BRITISH
DAIRYING
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The farmers' protest in London last month had an overwhelming feeling of solidarity and respect

Focus on the positives

I don't want to be negative – there's an awful lot of that around at the moment! So I'm going to pick out some of the positives that I think are worth celebrating right now.

Like many of you, I attended the London protest on November 19. As a farmer's daughter, I feel strongly about the importance of multi-generational stewardship of our land. My ancestors have farmed around the same area for hundreds of years and always tried to leave it in better condition for their own children to inherit. Not only that, they formed part of the backbone of the rural community, acting as church wardens, magistrates, village fete hosts, snow plough drivers – you name it!

I'm proud of my heritage. But it's nothing particularly special – thousands of you out there will have similar stories to tell. We're just 'normal' farming families - that is, until you contemplate not being there. When assets are sold to pay the death tax; when the farm gates close and land passes into some big investor's hands, who then provides the backbone of the rural community? Who, then, will love, nurture, cherish the land; produce local, healthy food; provide local employment; rescue those cut off by snow; and all the countless other little things that farmers do to support their community? Suddenly, faced with its destruction, one realises how special that heritage – and its continuity - really is.

Standing shoulder-to-shoulder in London with farmers and supporters from across the supply chain, I was once again reminded how wonderful this community is. In no other situation, crammed in with little room for independent movement, would I have felt remotely comfortable. But those tens of thousands of people were respectful, honest, looking out for each other and helping anyone in need. It was a very similar feeling at the Countryside March in 2002 – I just hope that those in power take note, have the grace to admit they're wrong and the humility to accept help to put it right.

Even if you didn't make it to London, cross-sector support for farming is strong. The AHDB's annual consumer survey (see p23) shows public trust in farmers is at 76%, just two points behind doctors. Politicians, take note – you scored 26%. There's work to do here – how about you start now by showing you're listening to us? To be fair, a lot of politicians are standing firmly behind farming in this – you can see that in the responses on pp10-12, p20, and p70. Indeed, British Dairying signed Harriet Cross's letter to the Chancellor, and is organising a meeting with her in the House of Commons on December 17 to discuss ways to mitigate the impact of this disastrous Budget.

So, you have your supporters – and plenty of them. Don't forget the solidarity and kindness shown among those who marched, and among those who didn't – and perhaps pick up the phone or pop round to see your neighbour to make sure they're doing ok.

Finally, I hope you get some downtime to truly enjoy with your family and friends this festive season. Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy, prosperous and positive New Year.

Olivia Cooper

Managing Editor

BRITISH DAIRYING

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Managing Editor – Olivia Cooper
Email: olivia@britishdairying.co.uk / Tel: 01392 840009

Contributors this issue: Vivienne Williams, Iwan Williams, Kevin Lane, Howard Walsh, Alicia Kearns, Harriet Cross

Publisher & Sponsorship - Alan Whibley
Email: alan@whibleys.net / Tel: 07786 993789

Subscriptions/Accounts/Office – Nicki Grovestock
Email: nicki@britishdairying.co.uk / Tel: 01438 833448

Marketing/Events/E-newsletter – Caroline Calder
Email: caroline@calderwood.cc / Tel: 01892 231604

Advertising/Sales – Alan Whibley
Email: alan@whibleys.net / Tel: 07786 993789

Production/Pre-press - Jamil Dhansey, Ruth Wills, Lydia Wombwell, Danusia Osiowy, Amanda Cornforth-Smith

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Publisher
Alan Whibley


Managing Editor
Olivia Cooper


E-News/Marketing
Caroline Calder


Agritrader/Feed
Jamie Day


Contributor
Mike Green


Comment/Markets
Chris Walkland

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Low antibiotic use is beneficial

By Howard Walsh

The latest Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) Targets Task Force report shows antibiotic use is remaining low in UK livestock. And long-term surveillance shows resistance has fallen to sit at an all-time low.

The report hails 2023 as another year of "great effort and commitment" across UK livestock sectors in the responsible use of antibiotics. Nationally, usage remains low and largely unchanged from the previous year, with Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) surveillance showing multi-drug resistance in animals is at its lowest level in a decade.

There has also been good news from the latest UK-Veterinary Antimicrobial Resistance and Sales Surveillance (VARSS) report. This shows antibiotic sales in food-producing animals remaining at 25.7mg/kg which maintains the 59% reduction since 2014.

Abigail Seager, Chief Executive at the VMD said: "This year's results, especially the record lows in antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in animals, are testament to the UK's farmers' and vets' ongoing commitment to improved and responsible antibiotic use." The organisation's Agriculture Chair, Cat McLaughlin, added: "These latest results demonstrate that the collaborative, voluntary efforts over the past decade from the UK farmed animal, bird and fish sectors in addressing AMR are clearly paying off.

Cat McLaughlin, Agriculture Chair

Long-term surveillance shows antibiotic resistance sits at an all-time low

"The fact that AMR continues to decline should be applauded and should reassure everyone that the work on responsible use and stewardship is making a real and tangible difference.

