/25 milk year to total 12.2bn litres, down 1% on the previous year. This is based on declines in production for the first two months of the milk year, the highest producing months. We forecast year-on-year increases in production in the months of July and August, supported by good grass growth and strengthening prices. However, for the remainder of the season the decline in production is expected to continue, unless prices move more radically northwards.

Stable milking herd

British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) figures as of April this year showed stability in the GB milking herd, at 1.64m. This suggests that despite lower milk prices, farmers have maintained cow numbers and the decline in milk production is primarily due to lower yield levels.

Milk yield will have been impacted by poor grass and forage during the wet weather of the past few months. Looking ahead, eyes will be on grass and forage availability and quality, to see the effect on yields as we move into the autumn months.

Turning to wholesale prices, we saw the impact of the disappointing spring flush born out with price increases across all products in June. Butter was the biggest climber, up 11% on the previous month and 42% on the previous year, to sit at £5,660/t in June. Reports suggest that butter stocks are very low, which, alongside concerns about milk supply for processing, has driven up the price.

The uplift in wholesale prices fed through to the market indicators, with the actual milk price equivalent (AMPE) up a significant 3.4p on the month to 40.5ppl, the highest it's been since November 2022. The milk for cheese value equivalent (MCVE) followed the same trend, gaining 1.8p in June to sit at 38.2ppl. Stronger mild cheddar prices contributed to this growth, up 4% from May's prices. These changes resulted in the market value of milk (MMV) strengthening by 2.1p to sit at 38.7ppl in June.

July milk price announcements

In July, we saw price increases across most contracts on the AHDB league table. In particular, strength was seen in cheese and manufacturing contracts, with all reported contracts recording increases in the range of 0.2ppl to 1.5ppl.

On aligned contracts, most buyers on the AHDB league table held their prices from the previous month. The exception to this was Sainsbury's, whose price lifted by 0.20ppl from the previous month.

Looking to non-aligned liquid contracts, most buyers lifted for the second consecutive month. Payne's Dairy saw the greatest increase, up 2ppl, while both Muller Direct and Graham's Dairy moved up by 1ppl. Crediton Dairy inched up the price by 0.75ppl, while Freshways held its price from the previous month.

Cheese contracts saw the largest growth in July, with all buyers on the AHDB league table increasing prices this month. The greatest increases were seen for Leprino and South Caernarfon Creameries, both up 1.5ppl. Prices moved up by 1ppl for Barbers, Belton Cheese, and Parkham Farms, while Wensleydale Creamery increased by 1.01ppl. Slightly smaller increases were seen for First Milk Manufacturing, Wyke Farms and Saputo, of 0.8ppl, 0.71ppl and 0.5ppl, respectively.

All manufacturing contracts on the AHDB league table saw growth, between 0.4ppl and 1.5ppl. Arla Direct Manufacturing contracts were up, by 0.43ppl, for the second month in a row, while Meadow Foods increased by 1.5ppl. Pattermores Dairy increased its price by 1ppl for the second consecutive month, while UK Arla Farmers Manufacturing inched up by 0.81ppl.

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GDT auction sets negative tone

By Chris Walkland

Spring is the time of year when many farmers spring into action for the year. And summer is the time when many traders spring into inaction. Because the holiday season seems to get earlier and earlier, if last year and this one are anything to go by. Already some manufacturers and traders are saying that the market has gone very quiet; that buyers have bought what they need for the time being, and that we are in for a stable but dull couple of months where nothing much is likely to change.

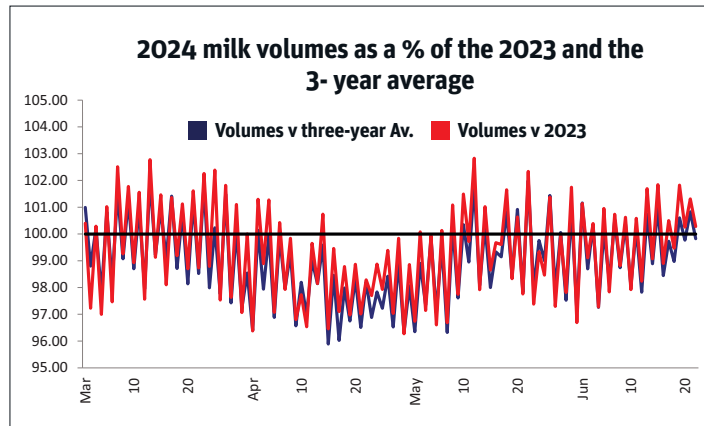
Certainly commodity prices haven't done much over the past few weeks, with Dutch butter prices remaining at €6,750/t (£5,715/t). In the UK prices are also stable at £5,700/t. The EU butter futures aren't painting a significantly different picture to real market prices, and have fluctuated from a 2024 low of €6,600/t (£5,588/t) for December, to a peak of €6,700/t (£5,672/t) now, then down to €6,275/t (£5,312/t) by March 2025.

"The steam is coming out of the market."

Cream continues to creep up both here and in Europe on the back of the better weather and increased demand for fresh product. We are, after all, in soft fruit season and it's Wimbledon. New strawberries please! In the UK, cream held at £2.00-£2.10/kg from January through to the end of April, before lifting in May to average £2.20/kg. But it wasn't until early June that it really started to take off, and ended the month just short of £2.50/kg, say most traders.

At the time of writing the indications were that it was heading higher too... but then came the GlobalDairyTrade (GDT) auction, which I'll come to next. The price hasn't been over the £2.50/kg threshold since October 2022.

Powders have been having a dismal time of it recently and nothing has changed on that front. Sellers are reporting no interest whatsoever. The last GDT mini auction on June 25 didn't help either – whole milk powder (WMP) sold for \$3,345/t



UK production is now slightly above last year but below the 3-year average

(£2,623/t) and skimmed milk powder (SMP) for \$2,540/t (£1,991/t) – both were down over \$100/t (£78/t) on the previous main GDT auction for the same contract period. This then helped to set the tone for the first July GDT event, which saw overall prices crash nearly 7%. This was a shocker of an event – the biggest fall since August 2023.

Butter and anhydrous milk fat (AMF) were both down over 10%, and WMP was down 4.3%. SMP fell 6.1%. But this wasn't a complete disaster – Arla's SMP (which was down at the last auction) actually increased, and the 6% drop was because there were some insanely high prices for Fonterra product at the last event.

Nevertheless, the result will have dropped the GDT returns to a farmer by several pence, and take potential returns from over 40p down into the mid 30ppl zone.

Quiet cheese market

The cheese market in the UK is quiet, stable and well balanced, say traders, with sellers not bending over backwards to sell, and buyers not beating down the doors to buy either. Mild is at £3,800/t from those who haven't got much to sell, as they can afford to keep it for mature cheddar if they don't get the price. But sellers are only willing to pay £3,700 (if that!), and there are manufacturers who are tempted to take the cash.

The GDT crashed 7% for cheddar, which won't do sellers any good. Demand still isn't brilliant, apparently. Mozzarella is at £3,450/t to £3,500/t.

Cheese is also slipping on the Continent, possibly due to buyers having one eye on what looks like rising milk volumes. Curd and gouda have dropped by an average

of €50/t (£42/t) to €4,125/t (£3,494/t) and €3,900/t (£3,303/t) respectively. These are worrying trends, as it has taken so long and so much effort for cheese prices to climb.

So what does all of this mean for farmgate milk prices? Well at the time of writing seven companies had increased their prices for August, with five at or over 40p on a standard litre – Arla, Barbers, Crediton, Freshways, and the Pembrokeshire Creamery (which I don't really count as it hasn't got many suppliers). Some 13 processors are now paying between 39 and 40ppl, and the average standard litre non-aligned price is just over 39p. The manufacturing litre is 40.4p.

The main question now is whether prices will go up much more. And I'm not sure they will. The steam is coming out of the market because of the holiday period, and milk volumes look as if they are rising in Europe, and they aren't terrible here. The latest data shows April's volumes in the EU were up 0.9% or so – the highest for a year – and in the UK the past 50 days have seen volumes down 0.75% on

last year; 1.15% up compared to two years ago and 1% down on the five-year average.

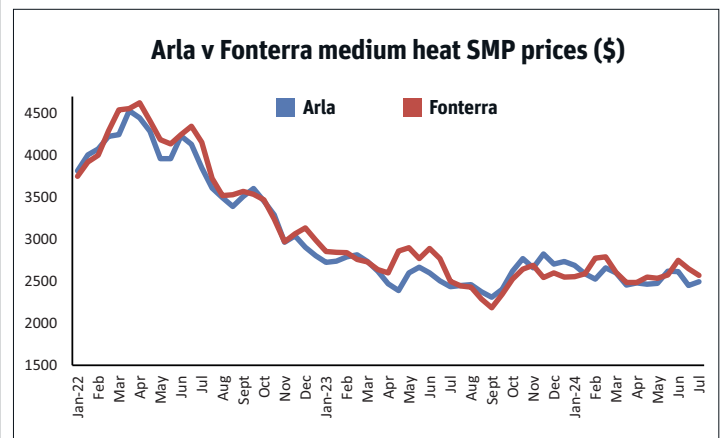
The past two weeks have seen UK volumes 0.17% more than last year, but 0.5% below the long-term average. It is the first time volumes have consistently turned positive compared to last year and the long-term average since the spring.

Costs are clearly coming down too, else Tesco wouldn't have dropped its price by 0.95ppl for August. Thus the stars are aligning for some profitable months for milk production... and we know what can happen in these circumstances. I can see milk volumes rising here and in Europe, and buyers becoming much less concerned about the supply situation. And it has been concerns over supply driving the price increases, not necessarily demand.

Tight purses

Despite inflation falling to lows that we haven't seen in months, and dairy prices actually falling compared to a year ago, many consumers say it doesn't feel as if the cost-of-living crisis is easing for them. We can, therefore, expect muted sales for some time yet – and especially if AHDB's figures are right that 11% of consumers are reducing their dairy consumption.

All of this; and especially with the latest GDT setting a new negative tone for the market, means that you might have had your lot for milk price rises for the summer. Before the auction it was hard to envisage milk prices going up much more – and certainly not anywhere near to 45ppl, which some farmers had suggested. Afterwards it's even harder to see that now, I'm afraid.



Skimmed milk powder prices have been lacklustre for many months



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Role of rumen microbes in fibre digestibility and utilisation

As the year progresses and grass matures, palatability and digestibility reduce, meaning intakes and milk yield can drop off. British Dairying explores the role of rumen microbes and how managing the rumen can help improve fibre utilisation.

The past 12 months have brought their fair share of challenges on farms throughout the UK, including a slow start to the spring and delayed turnout for many. It is little surprise to hear that recent AHDB analysis shows that May milk deliveries were the lowest for eight years.

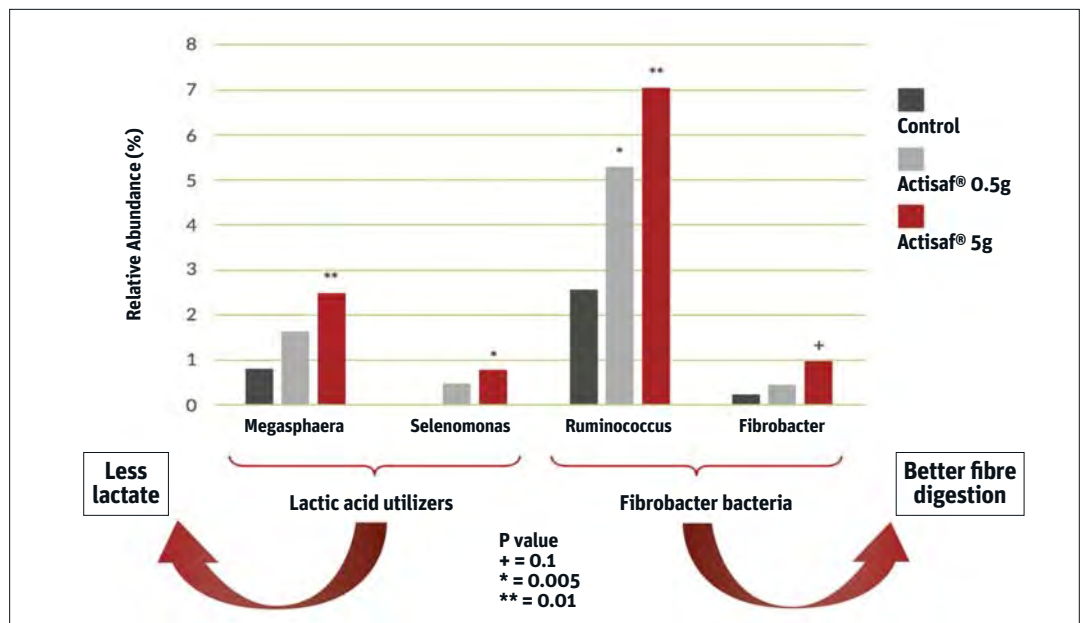
A particular test now will be keeping on top of grass quality as grass naturally enters its reproductive phase and puts out a seed head, making it less palatable and digestible. With resulting reduction in intakes and energy provision, ensuring adequate nutrition will be essential to flatten the milk curve and minimise a drop in yield post-peak production, says Kevin Doyle at Phileo UK & Ireland.

“Consistency is key to managing the rumen and feed efficiency.”

“At this time of year grass becomes more fibrous, and in turn is more difficult for rumen microbes to digest, which can reduce feed efficiency, milk yield and quality.”



Up to 60% of variability in feed efficiency is due to the rumen microbiome



The live probiotic yeast supports the growth of key microbes which digest fibre and utilise lactic acid

Fibre is an essential nutrient for cows as it aids rumen function, supplies energy and is a key component of butterfat synthesis. Fibre consists of plant matter that is both highly digestible (cellulose and hemicellulose) and more difficult to digest (lignin).

“When it comes to fibre for lactating cows, balance is key, as too much neutral detergent fibre (NDF)

can result in a drop in dry matter intakes (DMI), and too little can lead to acidosis,” notes Kevin.

“Diets should ideally contain 32-35% NDF, with around 75% of this coming from forage like grazing and/or silage.”

Microbes in the rumen

Ruminants can only digest fibre because of the microbes in their rumen. And in order to fully access the energy these materials hold, the rumen microbiome must function optimally.

“The rumen contains trillions of microbes, including thousands of species of bacteria, protozoa and fungi,” explains Kevin. “Specific species, like *Fibrobacter succinogenes*, specialise in digesting fibre and are consistently found in the rumen of the most efficient dairy cows.”

“Research has shown that up to 60% of variability in feed efficiency comes down to the rumen microbiome.”

This difference can be up to 2.5kg less DMI required for more feed efficient cows, which equates to around 8-10kg fresh weight of a

typical grass silage. That saves one tonne/day of fresh weight silage in a herd of 100 cows with no loss in yield.

Feed efficiency

“The ability of the rumen microbes to digest fibre is highly influential on feed efficiency – the more effectively these ‘bugs’ can do their jobs, the more nutrition and energy the cow can extract from the diet and, consequently, the more milk she can produce.”

It can be helpful to remember that when you feed the cow, you are actually feeding the microbes in her rumen, says Kevin. The balance of this community, called the microbiome, is important to rumen function but can be delicate.

“Consistency is key to managing the rumen and feed efficiency,” he advises. “In a perfect world, we would control all the variables but, the real world isn’t that simple so we just focus on what we can control.”

“First and foremost, you can’t manage what you don’t measure – analyse grass and silage regularly so concentrates and additives can

effectively complement forages. Many feed companies regularly analyse grass quality at a regional level which can be beneficial in getting a handle on this in your local area."

Balancing grass quality

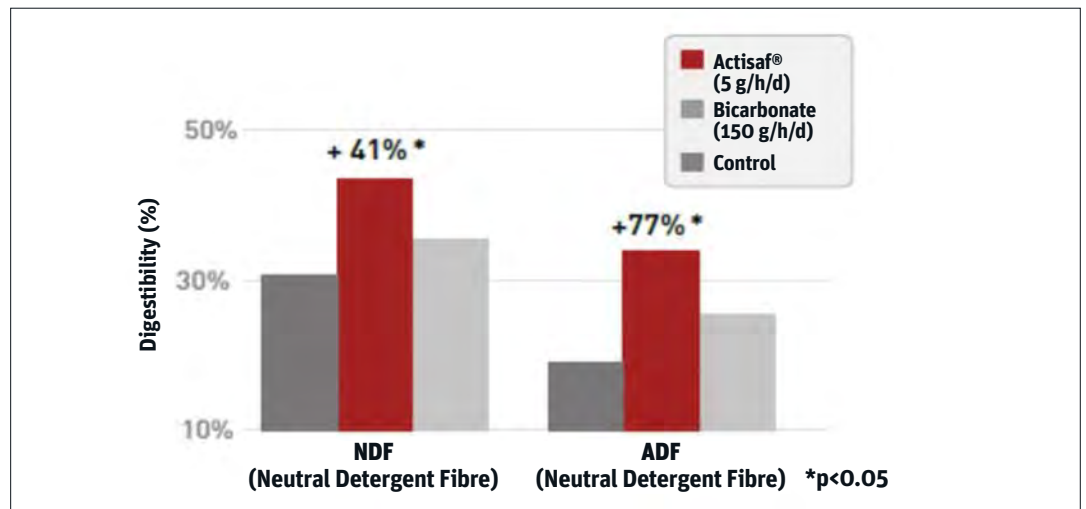
Enlisting a dairy nutritionist to help balance current grass quality will pay dividends by improving yields and feed efficiency.

For example, higher NDF grass is generally lower in protein, so adding a higher protein compound to the diet can help compensate, explains Kevin.

"Similarly, your herd could require a higher starch level in the compound to help with fibre digestion."

Other practical tips to improve feed efficiency this summer include:

- Plan ahead and make changes in diet gradually, over two-to-three weeks if possible.
- Ensure clean water is available at all times.
- Manage heat stress carefully – high humidity in the UK means that temperatures as low as 15°C can have a negative impact on yields, with cows selectively avoiding fibre in the diet to lower their internal heat load, which



The supplement increases the digestibility of both neutral detergent fibre and acid detergent fibre in the diet

can increase acidosis risk. Adding a live probiotic yeast like Actisaf Sc 47 to the ration can act as insurance for rumen function when challenges inevitably occur.

But not all live yeasts are the same – differences in strain, stability and dose rate impact effectiveness, warns Kevin.

By stabilising the rumen environment, the probiotic supports growth of key microbes which digest fibre and utilise lactic acid (figure

one) – this improves feed efficiency and lowers the risk of acidosis. This dual mode of action means better productivity, profitability and, depending on supplementation, a 5% reduction in CO₂e/kg energy corrected milk.

In practice

In a recent study at the University of Nottingham, cows that were fed 10g/day of Actisaf had more than 6% better NDF digestibility and 5%

increase in feed efficiency with no negative impact on body condition, health or fertility (figure two).

Regardless of the season and what else is happening on farm, ensuring good rumen function makes the most of every bite of feed and forage, he adds.

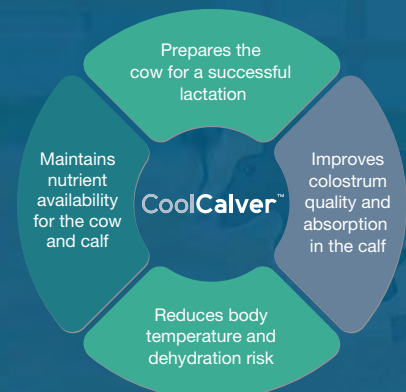
Not only does this mean better cow performance and welfare, but benefits to sustainability measures (including carbon emissions) and the bottom line.



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A good calf milk replacer packed with British ingredients

A quality milk replacer will contain 100% dairy protein to ensure optimal utilisation, as young calves struggle to digest vegetable protein sources. How the skim milk powder is processed is also important, as not all skim milk powders are the same. High heat-treatment can denature dairy proteins, making them less digestible and reducing what the calf will utilise. RS Energy Advance contains skimmed milk and whole milk powder which deliver excellent levels of readily digestible energy and protein.

Formulated to be as close to whole milk as possible, RS Energy Advance enables high feed rates which can help promote daily liveweight gains and support gut integrity. RS Energy Advance has also been trialled and tested on multiple farms across the country and been demonstrated to be suitable for all systems; both teat feeding and for automatic feeders, for rearing beef calves as well as heifer replacements.

RS Energy Advance is a high constituent, 100% dairy protein replacer containing British skimmed milk. Many 'British' skim calf milk replacers on the market, use imported skim milk powder which is then manufactured into calf milk replacer in the UK. RS Energy Advance is not only manufactured in the UK, but uses milk collected from British farms, ensuring, high quality BRITISH skim.



Glencairn Jerseys

Glencairn Jerseys are based in Ayrshire, where Colin and the team run a 250-cow herd, calving all year around. All calves are fed milk replacer using an automatic feeder, giving Colin and the team the time to monitor and manage the calves closely while achieving high intakes of milk replacer.

"We understand that our replacement heifers are the future, and the beef calves are also a valuable component of the business which is why we treat every calf the same" Colin explains.

"For the first two weeks of life, calves are kept in individual pens, which allows them to get going at the most vulnerable and important time in their life. This also gives us the confidence that they are healthy and strong enough to be put into the group pens with the feeder".



"They have access to fresh clean water, compound feed and straw in racks from day one. This is continued throughout the rearing phase to aid with rumen development".

"Once in the group pens, the calves are fed eight litres a day. Jerseys are slightly different to their black and white counterparts.

They have very little body fat at the start and can be quite sensitive, the RS Energy Advance Milk replacer has not disappointed."

"Since changing to RS Energy Advance, growth rates have increased by 0.2kg/day on average, from 0.50g-0.70g/day which is good for Jerseys, who typically have slightly lower growth rates than black and whites. We are very happy with this, especially during the winter months, and we aren't getting any scours which shows the calves are healthy". Colin from Glencairn adds.

Dave Hastings at Bulls Green

Based in Cheshire, Dave manages a 400-head dairy herd with 320 youngstock on the farm.

The team at Bulls Green switched to RS Energy Advance after hearing about the quality and the savings they could be making.

"After receiving colostrum, calves are fed RS Energy Advance and monitored for seven days in individual pens before they moved into the groups, where they are fed on automatic feeders. Calves are vulnerable at the best of times, so we find ensuring seven days on the replacer before moving to group pens works very well to help minimize upsets.

"Once in the group pen, calves are fed eight litres of milk in four visits. From eight weeks old, a step-down weaning process is set up to wean over two weeks. The calves are calm and content since the switch, as well as the powder mixing well in the machine. Our age of first calving is 24 months with heifers served at around 13/14 months and our conception rate to first service is 53%, which is pretty good compared to the national average of 42% (Kingshay costings report and NMR 500 Report 2023)" Dave adds.

Redmayne family, Preston

Located just outside of Preston, the Redmayne Family run a herd of 220 of Holstein Friesian cows with 150 followers. Calf management and the future of the herd is a key priority where the attention to detail is carried throughout the rearing cycle to maximise pre-weaning growth.

"Colostrum is tested with a refractometer and given to calves within six hours but ideally quicker" Sue, who manages the calves and youngstock, comments.



"We have used similar products in the past and have paid a premium, so we were a little reluctant to change; however, we are happy with the quality and performance of RS Energy Advance for both the machine and milk bar system. Not only are the calves performing exceptionally well on the replacer, but it is easy mixing for both the milk taxi and the machine".



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How to tackle weeds for more productive grass and silage

High input prices are leading to tough decisions surrounding cost control on-farm, but it is important not to scale back your weed control strategy to the detriment of your grassland. British Dairying finds out how to tackle these weeds.

Maximising homegrown forage is more important than ever, so it's important not to ignore weed control in a bid to cut costs. While it may help in the short-term, it's likely to cause problems for sward productivity in the future.

"It is vital to control the major problem weeds like docks, thistles, ragwort, buttercup and nettles, as they can quickly dominate a sward, reducing its nutritional value, with potential to cause animal health issues," says Dave Gurney at Corteva.

Grassland productivity

"Make sure the right plant species dominate without allowing weeds to take over. Even at low populations, weeds pose a threat to grassland productivity. For example, a 10% dock infestation can equate to a 10% reduction in grass dry matter, leaving significantly less grass growing for livestock to consume."

Weeds also have lower feed value than sown grass species, so their presence in silage fields in particular can cause nutritional shortfall. This may need to be supplemented by other, more expensive, bought-in feed, he explains.

Controlling weeds when they are young in newly-established grassland remains the most effective approach,



A 10% dock infestation can equate to a 10% reduction in grass dry matter, affecting livestock productivity

and requires less herbicide than controlling them later when they have become established."

However, it remains vital to control them at this later stage, too, as this is when they have the most impact on yield and quality.

"The economic conditions are tough at present, so ensuring you gain the most from grazed grass and winter forage is imperative," notes Dave. "Carefully planning your weed control in the summer months could save you money in the long run.

"Taking the time to plan a spray in your grassland is vital to its success. A well-timed spray, using the right product, can significantly reduce the weed burden and encourage grass growth, as well as minimise the risk and cost of having to spray again."

Effective dock control

Left uncontrolled, docks can out-compete grass species for valuable nutrients, especially costly nitrogen. Docks carry little nutritional value for livestock but are prolific and fast

growing, with deep taproots giving the ability to withstand grazing and cutting.

"Any level of dock infestation reduces grass yield," says Dave. "A practical way to calculate the impact on grass dry matter (DM) is to pace out a 5x7m area, ideally in five positions in the field in the shape of a W." Counting the number of docks in each area, and then dividing the total by the number of plots will give the percent DM loss being caused by the docks. So, an average of 20 docks

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Creeping and spear thistle are increasingly problematic across the UK

across five plots equates to 20% lost grass DM yield.

The two main types of docks in grassland are broad-leaved and curled dock. Curled dock is the most difficult of the two to control. It is thought the most likely reason for this is that curled dock has a very erect growth habit with narrower leaves, compared to the broad-leaved species, making it more difficult to target with a spray. Maintaining recommended water volumes is important to minimise this effect.

Using herbicides

"Farmers need to maximise benefits to protect investment in chemicals, but also future productivity," says Dave. "It is too late for effective treatment when docks are flowering."

"The weed becomes a problem as soon as it is visible and needs to be controlled at its optimum size. Timing and weed health are everything. The rosette needs to be 15 to 25cm across. In grazing pastures, dock rosettes larger than a dinner plate are best topped before spraying."

"We want the leaf to absorb the chemical and to translocate it to the root, as it's the most difficult and important part to kill," he explains. "If the plant has already flowered, the chemical will not move into the root system effectively and this will result in ineffective kill, meaning the plants will recover quite quickly."

Apply your chosen herbicide when docks are growing actively with a good clean leaf, minimal ramularia and no significant dock beetle damage pre-flowering, advises Dave.

"A good time to spray at this time of year is two to three weeks after cutting grass for either silage, hay or haylage, catching the recovering docks at a critical time when they have fresh, healthy leaves and are of a size that sufficient chemical can then be absorbed and translocated."

"For good dock control, choose a translocated herbicide, like Doxstar Pro, which when applied at two litres/ha in 300-400 litres/ha of water will

kill down to the roots. It is not safe to clover, so should only be used on clover-containing swards where it is intended to kill the clover."

To allow for optimum translocation, silage can be cut 28 days after spraying and stock can return to graze after just seven days.

Tackling thistles

Creeping and spear thistle seem to be an increasing problem across grassland areas of the UK.

These weeds can restrict a field's grazing area, denying livestock energy and protein.

Creeping thistle, a perennial plant, spreads underground horizontally by 1-2m per year via its root system, producing many offshoots. These roots are also very brittle and easily break into fragments which grow into new plants. Coupled with the rate of root spread, this makes them hard to control.

"The best time for thistle control is at the rosette stage."

On the other hand, spear thistle, a biennial plant, produce up to 8,000 seeds which can remain viable for three years.

Farmers can achieve a better return on investment if these weeds are targeted at right time, says Dave. "The best time for thistle control is at the rosette stage when thistles are actively growing, up to 20-25cm in height, but before flowering."

As with dock control, it is important to select a product which will kill down to the root and not just kill the top of the plant.

"Thistlex used at one litre/ha in 200-400 litres/ha of water must be applied using a boom sprayer; it is perfect for controlling thistles in grassland grazed by cattle and sheep."



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Wet winter affects first cut silage

The impact of the wet winter and spring are likely to be felt when feeding silage this winter, with first cut analyses showing lower quality than usual. British Dairying reports.

Regular forage analysis, diet fine tuning and performance monitoring will be needed this winter due to the poor quality of first cut silage. That's according to Trouw Nutrition, which has announced the results of the first 500 samples analysed this year.

"The combination of the mild winter and extremely wet conditions has had an impact on the growing and harvesting season, and consequently the quality of silages produced," says Nacia Bonnick, Ruminant Technical Support Co-ordinator at Trouw Nutrition. "In many parts of the country, growing conditions were atypical, and first cuts were significantly delayed."



Wet weather conditions led to a delayed first cut and impacted on quality

"Forages will need careful supplementation."

The winter weather had two main consequences for first cuts. The mild winter extended the growing season, resulting in higher covers of older, over-wintered grass in the spring. Ideally this material would have been removed before the first cut.

Then the prolonged wet conditions in the spring impacted slurry and fertiliser application and delayed the timing of first cuts, with implications

for quality. "Results from the pre-cut samples we analysed indicated the optimal cutting date would have been mid-April through to the first week of May, based on a range of factors including neutral detergent fibre (NDF) content," says Nacia. "But field conditions prevented many farmers from taking cuts this early, as they tried to preserve season long conditions and reduce soil contamination."

Material in clamps

"The delayed harvest has resulted in a higher proportion of older and overwintered material in clamps, which tends to be more fibrous

and less digestible." The average early first cut this year is 33.7% dry matter (DM), which is higher than last year's crops, at 30.9%. Average D value is lower, at 68.6%, reflecting the age of ensiled material. Consequently, metabolisable energy (ME) content, which is directly related to digestibility, has decreased marginally to 11.0MJ/kg DM.

NDF is higher than usual for a good first cut at 46.7%. This, combined with very high lignin levels, at 38g/kg DM, means forages will ferment more slowly in the rumen, which will have implications for supplementation and intakes. Crude protein levels are slightly depressed at 14.4%, which in part will be due to the inability to get onto fields with fertiliser, she adds. As ever, there is a range in energy content but the average is tending towards the lower side.

"Overall, forages will need careful supplementation to get the most milk from forage, control purchased feed costs and reduce the carbon footprint per litre," says Nacia. To compensate for the lower digestibility, rations may need to include ground cereals and rumen energy sources to promote digestibility and intakes.

Less digestible forages can impact on rumen throughput, leading to slower fermentation and depressed intakes. Overall, rumen health would be considered safe given the low acid load and high fibre index from

silages, which may make it easier to supplement forages with more rapidly fermentable energy sources.

"It will be essential to supplement and balance both total fermentable protein and carbohydrates, both of which are lower than last year," she notes. "This will ensure good rumen function and efficiency and microbial protein yield."

The lower fermentable protein levels, combined with lower fermentable carbohydrates, mean that the supply of digestible intestinal protein will be severely impacted. To overcome this, it will be important to supplement carefully with energy and protein sources.

"It will not just be a case of increasing the crude protein in the diet, but instead balancing the supply of energy and protein in the rumen to optimise the production of microbial protein, while supplying the appropriate levels of bypass protein," explains Nacia.

"Alongside supplementation of rumen fermentable carbohydrates and protein we would expect bypass protein supplementation will be required to support milk production. The obvious choice may be soya, but this should be considered in terms of carbon footprint and cost. Other good sources of protein could include rapeseed meal, protected rape and distillers' grains."

Analyse clamps regularly

Of course, averages are only a guide: What is important is the silage actually being fed. Nacia urges farmers to analyse clamps regularly, to understand the forage being fed and allow accurate and cost-effective supplementation.

"Clamps should be analysed at least monthly throughout the winter and the diet fine-tuned to make the best use of forages. Where practical, and depending how other cuts develop during the season, it may be beneficial to feed a mix of grass silage cuts from different clamps," she adds.

"Then pay close attention to feed management, ensuring rations are well mixed and regularly pushed up to encourage higher intakes. But monitor feed rejections closely and revise the diet accordingly if intakes are less than expected."

Early first cut averages 2023- 2024

	Units	2024	2023
Dry matter	%	33.7	30.9
Protein	% DM	14.4	14.3
D value	%	68.6	69.4
ME	MJ/kg DM	11	11.1
NDF	% DM	46.7	44.5
Acid detergent fibre	% DM	29.7	27.6
Lignin	g/kg DM	38.4	40.1
Sugars	% DM	1.7	0.9
pH		4.1	4
Lactic acid	g/kg DM	84.9	79.1
Volatile fatty acids	g/kg DM	24.9	44.4
Ammonia	%	3.3	3.9
Rapidly fermentable protein	g/kg DM	88	92.5
Total fermentable protein	g/kg DM	103.4	104.1
Rapidly fermentable carbohydrates	g/kg DM	190.9	192.8
Total fermentable carbohydrates	g/kg DM	434.2	417.2
Acid load		47.5	48.5
Fibre index		187.6	178.2

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Plan carefully to maximise farm maize yields this year

Favourable late season weather could allow maize crops to recover from the challenging early conditions, and closer attention to planning cuts ahead of this year's harvest could further support yields. British Dairying finds out more.

The national maize yield could fall short of the five-year average this year, due to challenging early conditions which delayed drilling. Maize sowing was delayed by up to three weeks, following a prolonged spell of cold wet weather in early season, says Andrew Cook at maize seed breeder, KWS.

Producers who had not traditionally grown early maize varieties scrambled to place their orders, because short season varieties require only a minimum of 130 days to reach maturity, compared to 160 days for their mid-to-late counterparts.



A foliar nitrogen spray can be applied in mid-July if the crop looks deficient

“Treatment should deliver ‘bang for the buck’”

Andrew is confident there should still be time to rectify any nitrogen deficiencies identified in the crop. “Maize is known as a ‘hungry’ species and a foliar nitrogen spray can be applied in mid-July, if the leaves are looking pale and a nutrient shortage is suspected,” he says.

“The problem will have been exacerbated by the very high early

season rainfall, which will have increased the risk of nitrogen leaching from the soil. Treatment should deliver ‘bang for the buck’”

Early signs indicated a relatively high risk of maize eyespot, although a lot will depend on the weather in the coming weeks, he adds.

Maize eyespot

“Maize eyespot thrives in cold, wet conditions and it can start in the centre of the field, which requires regular checking. A severe eyespot infection can cause losses of about 20-25%, although the figure can be much higher. It is not related to the eyespot pathogen found in cereal crops.”

Initial indicators include small yellow lesions with brown circles, and the affected area can appear translucent when the leaf is held up to the light. The disease can spread rapidly and eventually cover the whole leaf area, with the fungal spores transported on the wind to neighbouring fields. “Fortunately, growers still have access to the pyraclostrobin fungicide, Comet 200, which offers a level of control.”

Despite his prediction for a dip in maize yields, favourable late season weather could allow for a degree of catch up. Harvest may seem a long way off, but early planning might

pay dividends. “At this stage, I estimate that harvest will be between two and four weeks later than normal, even if conditions are favourable in the latter half of the season,” Andrew says.

“It might be worth speaking to the harvest team or contractor and discussing the possibility of making multiple cuts of maize this year. On some farms, drilling started in reasonable time but was then held up because of high rainfall.

“Therefore, the sowing dates have differed across the same unit. This stop/start pattern at drilling, combined with variable maturity dates where multiple varieties have been sown, makes staggered harvest dates useful for fulfilling starch level potential. It will increase the chance of producing a stable and palatable maize silage, after a very challenging start.”

A maize shortage?

The jury is still out on whether individual farms will suffer from a shortage of maize silage for the coming winter, he says.

“Yield results are likely to vary, depending on farm location and field site, as well as varietal choices. A minority of crops may achieve results that are close to their potential, although the number of heat units goes into decline as

autumn approaches. “The crops most likely to experience a yield dip will contain the late varieties, which have been more seriously affected and may not respond well to a short season.”

The key to minimising starch penalties is to make sure that the crop has fully matured before cutting, notes Andrew.

This could test growers’ patience, if harvested dates have to be put back due to late planting. “However, plant sugars must be given time for conversion into starch. Otherwise, high sugar levels will result in an acidic fermentation, which will be less palatable for the cows.”

“Close monitoring is a requirement for all successful crops.”

In addition, the dry matter content will be lower than ideal, which raises the risk of an acidic silage, with a subsequent negative effect on intakes.

Another factor is the increase in storage requirements, which will put pressure on farms with limited clamp facilities. “A combination of high sugars, low starch and a wet crop, and the resulting poorer fermentation, could affect the excellent palatability for which maize silage has such a well-deserved reputation,” warns Andrew. “If at all possible, cutting should be put off until the crop has passed the two main tests for maturity, which involve snapping the cob and looking for a hard cheese consistency, and examining the stem to check for a low moisture content.

“Close monitoring is a requirement for all successful crops, but given the conditions that have been experienced to date, regular maize walking will be more important than ever this season.”



Andrew Cook at KWS

Trials prove benefits of mixed grass leys

Adding clover, multi-species or herb mixes to grassland delivers significant yield advantages, according to new research, so what is the best way to manage these leys?

Over the past four years, scientists have been comparing the performance and management of six different grass mixtures – and the results offer real benefits and practical insights. Benefits include improved resilience in grazing systems, with maintained growth throughout the season and higher overall yields.

Unveiled at the Down To Earth event at Grosvenor Farms, Cheshire, July 3, the results show the effects that establishment timing, grazing regimes and nitrogen application rates have on persistency and yields.

The trials, held at Germinal Horizon's research facility in Melksham, Wiltshire, compared perennial ryegrass (PRG), PRG and clover, and four multi-species mixes containing eight, nine, 14 and 16 components, respectively. All were trialled using two nitrogen fertiliser application rates of 250kg/ha and 150kg/ha.

Scientists found that PRG dominates early season yields when herbs are not actively growing, but multi-species leys come to the fore from June to September when PRG 'shuts down' under drought conditions.

PRG yielded 35.4t/ha of dry matter (DM) over the four years. Adding clover improved this by 8.61t, while using a multi-species and herb mix produced an extra 11.7t/ha – comparable with the nine-component mix (see graph).

However, as multi-species swards became more complex, yield suffered; the 16-component mix was the lowest-yielding multi-species option, growing almost 6t DM/ha less than grass and clover.

"Multi species can bolster yields mid-season, even by just adding white clover," says Dr Joanna Matthews, Technical Trials Manager at Germinal Horizon. "As the number of components increases, in later years you are left with fewer primary herbs

and the lower content of base grasses in the seed mix at establishment penalises yield." Higher nitrogen rates (250kg/ha per year) only grew 4t/ha more over four years across the six mixtures, on average, compared to those that received 150kg/ha (mimicking the amount of organic nitrogen applied by grazing animals).

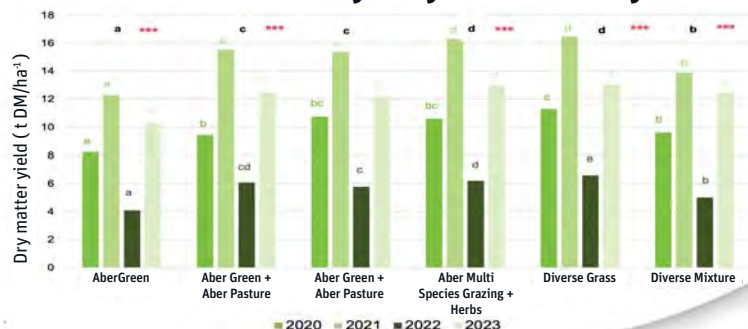
"This extra 100kg of nitrogen would not be cost-effective when it only returns 1t/year," says Joanna. "Furthermore, nitrogen impacted sward composition; we saw lower levels of clover when nitrogen was applied at higher rates, but higher levels of grass, chicory and plantain."

When it comes to establishment, later drilling can be effective, but herbs and clovers are 'not quick out of the blocks' and must be established before soil temperatures drop in winter. "Multi-species swards need to be established four to six weeks before your farm's usual cut-off date for sowing grass."

In the first year, herbs were dominant in the eight- and 14-species mixes, but were largely overtaken by PRG and clover by year two. By year four, plantain disappeared, and chicory levels fell dramatically. Clover consistently delivered more metabolisable energy (ME) and protein throughout the season over the four years (11.49MJ/kg of ME and 22.29% crude protein) compared to grass (at 10.69MJ/kg and 20% CP).

Multi-species offered higher protein and energy than grass, but had more pronounced variations throughout the season and were lowest mid-season, when reproductive growth compromised energy. "The research shows multi-species leys can make your grazing platform more resilient," says Joanna. "By incorporating clover, you will see a yield benefit and can underpin the quality of the sward while fixing nitrogen."

Over-year yield summary



Multi-species leys improve resilience and bolster yields throughout less ideal weather conditions

ROUTINE SCREENING VITAL TO KEEP JOHNE'S LEVELS DOWN



Julian Evans

Shropshire producer Julian Evans works closely with his vet Sean Hughes from Shropshire Farm Vets in keeping infectious disease well under control and is committed to routine scanning of key diseases like Johne's and BVD.

Julian is the second generation of the family to run the crossbred block-calved herd at Heath View Farm, near Shrewsbury. He takes a long term view to Johne's control and has been screening for Johne's using NMR's HerdWise milk test since 2016. Although levels were never high, they've gradually reduced to a current Average Test Value (ATV) of 5.2%.

The milking herd is Johne's screened four times a year, in October and November, then in spring and in June prior to drying off. "Screening before breeding is vital in making sure we don't breed replacements from any infected cows," says Julian.

"If we do breed from them, we'll use beef sires and mate them towards the end of the block so there's no risk of infecting any heifer calves. This is part of our Johne's plan, and it has really helped me manage Johne's."

HerdWise tools accessed via NMR's Herd Companion portal have made control even more precise. The Johne's Progress Tracker compares the farm's data with benchmarks recognised as having a significant impact on Johne's infection rates.

"We use the Progress Tracker in Julian's annual Johne's review so we can home in on area to make best progress," says Sean.

Despite very low levels of Johne's, Julian and Sean both know the importance of routine screening for the disease.

"Without regular NMR cell counts, Johne's screening and BVD Tag-and-Test data the herd would not have its high health status and be confident in meeting its Arla Care requirements," says Sean.

"We'd have no idea if good progress was being made," he adds. "This is a good herd - disease infection rates were never high, but screening keeps a check on trends and progress."

Take a look at the Progress Tracker on Herd Companion's Demo Herd by visiting bit.ly/NMRHCDb or drop us a line to customerservices@nmrp.com and we can help you get your Johne's plan back on track.



Plan ahead to avoid shortfalls

It may seem a long way off, but farmers should focus now on maximising both the quantity and quality of remaining grass silage cuts as a contingency against another wet spring delaying next year's turnout. British Dairying reports.