"I've no doubt that as RUMA starts to plan our third cycle of targets, these latest results will undoubtedly give everyone the ongoing confidence and focus to build on what is already done and be as ambitious as possible."

However, for some sectors, reductions in use have been significant over the past decade, so there will be a point where a plateau is to be expected, she said. Antibiotics remain a critical tool in a vet's medicine 'cabinet' and, even with the best husbandry standards, animals can fall ill due to disease outbreaks or as a result of environmental impacts, which can mean antibiotics are necessary at times.

Looking ahead, RUMA is concerned about the impact that shortages of some vaccines could have on future progress. Shortfalls in certain sectors are beginning to curtail the veterinary response to some diseases, explained Ms McLaughlin.

"This is a red flag in efforts to tackle AMR. We are concerned that there could be a resultant increase in antibiotic usage to resolve the consequences of failing to effectively prevent disease threats through vaccination. There is a need for political recognition of this risk and more collaboration to highlight the importance and availability of veterinary vaccines," she added. "A reliable supply is vital for the UK."

Deadline looms for AHDB Chair applications

A successor is being sought to replace the current AHDB Chair, Nicholas Saphir, who will be standing down at the end of March 2025.

Mr Saphir was originally appointed to serve a three-year term in 2020, with his tenure extended by Defra Ministers for a further two years. The application deadline for a successor for the £58,000/annum, 104-day role, is midday on December 13. "I will leave my role at AHDB with the organisation very much focused on guiding levy payers through what is a significant period of change for agriculture," he said. "CEO Graham Wilkinson and his excellent team are committed to supporting levy payers on key issues through industry collaboration, expertise and strong, decisive leadership.

"Our work on environment and sustainable land management, like our recently launched Baselining pilot and recommendations regarding solutions for farm-level and environmental data, will place farmers and land managers where they deserve to be, as heroes not villains, in the fight against climate change and rebuilding biodiversity."

The appointment is a ministerial public appointment and the role includes six board meetings. To apply, visit the Public Appointments website: https://bit.ly/41fkEm3

Veterinary group on board

The York-based VetPartners Group is supporting cross-sector collaboration to preserve the effectiveness of antimicrobials. And it has recorded a further reduction in the use of antibiotics across its UK practices.

Data in the group's 2024 Antibiotics Stewardship Report shows the use of antibiotics has declined by 44% since 2021.

VetPartners Director Dr Rachel Dean believes the latest reduction is another important step forward in tackling what is a global issue.

Among a number of initiatives across its practices has been the production of clinical decision-making resources to help farm vets better utilise non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs when refining their antibiotic choices in cattle, and to promote the responsible use of antibiotics at lambing time.

Dairy incomes drop by 68%

Defra's recently published Farm Business Income figures for 2023/24 paint a stark picture of the challenges facing many farmers, according to NFU President Tom Bradshaw.

The data shows income is down for all farm types except specialist pig and poultry operations. For dairy farming, incomes dropped 68% to £70,900, with a fall in the farmgate milk price the primary driver.

Overall, Mr Bradshaw cited the challenges as rising input costs, significantly lower commodity prices, reduced direct payments and one of the wettest winters in decades leaving many businesses worse off.

"When these figures were first estimated back in March 2024, we said that we needed a government that would create policies to support British agriculture and help farmers and growers to build financial resilience into their businesses," he said. "Instead, we have seen the opposite."

The farmgate milk price is a driver

Ongoing backlash to Budget tax changes

There has been a massive ongoing backlash to the Government's inheritance tax (IHT) and other changes announced by the Chancellor in her Budget.

One of the most recent responses came from CLA President Victoria Vyvyan, who spoke at the CBI annual conference. In response to the Chancellor's claim that nobody was offering alternatives to her 'disastrous Budget', Ms Vyvvan said: "This is not true. There is an alternative, but the Government needs to be willing to work proactively with the business community, something it has so far seemed unwilling to do. If she needs more revenue, we can help her find it by unlocking growth, instead of choking it off."

Referring to the London farmer protest, she said farmers had every right to be angry; the Government had lied about the impact on their livelihoods. Ministers claimed the IHT cap hits only the rich, but it could put 70,000 farms, big and small at risk, she said. Farmers shouldn't need to be marching to London; Ministers should be marching to them. They need to understand the real damage and fix it before they destroy confidence in the rural economy.

"This Government was elected on the promise of delivering economic growth, but we've seen no evidence of its commitment to it in office," said Ms Vyvvan. "With the right policies, rural businesses could add £40bn to the UK economy."

The Government's estimate is out by a factor of five, says Jeremy Moody

More than 250,000 people have backed the NFU's campaign to reverse the family farm tax, signalling that the public disagrees with "the cruel, ill-thought-out policy".

"I want to send a heartfelt thanks to the public from the whole farming community for backing our campaign to overturn the family farm tax," said NFU President Tom Bradshaw. "Earlier in the year the public decided farming was the second most trusted profession in Britain after only nursing, and this milestone of support is further confirmation that the public values British farmers and growers."

Meanwhile, the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV) has calculated that the Government's estimate of affected farmers is out by a factor of five. In practice, up to 75,000 individual farm business owners are likely to be affected over the coming generation.