For most farmers, making enough silage to last the winter is their first goal. But this year's wet spring provided a stark reminder of the importance of conserving some extra supplies. However, if producers prioritise bulk over quality, this could leave cows milking off silage with inferior nutritional value, says Ecosyl silage scientist, Dr Mark Leggett. That would be disastrous if this coincided with peak lactation of spring-calving cows, so it is important to balance both quantity and quality. "You can compensate for low silage stocks or poorer silage with bought-in feed, but you have to ask yourself whether this stacks up financially," says Mark.

"Purchased feeds are important, but homegrown silage should be providing milking cows with as much of their energy and protein needs as possible. And dry cows over winter need good nutrition, too.

"Even in well-made grass silage, dry matter (DM) losses in clamps typically run at about 10%, but can easily be higher. More importantly, it is the most nutritious parts of the DM that are lost first. So the DM remaining will be less able to support milk production."

There are four common ways in which losses in silage quantity or quality can occur:

1. Cutting grass after heading

Younger grass is typically higher in protein and energy, but too often silage is made from grass that has



Producers will want to make sure there is a plentiful silage supply, however, bulk over quality could pose a risk

already headed, by which time digestibility is falling by about 0.5 D units a day.

"By one week post-heading, each cow will need around 1.5kg/day of extra concentrate to make up for this digestibility shortfall, in order to produce the same milk yield," notes Mark. "So make sure grass is cut before it goes to head."

2. Losses in the field

Wilting mown grass rapidly to the optimum DM, which is typically 30% for clamped silage or drier for bales,

so that it can be ensiled as soon as possible after cutting, is also crucial for minimising DM and quality losses. Otherwise, all the time that grass is in the field it is losing sugar and protein.

3. Not using an additive

It is easy to think of an additive as a cost, but producers should look instead at what it provides.

"A proven additive has been shown to cut silage DM losses by about half, which means more silage is available to feed," explains Mark.

"And the benefits don't end there. Independent trials have shown that feeding a range of silage crops preserved with Ecosyl boosted milk yield by an average of 1.2 litres/cow per day.

"With a tonne of silage typically feeding 25 cows for a day, this extra 1.2 litres over 25 cows equates to an extra 30 litres of milk produced per tonne of silage fed."

4. Shortcuts with clamps

Failing to manage silage clamps correctly so that air gets in is another key way that DM and nutrients are wasted, says Mark.

"Too many clamps still aren't compacted enough to remove all the

air, which risks losses from a poor fermentation and heating (aerobic spoilage) as unwanted microbes in the silage start to grow.

Grass of 30% DM loaded into a clamp at 100t/hour typically needs 25t of machinery rolling it to compact it properly. But the key point is that this 25t needs to be rolling it constantly.

"After rolling, make sure clamps are fully sealed and weighted to keep air out. As one of the cheapest feed sources available, making and conserving good silage is key to farming profitably."



Dr Mark Leggett, silage scientist

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Investing for the future

Environmental funding has helped Stuart Heath, from the Staffordshire moorlands, invest in his dairy system's infrastructure for the future. British Dairying reports.

The Heath family have been farming at Red Earth Farm near Leek, since purchasing the farm in 1969.

Over the years, the family has expanded its operations, with Stuart Heath and his two sons, Hayden and Sam, now milking a 600-cow flying herd on a setup that spans 300ha, split across three local sites.

While growing and modernising their dairy business, the family have been keen to invest in environmental protection – ensuring that the enterprise is sustainable all-round for the next generation.

"I've been at Red Earth Farm all my life, and as a family, we're consistently doing our best to improve the farm and the environment we work in," says Stuart.

"I believe we have a moral responsibility to take care of the countryside for future generations, by



Stuart Heath (L) has worked with Severn Trent to implement environmental actions that benefit his farm's future

following best practice when it comes to protecting soils and watercourses."

With succession in mind, he has made the most of grant funding

opportunities on offer from Severn Trent, Defra, and Natural England to invest in the farm's infrastructure and soil health. As Red Earth Farm

is located in between Severn Trent's Wallmyres, Highgate and Poolend groundwater catchment areas, and also next to the Tittesworth



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Concreting high traffic areas has greatly reduced dirty water runoff

Reservoir, the Heaths have been able to access funding available through the water company's environmental protection scheme, STEPS.

Stuart has now been working with Severn Trent for over 15 years, to futureproof systems like slurry management.

"Virtually every year since the scheme began, we've accessed STEPS funding to make investments in our farm," he says.

Precision technology

He has also tapped into Defra's Farming Equipment and Technology Fund to invest in precision technology for slurry spreading.

"In the first instance, we used the funding to help purchase pumping equipment - an umbilical kit, flow meter and a dribble bar - to get us up and running with applying slurry more accurately and avoid needing to take heavy machinery across the fields. This helps prevent structural damage to the soils.

"Latterly, we've invested in GPS mapping and chemical and physical soil assessments to target slurry spreading to specific fields and get the most use out of the nutrients for improved grass growth," Stuart adds.

"Some of our land is managed fairly intensively to achieve the yields we're aiming for. However, it's important for us to manage nutrient application carefully to look after the environment long-term."

Beyond regulatory compliance, having six watercourses running through the farm means protecting water quality is front of mind for the family. "Polluting the environment is a risk we don't want to take," says Stuart. "I want to be proud of the way we farm."

As part of their infrastructure investments, the Heaths have also improved the longevity of the farm's yards and tracks.

"We've used STEPS funding to concrete a high-traffic area between

the main cow shed and the silage clamp, which has been really beneficial - it's become a lot easier to clean up and keep the yards tidy, meaning there's less dirty water runoff," explains Stuart.

"We've also put in tracking to enable cows to travel to rotational grazing pastures without poaching the ground."

By protecting the soil surface, this has also reduced the risk of soil erosion and sediment run-off into watercourses nearby.

"With these investments, I believe we've improved the way we farm the land, making the best use of nutrients that we have access to, and minimising the need for bought-in fertiliser.

"The grants have enabled us to bring forward some of the investment ideas we had, making them happen sooner than we'd realistically be able to do on our own."

Funding streams

Before making decisions, the family discussed their ideas extensively, both together and with their local Severn Trent agricultural adviser. "We've had some great advisers over the years," notes Stuart.

"They understand the problems we face, bringing energy and enthusiasm to help us find solutions by putting our heads together.

"On the technical side, they've helped with the nitty-gritty aspects of submitting applications and helping with claims."

With many funding streams currently on offer, from water companies as well as the government, Stuart recommends making the most of these to support on-farm investment.

"It's essential we look after the environment for the next generation, so I'd encourage any farmers to have a friendly chat with their local water company representative to find out about the funding options."

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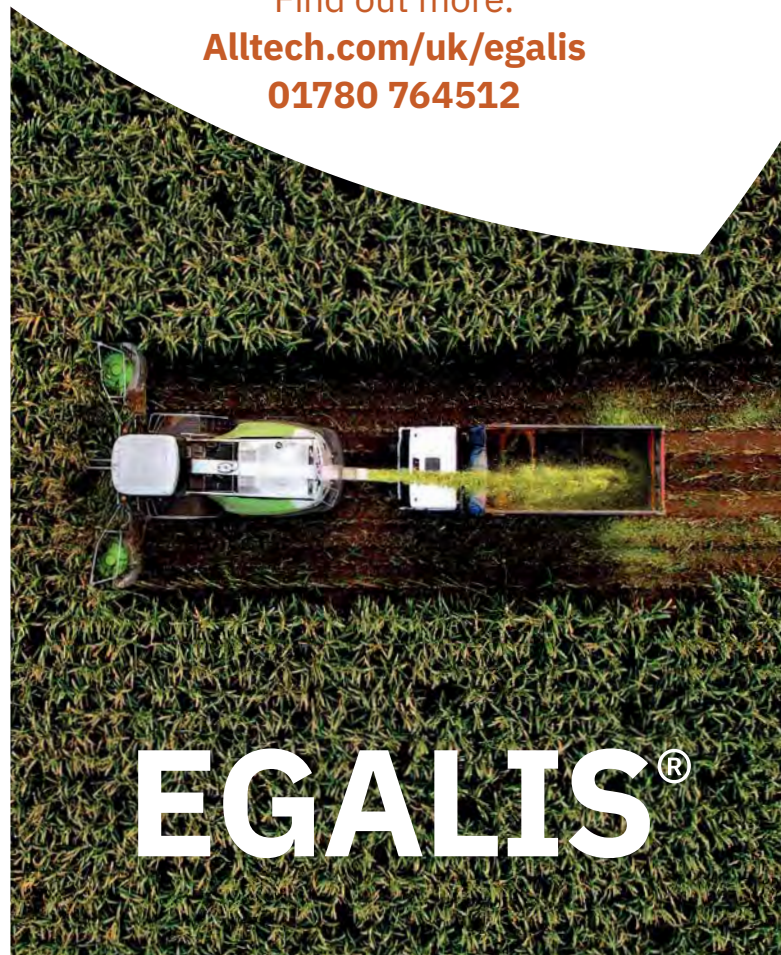
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Improving animal welfare through the practice of pain management

The Southern Regional Women in Dairy group recently gathered to focus on strategies to improve livestock welfare through effective pain management. Sarah Bolt, Technical Knowledge Exchange Manager at Kingshay and Women in Dairy Co-Founder, reports.

Changing moral and ethical concerns around the world are driving society to demand better agricultural practices and enhanced welfare for farm animals.

Central to these changes is effective pain management, a crucial aspect of ensuring farm animal wellbeing. Pain in animals not only causes behavioural changes but also disrupts their autonomic functions and triggers neuroendocrine responses.

These disruptions create stress and significantly compromise animal health and welfare. For example, chronic pain in cattle can lead to increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, and lowered body temperature, impacting milk yield, growth rate, and ultimately, farm income.

Despite these significant impacts, pain in farm animals often remains overlooked, under-recognised, and inadequately treated. Pain can arise from various sources, including:

- Infectious diseases: Mastitis, respiratory disease, scours, lameness, and joint infections in young calves
- Routine management practices: Disbudding and castration
- Surgery: Caesarean sections, displaced abomasum surgeries
- Calving: Consideration for both the cow and calf



The group met at Stowell Farms' 1,450-ha Sharcott Pennings farm

Meeting at Stowell Farms' Sharcott Pennings farm, a 1,450-ha mixed farming business in the heart of the Pewsey Downs in Wiltshire, Becca Cavill from Boehringer Ingelheim led the first session. She took the group back over 3,500 years to when salicin (from the bark of willow trees) was first used to treat pain and fever. Participants explored the inflammatory cascade and how non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) reduce inflammation-related damage like swelling, heat, and pain. Understanding NSAIDs' mode of action is crucial as they play a significant role on farms when used appropriately and in combination with other drugs and therapies, with veterinary advice.

The roundtable discussions then shifted to pain recognition in farm

animals, a challenging task due to their stoic nature. As prey animals, grazing species naturally avoid showing vulnerability to avoid being singled out by predators.

Traditionally, appropriate training on pain recognition was not always given to vets, farmers and farm workers. However, recent advancements have improved the understanding of pain-related behaviours, leading to better training for personnel to detect signs of pain or ill health. Many farms now have regular programmes for observing and monitoring animal health.

In addition to human observations, technologies like accelerometers, pedometers, and other cow monitors are becoming more affordable and easier to use, helping to detect behaviours related to pain.

Using a polling app, the group rated the pain for various conditions, including headaches, toothaches, disbudding, mastitis, giving birth, and castration. While there was no consensus on the most painful condition, there was definite agreement that pain detection and management need to be prioritised to improve cow welfare on farms.

At Sharcott Pennings Farm, the ethos to prioritise the needs and health of cows is evident in their practices. Since 2022, robots started to replace the rotary parlour.

Today there are 12 Lely A5 Astronaut robots milking the 680-cow herd. Low stocking rates and high-quality cubicles

alongside the free-access milking system allow cows to express their natural behaviour.

The dry cows have their own shed, divided between those far off from calving and those close to calving, with the actual calving taking place in purpose-built pens lined with soft rubber matting. This thoughtful setup extends beyond just the dry cows; the entire herd benefits from being kept in small groups of around 100. The team has observed that this arrangement contributes to a happier, more relaxed herd, especially since heifers and fresh cows also have their own dedicated groups.

The farm's team, consisting of 7.5 full-time equivalent people, predominantly features women and they dedicate significant time to closely monitoring stock health and welfare. All treatments are carried out in the sheds without separate handling facilities, showcasing the stockmanship skills throughout the team, led by Farm Manager, Neil Ridgway and Herd Manager Chris Gowan.

The Women in Dairy meeting highlighted the importance of effective pain management in farm animals and inspired attendees to drive change within their own practices, ensuring higher welfare standards and better farm management.

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Signs of pain in cattle

Pain is typically assessed by changes in cow behaviour, including:

- Dull, depressed, lethargic demeanour
- Isolation and failure to graze with the group
- Expiratory grunt, teeth grinding
- Inappetence, decreased rumination
- Increased respiratory rate and vocalisation
- Increased sensitivity (hyperalgesia)
- Attention/licking at the site of a wound/lesion
- Increased rectal temperature higher than 39.5°C

Why Bonanza calf milks are so effective on UK farms



When it comes to calf rearing, there are multiple points of difference between the UK and mainland European countries.

- Take herd size. In the UK, they are on average bigger and male calves produced from these herds, even on farms that are TB-free, are reared for longer. More animals means greater disease pressure and labour challenges.
- On farms where calves are machine-fed, numbers per station are often four or five times higher compared to Europe, again adding to disease burdens.
- Then there is the weather. For spring block calving systems in particular, which are uncommon in mainland Europe, the weather is a greater challenge.
- Availability of calf housing and labour are also bigger issues on UK farms.
- There is less emphasis on dry feed intakes on farms in mainland European countries so feeding rates and durations are longer with less emphasis on development.
- Heifer age at first calving is later in many EU countries compared to the UK.

Bonanza's domination of the skim based calf milk replacer market is in part a result of products being manufactured with UK calf rearing in mind.

Our range is based on real milk ingredients and specialised products, not specifications.

We also use low heat skim milk and buttermilk as a base in all but one product and keep formulations consistent from year to year, the only exception being when we find a way of improving a feed.

This is why we are at the forefront of the industry with our transition milk, once a day feeding, and with calf nutrition based on skim milk powder and buttermilk powder.

***“The Secrets in the powder
not on the label”***



Eileen Jamieson with some heifer calves still on milk



Future proofing starts with calf rearing at Penberry Farm

Calving 540 cows in seven and a half weeks requires stamina, good organisational skills and a calf rearing system that delivers on hygiene, husbandry and housing.

Sean and Eileen Jamieson and their son, Stuart, produce milk from a herd of spring calving British Friesian crosses at Penberry Farm, St Davids.

Cow longevity is a strong feature in the herd with some of the cows currently milking born 12 years ago.

Future proofing the herd starts as soon as calves are born with attention to detail given to good hygiene, husbandry and housing at every stage.

Newborn calves receive two feeds of colostrum.

Each calf has a paper record that details feeding, vaccination and any health interventions from birth to weaning.

The team of calf rearers, led by Eileen, sees the payback from keeping the pens and feeding equipment scrupulously clean.

By removing the threat of health issues and the labour requirement associated with sickness, more time can be spent helping the calves to grow and develop.

Beef and dairy replacements are reared in separate sheds, in deep-bedded straw pens of 14.

To minimise the threat of disease spread, each pen is dedicated to one group right through to turnout, which is at 10-12 weeks depending on weather conditions.

By producing strong and healthy calves, the Jamiesons have no shortage of buyers for their beef animals. Good nutrition is key, with a system that results in active and healthy calves that don't experience growth checks.

Every calf receives three litres of colostrum as soon as possible after birth and a second feed of three litres. Bonanza Calf Nutrition's transition calf milk replacer, Transformula, is then introduced to help develop the digestive system. Trials have shown that feeding transition milk to young calves vastly improves their digestive system's ability to digest milk.



Transition milk is classed as the first six milkings post-colostrum, containing three quarters the number of antibodies of colostrum together with non-nutritive factors that set up a calf's gut for long term performance.

The Jamiesons were among the first to trial Transformula. "We have stuck with it, the calves do really well on it, we don't get any scours because it has got everything they need in it," says Eileen.

Transformula has been developed by Bonanza Calf Nutrition as the first transition milk replacer on the market; it has done this by identifying the key elements of transition milk.



Transformula - baby calf **development** needs to start with transition milk and not milk

Transformula is made with pasteurised and low heat-treated protein ingredients and a selection of short chain fatty acids; these ingredients ensure the calf can utilise the energy and protein within the product.

Oligosaccharides, found in cow transition milk, are unique to Transformula. They act as a prebiotic for beneficial bacteria and aid in preventing pathogens binding to the lining of the gut; these can often present

themselves as scour in the young calf. They also promote cell proliferation, therefore reducing the time taken for closure of the porous gut.

Having a well developed microflora early on is keep to reducing inflammation and ill health in calves. Using Transformula limits the risk of disease spread in the Jamiesons' herd and the pay back of their investment is fewer calf treatments and stronger calves at two weeks old, resulting in a more uniform batch of calves.

The Jamiesons introduce CCF Breathe Easy starter feed in small amounts from birth and provide fresh, clean water from day one. An intranasal pneumonia vaccine is given in the

first week and calves are also vaccinated for blackleg.

When calves are 10 days old Transformula is replaced with Shine Original, fed twice a day until they are four weeks old when a once a day feeding system is introduced.

This calf milk replacer (CMR) is made with low heat treated skim and buttermilk. Mollie Phipps, of Bonanza Calf Nutrition, which manufactures Shine Original and supports the Jamiesons with their calf feeding programme,

says the "secret" of Original is in the contents of the bag, not on the label.

This comes from combination of milk ingredients that help calves get maximum levels of utilisable amino acids, she says.

"Original promotes the development of the digestive system by increasing dry feed intake and total dry matter (DM) intake," says Mollie.

This has a positive effect on the calf's immune system, allowing calves to be weaned with good rumen and digestive tract development.

It means that the calves at Penberry Farm have virtually no health issues before, during and after weaning.

Eileen says it is one of the reasons why cows in the herd perform - and last.

Her calves are weaned when they are eating at least 1.25-1.5kg/head/day of starter feed, when they are approximately eight weeks old, by which time they have doubled their birth weight.

They are then turned out to grass to achieve the growth targets needed to calve at two years old.

Calves are the next generation and that's why there is so much attention to detail given at the rearing stage, says Eileen.

"I often say it's the hardest job on the farm," she says.

"When you are breeding your replacements you have got to get it right because those are your future herd, if you cock the rearing up you've had it."

That's where her team of calf rearers are invaluable, she adds.

"We really appreciate them for their dedication and hard work, they are very much valued," says Eileen.

"We are also very appreciative of the team at the Oak Veterinary Practice, they are always at the end of the line for any advice that we need."



Eileen Jamieson and Tom Warren (Bonanza) with a pen of weaned heifers

Calf Nutrition Update

The power of buttermilk at weaning

The changes that happen to the calf's digestive system and its microbe population around weaning are very important, but getting it right is like feeding good quality colostrum and transition milk. That is, you frequently only see the benefits over the coming weeks, months and years. Having ingredients like buttermilk that help with that digestive development is the same.

Low-heat buttermilk is an excellent source of nutrition and bioactive components to young calves to aid in the prevention of pathogen causing diseases.

By including buttermilk in all our milk replacers and at much higher levels than in cow's milk, we ensure the development of the calf's immune and digestive systems can withstand the stresses of calf rearing.

Why calves need the right fat levels in their diet

There are multiple and important reasons why calves need fat in their diet. Fat is a source of essential fatty acids, which form important membrane structures in the calf, and have a key association with vitamins. Fat is also a store of energy and can be converted to sugar when the calf most needs it.

Calf rearing is about keeping the calf healthy and, as importantly, developing it into a ruminant so it can be weaned successfully and grow.

To achieve this, keep fat levels to a daily maximum of 150g/head while also providing dry feed to

ensure calves start consuming this from an early age, says Dr Amanda Dunns, of Bonanza Calf Nutrition. This is because

as we increase fat levels, we reduce other key ingredients in the diet and we also find calves eat less dry feed. Increasing the fat level from 18% to 31% (Table 1) only increases the energy level by about 12%, but reduces carbohydrate levels by nearly 30%. These milk sugars are very important for energy production especially during cold weather and are key to helping calves fight disease especially viruses. Feeding more fat reduces concentrate intake, delays weaning thereby increasing labour and rearing costs for no extra benefit.

Table 1 - Effect of fat level on energy content

	Product 1	Product 2	Product 3	Product 4
Crude protein %	22	22	23	23
Crude fat %	18	22	26	31
Lactose %	48	43	39	34
ME MJ/kg	19.6	20.2	21	21.9
Relative ME	100	103	107	112

When the products above were fed on trial, all performed equally regardless of energy content. This is consistent with trial work carried out over the last 40 years. Energy levels above normal feeding rates have no positive effect on growth rates.





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Joint approach to sustainability

Farmers could work more closely with vets and consultants to lower their input costs and environmental impact, while improving cow welfare. British Dairying reports.

When it comes to improving sustainability, there are many factors for farmers to consider. Gaining expertise from your farm veterinary team can be a great place to start, explains Sarah Bolt, Technical Knowledge Exchange Manager at Kingshay.

“Sustainability is a major focus for the industry right now, and will remain so, but it’s important to remember we don’t need to wait for the next breakthrough or innovation to start making a difference,” she says. “There are many ways farmers can work with vets to improve production efficiency, while reducing the environmental impact of each unit of milk produced - all while using fewer resources.”

Vets can help to bring a nutrition team together for regular meetings, which can be very effective in reducing carbon footprint and costs. “Improving feed efficiency reduces overall feed costs as well as improving environmental sustainability,” says Sarah.