While the Government's data may come from correct answers to the questions it asked, by basing them on agricultural property relief only, it has missed large parts of rural businesses, said the Association's Secretary and Adviser, Jeremy Moody.

"Even allowing for almost any plausible margin of error, it is reasonable for large numbers of farmers to expect to be adversely affected. More widely, privately owned businesses, accounting for 30% of the UK economy, face the same changes to business property relief and will also be affected."

Given the level of anger and concern, NFU Scotland has invited the Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Murray, to visit a farm in the near future to discuss the issues.

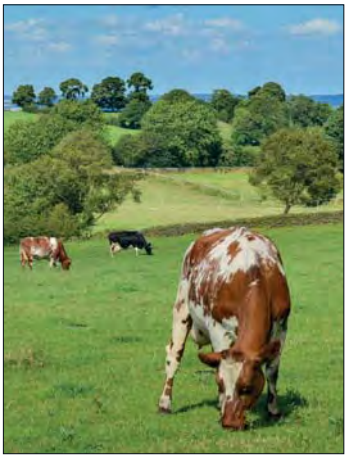
But NFUS also highlighted another consequence of the UK budget. This was the decision to end five decades of ring-fenced, multi-annual funding and for that funding to now become part of the Scottish block grant.

Capital grants scheme closed — for now

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) has suspended the majority of the capital grants scheme for the remainder of 2024. This has sparked widespread worry and uncertainty for many businesses, not least those dairy farmers anxious to progress projects necessary to meet Environment Agency legislation.

After the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers flagged-up some members reporting "significant delays" with the progress of applications, Defra confirmed that unprecedented demand had driven the decision to temporarily close 76 capital grants to new applicants. It said this is so funding can be prioritised to where it is most needed. However, agreements which have already been signed will be met, according to a Defra spokesperson.

"The sudden closure of the capital grant scheme will come as a real blow to members," said NFU Deputy President David Exwood.



Further funding will be prioritised

"We are extremely concerned about the impact which this decision, along with any delays to applications waiting in the RPA system, could have on those relying on these grants to achieve their agricultural transition and environmental ambitions. Many of these applications have been timed to fit in with the farming year and enterprise activities." One land agency said many of its clients were still awaiting a response to grant claims submitted months ago.

Rural surveyor Robert Spencer, at Richard Turner and Son, said there are dairy farmers anxious to progress capital works like covering slurry stores or concreting yards, but who are in limbo as far as their grant applications are concerned.

"For several months we have not been getting applications approved by the RPA, and now we learn the scheme has been closed for the time being," said Mr Spencer. "We simply don't know what will happen to those already submitted. However, we need to know, not least because many of these works will relate to Environment Agency compliance."

A Defra spokesperson maintained the Government's commitment to farmers "remains steadfast." He said more than 60,000 agreements for environmental land management schemes were now live and these would continue to evolve and be improved to support farmers, sustainable food production and nature recovery. He claimed further funding would be prioritised "to help build a sustainable farming sector".

Welsh Government says it's listening

Farmers in Wales will no longer be required to have a minimum of 10% tree cover on their land.

This is one of the main changes announced by Deputy First Minister Huw Irranca-Davies as part of an updated outline plan for the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

Speaking at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair, he confirmed this latest update contains important changes to previous proposals, while still supporting sustainable food production, climate change and nature commitments. Following consultation, he acknowledged that it was clear changes were needed. "We said we would listen - and we've done just that."

The other main changes include a reduced overall number of universal actions within the framework of a universal layer for all. This now has 12 actions reduced from 17, with alterations made to 10 of those remaining.

The farm-level tree cover figure will be replaced by a scheme-wide target, which will be agreed after discussions with the Ministerial Roundtable, and there will be a new universal action opportunity plan for tree planting and hedgerow creation.

Huw Irranca-Davies is commited to working with stakeholders

Also, farmers who apply for the scheme will be able to decide where they want to add more trees / hedges on their farm, and how many - and get funding to support them.

The animal health, welfare and biosecurity actions have been merged into a single, simplified universal action to focus discussions with the farm vet. And the requirement for all farms to have wash stations has been moved to an optional action.

Also new are additional payments for social value, which will be made under the universal part of the scheme. The intention is to represent the wider benefits which come from a sustainable agricultural industry.

Furthermore, the universal payment will take account of sites of special scientific interest and common land rights. Further support for both will be available as optional and collaborative actions.

The requirement for farmers to manage at least 10% of their land as habitat remains, but support to help meet this requirement and additional options to create temporary habitat are being considered.

"I remain committed to listening to and working with our stakeholders to ensure the final scheme we deliver next year is one that will help support the economic resilience of farming businesses, the sustainable production of food, our climate and nature objectives, and our rural communities for current and future generations," said Mr Irranca-Davies.

The announcements were welcomed by the FUW, NFU Cymru, the CLA and the Wildlife Trusts Wales.

European project on longer cow-calf contact

A new project examining how to allow dairy calves to spend longer with their mothers has been launched by the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). It is working with more than 25 other organisations from 14 different countries.

Co-ordinated by University College Dublin (UCD), the TransformDairyNet initiative will run for three years, embracing the expertise of 26 European partners.

"Cow calf separation is a significant animal welfare challenge and an ethical concern for European citizens," said Project Co-ordinator, Professor Siobhan Mullan from UCD.

The traditional practice of separating calves from their mothers shortly after birth impacts the welfare of both cow and calf, she maintained. It is hoped TransformDairyNet will enable dairy farmers, and others in the industry, to learn from existing cow-calf contact (CCC) dairy farmers who have already adopted systems where calves stay with their mothers for months.

The project will share best practice

It is cited as a "ground-breaking European project, designed to revolutionise the dairy industry through these CCC systems, to promote sustainable dairy practices that prioritise animal welfare, environmental sustainability, and economic viability".

Dr Jessica Stokes, Associate Professor in Farm Animal Welfare Science and Policy at the RAU said: "We want to support existing and curious dairy farmers and industry across Europe to work together and learn from each other in the adoption of CCC systems.

"The RAU is leading in the set-up of 11 national innovation practice hubs and a European knowledge and innovation network to share existing CCC knowledge across borders," she added.

"We are also leading the farmer-led innovation process which will fund trials in the practice hubs across participating countries on specific CCC knowledge gaps, challenges, and needs that farmers want to address."

Appointments on AHDB dairy council

Four new AHDB dairy sector council appointments are among the total of 10 which have been ratified by levy payers across the Board's four sector councils.

Levy payers could vote in each of the sectors for which they pay a levy between October 21 and December 1.

Three of the four new dairy council members are farmers, and one an independent member. The three farmers are Anna Bowen, Ceredigion; Emma Furnival, North Shropshire and Andrew Rutter, Cheshire. The independent member is former NMR Managing Director of 20 years, Andy Warne.

Each sector council member will serve for three years, with a maximum of two terms. They will receive £256.25/day for up to two days a month.

Can you provide a future vet with a student placement?

All veterinary students in the UK must complete extramural work experience throughout their degree course. This includes 10 weeks of animal husbandry during the first two years of the programme, and now the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is asking farmers to register as student placement providers on a new database.

Students gain valuable experience in livestock handling and husbandry, which helps prepare them for the rest of their clinical education, and to decide which area of veterinary practice they eventually want to work in. Farmer providers get access to up-to-date veterinary knowledge, additional support in animal care, and help foster a new generation of skilled vets. The database, which is free to join and endorsed by the NFU, will launch in early 2025. Visit www.rcvs.org.uk.

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Dairy UK presents industry's case to the House of Lords

A report by Dairy UK, launched at a House of Commons reception, is urging policymakers to view the dairy sector holistically. It calls on them to consider not only its nutritional value, but also its contributions to rural and national economies, as well as food security.

The organisation said its report presents a compelling case for the importance of dairy in sustainable, nutritious diets and is calling for a balanced and informed approach to sustainability, which doesn't sacrifice public health.

With processors and farmers working to ever more ambitious targets through the Dairy Roadmap, they are dedicated to meeting their commitment to net zero, said Chief Executive Dr Judith Bryans.

"A sustainable diet doesn't simply eliminate key nutrients or disregard social and economic factors. Our report highlights the potential impacts of these calls for reduction and the importance of an informed approach in our move toward net zero."

The report urged policymakers to consider the dairy industry holistically

Green light for Arla-Volac deal

The UK Competition and Markets Authority has given the go-ahead for Arla Foods' acquisition of Volac's whey nutrition business.

This follows on an agreement between the two companies signed in April 2024.

The whey nutrition business is built around a processing facility at Felinfach in Wales, which specialises in the production of whey protein isolate (WPI). Arla said the site will become a cornerstone of the ingredients' division's global production facilities, with further investment and expansion planned in the coming years.

There is reported to be a growing market need for WPI in the health and sports nutrition sectors, and Arla projects its WPI sales will rise significantly over the next five years. The site will also produce whey fat concentrate and lactose.

Five projects sharing £1m fund

Digital Dairy Chain has announced the winners of the 2024 Collaborative Research and Development Grant Competition. The initiative, which aims to benefit the sector, is led by SRUC, with the grants awarded independently by Innovate UK.

The projects awarded include a fast-response device to monitor carbon dioxide in breath, for the early diagnosis of bovine respiratory disease. It is being developed by Albasense, which said it will allow timely intervention, reduce antibiotic use, improve animal welfare and boost milk yields.

Culquha Farm is also benefiting, with its integrating sensor technology to enhance manure management. It offers environmental benefits like reduced pollution, improved soil health, increased crop yields and social benefits.

An app and digital tool which will allow farmers to analyse heat stress and its impacts on cattle is being developed by Galebreaker. It aims to improve animal welfare, productivity and the future development of building designs to mitigate heat stress.

The initative aims to benefit dairy

Grouse Fibres is developing a process to biorefine waste milk from the dairy industry to create a casein-based fibrous growth material for horticulture as an alternative to traditional fertilisers and peat.