“Livestock in poor health are inherently less efficient.”

According to Kingshay dairy costings, purchased feed costs represent about 26% of total dairy farm input costs, averaging 12.7ppl. Additionally, reports show the top 20% of 2,000 recorded herds achieve nearly 4,000 litres from forage, with the top 10% nearer 4,500 litres.

“If you plan to enhance your milk production from forage, this can significantly improve margins by reducing dependency on bought-in feed,” she says.

“When cows efficiently convert forage into higher-quality milk, the need for costly supplementary feed decreases and profit margins increase. Monitoring your milk from forage and setting realistic goals with tools is a great place to start.”

Feed efficiency also extends beyond homegrown feeds, explains



Ryan Dobson at Colley Farm, Somerset, is this year’s VetPartners Sustainable Dairy Farmer Award runner-up

Sarah. “Many studies indicate up to 80% of all nitrogen consumed by cows is excreted, contributing significantly to ammonia and nitrous oxide emissions from dairy farming.

“Therefore, feeding lower protein dairy rations and improving rumen efficiency will benefit the environment by reducing emissions while improving feed margins. With protein often being the most expensive part of the ration, enhancing protein efficiency from forage will help save feed costs.”

High milk urea is also an indicator of poor protein utilisation. “Working with your vet or nutritionist to work out how you can lower this to a target level of 250-350mg/litre will also help reduce feed costs.”

Another practical way to reduce the environmental impact of compound feeds is to consider their country of origin. “Trouw Nutrition suggests that buying soya from the US instead of Brazil, or palm kernel from Malaysia rather than Indonesia, can reduce the feed’s carbon footprint by 50%,” notes Sarah.

“Modifying the ration is often the quickest way of improving the sustainability of the herd.”

When it comes to nutrient management, undertaking regular soil and slurry analysis is critical, helping to match fertiliser and manure applications to the specific crop requirements.

“Efficient nutrient management ensures crops receive the right amount of nutrients at the right time, leading to healthier growth and higher yields, while conserving

resources and reducing costs by cutting down on unnecessary fertiliser expenses,” says Sarah.

“There are tools that can be used to regularly analyse soil and slurry to help achieve optimal nutrient management. This practice is crucial for sustainable farming, benefiting both the environment and the farm’s bottom line.”

Animal health

Improving animal health can also significantly reduce emissions and costs for producers. “Livestock in poor health are inherently less efficient, while healthier animals convert feed into milk more effectively, reducing the environmental impact, and often production expenses,” she explains.

“Vets can not only help with herd health planning but also to optimise specific grant applications to benefit herd welfare.

“There are now Animal Health and Welfare Pathway funds available in England to use with your vet for BVD testing.

“Given that veterinary endorsement is also key to increasing application scores, farmers can use these vet visits to evidence discussions needed for the Farm Equipment and Technology Fund when the next round opens.”

Finally, focusing on your breeding strategy can help with yield and input efficiencies. “When it comes to breeding decisions, consulting resources like the AHDB dairy herd genetic reports with your vet means you can select stock that will produce the best output for your buyers, while optimising milk production and reducing input costs,” Sarah says.

“You can also plan for longevity of the herd to reduce replacement rates and the carbon footprint created by heifer production.”

VetPartners Sustainable Dairy Farmer Award

Ryan Dobson, a two-time ‘Somerset grassland milk from forage’ award winner, manages 240 Holstein cows at Colley Farm, Somerset. He was placed as runner-up in the VetPartners Sustainable Dairy Farmer Award, having worked with Cormac White from FarmVets SouthWest to achieve a thorough preventative herd health planning and vaccination programme.

“The results of this, combined with the Dobsons’ investment into improved cow and calf housing, have helped to reduce antibiotic use and improve health statistics,” says Cormac. “Lameness and cow longevity have also been a key focus, with lameness now consistently below 5%. Johnes is under 4% and the farm is also free of bovine viral diarrhoea.”

Ryan is achieving exceptional grassland management, maintaining 8,300-litre yields in 2023 with 4,754 litres from forage. And he’s also reducing artificial nitrogen application and costs by undertaking regular soil sampling and slurry analysis, notes Cormac. “Additionally, the farm is utilising herbal leys across grazing platforms to improve soil quality and animal health.”

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Assessing carbon footprints regularly for maximum benefit

Securing performance-related data across the widest possible range of farming activities is the only way to secure a sustainable future for the dairy industry. So said speakers at the recent AFBI open day in Northern Ireland. Richard Halleron reports.

Consistent measuring by dairy farmers is key to truly understanding the sector's carbon footprint. That's according to Professor Elizabeth Magowan at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, who was speaking at the organisation's recent Dairy Open Day at Hillsborough, Co Down.

Although there are a number of specific carbon calculators available for use, it is vital that farmers choose one which suits the particular needs of their business.

"Once a farmer finds a calculator that suits their needs, it's a case of sticking consistently with this option. Only in this way will consistent results and trends be secured."

Sustainable future

Information sharing in an open and transparent manner at farm level will be part of this process, she added.

Holistic sustainability is a key driver for the various research programmes currently being implemented at AFBI. "Sustainability can be a very overused word," said Elizabeth. "But in terms of developing the dairy sector, the following themes come into play - our economy has to be healthy, our society has to be healthy and our environment has



AFBI Director Professor Elizabeth Magowan with former NFU England and Wales president, Sir Peter Kendall

to be healthy. And when these three priorities are working in harmony, sustainability will be delivered in its truest form." Elizabeth highlighted the specific challenges confronting the dairy sector and the way these interface with the environment.

Northern Ireland's milk sector is in the top 10% when it comes to the lowest carbon intensity figures produced by dairy industries around the world.

However, a number of important environmental challenges remain to be addressed. Production agriculture is the largest contributor to ammonia emissions, which are at the heart of the very significant deterioration in air quality that has been witnessed in Northern Ireland over recent years.

"The dairy sector is a significant source of ammonia emissions," noted Elizabeth. "The gas is produced when dung and urine are mixed together in slurry tanks. Subsequent to this, ammonia can be emitted when slurry is spread on to land.

Once this happens the gas will alight on the ground some distance away from the point of spreading. And it is in this context that ammonia can damage our most sensitive habitats."

That said, emerging technologies can significantly reduce ammonia

emissions, including the use of low emission spreading equipment like trailing shoes and dribble bar systems. The use of extended grazing techniques at the shoulders of the grass growing season is another way to reduce ammonia emissions.

"Our economy, our society, and our environment have to be healthy."

Improving water quality is the other key sustainability challenge confronting Northern Ireland's dairy sector. "Phosphate run-off into watercourses is the key contributor to this problem," explained Elizabeth. "Soil testing to assess the levels of available phosphorous in fields is an important starting point, when it comes to developing mitigation strategies.



Ulster Farmers' Union President, William Irvine and AHDB's Marco Winters

“Acting to reduce the levels of phosphate coming out of animals is also important. On average, the phosphorous balance being generated by many farms across Northern Ireland is between 11 and 12kg/ha. We want to get this figure down to around 5kg. Securing this

level of surplus will deliver sustainable improvements in our water quality levels,” she added.

“And this can be achieved by reducing the levels of phosphate included in dairy rations.”

While research programmes have been developed to deliver

solutions on commercial farms at minimum cost, application across other farms remains key to ongoing improvement.

“If the environmental impact of dairy systems is to be reduced, a number of mitigations will have to be introduced,” said Elizabeth. “Our

research teams realise that one-size-fits-all solutions will not work across the networks of farms that make up Northern Ireland’s dairy farming sector.

And, again, our programmes have been developed to reflect this situation.”

Improved genetic selection is driving the future

Improved genetics has served to secure a very efficient dairy industry across the UK, according to Marco Winters, Head of Animal Genetics at the AHDB.

Speaking at the same event, which was held as part of an overarching ‘Farming for the Future’ event, he was confident in the increasing role genetics will play to improve sustainability and efficiency within the dairy sector. “The cows we have today are very different to those that would have been on our farms, even 20 years ago. And the application of improved genetics has made this possible,” he said. “We also know that the selection of heritable traits can help drive the carbon agenda from a milk production perspective.”

The power of genetics is extreme, particularly given the growing use of genomics in the sector. “The past decade has seen tremendous changes introduced within the UK dairy sector from a breeding point of view. And the growing use of genomics has brought much of this about,” he explained. “What’s more, the UK has been at the fore in adopting many of these new technologies. The latest figures confirm that 84% of the semen used within the UK dairy sector is sexed. No other country in the world comes near this figure.”

As a result, milk producers can now be much more selective in terms of the heifers they want to breed from. “Currently, 70% of the bulls available through artificial insemination are sexed,” said Marco. “Adding to this is the fact that 20% of the calves born today in the UK are genotyped. And this figure is set to increase significantly over the coming years. This specific technology is no longer a novelty on farms. It is allowing for identification of the very best heifers within a herd, which can then be bred to sexed sires.”

Up to 20 years ago, most British dairy farmers were selecting for production traits, he added. However, the introduction of a new breeding index in 2005 allowed them to breed for both performance and improved fertility at the same time.

“Calving index figures on UK dairy farms are now starting to reduce. In about five years’ time herds will be averaging 385 days.”

A number of breeding tools are now available to milk producers, including specific breeding indices for both autumn and spring calving herds. “Production and health traits can also be combined in ways that allow milk producers to take herd breeding decisions in a more effective manner,” said Marco. “Genetic progress is taking place at twice the rate than would have been the case 10 years ago. Farmers not using the new genetic technologies will find themselves left behind very quickly.

“The other alternative is that their businesses will be moving in the wrong direction very quickly. Farmers setting relevant breeding goals is the all-important starting point when it comes to them assessing the use of the new breeding technologies.”



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Supporting farmers to host school visits

Hosting school visits can be incredibly rewarding, both for the farmer and the children, helping to educate them about farming careers and where their food comes from. And an AHDB initiative is offering fully-funded training and support, as British Dairying reports.

Last year, AHDB launched its first education pilot programme to help farmers start their own school farm visits. This opportunity, delivered in partnership with LEAF Education, was open to farmers across all sectors represented by AHDB. Following an open application process, 20 farmers were selected to receive funded places, offering them training and one-to-one support to give them the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver safe, high-quality and memorable school visits. So how did they get on?

A real working farm

The programme kicked off in November 2023, providing fully-funded Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS) training and accreditation. One of the aims of this pilot was to

give more children the chance to experience a real working farm first-hand and better understand where their food comes from.

One of the farmers who eagerly embraced this opportunity was Serena Colwill, a fourth-generation farmer managing her family farm in Exford, Somerset. She saw the programme as a golden opportunity. "It's a way to sharpen my skills and learn new things," she explains. "It also allows me to hear from other farmers."

Serena passionately believes in the importance of inviting young people to her working farm. "It not only benefits their mental health but also helps them understand about where their food comes from, how we care for our animals, and the environment. Each child should be given the opportunity to experience this."



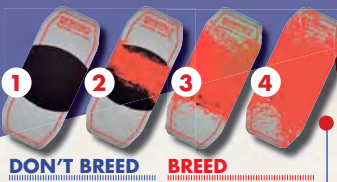
Serena Colwill welcomed students to her family farm in Exford, Somerset

She learned about AHDB's school farm visit programme through LEAF and decided to apply. Reflecting on the application process, she says: "It was simple. We were given the option to do the CEVAS training online, which was very

beneficial considering my location and family commitments."

The CEVAS training could either be completed face-to-face with two full-day training sessions or online via weekly two-hour sessions over six weeks. Farmers had access to their

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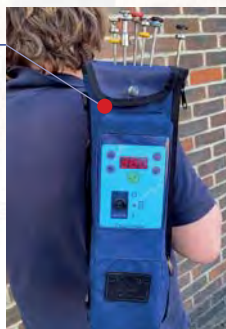
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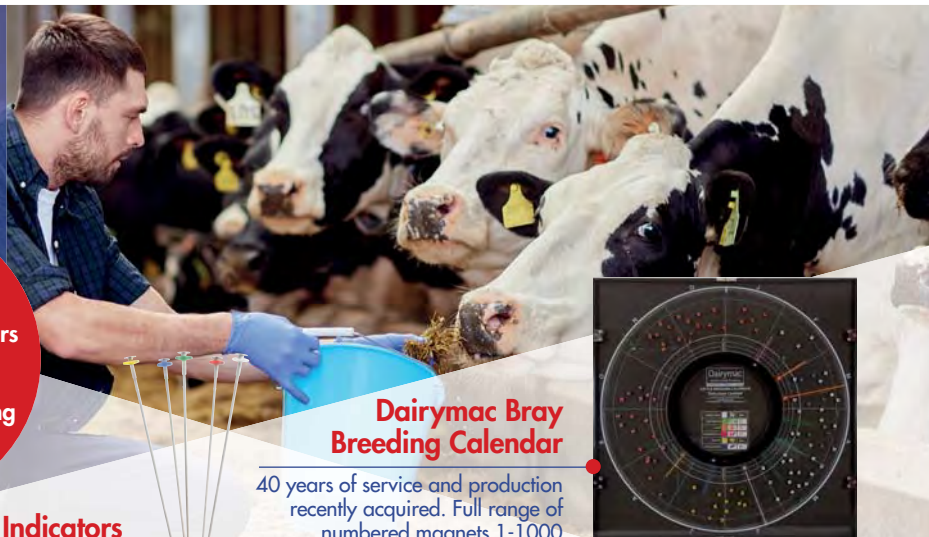
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CEVAS trainers (LEAF's Education Specialists) who were always quick to address their queries. The course provided all the necessary information and know-how to confidently deliver memorable school farm visits.

Serena successfully completed her course and held her first school farm visit with the support of a LEAF education specialist. "My one-to-one support was invaluable in helping me deliver the perfect session for all age groups," she says. "Overall, I have had a fantastic experience: It has really helped me build on the success of my business, Farm School, Exmoor."

Another farm which took part in the programme was Dobcross Hall in Cumbria, which opened its gates to eager young minds from William Howard School in Brampton in early May. These visits brought year nine students face-to-face with the intricate workings of a modern dairy farm.

Dairy cow life cycle

Host farmer Helen Holliday wanted to give students an in-depth understanding of the dairy cow life cycle and educate them about cow health and welfare standards. Additionally, she aimed to demonstrate how Dobcross Hall is advancing in sustainability and technology, showcasing innovations like robotic scrapers and silage pushers.

The day began with a tour of the calf shed, where students learned what makes a healthy calf, setting the foundation for understanding animal health from an early stage. They then moved on to the main cow shed, focusing on the farm's health and welfare practices for adult cows.

"The students' enthusiasm was palpable."

A highlight of the visit was observing an artificial insemination and hoof trimming session, which captured the students' attention and provided insight into essential farm practices.

A healthy soils workshop allowed students to conduct soil health checks and worm counts, emphasising the importance of soil health in farming. The visit concluded with a stock judging activity, where students used the A, B, X, Y method to evaluate dairy cows and gained insight into the criteria for high-quality livestock.

The feedback from the school was exceptionally positive. The headteacher expressed a keen interest in developing a lasting partnership with Dobcross Hall, integrating farm visits into the school's curriculum. This collaboration aims to provide continuous educational experiences for students in both years eight and nine.

The students' enthusiasm was palpable, says Helen. They particularly enjoyed observing the foot trimming session, witnessing the farm's robotic technology, and spending time with newborn calves. When asked if they would like to return, the response was a resounding "yes".

Helen found immense joy in the students' enthusiasm and curiosity. Their interest not only made the visit enjoyable but also instilled a sense of



Feedback has been exceptionally positive

pride among the farm staff, she says. The variety of questions from the students, ranging from serious business inquiries to whimsical ones, added to the richness of the experience.

The CEVAS course and one-to-one consultancy support were crucial in preparing Helen to deliver these visits. The training significantly boosted her

knowledge and confidence, and she advocates for CEVAS training to be mandatory for all farmers hosting school visits, underscoring its value.

Reflecting on the pilot project's success, Roz Reynolds, AHDB Head of Education, says: "We are glad to have supported 20 farmers on their journey to hosting school visits to their farms. Our farmers have put in a lot of hard work and it's great to see them now hosting their first visits with great success. They're giving young people a unique opportunity to learn where their food comes through experiencing a working farm first-hand, which is so powerful."

Apply now

Following the programme's success, AHDB is fully committed to continuing the initiative and is calling for more farmers interested in benefiting from all the project has to offer. The application deadline is midnight on August 1, 2024. For more information and to apply, [visit: ahdb.org.uk/schoolfarmvisits](https://ahdb.org.uk/schoolfarmvisits)

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Teat health and hygiene – back to basics

Improving dairy cow defences to environmental factors is key to preventing mastitis taking hold. British Dairying takes a closer look at products and practices that can help.

As all producers know, managing udder and teat health is critical to reduce the risk of mastitis in both lactation and the dry period. But with ever-evolving products and technologies, what does best practice now look like?

“Maintaining well-moisturised, supple skin on the teat, avoiding hyperkeratosis (skin thickening) and oedema through over-milking or pressure within the liner, and using dips and sprays effectively are key to reducing the chance of infection taking hold,” says Alison Clark at Progiene.

Natural defences

The anatomy and physiology of the teat are the cow's natural defences against pathogens invading the teat canal and leading to infection. “Good teat end condition ensures that the teat sphincter can close properly and makes the teat easier to clean thoroughly,” she explains. “Post-milking teat dipping has been recognised as a key part of the mastitis Five Point Plan which, since it has been adopted on many farms, has significantly reduced cases of contagious mastitis.

“Where it was once considered best practice to use a separate pre- and post-milking dip or spray, combined products are now much more popular.”

“An abrupt drying off is a better option in the long run.”

Biocidal Products Regulations efficacy tests are more stringent for pre-dips than for post-dips, notes Alison. This is because the pre-dip has to kill pathogens much quicker and more effectively, as it is on the teat for such a short time. They are also proven to be effective against environmental pathogens, which is hugely important as more infections are being caused by environmental pathogens these days.

“Whether a dip or spray, pre- or post-milking, provided the product completely covers the teat without



Post-milking teat dipping is a key part of the mastitis Five Point Plan

leaving excess liquid on the teat end, and product guidelines are followed, you should be well on the way to winning the battle,” she explains. “And as we learn more about the milk let-down process and oxytocin release mechanism, pre-milking disinfection has become the norm.”

Iodine-based dips and sprays are quick and easy to use and have proven to be effective on farms throughout the UK for both pre- and post-milking use. “During product development (of the Sprayshield range), we saw the benefits of emollients to improve teat condition, leaving the skin surface feeling soft and supple.”

More recent work by Progiene sought to include glycolic acid in a pre- and post-milking product, as it is a quick and easy way to enhance efficacy and skin conditioning effect. Sprayshield Prepost is a ready-to-use pre- and post-milking product which can be used as a dip or through an automated teat sprayer.

“It is quite a viscous product, due to high levels of emollient, but it will work through a sprayer, giving the same results as a barrier dip, forming a second skin on cows’ teats and helping to maintain good skin health,” Alison explains.

Regular teat scoring is now part of herd health management on many farms and, done on a regular basis, will help pick up changes and identify trends. Maybe the vacuum needs attention, perhaps pulsation rate is ‘off’ or liners are overdue a change.

Using standards

“Having the same person teat score, using the standards laid out by Teat Club International is the best approach, and doing it straight after milking is advised.”

When teat scoring, look out for:

- Post-milking teat colour
- Firmness of the teat barrel
- Openness of the teat orifice
- Tissue ringing at the base of the teat
- Dryness of the teat

Pressure in the udder at dry off may also pave the way for pathogens to take hold and lead to mastitis infections, so ideally yield will have been falling in line with a reducing plane of nutrition prior to dry off, she adds.

“Work has shown that, provided the cow's body condition score is appropriate, an abrupt drying off is a better option in the long run. But do it when she's still giving a lot of milk, and you run the risk of pressure building up in the udder and milk leaking. Teat ends with droplets of milk on are a perfect host for mastitis-causing bacteria, which work their way up the teat sphincter and lead to infection.

“Selective dry cow therapy has been one of the most significant management changes for dairy farmers in recent years, and has certainly gone a long way to reducing the amount of antibiotic used on-farm, which is good news,” notes Alison.

Physical barrier

“Some milk contracts – often those destined for cheese – don't allow internal teat sealants to be used so a product like T-HEXX Dry is a good option,” she says. “Whether you use a sealant or not, it can be a helpful addition; it is administered at drying off as a dip, forming a physical barrier film on the teat, working as the cow's first line of defence against pathogens.

“This is especially important in the first two weeks of the dry period when cows are most susceptible to mastitis.”

In addition to teat scoring, regular parlour testing is important to check all is working as it should be. Checks should include wash cycle testing, bactoscan troubleshooting, hygiene assessment and water sampling.



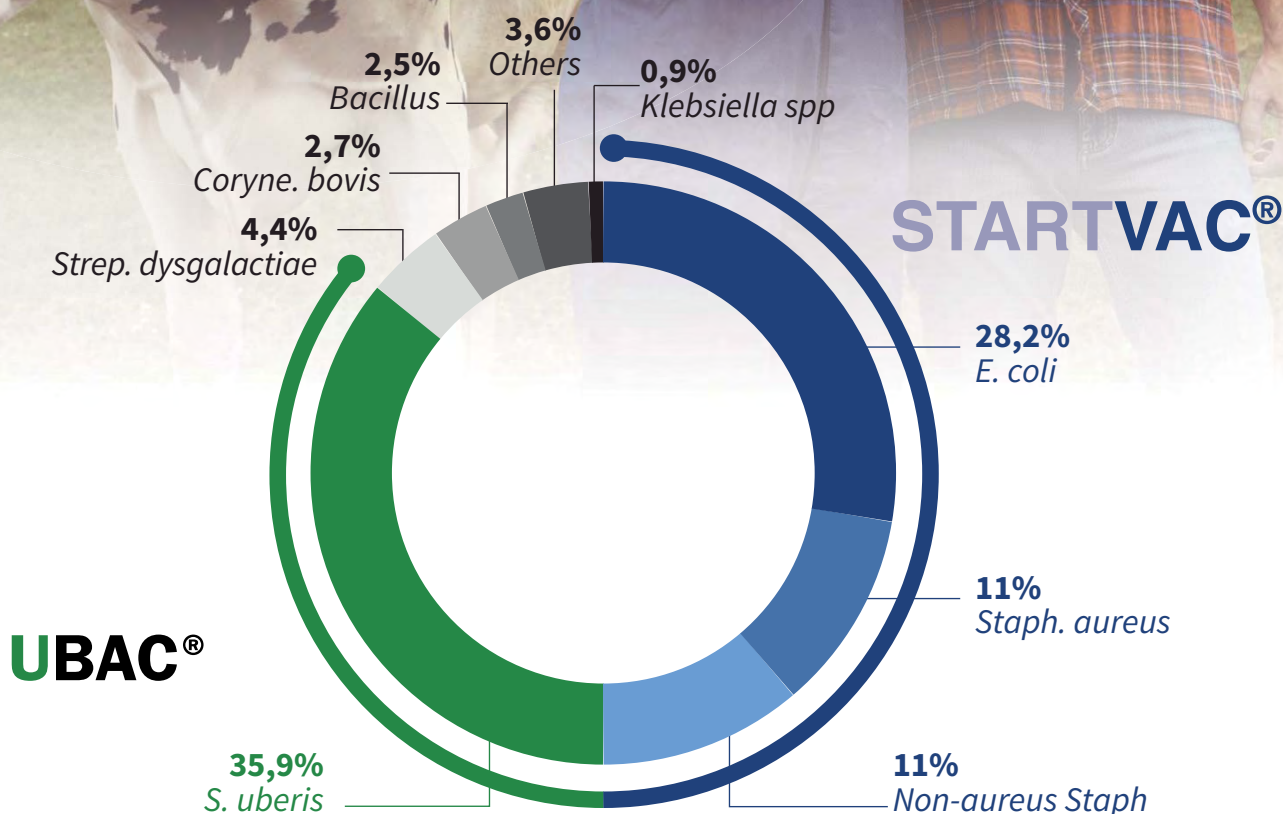
Alison Clark at Progiene

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These products are not licensed for concurrent use. A decision to use either of these vaccines before or after any other veterinary medicinal product therefore needs to be made on a case-by-case basis.

Time to tackle lactation mastitis

Selective and targeted dry cow therapies have revolutionised the way producers dry cows off and significantly cut antibiotic use. However, greater focus on treating lactating cows is now needed. British Dairying looks into the best practice.

Dry cow treatments have changed markedly in recent years, dramatically cutting the use of routine antibiotic tubes. And the approach to treating mastitis in lactating cows requires a similar overhaul, according to vet Andrew Biggs from the Vale Vet Group in Devon.

“This will futureproof antibiotic use in dairy cows, as, globally, ensuring a responsible approach to antibiotic therapy is the way ahead in both human and animal treatment. To help ensure intramammary antibiotics are used responsibly, we need to adopt an evidence-based approach to clinical mastitis therapy,” he says.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs like Metacam have multiple actions on the body:

- anti-inflammatory
- reduce fever
- counter endotoxin-induced cellular damage
- provide pain relief

Based on available evidence, an increasing number of farmers are now opting to use NSAIDs in all cases of clinical mastitis – mild, moderate and severe – so improving cow comfort and recovery rates.



Andrew Biggs says that the days of blanket mastitis treatment are gone

Mastitis is caused mostly by a range of bacteria, categorised as environmental or contagious. Contagious pathogens – like Staph. aureus or Strep. agalactiae – tend to be persistent and can spread from cow to cow. Since the Five Point Plan was widely adopted, these pathogens are now well controlled in most herds, and national somatic cell counts are much lower as a result.

Environmental pathogens, like E. coli or Strep. uberis, originate from the environment – most often from faeces. Mild or moderate E. coli mastitis cases tend to be short-lived and will often self-cure as a result of the cow's immune response. These cases are effectively getting better despite the antibiotic tubes; something which the industry has understood only relatively recently.

“And there is always one that likes to bend the rules, and in this case it is Strep. uberis,” says Andrew.

“Some strains can become persistent and then have the ability to behave in a contagious manner, even though we typically view it as an environmental pathogen.”

“Why use an antibiotic when it is not needed?”

Mastitis is an inflammatory response which is most often triggered by an infection. “But like with many infections, the inflammation that goes with it can often extend beyond the duration of the infection itself,” he adds. “This means that tubing until the clots have gone is not justified.”

Knowing the bug behind the mastitis case will help inform treatment decisions, and is known as

targeted lactation therapy. “Why use an antibiotic when it is not needed? If we can target antibiotic therapy to cows that need it and will benefit from it, and give a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) in all cases, another huge stride will be made in our responsible use of antibiotics,” says Andrew.

Cow-side tests

“The days of blanket treatment of lactating cows, or treating until the clots have gone, should be put behind us. There's a range of cow-side tests which will reveal the problem pathogen in a matter of hours. Talk to your vet about their availability and how to use them.”

Cow-side tests like MastDecide accompanied by targeted lactation therapy and NSAIDs for all cases can:

- Reduce use of antibiotic tubes
- Increase milk sold – less milk discarded
- Reduce the risk of bulk milk antibiotic failure
- Reduce milk with antibiotic contamination
- Reduce milk with antibiotic residues to dispose of
- Maintain good cure rates

“All cows with mastitis deserve NSAID treatment, and certain infections like Strep. uberis or Staph. aureus also need prompt antibiotic treatment,” adds Andrew. “But for mild or moderate E. coli cases (not sick cows), or cases where no bacteria are found (no growths), an NSAID may be all that is needed.”

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Battle against antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

It is nearly 10 years since the UK livestock industry began a concerted effort to monitor and measure antibiotic use on-farm as part of the battle against AMR. With the World Health Organisation declaring that AMR is one of the top 10 global public health threats facing humanity, working collaboratively to ensure antibiotic use is 'as little as possible but as much as necessary' is now part of everyday vet: farmer decision-making.

Dairy, beef and calves' indicators of progress		2020	2021	2022	Progress
Antibiotic use (centralised data)	15% mg/kg fall in dairy herds by 2024; baseline 2021/21	Data unavailable	Data pending	Data pending	✓
Sales of lactating cow tubes in dairy	Annual reduction in 3-yr rolling average; baseline of 0.69 DCD/Vet	0.63 (2018-2020)	0.51 (2019-2021)	2022 - 0.43 (2020 - 2022)	✓✓✓

Monitor rodents to reduce costs

Rodents are an ever-present threat on farms, and as rodenticide products become more tightly regulated, monitoring bait is an increasingly important tool.

Rats and mice are costly visitors on dairy farms – as well as carrying diseases, they are destructive, chewing through cabling and contaminating feed. And they can be hard to control, given their fear of anything new, rodenticide resistance, and environmental factors. Producers also have to be extremely careful of inadvertent impacts on non-target species like owls.

And that's where monitoring bait really comes into its own, as visitors to a recent BASF training day at Top House Farm in Rawcliffe Bridge, East Yorkshire, discovered. "The rural setting of the day helped to give guests a real example of the problems that can occur, as well as the chance to demonstrate how to combat these issues first hand," says Laurence Barnard, Country Business Manager at BASF.

So what are the benefits of using a monitoring bait?



Rodents risk health and finances

1. Detect infestations early

Previously, farmers may have relied on discovering physical evidence like droppings, runs and signs of damage – but monitoring products help farmers to detect earlier signs of activity and get ahead of infestations. Non-toxic blocks act

as a first indicator that a site has rodent activity, with rats and mice making the most of the palatable and accessible food source.

2. Prevents permanent baiting

Permanent baiting can be difficult to justify from an environmental perspective, and costly. There also aren't many circumstances where farmers and professional pest controllers can legitimately permanently bait for auditing purposes. Only certain products are authorised for permanent baiting, and the older anticoagulants are less effective due to resistance.

3. Encourages rodenticide uptake

Rodents are notorious for being wary of new objects, so putting a rodenticide down when early activity is detected can delay uptake. By using monitoring baits, rodents will become familiar with the object, reducing neophobia when the baits are replaced with rodenticide.

4. Save money on wasted bait

Before an infestation takes hold, it can be difficult to know exactly where rodents come from and how they move around a site, which can make baiting in all boxes tempting.

Over time though, if there is no activity, farmers have to replace the rodenticide as it will go mouldy and become unappealing to rodents, or worse be demolished by slugs and snails. Replacing monitoring blocks is far cheaper than replacing their toxic counterparts.

5. Target your baiting programme

Farmers often experience repeated activity around the same areas of the site.

By changing their approach to monitoring and having toxic bait at those regularly affected areas, they can target treatment appropriately rather than blanket treating. This saves money and reduces exposure to non-target rodent species.

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Overhaul needed to improve foot health

A national survey has highlighted there are still key areas being overlooked by farmers to improve herd mobility. British Dairying takes a closer look at the surprising findings.

There is still a significant opportunity to reduce the economic, welfare, social and environmental consequences of compromised mobility. But to make the most of the opportunity will require a clearer focus and new thinking, according to the UK's largest survey of dairy cow mobility and foot health.

The survey was commissioned by Stride, a not-for-profit initiative headed up by industry partners Ceva, HerdVision, IVC Farm Vets, Neogen and Zinpro. Over 350 dairy farmers managing around 119,000 cows completed the survey this spring, allowing the most detailed picture of foot health in the UK to be produced.

Respondents represented a broad cross-section of dairy farming systems in the UK, with 67% all-year-round calving, while 19% of herds do not turn cows out. Dairy

vet Matt Dobbs, Chair of the Stride Technical Board, says mobility issues have remained stubbornly high for many years.

"While we have seen sustained reductions in somatic cell counts, the same is not true for improvements in foot health. In part this is due to the milk price incentives on offer for achieving low cell counts, but it also reflects the complex and multi-factorial nature of compromised mobility.

Seen as 'normal'

"It might also reflect a level of compromised mobility that is seen as 'normal' and just something that is accepted," he says. "As an industry are we too accepting of higher levels of poor foot health?"

The survey shows that compromised foot health is an issue for all farm sizes and management



Foot health is an issue for all farm sizes and management systems

systems, and that there is a variable uptake in the preventative measures available. All the major causes of poor foot health – digital dermatitis, sole ulcers, foul, and overgrown claws – remain issues on farm.

"While businesses know the key components of a preventative programme, like mobility scoring, foot trimming and foot bathing, the uptake across respondents was variable, suggesting it should be possible to improve management," notes Matt.

While foot trimming is widely adopted, with only 1% of respondents not trimming, 60% said they only trim 'when necessary', suggesting an opportunity for a more structured approach.

Around 78% of respondents are footbathing milking cows more frequently than weekly, but 11% do not footbath the milking herd at all. Concerningly, some respondents said they only footbath when they have a problem, suggesting it is seen as a reactive rather than a preventative measure to maintain higher levels of hoof health. The uptake of footbathing is significantly lower in dry cows and heifers.

Foot health is still seen as a key issue when breeding cows, with 65% saying they consider mobility traits, and the use of genomics is increasing.

Mobility scoring is gaining traction as a way to assess the herd, but Matt concedes there is still a need for education in the approach. "To be most effective, cows need to be mobility scored frequently to aid early identification of problems. Yet

51% only mobility score quarterly or less frequently, probably in response to processor requirements, while 24% of farmers do not mobility score at all. However, many of these say they see the cows every day and feel they pick up mobility issues during the course of the day."

Diet is recognised as a key preventative measure, especially the use of biotin and zinc, and many farmers said they will be investing in cow comfort to help reduce leg and foot issues.

Importantly, the survey indicated a lack of clear delegation and responsibility for foot health, with many farms adopting a team approach. "When respondents were asked who is responsible for managing foot health, the survey exposed a wide range of answers, including external advisers as well as members of dairy management teams," says Matt.

"It was not unusual for more than one person to be 'in charge'. But how can this be an effective way to manage a complex issue? Equally, how can an external specialist in one field be expected to manage such a complex condition, especially when only on the farm occasionally? Clear communication and a lack of protocols can also be an issue."

To improve progress, Matt suggests a review of accountability and whether there is clearly allocated responsibility for foot health. Has been allocated to the correct person? This could be someone working closely with the cows on a daily basis. Producers should also

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TACKLING LAMENESS

ask what the main motivators are for their team to improve foot health, as it may be surprising. It could be small practical things, like less time spent trimming feet or sorting cows for the foot trimmer. It could be saved time getting cows in for milking either from grazing, the cubicles or the straw yard for lame cows. It may be pride in managing a herd of cows that are sound on their feet.

“Allocating responsibility to someone with a vested interest in improving foot health, because they

will benefit directly, it is more likely to see them commit to the task,” notes Matt. “And they need to have agreed targets for improvement, so they know what they are expected to achieve.”

The report also highlights that there may be a degree of under-estimating the consequential cost of a case or poor foot health. “Respondents generally feel foot health has a small impact on profitability, possibly because incurred direct costs are only a small part of the total, with the majority being lost production, which is rarely measured.

“A common theme in the comments from the survey was the issue of time. Time is a precious commodity on farm,” he adds. “Making foot health a priority and allocating time to carry out routine activities could be crucial in improving foot health. How often does time pressure affect mobility issues, because producers and dairy staff just don’t have the time to get things done?”

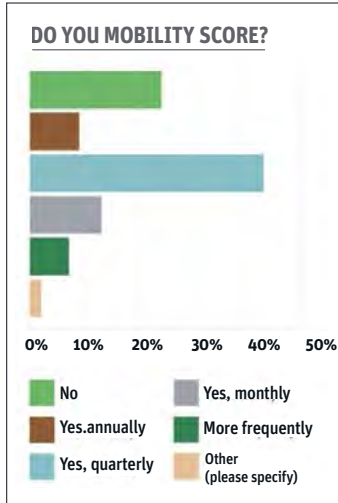
There is no doubt that time invested in prevention is better than time spent on treatment and will deliver a better return and reduce stress on the team. If prevention strategies are more effective then less time will be spent treating cows,

which would release time and have a positive impact on staff motivation and wellbeing.

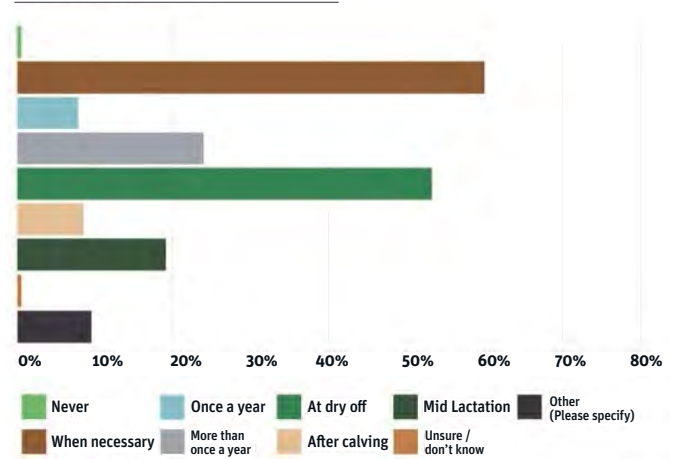
“Overall, the survey highlights that while there are undoubtedly opportunities, it is a complex issue,” says Matt. “To begin the drive to reduce foot issues, the industry needs to work more closely to help dairy farmers, their teams and advisers develop more comprehensive preventative strategies.

“Key to this will be clearer allocation of responsibilities, improved skills development, better appreciation of the consequences and benefits, and embracing the new technologies that can make a difference on farm.”

A series of practical workshops focusing on improving mobility will be held over the forthcoming months. For more information visit www.stridemobility.co.uk/news



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60% of respondents only foot trim when necessary



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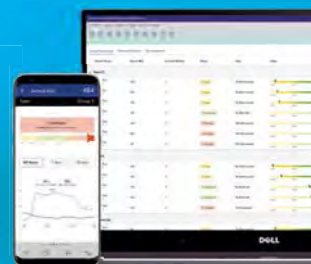
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Achieving better dairy foot health: Practical advice for herd managers

Lameness is multi-factorial and difficult to address, but there are some practical steps that can be taken to improve foot health in dairy herds. British Dairying finds out more.

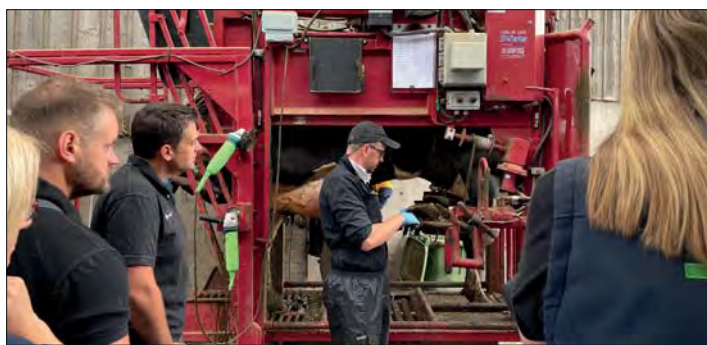
Lameness is a major issue in dairy farming, impacting productivity and cow welfare. And it's a multi-factorial issue, so it's vital to adopt a holistic approach, bringing together nutritionists and veterinary advisers to create long-term preventative strategies.

"Everyone knows lameness is a huge problem on farms. It stops us from getting the best out of our cows," says Eoghan Mullery, Technical Director at Advanced Ruminant Nutrition. "When we get asked to visit a dairy with a lameness or mobility problem, the farmers often feel overwhelmed by the challenge. This is common, but we should take confidence from herds that manage to achieve great results in tackling the problem. It's why Advanced Ruminant Nutrition and Herd Health Consultancy have worked together over the last few years."

"This is a two-to-three-year process."

Dr Nick Bell, vet and Director at Herd Health, agrees. "In the daily grind of foot trimming, bathing, and other regular practices, it can be tough to see a clear path forward. Every farm is different, but the key is to make a plan that addresses the main obstacles."

The biggest bottleneck to reducing lameness is knowing where to start,



Skilled farm staff who can treat lame cows immediately are an asset

says Eoghan. "Expert advice can generate a huge to-do list, often seeming unachievable, but we must begin somewhere. Creating a plan that prioritises the 'easy wins' and gradually tackles the bigger challenges is crucial. For most farms, this is a two-to-three-year process. Identifying the causes of lameness is the only way to prevent it. While we can treat the current problem, unless we address the root cause, we'll remain stuck in a cycle of treatment."

It's also about understanding the farm's limitations," notes Nick. "What can you tackle right now? For example, improving the grooving on shed floors to prevent slipping might not be feasible if there's no budget for it. In that case, what else can we do?"

Step 1: Quantify foot health

Nick recommends starting with a mobility score from an experienced and professional Register of Mobility Scorers (RoMS) scorer. "Having a professional scorer helps you spot cows before they become lame and provides valuable insights from a scoring session," he says. "Don't hesitate to discuss and refine these scores together to fully grasp the problem's scope."

He suggests scoring cows the day before a trimmer visit. This way, all score two and three cows can have their feet lifted. "You can then look at the types of lesions you have and prioritise from there. If you find sole ulcers, white line infections, and large digital dermatitis lesions, you were too late. Ideally, fewer than 1% of cows should be affected by sole ulcers and digital dermatitis."

Getting the whole team on board is crucial, says Eoghan. "Look at what you can do and when, prioritise actions that will yield the most gains, understand your limitations, and manage expectations. Set realistic key performance indicators (KPIs) for years one, two and three. This isn't a quick fix, but a long-term plan will improve lameness and the herd's sustainability."

Step 2: Focus on foot trimming

After mobility scoring, plan your trimming slots throughout the year, advises Nick. "Most high-yielding Holstein herds need four to five visits to the crush per cow on average. Ensure you have enough trimming slots to cover all the mobility score two and three cows you found during scoring, plus any high maintenance cows and rechecks. This should be in addition to budgeting for two to three routine trims, per cow, annually."

Nick stresses the importance of correct foot trimming technique. "Foot trimming recommendations

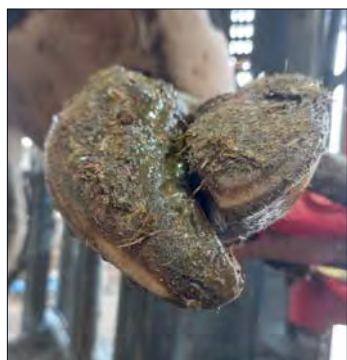
have advanced significantly in the past 20 years. It's essential to get the technique right before doing more trimming; otherwise, you could worsen the problem," he says. "This element can be transformative but old habits can be hard to shake for any of us. Use professional, up-to-date trimmers. And always have someone on the farm skilled at treating cows any day of the year. The aim is to treat them before they are noticeably lame."

Producers should treat mobility score two cows as an emergency. "Aim to treat these within 24 hours. You wouldn't leave a cow with mastitis untreated for a month, and the same urgency applies to cows with foot lesions," says Nick. "Ensure the trimmer knows which cows and which legs to check for mobility score two and three." Early treatment of deep bruises with a block and anti-inflammatory is the key to good cure rates. "Someone trained to carefully spot cows every one to two weeks as they walk past you can be highly efficient for this, but some herdspeople do this instinctively every time they look at a cow."