And four technologies from Soltropy are aimed at decarbonising heat for dairy farms and dairies. They are solar thermal heating, a solid-state heat pump, a steam heat pump and a sensor system to be implemented at Appleby Creamery in Cumbria.

This is the second round of funding and the five winning projects have been awarded almost £1m between them.

New sustainability course for vets

A new 'Sustainability in Veterinary Practice' micro-credential course has been launched by Scotland's Rural College. It aims to help vet practices meet sustainability standards set by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons at the beginning of September. SRUC says the online course is aimed at those in the industry, at all levels, to help them meet these standards by providing concrete examples that can be easily translated into practice.

Co-created by veterinary nurses Helen Ballantyne and Laura Edwards, it takes 12 weeks to complete. By empowering veterinary professionals with sustainable tools and insights, they aim to create a positive impact which supports animal welfare, community health and ecological balance.

The online course takes 12 weeks

Labour not trusted by its voters, claims NFU

Data commissioned by the NFU shows Labour is not trusted by its 2024 voters on issues around the Budget's impact on farmers. The poll, carried out by Portland last month, shows that two thirds of the public do not think the Government has fully considered the impact of its planned changes on family farms.

Only 27% support the family farm tax, while 49% think the Government is biased against the countryside. Other results show that inheritance tax (IHT) on farms is the joint most unpopular measure in the Budget, tied with changes to pensions.

Some 49% of 2024 Labour voters think that IHT on farms and businesses is unfair, and only 17% trust the Chancellor most to tell them about the impact on farms. More than 50%, however, trust farmers to tell them the truth. "I am not surprised by this data," said NFU President Tom Bradshaw. "It shows the level of support for British farmers from people across the country. This is echoed with the 263,000 people that have so far signed our petition to stop the family farm tax." Nearly 3m people have also signed a separate petition calling for a new general election.

Industry partnership sustainability pledge

Tesco, together with Arla and Müller UK & Ireland, jointly launched the Future Dairy Partnership last month with a pledge to reduce on-farm emissions by 30% by 2030.

The partnership believes that with climate change impacting UK food production, leading to a reduced supply of milk, there is a potential impact on food security.

All 400 producers in Tesco's Sustainable Dairy Group will be part of the initiative, with other organisations across the sector being looked to for input and support.

"The group has pioneered ground-breaking work on a number of areas, including animal welfare improvements, carbon footprinting and introducing innovations like methane reducing additives," said Ashwin Prasad, Chief Commercial Officer at Tesco. "What is clear is that to achieve our stretching climate and nature goals, we must work together." In a joint statement, Arla producer Will Hosford and Muller producer Dave Jones said: "As farmers, we are custodians of the countryside and our animals, and want to leave our farms in a better place for future generations.

"Through our longstanding relationship with Tesco, Arla and Muller, we have collaboratively set out standards to measure our carbon footprint, improve animal welfare and biodiversity on our farms. We recognise that there is even more to be done and that will require additional effort and cost."

Innovative on-farm projects are planned, along with an industry-wide report highlighting a pathway to more sustainable dairying. A sustainable dairy blueprint will be produced to provide farmers with guidelines on sustainability targets and ethical practices.

Next-Gen Scholars Kirsten Henry, Ewan McCracken and Bronagh Dempsey

Nuffield dairy scholarships

After a successful pilot programme with Northern Ireland dairy farmers, the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust has made the 2025 Next-Gen Scholarships available to a wider group.

They are now open to young farmers aged between 18 and 24. One scholarship, with up to three places, is available for dairy applicants throughout the UK, while another is for the poultry sector in Scotland only.

For successful candidates, the 30-day study programme will take place in June 2025. After an induction, they will spend the month staying on farms with members of the Nuffield Farming Dairy or Poultry group.

The programme is fully funded to include travel, subsistence and attendance to the Nuffield Farming Conference plus Nuffield Farming Associate membership. A financial incentive of £1,000 is also included to part cover the cost of replacement labour.

Applications close on January 31, 2025. Visit www.nuffieldscholar.org.

Making all of our voices heard

An estimated 20,000 farmers and supporters descended on Westminster last month to protest against the changes announced in the autumn Budget. British Dairying Editor Olivia Cooper joined them in London and reports from the day's extraordinary events.

Feelings have been running high in the farming community since Rachel Reeves' controversial Budget, which has prompted widespread outrage, upset and worry. Addressing the protest on November 19, an emotional Tom Bradshaw, President of the NFU, spoke on behalf of the farming community.

"It takes something extraordinary to get us to act like this, and this betrayal is extraordinary," he said. "I don't think I've ever seen the industry this angry, disillusioned and upset. To launch a policy this destructive without talking to anyone in farming beggars belief and is nothing short of a stab in the back."

Some 1,800 farmers turned up to speak with their MPs - more than three times original expectations

Meeting representatives

At Church House, some 1,800 farmers – three times the expected number – met with their MPs throughout the day. But while Mr Bradshaw had met with representatives from Defra and the Treasury, Ms Reeves had still refused to engage as British Dairying went to press.

"This isn't about politics – it's about right and wrong," he said. The industry simply wants to understand what the Government is trying to achieve, and help them attain that without the devastating human impact. "We can solve this while keeping our family farms farming. But the longer they leave this hanging the more I find it vindictive."

Farm margins are ludicrously tight, offering less than 1% return on capital, and with the other measures announced in the Budget, farmers have nothing left to give, warned Mr Bradshaw. The failure to consult Defra compounded frustrations, with the Government seeming to have forgotten the empty shelves in supermarkets during Covid-19.

"I have a real issue with the duplicity. This Budget is inflationary for food production, and is full of let-downs for our vital sector.

"This makes continuity of milk supply even more vulnerable."

"And the human impact is simply not acceptable," he added. "This is a policy that will rip the heart out of family farms. You need to look your MPs in the eye and make them understand how this impacts you, your farm, your family, and your future. This is only a start and none of us are going to give up – we won't stop fighting."

Paul Tompkins, Chair of the NFU Dairy Board, said he had received lots of very emotional calls from farmers with multiple generations working in the business. Some parents had expressed a wish to pass away before 2026, to avoid leaving their children with the death tax that could force them to break up the farm.

"I know what it's like to get up and milk the cows the day after someone in your family dies," he said. "Anyone inheriting the farm in an untimely fashion will then also have to find the money to pay the tax."

Getting the message across

The political view

Cross-party support for farmers is strong and no political party in this country can rule without rural seats, said Labour peer Baroness Ann Mallalieu. "I can't believe we're making the same mistake again. It's a serious political miscalculation."

Ed Davey, leader of the Liberal Democrats, said that rather than tackling large investors using land as a tax haven, the new policy will force more sales into their hands, he said. "This tax is not only cruel, it's stupid. Every Lib Dem MP will be pushing this Government every day until they listen. We will stand by you every step of the way."

Kemi Badenoch, leader of the Conservative party, agreed. "This policy is cruel and is going to destroy farming as we know it. Farming in this country is absolutely critical for growth."

Rachel Gilmour, Liberal Democrat MP for Tiverton and Minehead, said the figures simply don't stack up. Not only will more people be affected by the changes than the Government calculated, but the revenue generated will be, in the scheme of things, tiny. "The Government has got this massively wrong, and it will devastate the industry."

Given that the plans are not due to come into force until April 2026, there is still time to negotiate a change, she said. As Vice Chair of the All-Parliamentary Group on Farming, she will be reaching out to as many Labour MPs as she can. And she urged farmers to do the same – to tell their personal stories and speak from the heart.

The impact of family farms giving up will be felt throughout the rural fabric, especially as so many are involved in their communities through roles like church wardens, school governors, or parish councillors, she added. "When we say it's tearing the heart out of the countryside, it literally is."

The policy is a real threat for food security, as many families are saying that, rather than sell the farm to pay the tax, they will sell the cows instead. "This makes continuity of milk supply even more vulnerable."

Mr Tompkins and his wife Rachael keep 400 Holsteins in the Vale of York, and would expect a tax bill of over £400,000 should his mother-in-law pass away unexpectedly.

"We are worried about farmers' mental health and well-being."

"Our business operates on sweating every asset – I can't choose any asset to shave away and maintain productivity," he said. "Nor could we afford to pay over the next 25 years."

The increase in national insurance (NI) was another blow to farm businesses, warned Mr Tompkins. "We employ 20 people, all part-time, and will have to swallow paying more NI by not offering any pay rises. How do I keep them motivated to keep milking the cows?"

NFU officeholders have been inundated with emotional calls from farmers

Mel Squires, South NFU Director, said she and her team had been overwhelmed by the number of emotional phone calls and emails. "We are worried about farmers' mental health and well-being, coming on the back of two years of challenging weather," she said. "In 25 years, I've never known such fear, lack of confidence to plan for the future, and astonishment that the Government has lied to us.

"These assets have been invested in for generations, never with a view to selling them – that's the bedrock of sustainability for family farms," she added.

Expected tax bill

"Agricultural and business property relief were meant to protect the self-sufficiency of food. Layered up with the loss of Basic Payments, NI increases, and the wider rural economy, this is colossal. It's deeply sad."

Farmers had been encouraged to diversify by successive governments, to shore up fragile farming incomes, explained Ms Squires.

"So they're being hit every which way." At a time when farmers are meant to be investing in delivering environmental benefits while feeding the nation, she was also concerned about the effect of this uncertainty on lenders. "The dairy sector is already very highly geared – we hope that banks will continue to support farmers."

Continued on page 12.

Feeding the nation

Farmers attending the protest were tasked with bringing food to feed those in need – and they delivered over six tonnes to London food bank City Harvest. The food bank said it was 'overwhelmed' by the donations, which would go to provide over 15,000 meals.

"We want to show how much value farmers have for the nation," said Lincolnshire farmer Andrew Ward. "The sooner they realise that farming is the solution, not the problem, the better."

Continued from page 11.

The view from outside

Gathered around the cenotaph, tens of thousands of farmers held a minute's silence for those who fed and protected the nation during wartime, before the protest began.