Step 3: Implement farm team protocols

Getting the full team on board is crucial. The Advanced Mobility programme offers a comprehensive approach, helping farmers develop bespoke protocols for their farms. This includes a systematic risk assessment during a farm walk, covering all areas cows walk, including youngstock, dry cows, and tracks.

Nick advises working with a vet to develop treatment protocols. "Check your prevention fundamentals. For sole ulcers, ensure good cubicle comfort, short pen times, effective cow cooling and regular foot checks in the crush. For white lines, focus on cow flow, walkways, and claw horn quality. For digital dermatitis, prioritise daily foot cleaning and disinfection of lactating cows, and don't forget foot bathing for dry cows and youngstock."



Cow with a corkscrew claw



Improve cow comfort for sole ulcers

Step 4: Diagnosis and treatment Digital dermatitis (DD)

- Best practice is monthly hosing of feet for blitz treatment
- Daily foot cleaning and disinfection with an appropriate biocide at the correct concentration and depth
- Regular foot baths for dry cows and youngstock
- Improve slurry management, especially around foot baths
- Disinfect during trimming with 2% hypochlorite, 1% FAM30, or 2% Virkon
- Ensure strong biosecurity measures

Sole ulcers

- Minimise standing times by optimising bedding, cubicle dimensions, pen times, heat abatement, stocking rates, and preconditioning heifers to concrete and cubicles
- Ensure safe foot shape and appropriate trim intervals
- Use 'big' models when trimming, especially when housed
- Screen for early bruising
- Effective treatment of bruising (EDPET method)
- Maintain a high-maintenance cow list
- Implement culling when necessary

White line disease

- Enhance cow flow with quiet herding and handling, careful backing gate management, adequate space, sensible stocking rates, appropriate alley dimensions, housing design, and managed group movements
- Improve cow walkways with level but grippy concrete, optimal groove and texture, or targeted rubber or pasture surfaces
- Enhance horn quality through biotin supplementation (20mg/head per day) and organic trace minerals tailored to yield

Necrotic hoof lesions

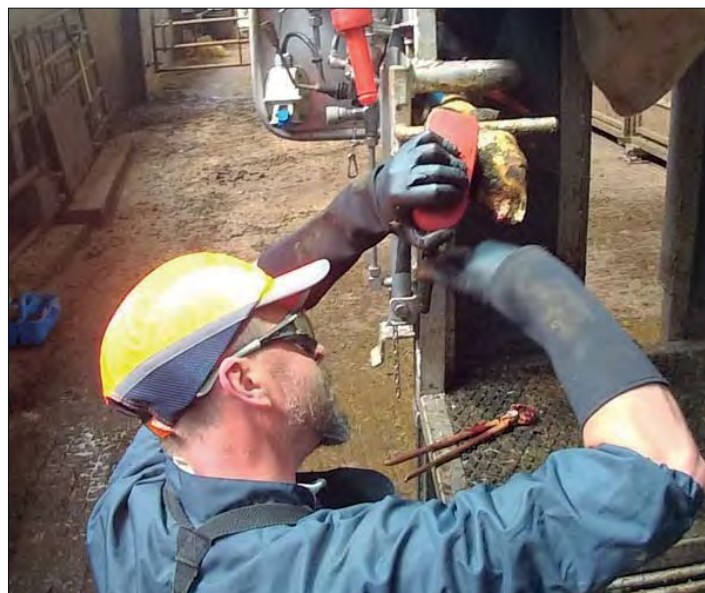
- Protect sole depth
- Eliminate trim faults from the farm, such as not removing axial walls
- Establish treatment protocols with the vet and trimmer
- Control DD

Thin soles

- Employ sole-sparing trimming techniques
- Address wear issues
- Improve horn quality

Corkscrew claw

- Review rearing practices and feed barrier management
- Adjust trim techniques accordingly



High-yielding Holstein herds need four to five visits to the crush per cow

Working with your vet, nutrition consultant and a fully qualified trimmer can be a good way to find the first step. Make sure your trimmer understands why toe length recommendations have now changed, why the 'big' model is so important to housed cows, and legislation on things like salicylic acid usage, notes Nick. A good trimmer

will be in demand and so finding someone at level four qualification and up-to-date on checks and audits is a priority.

"By following these steps, you can take meaningful action to improve foot health in your dairy herd. It's about creating a clear plan, involving your entire team, and making practical, impactful changes."

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Industry collaboration to tackle lameness

Ruminant Health & Welfare (RH&W) Chair and former Sussex dairy farmer Gwyn Jones highlights how progress is being made against the five-year welfare strategy lameness goal.

Last year, the new five-year UK Dairy Cattle Welfare Strategy was launched under RH&W, with lameness identified as one of the six main welfare priorities.

It set out a goal of 'Healthy Feet', with every farm putting a proactive lameness management plan in place. It was in response to lameness being highlighted as one of the most problematic and costly, but preventable, welfare issues in the UK dairy herd.

Since launching this strategy, we have been working across our four nations to ensure progress is joined up and reported on.

“There is more scope for lameness to be reduced and eliminated on all farms.”

At our recent Steering Group meeting, we dedicated the agenda to discussing health and welfare issues caused by lameness and invited experts to highlight the efforts being made across different areas of the ruminant industry, to track and improve lameness on-farm.

We heard from academics who shared innovations in lameness research, yet across the board it was clear that lameness is still a big issue, with efforts so far not appearing to have made any significant impact



Gwyn Jones believes that significant reductions in lameness are possible

in UK herds. Best estimates are that lameness has remained at roughly 30% for many years. However, where there is significant change is how we approach lameness these days.

Lameness

Today, any cow with mobility issues is considered lame, so one could argue things have improved in this area, but there remains a huge range of lameness amongst dairy herds.

Ultimately, we need to close the gap and keep pushing forwards, as we know there is more scope for lameness to be reduced and eliminated

on all farms, which currently is not happening. There is a good programme that works, utilising the science and learnings from mobility scoring available. This is the AHDB Healthy Feet Programme which is helping to drastically reduce lameness levels on the farms engaged with it.

The challenge for dairy farmers appears to be that while trimming and dealing with severely lame cows is improving, there is little time left to deal with the 'slight' mobility problems identified by mobility scoring in the herd.

These are the lame cows of tomorrow or next week, so we need to flip the focus to break the cycle, and see treating cows early every bit as important as treating visibly lame cows.

Mobility scoring

The answer to this, of course, is regular mobility scoring; if slightly lame cows are identified and treated early, they will be put right and the problem reduced, so long as regular mobility scoring continues.

Mobility scoring can now be enhanced and automated by technology, like installing cameras to pick up cows with mobility issues early, or by upskilling farm staff to mobility score. As we heard from academics

Laura Randal (Nottingham) and George Oikonomou (Liverpool) who are involved in the latest research - as well as Sara Pedersen, a veterinary surgeon specialising in cattle hoof health - lameness is a complex and multifactorial problem.

It is associated with different challenges on each farm, with different, preventable answers to the problem coming to the fore.

“Mobility scoring can now be enhanced and automated by technology.”

They explained initiatives looking at dairy cattle mobilising fat after calving, for example, where the fat cushion in the hoof diminishes, causing sore feet and mobility issues.

Learnings from trials were also shared which indicate the use of pain relief at calving reduces lameness by up to 10%. The one thing that all experts agreed on is early detection and intervention is key.

That means making sure that lame cows of tomorrow are spotted and treated while dealing with today's lame cows. If that means getting in extra help to catch up, for example, qualified foot-trimmers and mobility scorers, that is money well spent.

Working together

At RH&W, our focus remains on bringing together experts and stakeholders across the ruminant industry and across the four nations to ensure a joined-up approach where we can show tangible progress.

Everyone has a role to play, whether that's being more proactive with mobility scoring on-farm and sharing your data to build a clearer UK-wide picture of dairy lameness, or academia delivering applied research which is affecting the advice and ability to spot and treat lame cows.

I look forward to reporting more on the collective progress made in due course.

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Tackle feed efficiency head-on

Improving efficiencies is key to a sustainable dairying future, and feed efficiencies play a valuable role in this. Improved understanding of technology and the rumen microbiome is enabling producers to directly influence this, as British Dairying reports.

In today's dynamic dairy industry, where market demands fluctuate and input costs continue to rise, dairy producers face a critical challenge: How to enhance dairy cow performance, improve efficiency, and maximise profitability while ensuring sustainability in operations.

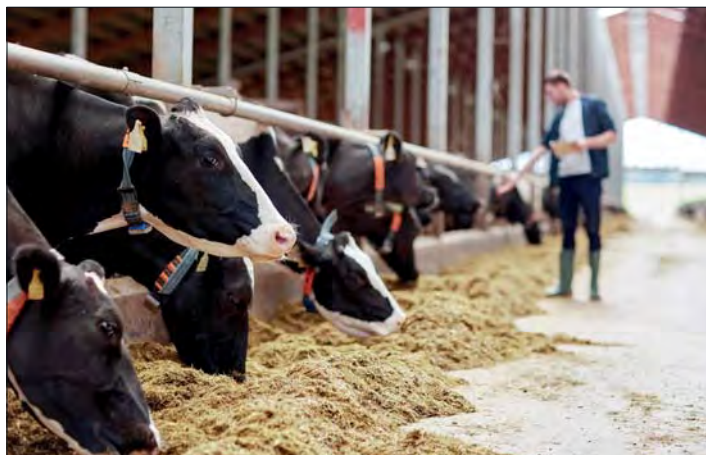
Feed prices have surged by approximately 70%, while other key inputs like fuel and fertiliser have doubled or even tripled in cost. This has compelled industry professionals to explore innovative solutions which not only optimise production, but also reduce waste and emissions. In this pursuit, a focus on sustainability and production efficiency has become paramount for dairy producers and nutritionists alike.

Efficiency gains begin with optimising forage production and utilisation, notes Huw McConochie, Dairy Nutritionist at Zinpro. By reducing shrinkage during forage production and feed-out, losses can be minimised, ensuring maximum utilisation of resources. "Attention to transition management, including factors like feed space, lying space, and minimising pen moves, further enhances efficiency."

Feed conversion

Feed conversion efficiencies play an important role in maximising outputs from reduced inputs, and improved understanding of how the rumen microbiome works is offering producers the potential to directly influence that.

A groundbreaking innovation in dairy ration formulation - isoacids - has the potential to revolutionise dairy nutrition. "An essential nutrient for fibre digestion in the rumen, isoacids play a pivotal role in maximising microbial protein production and energy utilisation," explains Huw. "Direct supplementation with isoacids enhances fibre digestion and significantly improves feed efficiency, particularly in scenarios where ruminal starch degradability is high." Multiple studies have corroborated the positive impact of supplementing lactating dairy cattle diets with isoacids. Across 10 controlled studies, isoacids supplementation



Isoacids in the dairy ration maximise microbial protein and energy use

led to a 3.9% increase in energy-corrected milk (ECM) yield and a 4.6% enhancement in feed efficiency.

"Dairy producers are already active leaders in dairy farming sustainability with practices like recycling water, applying manure as a natural fertiliser and feeding human-inedible by-products, like rapemeal, distillers' grains, soyabean hulls, maize gluten and many others" he adds.

"Nutritionists should capitalise on the upcycled fibre feedstuffs they are already using in the ration by including Zinpro IsoFerm in diet formulations to focus on fibre digestion. Improved fibre digestion equates to greater feed efficiency and income over feed costs - key metrics to drive dairy farm profitability."

Peer-reviewed research has shown that adding isoacids to dairy diets increased neutral detergent fibre (NDF) digestion by more than 7.5%, conversion of ruminally-digested feed to microbial protein by more than 6.5% and production of microbial protein by almost 8.5%. With improved fibre digestion and protein utilisation, lactating herds have seen a 2% reduction in dry matter intake and 5.5% better feed efficiency.

"Additionally, improvements in microbial protein yield may provide an opportunity to reduce dietary crude protein and more specifically rumen undegradable protein while maintaining performance," notes Huw. "In the ever-changing landscape of the dairy industry,

of rising input costs, fluctuating market demands, and the imperative to reduce environmental impact necessitates a reimagining of dairy production strategies."

Prioritise innovation

The transformative approach of using isoacids - focused on optimising rumen microbial protein production and efficiency - not only elevates milk yield and feed efficiency but also embodies the essence of sustainable dairy nutrition, says Huw.

"By prioritising innovation, optimising resources, and embracing sustainable solutions, the dairy industry can forge ahead, sustaining excellence and resilience in the face of challenges, and ensuring a vital, sustainable future for dairy farming around the globe."

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Empowering student athletes with the natural goodness of Milk

by
Nicola Dodd,
AHDB Senior Marketing Manager

AHDB has teamed up with British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) to launch a dynamic new campaign called 'Milk Every Moment'. This exciting initiative aims to empower university student athletes and Gen Z's (18–25-year-olds) with the knowledge they need to make informed dietary choices and rediscover the power of milk as a natural nutritional powerhouse.

University students and Gen Z are bombarded with conflicting information about nutrition, often leading them away from traditional staples like milk. 'Milk Every Moment' cuts through the noise by providing evidence-based facts about milk's nutrients and health benefits.

The campaign aims to capture market share from high sugar energy drinks and milk alternatives through its messaging. Milk is presented as a natural source of seven essential vitamins and minerals*. A high-quality protein, which supports muscle growth and maintenance. Additionally, as a rich calcium source, which helps maintain normal bones. These benefits make milk an excellent choice for helping to fuel athletic performance.

Launched on 8 July, this three-year initiative is an investment in our next generation, empowering student athletes and fitness fans with the knowledge to make informed choices and fuel their winning moments. 'Milk Every Moment' goes beyond promoting milk as a drink. It reminds students that milk can be a winning ingredient in their quest for peak performance and a healthy lifestyle.

The campaign leverages BUCS's extensive reach across 165 universities and colleges, engaging over half a million student athletes and sports fans. The 'Milk Every Moment' message will be spread through engaging content on channels like: BUCS social media (Instagram, TikTok) and emails, a microsite, and in-person events. The BUCS Rugby Union National Championships will now be known as The Milk Cup.

If you would like to know more about AHDB and BUCS 'Milk Every Moment' campaign, please visit: milkeverymoment.co.uk.



AHDB

Supply chain shocks: The new norm?

Supply chain shocks seem to be becoming more frequent – but investment in UK dairying remains extremely positive. So what is the outlook for the months ahead, both at home and further afield? John Giles, Divisional Director at Promar International, reports.

Not too much stays the same in the UK and international dairy sector for long. Just looking back over the past few months should tell us that. A quick glance shows a plethora of activity in terms of investment and other measures to mitigate against what is now known commonly as the 'VUCA' (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environment in which the industry all around the world operates.

The dairy supply chain has been subject to a number of supply chain shocks over the past few years (and more in some cases), much of which has already been written about.

A combination of Brexit, Covid, the situation in Ukraine, uncertainty in the Middle East and geopolitical tension; not least, between the US and China, have in their own way, all caused severe disruptions to the UK and international dairy supply chains.

Going back in time, we also had to endure the global financial crisis, and of course, in the UK, severe outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease and BSE, too.

There have also been issues with transport logistics, especially in the Suez Canal, and consumer and political opposition to the adoption of new agri-food technology, especially in Europe, but maybe less so in other parts of the world.

There are also wider geopolitical tensions, not least between the US and China, which have seen issues around international trade and knock-on impacts across South East Asia, in particular.

What seems to be clear is that:

- These supply chain shocks have always been happening
- They seem to be happening more often
- The causes and impacts are increasingly complex and global in their nature; global supply chains are often turning micro shocks into macro-level effects
- The after-effects can take a long time to recover from.

It is likely that the next big supply chain shock is already 'out there' – we just can't see it right now. Like a big wave in mid ocean, it will, some time before too long, come crashing down on shore.

Supply chain shocks

So, should we be surprised by supply chain shocks any more? Probably not.

We live and work in a VUCA society. Supply chain shocks are all part and parcel of this, it seems. Many of the things that constitute a supply chain shock are often well beyond the control of individual agri-food companies, but this does not mean there is nothing that can be done to mitigate against them. There are several things that can be done, albeit some are easier than others to do (and just because they are difficult, does not mean they should be avoided either).

In the UK, the largest dairy producer, Arla, has announced that it will invest some £300m in five UK sites, including £179m in what is reported to be state-of-the-art technology at its Taw Valley



Divisional Director at Promar, John Giles, says supply chain shocks are all part of a VUCA society

creamery, enabling the business to export mozzarella for use in the pizza sector around the world.

On top of this, Muller has announced it will acquire Yew Tree Dairy, based in West Lancashire, following on from Yew Tree's significant investment in recent years in milk powder production. Muller plans to use Yew Tree Dairy's production capabilities for milk powder to grow its export business.

“Dairy processing and farming businesses must plan ahead.”

Completion of the deal is expected later this year, subject to approval from the Competition and Markets Authority. Once the deal is completed, Muller plans to significantly invest in the capacity and capabilities of the Skelmersdale milk drying site.

In Wales, there have been more mixed fortunes for the dairy sector of late. The Anglesey-based

cheesemaker, Mona Island Dairy, has entered administration. The £27m cheese plant opened only last year. The business had been funded through private investment, loans and a £3m Welsh Government grant. It is reported that some £40m had already been spent on running the facility.

A further £10m was needed this year to maintain cash flow. It looks as if Mona has simply run out of money.

In the South West of Wales, though, Pembrokeshire Creamery will invest a further £5m into its Haverfordwest site following the success of recent partnerships with major retailers, Asda and Lidl.

Welsh milk has previously been bottled in factories in England before being transported back to Wales to be sold in stores.

On the other side of the world, things are also changing. Fonterra in New Zealand has announced that it will look to refocus on the foodservice and business-to-business ingredients market.

As part of this, it is exploring full or partial divestment options for some or all of its global consumer businesses, including Anchor, Mainland, Kāpiti, Anlene, Annum,

Fernleaf, Western Star, Perfect Italiano and others, as well as its integrated businesses Fonterra Oceania and Fonterra Sri Lanka. At the same time, sustainability targets and other associated investment plans remain unchanged, as Fonterra remains committed to improving cost efficiency across the business and will continue to report progress against efficiency measures annually.

Lessons to be learnt

So what are the lessons to be learnt from all this activity? A number seem clear: Having a very strong and well-developed business strategy as a starting point, and a clear focus on meeting customer needs and requirements - be they domestically or internationally based is vital.

Having great customers seems a good idea; playing in areas of the market where you are fundamentally strong, and being prepared to change things if they are not quite right, especially in non-core areas of the business.

Also important is having access to sufficient finance and ensuring a rock-solid supply of milk, while efforts to reduce carbon footprints

across the supply chain will not be undervalued. And while there are several reasons for the global investment environment to still be uncertain, the appetite for well-thought-through projects seems strong and the finance is there to do it.

“We will need more resilient, transparent and collaborative.”

One thing is certain though: Dairy processing and farming businesses must plan ahead for what will be an uncertain future. Factoring this in to their mid to long-term planning is going to be very important.

It is also clear that we will need more resilient, transparent and collaborative dairy supply chains in the future. No one single organisation can overcome these sorts of supply chain shocks on its own.

Even if it could, it would be far easier and a good deal quicker to do this in conjunction with other partners in the supply chain.

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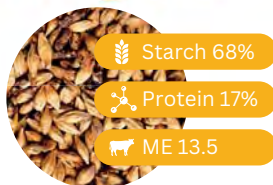
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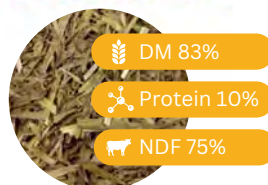
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Digital software improves farm nutrient management efficiency

Bringing together all nutrient management records within a digital platform to gain a clearer picture is helping one dairy and arable farm meet auditing requirements more easily, while also improving efficiency and sustainability. British Dairying finds out more.

Making the most of manures and fertilisers is a priority for most farms, and Inn Farm Dairy near Ashbourne, Derbyshire, is no exception. The mixed family farm, run by third generation farmer John Hutchinson, extends to 285ha of arable and forage crops, plus 200 cows supplying around 2m litres of milk annually to Arla.

John knows how important it is to maximise the use of manures and slurries within the mixed cropping rotation, not just for the benefit of crops and soil, but also to reduce reliance on expensive bought-in fertiliser. Plus, it helps satisfy the increasing requirements for dairy farms to improve their sustainability and green credentials.

Best practice standards

The farm is part of the Arla UK 360 Programme, which sets best practice standards across six key areas designed to help businesses improve sustainability. One of these is management of the environment and natural resources, which includes commitments to monitor the dairy's carbon footprint, to maintain and enhance soil quality, sample regularly and optimise nutrient balance.

Collating, storing and accessing all of the information needed to



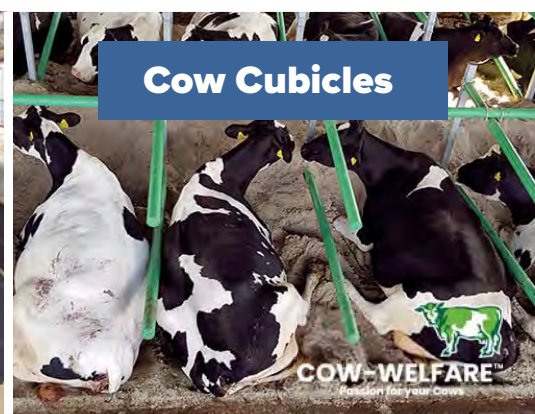
Maximising the use of manures and slurries benefits the crops and soil as well as sustainability credentials

comply with such schemes, as well as other farm inspections and statutory requirements for nutrient management planning, has been made much easier with

the move to Omnia Field Manager back in 2020/21.