Lancashire farmer Olly Harrison, whose son James is the sixth generation on the farm, articulated the grief of potentially being the last to farm on his family's land.

"We all know nobody owns their farm; we just look after it for the next generation. It would be hard enough to lose a member of my family; it would be even harder to lose the farm through political greed."

Fellow farmer Clare Wise, whose family have farmed near Durham for 139 years, over five generations and two world wars, shared similar fears.

"My family turned up every day. They built the village hall and managed the land for tourists to enjoy," she said. "If I dropped down dead my kids would have to find £100,000s; no bank would lend them the money, and even if they did it would cripple the business. We have a heck of a big mortgage and an overdraft that leaves me awake at night. Last year I struggled to buy school shoes for my kids after harvest."

An emotional Tom Bradshaw received a standing ovation from the crowd

Every pound her business pays into the rural economy generates £7, she said – while every penny spent on imported food might never make its way back to the country.

"Food poverty shames our nation – we should be doing everything we can to put that right." There are also environmental implications from losing generations of local knowledge; farmers know every nook and cranny of their land, she added.

Environmental destruction

"Without us, you have a wasteland; with us, you have a thriving natural environment. It's tantamount to environmental destruction on a massive scale. I'm a true, average, family farmer, and I will protect that with every breath."

> **"We are able to deliver on the environment and nature."**

Martin Williams, a third-generation farmer from Herefordshire, also spoke to the crowds. "Winston Churchill said you can't tax your way to prosperity; this Government is making grave errors," he said. "We need production, not a cost-of-living crisis based on tax. We need prosperity in the countryside. We are able to deliver on the environment and nature – they are taking that opportunity away."

The protest drew further political support for the role of tenants within UK agriculture, as custodians of a third of English farmland.

"All are worried about the unintended consequences the Budget will have on their future," said Baroness Kate Rock, author of the Rock Report. "In the immediate future, many tenants are worried about how they're going to pay their rent, due to the cut in Basic Payments, increased NI and wage bills."

There is also the risk of landlords not investing in tenanted farms, because it will simply add to their value, and therefore their tax bill. "It destroys any incentive to invest or to rent out land," she warned.

"Tenant farmers face the reality that their landlords will be forced to evict their tenants and sell the land to pay their tax bill. But we need new entrants to farming. Every single farmer here is a custodian of our land for future generations. This Government needs to think again and listen to our united voice."

Future generation

Reflecting the impact on the future generation, children riding 50 pedal tractors led a procession to Parliament Square – although the turnout was too large for the whole protest to join them.

And just before their procession, celebrity farmer Jeremy Clarkson lent his support to the protest. "I lived in London for 25-30 years and thought farmers drove round in Range Rovers, moaning, until five years ago I started farming and realised how unbelievably difficult and complicated it is," he said. "There's very little money in it – all the equipment costs a fortune and you can't recover that from the market place."

He made an impassioned plea to the Government: "For the sake of everybody here, and all those at home paralysed by a fog of despair, I say – be big, accept it's been rushed through, and it's a mistake."

About 20,000 people gathered

Feed markets drift downwards

Jamie Day
Feed market specialist

Commodity feed markets have continued to slowly deflate, bar the odd spike on geopolitical news from Ukraine and the Middle East. World supplies of most feed materials are relatively plentiful, so trade disruptions are the main threat to their smooth flow.

Traders report a slow UK wheat market, with low spot demand from buyers and little increase in activity now expected until the New Year. Even where farmers are keen to sell for cash flow reasons, there are few homes for their crops.

Wheat futures fell over November, save for a brief rally at the month end in response to Russia's large missile attack on Ukraine, although news of a possible ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon quickly reversed that. The November '24 feed wheat position began the month at £179.25/t and expired at £180.35/t. But the May '25 and November '25 contracts opened the month at £193/t and £192/t respectively, only to close it at £186.50/t and £186/t.

Domestic prices have also weakened in response to the better weather in November which allowed many growers to complete their winter crop drilling. Although later than ideal, there is a better chance of a more normal 2025 wheat harvest after the shortfall in 2024. A recent AHDB plantings survey puts the UK winter wheat crop area at 1.61m ha, a 5% increase year-on-year, although lower than some trade estimates of 1.75m ha. Spot wheat prices fell from £180/t ex-farm in early November to £175/t by the end of the month.

Barley values

Meanwhile, feed barley prices have remained relatively stable, with the discount to wheat narrowing over the past month. Demand is coming from feed compounders, while limited exports have started from the South East, after a long period of being uncompetitive on overseas markets. On the supply side, more malting barley is finding its way into the feed pile following a good UK harvest of malt varieties, a large stock carryover, declining UK maltster demand, and a quiet global market. Barley values were little changed over the month at around £145/t ex farm.

The AHDB plantings survey points to smaller winter and spring barley crops for harvest 2025, which may be supportive to values in a year's time.

There have been big soyabean harvests in the US and Brazil, while the new soya crop in Brazil is developing under favourable conditions, which points to another big crop on the way. With supply satisfied, much will depend on how the crop is traded. The two main soya market drivers are China's demand – the country could need to import up to 109m tonnes of soybeans. The other is the new Trump presidency from late January.