"Previously, we were regularly soil testing each field every three to four years, but that was all being recorded

on paper records as we didn't have any kind of digital system," says John. "It's so nice to now be able to put everything straight into the platform and easily access the information we



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need at the click of a button. Our agronomist Angel Ganev has also been through and put in as many of our old soil test records as possible, so we've got a useful digital record to refer back to.

"It's a really good, user-friendly system which has made it so much simpler and quicker to monitor and access our nutrient management data."

The platform has proven particularly useful for the Arla 360 audits of nutrient and fertiliser use required for carbon footprinting, as John can easily separate out all land and inputs associated with the dairy enterprise from the rest of the arable land.

Specific fields or crop types

"As a mixed farm, when Arla wants to know exactly how much we've used on the dairy, not the arable land, we've found it really useful to run off reports for specific fields or crop types, such as grassland or forage areas."

Aside from the compliance aspects, there are practical benefits from having a digital system for nutrient planning, which facilitates more efficient and targeted fertiliser application, says John.

"Generally, Angel and I will sit down at the start of the year and put together a plan for where we will target slurry and manure applications, liming, and artificial fertilisers, based on factors like current cropping, crop history, soil test results, and where additional phosphate (P) or potash (K) may be required."

"Soils are better at mineralising nutrition as we go later into the season."

The farm is spread over quite a wide geographic area, with some parts within a designated nitrate vulnerable zone and others outside it, so being able to easily map fields and tailor nutrient plans according to specific requirements and 'layers' of data, has been useful for the business.

"I also like to print off a copy of the nutrient management plans so there's a physical hard copy in the tractor cab that any operator can refer to when necessary," says John. "That's really easy to do, plus we've still got the digital record too."

At Inn Farm, cows are housed in cubicles on sand over the winter months, while youngstock are bedded on straw, providing sources of both slurry and farmyard manure (FYM).

Dutch-style multi-cut system

"Generally, we try to target the FYM applications to land going into maize, while the aim is to apply slurry to grassland after every silage cut where possible. We tend to put more nutrition on grass because we're following the Dutch-style multi-cut system, which typically applies more fertiliser to the first and second cuts, reducing rates for later cuts. The theory is that soils are better at mineralising nutrition as we go later into the season."

John aims to maintain soil P and K indices at around 2.5-3, and generally this can be achieved with very little need for additional bought-in fertiliser, although maize does receive some



John finds the system useful for Arla 360 audits

diammonium phosphate fertiliser applied 'down the spout' with seed at drilling.

Additional bagged granular nitrogen and sulphur fertiliser is required for the grassland and arable areas though. First wheats typically receive 170kg N/ha in total, while second wheats are nearer to 180-190kg N/ha. Grassland gets around 100-110kg N/ha for the first cut, reducing to 80kg N/ha for the second, and then by a further 10kg for subsequent cuts.

In recent seasons, John has been able to trim nitrogen rates applied to oilseed rape, with no detrimental impact on yield so far. "Traditionally, we always used to apply around 220kg N/ha to oilseed rape, but following the peak in fertiliser prices a couple of years ago, we decided to try reducing rates to 200kg N/ha, and this year have cut them back to 180kg N/ha."

The farm is not currently using yield mapping or variable rate applications, as John is unsure the technology would be beneficial given the farm's small average field size of less than 5ha. "It may be something we consider in the future though."

The carbon footprinting functionality may be another tool he looks at in more detail, and he is all set to create spray plans following a recent upgrade.

The farm is currently in the process of joining the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), and is looking to take up actions like nutrient management planning within this. "We're currently well into the mid-tier stewardship scheme, which features options like grass margins, hedgerow management and flower mixes in field corners, so may look to similar options within the SFI in future." The mapping may well play a role in helping to target future stewardship options too.

Inn Farm Dairy

- Mixed family farm near Derby, run by Chris Hutchinson and his son John
- Total area extends to 285ha, spread over three to four blocks of land
- Milking 200 Holstein Friesian cows, producing 2m litres/year
- Predominantly grass-fed, grazing outside mid-April to October
- Soils are mostly heavier clay-based
- Cropping includes winter wheat, winter barley, oilseed rape, maize and grass
- Farm also has a farm shop and milk vending machine

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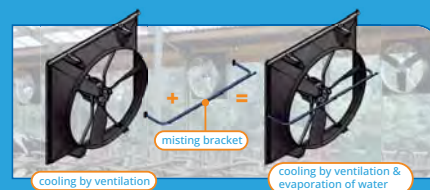
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Milk outlook: Not exactly flush

Locked-in inflation and the opportunities for dairy farmers are two of the topics that Edward Lott at Kite Consulting considers as he looks towards to autumn/winter.

Milk prices have been difficult across the autumn and winter for many dairy producers. Commodity values were at low levels and while liquid prices remained steady, many UK dairy farmers were in a negative cash flow situation over the winter. While we were seeing the average cost of production sitting at around 40ppl, for many milk prices were well below this.

During this period, we saw farmers extending their creditors and using up reserves built up during the higher milk prices of 2022. We've seen a reduction in the investments dairy farmers are making; both in terms of improving business efficiency and in renewing and upgrading infrastructure to help meet new legislation and manage business risk.

Milk price

This spring, we've seen a steady upward trend in terms of milk price, but not to the extent that farmers have been able to claw back anything on their cash flow positions.

This spring has been one of the most challenging in recent history, with the constant wet weather adding another layer of cost and stress to milk production.

Cows were housed for longer than normal this winter, which has reduced forage carry-over stocks for many. Spring work was delayed and farmers struggled to get slurry on to wet fields, so made later first cuts or took cuts on time but with lower protein levels. Many winter cereal crops and maize didn't go in on time, so we could see yields reduced



Substantial investments have been made in UK dairying, but farmers have extended credit and used up reserves

substantially. Unless we have an exceptional growing and harvesting year, forage stocks will be down for the winter.

While peak costs look like they are coming down, for many the lower feed prices cannot be accessed yet. And when it comes to power, there is a big spread of electricity contracts out there, with some locked into very high tariffs for a considerable period of time. Many farmers renewing are still seeing much higher electricity costs than three years ago.

Costs of feed, fertiliser and fuel have fallen from their peak and now appear to be operating in a narrower range. But feed stocks are tight and there is continued risk of volatility in the market. It's a case of inflation being locked into the day-to-day costs of dairy production. While headline inflation stands at 2% (and remember that means prices are still increasing

by 2%), service inflation stands at 5.7%. And farmers are seeing these cost increases in repairs, contractors and labour; in fact anyone coming onto the farm to offer a service.

The combination of underlying operational cost inflation and volatility in the feed markets is keeping the cost of production firm. There are opportunities here. Volatility means potential upside as well as down.

"The UK is fundamentally a good place to produce milk."

I'd urge you to keep a close eye and take cover well forward at low points. Risk management strategies are important to building a long-term viable business able to invest, both for its licence to operate and sustainable financial returns.

Global milk production is increasing by about 1% a month, with demand sitting somewhere near that figure. The Far East and China have seen softer demand, while the EU; particularly Ireland and Holland, have had closer to 0% growth in milk production. We have seen the milk price more recently rebased to around the 38-40ppl level for a standard litre, with manufacturing contracts being over 40ppl in most cases. And the market suggests it might have 1-2ppl

left in it. But this is a finely balanced situation. If the impact of this spring's poor weather feeds through to lower autumn milk production, then prices could strengthen further.

Massive investments

Remember, the UK is fundamentally a good place to produce milk. The country's two biggest milk buyers are making massive investments in UK dairy - we can be confident in the future of dairy here.

Make sure your business is fit for what this future demands, by working towards your milk buyer's net zero requirements, investing for environmental compliance, business efficiency and futureproofing.

The impact of the spring is likely to continue to feed in throughout the summer and early autumn, keeping supply under pressure. Then attention will switch to the performance of autumn-calving cows on winter forages as to whether this supply pressure continues.

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INTERSHAPE



Edward Lott at Kite Consulting

The power of open conversation

In the latest VetPartners comment, Hannah Batty, Clinical Director at LLM Farm Vets, discusses the importance of taking time to reflect and plan, to empower farm teams.

There's no disputing that the dairy industry can be a challenging environment at times, and remaining resilient and optimistic can be hard. So many milk not just for the cheque, but for a sense of purpose and passion.

I am of the opinion you should never stop dreaming about goals, to keep motivated and on the right track. Whether it's wanting to have the highest yielding cows in your discussion group, the tightest residuals on your grazing platform or have a team and work pattern that enable you to take holidays with your family; any goal is valid.

No matter what your aims are, cow health and welfare should remain at the centre. Fundamentally, healthy cows make for happy people and a thriving business. I'd encourage everyone to spend five minutes reflecting on where they are now and where they'd like to be. The

best business owners take time to work 'on the business' as well as in it.

While travelling for my Nuffield scholarship, I saw a variety of goal setting resources, like Dairy Australia's 'Our Farm, Our Plan'. This enabled producers to assess their performance in key areas and identify those to focus on with the team to yield improvements.

Engaging staff

Management isn't just about writing protocols for staff to follow. It's important to engage team members in the desired outcome of protocols to ensure they understand the 'why'.

Taking time to explain the drivers behind our methods not only develops understanding, but means people are more engaged and motivated by the results, or spot when something isn't working. As a leader, you have to coach and inspire your



Hannah says it's good to have goals

team. During a trip to a Brazilian beef farm, I enjoyed an inspiring talk with the farm manager who emphasised the importance of trust. You have to trust that your team will make decisions for the right reasons if you have shared your common goals with them.

But if they make decisions that have undesirable outcomes, use them as training exercises the whole team can benefit from. After all, failure is only failure if we don't learn from it.

Having a leader who has faith in you empowers the team to make their own decisions. Allow them the opportunity to try their own ideas; some you might not have thought of yourself. Although it is hard to admit, it's easy to become disillusioned and lose track of what you're working towards during the day-to-day routine.

In these situations, I believe in speaking to trusted advisers, friends and family. This can help you reflect on what you are achieving, drill down on what is important and provide clarity on next steps to take.

Getting off-farm can also offer fresh ideas and perspectives. Sometimes you have to see a dream to believe it.

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Nurturing skills and effective leadership in dairy farming

Effective leadership and management are essential for maintaining a high-performing and motivated team. British Dairying finds out how to implement this successfully.

Continuously developing your staff's skills and knowledge enhances the quality of their work and fosters a loyal and engaged workforce. By investing in continuous professional development (CPD) and using a skills matrix, you can build a strong team ready to meet the demands of modern dairy farming.

CPD is crucial for the professional growth of dairy farm employees. This structured learning approach ensures their qualifications, skills, and knowledge are consistently updated, benefiting both the business and the individual.

For employers, CPD creates more focused and cost-effective training programmes, enhancing efficiency and reducing costs.

Improved staff morale

It promotes ongoing development and learning, improving staff morale and motivation. For employees, CPD demonstrates their commitment to continuous improvement, highlighting their achievements and showcasing how their skills and knowledge benefit the organisation.

Cheshire dairy farmers Katy and Andy Goodwin strive to balance operating a profitable business with meeting their personal goals. Aspiring to become an employer of



Katy and Andy Goodwin are striving to become employers of choice

choice, they have taken steps to help their team be more efficient.

"If we're doing a good job, the business will thrive," says Andy. The couple both value family time, and for them, investing in their people is a no-brainer.

When Matt, a staff member, requested to change his hours, Katy and Andy were initially sceptical, but they managed to make it work.

"Where we can, we've tried to invest in the things that make the job simpler and easier for people," says Katy. For example, they invested in

a motorised calf feeder with a petrol pump to make feeding easier and less labour-intensive. Through time and experience, employees improve their confidence. Sometimes, it can be as simple as understanding how individuals best receive instructions. "It was a learning curve for us," says Katy. "Just delivering instructions isn't always enough."

Before a holiday, she gave Matt basic instructions but didn't walk him through the process. Upon returning, she realised he had been feeding calves individually instead of using

the multi-calf feeder. This highlighted the importance of clear, practical instruction. Katy and Andy have found the AHDB AgriLeader Labour Lifecycle resources very helpful in identifying different learning styles within their team.

"At the moment, we've only got one person working for us, but from the chats with AHDB, we've learned there are things we can do to be a good employer," notes Katy. "For this business to run, we can't do it on our own; we need a happy team."

"We can't do it on our own; we need a happy team."

Andy and Katy are committed to looking after their staff. In a review, Matt expressed a desire to improve his skills in veterinary care and mastitis treatment, which has started him on a journey to enhance his abilities.

"It's a no-brainer to invest in our people," says Matt. "They get better over time, gain confidence, and feel a sense of achievement because they make good decisions."

CPD options for dairy farmers

There are several ways to develop your professional skills in dairy farming:

- Online resources and webinars: Learn at your own pace or through AHDB's Labour Life Cycle
- Hands-on experience: Work alongside experienced farmers to gain valuable insights
- Mentoring and coaching: Develop leadership skills through structured guidance and support.

Leveraging a skills matrix

A skills matrix can be a game-changer for your dairy farm. This tool lets you see your team's capabilities at a glance. By mapping out job roles and required skills, and rating each team member's proficiency, you can easily identify

strengths and weaknesses. This helps you target training where it's most needed, closing skill gaps and boosting everyone's abilities.

Ultimately, a skills matrix empowers you to optimise projects by ensuring you have the right people with the right skills for the job, leading to a more efficient and successful farm.

Leadership development

Supporting employees aspiring to leadership roles is vital for the long-term success of your dairy farm.

Development programmes tailored to senior roles in agriculture can provide the necessary training and insights. For those stepping into leadership for the first time, resources like AHDB's 'Talking Leaders' webinars offer valuable guidance and inspiration.

Coaching and mentoring skills

To become an effective coach or mentor, consider the following steps:

- Know the ropes: Understand what makes a good coach or mentor
- Find the right fit: Choose someone to coach or mentor who complements your strengths and goals
- Set your sights: Decide what you want to achieve and how often you'll meet
- Plan: Create a clear roadmap with specific goals and ways to track progress
- Never stop learning: Look for training programmes to hone your skills
- Practice regularly: Use your skills frequently and ask for feedback to improve.

Traits of effective leaders

- Growth mindset: Embrace change, persist through challenges, and see effort as a path to mastery
- Resilience: Adapt to social dynamics, maintain fearlessness, and focus on self-reliance
- Inspirational leadership: Foster trust, embrace diversity, and provide empathetic guidance
- Strategic decision-making: Balance risk and reward, make informed decisions, and avoid over-reliance on emotion
- Entrepreneurial spirit: Cultivate curiosity, convert problems into solutions, and manage risks effectively.

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Exploring new ways to become more sustainable in the future

RABDF's Down To Earth event at Grosvenor Farms in Cheshire assessed how enteric methane emissions could be reduced through feeding and what options the sustainable farming incentive posed for higher-input dairies. Rhian Price reports.

Dairy farmers in England are being urged to carefully consider how environmental schemes could complement their current farming practices and offset the removal of basic payments.

Edward Earnshaw from Just Farm, who specialises in helping farmers access government grants, said there were several options for more intensive dairy systems to access payments without having to change their system.

In England, basic payments have now more than halved, and he urged farmers to look at ways in which the environmental land management scheme (ELMs) could make up for this shortfall.



Visitors flocked to Down To Earth to learn about sustainable practices

“It’s not about chasing the money.”

“Dairy farmers can access the schemes without changing their farming practices,” he said. “The single biggest thing about the schemes is to take action, even if that means deciding not to enter.

“Sometimes they don’t fit, sometimes they don’t work. But if you haven’t looked at them, how do you know? It’s all about supporting

Options worth considering:

- Legumeswards (grass and clover): **£102/ha**. No restrictions on slurry or nitrogen applications or grazing timings.
- Winter livestock removal: **£115/ha**. Simply not allowing stock to graze permanent pasture or silage ground during the winter (usually October until mid-March).
- Herbal leys: **£382/ha**.
- Expanded offering for 2024: No insecticide: **£45/ha**. No till: **£73/ha** and variable rate fertiliser: **£27/ha**.

the current farming practice and potentially evolving that, not having to change. It’s not about chasing the money because it looks good.”

At Grosvenor Farms, about 12-15% of the total area (299ha) is now in environmental agreements under the sustainable farming incentive (SFI) and countryside stewardship (CS).

Edward said the SFI was a ‘brilliant spectrum of greys’ but conceded Defra had made several revisions to make it accessible for more farmers. For example, there are now fewer restrictions under the herbal leys offering, which means fewer varieties are required in the mix to qualify.

There are various SFI options that dairy farmers might consider, including the ‘winter livestock removal’ payment, which Edward said was “the intensive dairy farmer’s best friend.” Under this option, intensive silage ground or permanent pasture cannot be grazed in the winter in return for £115/ha.

Farmers growing maize could easily capitalise on the no insecticide option, which pays £45/ha. And Edward urged farmers to apply sooner rather than later, as they can still determine the time of year they complete their claim. “SFI going forward is a monthly rolling start date, but [from] next year, it is in months 10 and 11 of the agreement,

and you don’t want that to come at the wrong time of the year for you.”

When it comes to emissions, making good-quality forage and displacing soya with co-products can cut them by 50%. That’s according to Dr Anna Sutcliffe, Ruminant Technical Manager at AB Dairy, who said feed accounted for 24-37% of enteric methane emissions.

Where products are grown impacts their carbon footprint. For example, South American soya has deforestation associated with it, which means it is 10x higher compared to soya grown in North America. However, using soya from North America comes at a price – usually a 20% uplift.

Rape, particularly protected rape, is an excellent alternative to soya with a low emission to boot. And co-products like biscuit meal have half the footprint of starch – but the real ‘bobby dazzlers’ are Trafford Gold, brewers’ grains and draff.

“This is because the carbon has followed the head product, so brewers’ grain and draff have a zero emissions value, so you just have the cost of transport to consider,” said Anna. “Greenhouse gas emissions associated with feed can be lowered by up to 50% by removing any origin soya products and replacing them with rape, protected rape and

co-products.” Grosvenor’s milking ration comprises two-thirds maize and one-third grass silage, and the team are using rape as the primary protein source, alongside making good use of co-products. When corrected for fat and protein, cows produce 45.5kg of milk daily, which is helping to lower enteric methane emissions to 840kg of CO₂e per kg of fat and protein corrected milk (FPCM). Anna modelled the impact of poor-quality forage at Grosvenor using AB Dairy’s new rationing tool.

She revealed a 10% reduction in the D value of forage and maize starch would lead to a five-litre milk yield penalty. This would cause greenhouse gas (GHG) per kilo of FPCM to rise from 840g CO₂e to almost 1,000g CO₂e per kg of FPCM. “Improving forage digestibility lowers enteric and manure methane and drives yield, which lowers GHG intensity.”

“Reducing methane by 10% is not enough.”

She also assessed the impact of reducing rape in the ration from 5kg to 2kg in favour of soya hulls. This increased emissions by 200g, to 1,036g of CO₂e per kg of FPCM. Using soya from North America would have a lower environmental impact but would cost an extra 33p/head per day. The modelling has not taken into account that Grosvenor has been using the methane inhibitor Bovaer. It is fed at 1.5g/cow a day and has reduced methane emissions by 31% — the equivalent of 1.3t CO₂e per cow annually.

Adrian Packington from Bovaer said: “If we’re going to move towards low-carbon dairy, we really have to address enteric methane. At COP26, 155 countries signed up to the global methane pledge to reduce methane by 30% by 2030. So, reducing methane by 10% is not enough.”

Development plans must embrace sustainability

Future development plans must have a bigger emphasis on sustainability, say Trouw Nutrition

DAIRY FARM DEVELOPMENT AWARD WINNING THE ANTHONY WILLS MEMORIAL CUP

Sponsored by: **Trouw Nutrition**
and **Willsbro Holsteins** supported by TBA



Dairy farms have been constantly developing to meet the challenges they face and to grasp new opportunities, seeking ways to drive efficiency and allow growth. "The Dairy Farm Development Award at the Cream Awards, sponsored by Trouw Nutrition and Willsbro Holsteins recognises dairy farm businesses that are planning and investing effectively for the future and this year's entrants are excellent examples of business looking to develop their operations for the future," comments Georgina Thomas from Trouw Nutrition who is one of the award judging panel.

The award was created in memory of Anthony Wills, the driving force behind Willsbro Holsteins, and the winner of the award will receive the Anthony Wills Memorial Cup. "Anthony was always looking for the ways to develop Willsbro, to make it more sustainable and be a business fit for future generations. The winner of the award will display similar qualities, drive and passion."

Georgina believes that in future sustainability will become an increasingly important criterion when deciding the direction of business development and the viability of plans. She maintains that development planning will need to include environmental, economic and social sustainability objectives. "Sustainability is not simply reducing emissions. Businesses need to be economically sustainable, making the necessary return on investment. But a plan that increases ROI and also increases emissions per litre is probably not the best for the business. Nor would a plan that reduces emissions and returns."

"The reality however, is that economic and environmental sustainability are good bed-fellows as both have their foundations in increased efficiency which should be at the core of any development plan. If you are more efficient you increase the prospects of better returns and fewer emissions."



"Sustainability is not simply reducing emissions. Businesses need to be economically sustainable"

External influences are going to ensure the pressure to demonstrate sustainability gains remains. Georgina comments that with raw milk continuing to contribute around 90% of the carbon footprint, processors will inevitably continue to require farmers to show they are taking steps to reduce emissions. She adds that lenders, who themselves are also having to move towards net zero emissions, are increasingly going to look at whether farmers have a baseline footprint and the emissions consequences of any proposals that require funding. This may affect both the availability and cost of finance.

"Any development plan will need to include demonstrable sustainability objectives and benchmarks alongside the performance and economic objectives. The starting point has to be a carbon footprint calculation for the current system so improvement can be measured against this. The good news is that there is a better understanding of how efficiency can influence emissions so it is easier to identify where progress can be made and to then monitor improvements - and in many systems, the easy first steps are in areas well understood by all producers which are directly linked to profitability."

On many farms, Georgina says there is considerable opportunity to reduce emissions by focussing on youngstock. Investment in calf and youngstock rearing can play a key role in reducing age at first calving, reducing rearing costs, including feed, and improving viability of the animal

in the herd. "The practical benchmarks are there to allow heifers to be reared to calve down at the optimal time. In particular, we understand the importance of maximising growth pre-weaning by feeding more milk and energy. By also focussing on why cows leave the herd, looking to increase completed lactations to five per cow, can allow a reduction in replacement rate, further reducing the size, cost and carbon footprint of youngstock rearing."

Georgina says a range of factors will contribute to reducing cows leaving the herd so development plans need to consider reduce disease risks like poor fertility, mastitis and lameness, improving transition facilities and management and getting cows back in calf.

A good benchmark from an environmental and economic stance is a culling rate in the first 100 days of lactation of less than 5%. "With feed a major contributor of emissions per litre, development plans that improve how cows are fed can have a big impact on sustainability. The starting point has to be improving milk from forage, producing and utilising more, better quality forages. Then it is about balancing forages precisely, for example reducing protein content and using lower emission feed ingredients, where possible, while maintaining performance levels."

Finally, the feeding facilities themselves will have an impact on intakes. Is there sufficient trough space? Will feed always be available?" Georgina says all these developments will contribute to an increased Lifetime Daily Yield which is the simplest benchmark of overall efficiency and emissions, encompassing age at first calving, improving yields and increased number of lactations.

She suggests that many of the entrants of the Dairy Development Award, both last year and this year have made or are planning developments that will deliver many of these types of improvements. While they talk about economic and performance improvements, there is less emphasis on the sustainability gains.

"So, it should not be a major change to include sustainability objectives and using Trouw Nutrition's Carbon Reduction Program and MyMilkPrint tool it will be possible to identify the quick wins and demonstrate the improvements made, allowing plans that deliver sustainability in all its guises."

www.creamawards.UK

Back to basics on bull proofs - part two

Last month, independent breeding consultant Kevin Lane explained the mysteries of bull proofs; focusing on production and health traits. In this second instalment, he looks at type and how things have changed since the widespread use of genomics in dairy.

Good type means different things to different people, and for the commercial dairy farmer, functional type is more appropriate than show type.

So what is functional type? Broadly speaking, this means ensuring that the important areas of feet, legs and udders are taken care of and that traits like extreme frames and dairyness are given less consideration. I have always been an advocate of the medium-sized cow for most dairy units, as I think that she will generally last longer in the herd and will be a profitable animal over several lactations.

Suitable cow types

I often say to farmers, go and look at your older cows, those who have had six or more calves, and the majority of them will be the medium-sized or smaller animal. Of course, not everyone is looking for the same ideal, and the type of cow that suits one farm doesn't suit another.

So how is type presented in the brochures and what do the traits mean? The traits are measured on a scale known as linear, which show the degree of each trait but not necessarily the desirability. They are presented on a -3 to +3 scale and the following table shows the traits and their extremes.



Clwch Crushabull Rhapsody V89, dam of current top young genomic bull for Type Merit, Clwch Rhapsody EX90

-3	Trait	+3
Small	Stature	Tall
Narrow	Chest width	Wide
Shallow	Body depth	Deep
Coarse	Angularity	Open rib
High pins	Rump angle	Low pins
Narrow	Rump width	Wide
Straight	Rear leg side view	Sickled
Low	Foot angle	Steep
Loose	Fore udder attachment	Tight
Very low	Rear udder height	Very high
Broken	Udder support	Strong
Below hock	Udder depth	20cm above hock
Outside	Front teat placement rear view	Close
Short	Teat length	Long
Apart	Rear teat placement	Close
Close	Teat position side	Apart
Poor	Locomotion	Excellent
Low	Condition score	High

Each trait is measured on a linear scale and presented on a -3 to a +3 scale

When these are presented as a bar chart it conveys a useful snapshot of the bull's transmitting ability for type, but it's a misconception that everything to the right-hand side of centre is desirable. Nationally, despite evidence that the smaller cow is more efficient in feed conversion for a standard litre and she has a better carbon footprint, cows are still getting bigger.

"New classification traits have been introduced."

However, most farmers say that their cows are big enough and don't want any further increase in stature. So why is this? Better nutrition? Not enough choice of the minus stature

bulls available? Tradition in breeding against small cows in the worry that they might become 'too small'?

Three traits can be referred to as 'intermediate traits', in that the most desirable score is closer to zero and not an extreme. These are rear leg side view, where neither too sickled nor too straight is ideal; rump angle, where neither high pins nor low pins are sought-after; and teat length, where an intermediate length is suitable for most situations - too long and they can be trodden on and too short causes problems with putting the milking units on. It could also be argued that udder depth is better closer to zero; not too shallow to have volume but not too deep to cause problems.

The heritability of type traits are, like the production and fitness traits, also unequal.

Continued on page 66.



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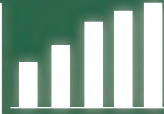
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Continued from page 64.

Trait	Heritability
Stature	41%
Angularity	34%
Body depth	33%
Rear leg side	26%
Foot angle	10%
Fore udder attachment	22%
Rear udder height	23%
Udder depth	35%
Teat placement and length	29%

Traits and their heritability

The management aspect of feet makes them the hardest to improve, and yet many farmers rightly consider feet one of their key traits. Locomotion scoring is now part of many milk buyers' farm assurance measures and ground-breaking work completed by Holstein UK over a number of years has set the international standard for this. We now know that the way a cow



A visiting classifier inputting type data into a hand-held device

tracks has more influence over her longevity and wear and tear on her feet than just looking at foot angle.

So what has changed since we have had genomic data and what new traits are we looking at, given emerging information on their importance to the future dairy cow? In the past five years, six new classification traits have been introduced to help monitor

and address areas where further improvement is needed. These are scored in all dairy breeds classified by the National Bovine Data Centre (NBDC) - thanks to Darren Todd of NBDC for updating this information.

The new traits are: Rear teat length, udder tilt, height at front end, thurl position, front feet orientation and loin strength. Rear teat length and

udder tilt are particularly interesting, given current trends in the Holstein population. They should provide more information to maintain functional udder conformation.

Enough information has been gathered for some of these traits to be included in genetic evaluations and added to bull proofs. Angularity has also been renamed 'rib structure' (this is worldwide) to remind users that this trait is a measure of rib shape rather than thinness in females.

Source of confusion

Over the past 10 years the Holstein type merit formula has focused heavily on mammary and legs and feet, and included a negative weighting on stature to help moderate that trait in the population.

The genetic trends for type merit, mammary and legs and feet continue to improve each year, but it should be remembered that the interpretation of bull proof type linears has been a source of confusion for many years, in terms of what a figure on a linear scale actually does to the offspring of an average animal.

For example, using a +1 stature bull on a breed average heifer would 'on average' produce a daughter that

HJ Lea Oakes
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was 1cm taller than her at the rump. Similarly a -1 chest width bull will only reduce that trait by 0.8cm on average. In general, it requires sires with extreme figures (+2 and over or -2 and under) to produce noticeable differences in progeny of breed average cows.

Given the availability of so much genetic information from genomic testing, the question might reasonably be asked 'why classify for type at all?' There are two solid reasons for doing so: One is that we need to continue to monitor and improve the desirable animal that will work in our herds now and in the future, and the second is for the reference population.

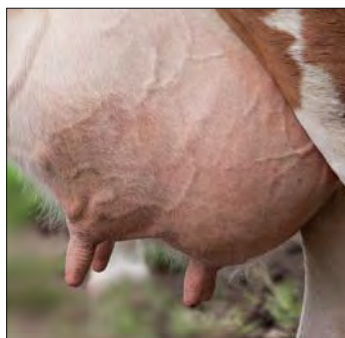
By type classifying we can note how trends in cow type are changing; and what is important today may be less important tomorrow. Had we not developed the locomotion trait and analysed what that meant for hoof health we might still be using just foot angle as that measure.

Genomic modelling

The reference population is the data collected within a population of animals, be it production, fitness or type, and we need this to continue, to develop the genomic modelling to increase accuracy and relevance.

And finally, many breeders take pride in their classification visits to show off their animals and improve them through genetics.

Regarding the actual displayed data and the changes that farmers see to bull proofs year on year, it should be remembered that we have what is known as a 'base change' every April (formerly every five years). This is because predicted transmitting abilities (PTAs) compare an animal with the average, and genetic progress has meant that the average animal has got better over the years. This is a recalculation of the base figure from which we work. Think of the retail price index. We can't compare a tin



New traits include udder tilt

of peas priced at 87p today with one in 1960 priced 3d.

One final note about type proofs as seen in brochures and flyers. A few companies have a policy to display type proofs of their bulls in the country of origin where the bull is proven. They are perfectly at liberty to do so, but it's important that comparisons between bulls from different countries are only made using the Holstein UK type proof.

You can't compare a Dutch proof with a US one, or a Canadian one. They are on different scales, and using the HUK conversion is the safest way to compare them.

The British Friesians are also part of the Holstein UK stable and classification (using a slightly different system appropriate for the breed). This is helping to keep the Friesian as a viable crossbreeding alternative for those looking for resilience, grazing ability, bull calf value and keeping their cows black and white.

They have their own breed code (20) for animals that are 87.5% or more pure, and there were almost 9,000 of these in-milk recorded in 2023, with some 80 herds classifying and 150 male calves registered annually. Their inbreeding is low, at just 3.2%, as they seek to further development of the breed - and type classification is playing an important part in breeding a 21st century British Friesian.



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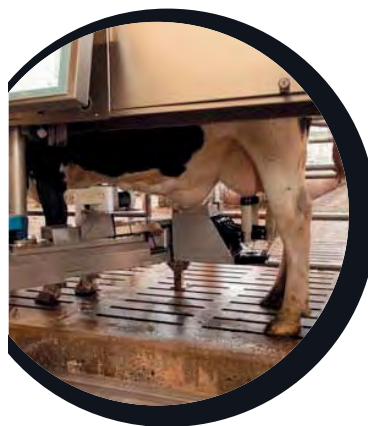
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Claas expands mower and baler range

Claas has introduced seven new Disco mower combinations, expanding its range to 15 models with working widths from 8.3m to 10.7m.

The new Disco 9300 Direct Swather replaces belts with a tapered auger positioned behind the mowing discs, to transfer cut material into a single central swath. The augers can be raised to spread the mown crop evenly across the full width of the mower or used individually to move the crop away from field margins. For ease of maintenance, all the drives are positioned above the mower.

The new Disco 9300 C Auto Swather mower conditioner utilises a new drivetrain that can accommodate tractors up to 400hp. The conditioner uses Hardox hardened components and features a new Belt Boost to clear the belts at the headland, with automatic belt speed reduction for one-sided lifting and automatic lifting of the mower units when reversing.

Meanwhile, the firm has unveiled its new Rollant 630 RC Uniwrap combination baler. The new model,



set to replace the current 400 series, features a redesigned chassis with a 20% increase in strength due to 20mm steel profiles, and an improved pickup and wrapping unit.

The 630 is available with the new 2.1m Multiflow pick-up, with a choice of either four or five-cam controlled tine bars. The cam track has also been redesigned and is said to reduce power requirement by 20%.

The number of drive chains has been reduced and, in addition to central lubrication for the baler, there is also the option of a lubrication system for the wrapper.

Speed of bale transfer from opening the tailgate to the wrapper table is just 12 seconds and a new hydraulic film brake pre-stretches the film by up to 82%, so saving film.

www.claas.com

New post-milking teat dip available

G Shepherd Animal Health has launched a new post-milking teat dip.

The Double Barrel Dip acts as a barrier which prevents mastitis bacteria getting up the teat after milking. The barrier is a non-drip formulation, so there is little waste.

The two components are mixed together to activate the disinfectant on a daily basis, providing fresh, active chlorine dioxide with a green colour to show coverage.

www.gshepherd.co.uk



Saputo UK removes greaseproof covers

Saputo Dairy UK has removed its cover papers from three of its major spreadable food brands, with all of the packaging now fully recyclable.

Saputo says the decision to disregard the covers from Clover, Utterly Butterly and Country Life Spreadable is the first of its kind for a branded manufacturer, and aligns with its commitment to ensure all packaging is reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

Cover papers on spreads are traditionally used to flatten the product for even filling and to provide a surface for promotional



messages. However, the greaseproof papers are not recyclable due to their tightly bound fibres and difficulty in separating them during waste management.

By removing them, this eliminates a significant source of waste, saving

around 44t of unnecessary packaging from ending up in landfill each year - the equivalent weight of 10 hippopotamuses, says the firm.

"The cover paper is not needed for product quality, freshness or hygiene, as the lid does this job," says Joanna Swan, Senior Brand Manager for Spreads at Saputo. "In general people want to do the right thing, but there is a lot of ambiguity and varying guidance around what can or cannot be recycled. Therefore, removing unnecessary packaging is a good choice for the environment." www.saputo.com

New gate handle

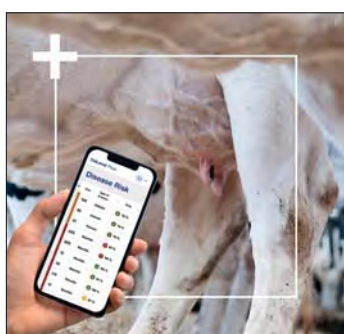
A new dual function gate handle for electric fences has been introduced to the UK by Dairy Spares. Developed by Taragate in New Zealand, users have the choice of attaching it to an un-electrified fence or post using the plastic hook, or to continue the electric circuit using the metal hook.



DeLaval's AI portal monitors cow health 24/7

A new portal to provide animal health information to farmers has been launched by DeLaval.

DeLaval Plus collects herd data to offer advanced health insights. Powered by unique artificial intelligence (AI) technology called DeepBlue, it provides animal health alerts including a 'Disease Risk' application which predicts which cows are at risk of mastitis, ketosis and



other diseases. Data is sent to the portal, which then uses AI to find patterns and trends from connected DeLaval farms from around the world. It is then divided into two groups: Analyses and Predictions.

DeLaval Plus Analyses looks at the farm's current performance and suggests improvements based on historical data and knowledge. This enables the farm to adjust and improve its performance.

DeLaval Plus Predictions reports on cow health and provides forecasts to enable farms to react faster to potential disease problems related to milk yield, feed and fertility.

"Thanks to AI and data from tens of millions of milkings, DeepBlue will automatically evolve itself, providing the farm with the best user experience," says the firm's Hendrik Veldman. www.delaval.com

Lower nitrogen, higher grass dry matter yield

Grazing trials to assess whether a fertiliser with 15% less nitrogen, but with additional elements, could match a calcium ammonium nitrogen (CAN) fertiliser have shown a 10% average dry matter (DM) increase.

Origin Fertilisers trialled Sweetgrass - which includes sulphur, sodium and magnesium - over a two-year period on four grazing areas. It found improvements in nitrogen use efficiency, energy, digestibility, and crude protein levels in the grass. The trials also showed a 14.8% reduction in emissions by using less nitrogen fertiliser during a growing season.

Origin's agronomist Guillaume Franklin says: "If we assess the returns from straight nitrogen as a benchmark for grassland yield, these four trials highlight there is so much that can be gained by changing the way fertiliser is selected.

"Although grass needs nitrogen to maximise growth, it can't grow quality crops on its own. We wanted to demonstrate that balanced nutrition is essential to high yielding and nutritious grass."



Each trial assessed DM yield across six grazing periods throughout the year, and increases were consistently shown from the third grazing onwards. Two trials also returned increases in the first and second grazing periods.

"The yield increase from the third grazing shows that once the plant had access to the tailored grassland fertiliser, it was able to comfortably outcompete the straight CAN area," says Guillaume.

"Grazing systems are subjected to heavy and persistent defoliation, so increasing yield is harder as the recovery rate of plants is lower, especially when there is nutrient deficiency. With the Sweetgrass area supplying sulphur to support nitrogen uptake, there was more potential for plants to build biomass quicker, while improving nitrogen use efficiency and digestibility."

www.originfertilisers.co.uk

Tackle heat stress through nutrition

Premier Nutrition has developed a new supplement which targets the physiological impact of heat stress for both dry and fresh cows.

VitalChill, a daily supplement added to total mixed rations for both lactating and dry cows at a rate of 25g/head per day, contains a combination of rumen support and heat abatement technologies which stimulate heat loss from the skin and help to lower the internal body temperature.

Alongside lactating cows, research has highlighted that dry cows who experience heat stress during this time see negative effects on their milk yield for the first 30 weeks of lactation, along with reduced gestation length and lower calf birth weights.

The new technology protects the rumen so that buffers are not lost through panting. The specialist additives also help to stabilise the rumen environment and increase water intake.

Feeding should begin at least seven days before the predicted heat period for optimum effect.

www.premiernutrition.co.uk

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Taking a look in the mirror



Charles Goadby

Political comment

Talk to anyone in the agricultural industry and I've no doubt that there would be a consensus that farming and food production is under attack and on a number of different fronts.

Animal rights campaigners and vegans want to put an end to livestock farming, environmentalists blame farming and food production for climate change and biodiversity loss, and governments have a lack of long-term planning, jumping from policy to policy, leaving farm investment and financial sustainability in limbo. All point the finger at farmers while waiving their peer-reviewed academic paper in the air backing up their theories or ideologies.

Generations of failure to communicate with the public - our customers - have left our voices unheard. And with a lack of answers to public concern and propaganda from the extremist groups, especially in the age of unregulated social media, our voices have become untrusted, too.

"Who wants to get up in the early hours?"

Larger retailers and corporations have used this to their advantage. Clever advertising campaigns dupe the public into believing that they're concerned and acting in the interests of the public, the planet and a sustainable future. While farmers are unable to continue, we see big business buying up land for offsetting schemes and tax breaks. In nothing more than green colonialism which does nothing for the environment, only procrastinates meaningful change and allows them to buy their way out of trouble for a few years, we are seeing more and more pressure put on our ever-falling food security.

It's easy to sit here and feel sorry for ourselves and blame everyone else. While these are the things we see repeated week in, week out in the farming press, one of the main reasons I hear of for farm sales and a move away from dairy is much closer to home.

Attracting people into the industry and staff retention has surely been one of the biggest challenges for a great number of employers. Who wants to get up in the early hours and work weekends and bank holidays?

Farming has been romanticised

Who wants to work long hours, nights and weekends in factories, hospitals, roadworks, haulage... the list is endless. I'm sure if you created a poll, farming would come out towards the top of that list. Throughout the years farming has been romanticised, and I wouldn't be able to count the number of times when meeting people away from rural settings that I've been told how much they'd love to be a farmer and work with animals. With the likes of "Clarkson's Farm" and "This Farming Life" putting farming in so many living rooms that interest in the industry has only grown.

Yet still so many have this issue within the sector. "How can we compete with the wages of X or Y?" Yet again we are back to looking at others for the failings within our own industry or businesses. Maybe it's time to have a look in the mirror or take a step back to look at your business from outside the farm gate. Would you want to work for yourself? Would you want your sons or daughters to be treated like your staff? Do you even really know how your staff are being treated or how they feel about coming in to work?

Money is not the issue

Farm wages have increased greatly over recent years and are not out of line with other industries of a similar nature, and there are a great many farm workers who have been in the industry and worked for the same business for a long time. Money is not always, and I would argue - seldom - the issue when it comes to staffing problems.

If I were to ask what your herdsman is worth, many would give me a financial value. Would you

do the same if I were to ask what your family or friends are worth to you?

We need money to live, to put a roof over our heads and food in our bellies, but there is a huge difference between existence and life. Money will not create passion, pride or excellence. That can only be nurtured by giving a sense of purpose, by making someone feel their worth.

How many employers know their staff? Talk about their families and lives away from work? Know their dreams and ambitions? How many spend a little extra time to help them build and maybe go that extra mile because an investment in their staff is an investment in their business?

"Not one person asked for more money."

During the cost-of-living crisis we offered our staff a number of wage rises to help them and help ourselves in turn. On the third occasion I asked them all what I could do for them to ensure they remained with us and happy at work. Not one person asked for more money. Instead, they all wanted better quality free time, so alongside them we worked together to devise a rota that gave them what they asked for and gave me security, knowing that I had a good and happy workforce.

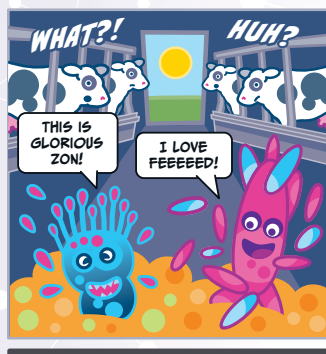
Since then, we have had that same conversation again, and this time they've asked for some training. Again, an investment in my business that's going to keep staff happy, and will allow them to have more responsibility.

Involving staff in business decisions, allowing them to give their views and share ideas too will give a greater sense of worth and will allow them to feel more like they are working with you and not just for you. It's about time we realised that without those on the ground; the ones putting in the manual graft, many of us would not have a business at all. While we should all feel like there is nobody better than ourselves, it's important that we realise that we are no better than anyone else, either.

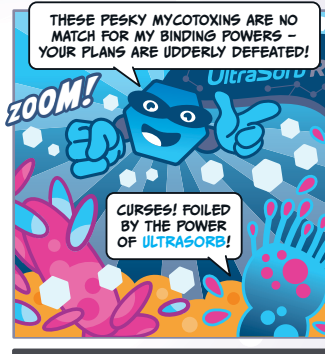
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