Trump's previous presidency saw him impose tariffs on Chinese imports to the US, with China switching from US to Brazilian soyabeans in response, which in turn disrupted trade flows. Trump is threatening tariffs on all US imports when he returns, so further disruption is likely.

Soyameal values have largely followed the soyabean complex downwards. But a shortage of rapeseed could see soya demand increase. Soyameal traded in a narrow range of £320-£318/t ex-store over November in the UK.

The EU deforestation regulation, which had threatened to disrupt imports of South American soyabeans and meal from January 1, 2025, has been postponed for a year. But this is a comparatively short time to implement full traceability from the large number of small farmers involved in filling a large transatlantic vessel. So, there is likely to be a repeat of shippers' reluctance to charter vessels in 12 months' time, without a guarantee that the feed material meets the deforestation rules.

Australian imports

Rapemeal has traded in a relatively narrow range of £246-£250/t ex-store during November. Ex-farm rapeseed values had strengthened since September in the UK, on the back of another small harvest, but there was a sharp correction in late November as new crop imports from Australia started to arrive. There is also market speculation that more Canadian rapeseed could arrive in Europe if the new Trump presidency imposes tariffs on Canadian imports into the US.

Europe is expected to crush more soyabeans and less rapeseed and sunflower than last year, with a resulting effect on supplies of each protein meal. Soya hulls lost about £4/t over the past month to close at £171/t ex-store, while palm kernel lost £15/t to close at £172/t ex-store.

Purchasing group AF's annual Agflation index, which measures the price trajectory of essential farm inputs, reports that the cost of dairy farming followed input prices downwards in the year to September 2024. This included a significant drop in the cost of energy, down by 21.28% from the record highs seen in 2022 and 2023 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Dairy feed and medicine costs fell by 5%, with the overall deflation in dairy inputs measured at 3.53%. However, AF notes that there was no increase in the retail milk price paid by consumers, unlike the outputs of other crop and livestock farm enterprises it monitors.

The latest quarterly estimate from Defra of average cattle and calf compound feed prices for the July-September quarter in GB is £306/t. This is the lowest since the £294/t in January-March 2022, just before Russia's invasion of Ukraine saw energy and commodity prices soar, and down from their peak of £382/t in January-March 2023.

The AHDB reports that overall cattle and calf feed production rose by 6.9% in September, to 350,500t. Within that total, the compound feed volume fell by 0.4% year-on-year to 179,200t, while dairy blends were up 12.8% to 69,700t. Feed manufacturers have been using less wheat but more barley, while soya and sunflower meal usage has increased at the expense of other oilseeds.

Counter the Endotoxin threat

Dr Hsueh-lui Ho
Volac R & D Manager
for Feed Additives

Mitigating the health and performance sapping impact of endotoxins is a great example where novel feed additive solutions can support improved dairy production efficiency.

Endotoxins are produced by gram-negative bacteria and can be found everywhere in the UK dairy farming environment. They are present in the food cattle eat, their normal rumen flora, the water they drink and on the surfaces they lick. In fact, wherever you find bacteria, you will likely find endotoxins.

Endotoxins are incredibly diverse and form an integral part of the outer membrane of gram-negative bacteria such as *Salmonella* or *E.coli*. Their main function is to provide structural integrity to bacteria and provide a barrier or defence against environmental stresses.

Endotoxins are normally released within the host animal or into the environment when gram-negative bacteria die. But they can also be released by bacteria when multiplying or invading a host.

Cattle are consistently removing and dealing with bacterial endotoxins. However, most of the time, none of their adverse effects will be noticeable because a healthy cow's immune system is able to cope daily with the general challenges presented by endotoxins.

Endotoxins only become a problem if they enter the bloodstream. This sometimes happens if a host's immune system is overstimulated or unbalanced, such as when challenged by disease or environmental stress. If this happens, depressed feed intake is often the first sign, but inflammation can also occur, resulting in reduced performance as more energy is required for the immune response.

For example, when cows are fed a high cereal diet and rumen pH drops, the acidotic state of the rumen can lead to bacterial death and release of endotoxins. If the endotoxin load is high enough, endotoxemia can occur.

Maintenance of a healthy immune status and a favourable population of rumen flora – as well as the feeding of certain feed additives – will help mitigate any threat from endotoxins to the cow. For example, beta-glucan can be used to train the immune system not to overstimulate in the presence of endotoxins. Alternatively, proven endotoxin-specific binders, such as next generation UltraSorb R 3.0 – which is available to dairy farmers in the UK exclusively through Trident MicroNutri – can also be used routinely to bind endotoxins in the gut and prevent them from entering the bloodstream.

With today's high performing dairy cows often on a knife-edge, standard endotoxin remediation strategies are well worth considering.

For more information, please contact feedadditives@volac.com

A time to reflect and celebrate

The autumn cycle of inseminating cows, grazing youngstock and drying off the spring calvers is starting to wind down at Bisterne Farms. That's allowed the team to celebrate recent awards and look forward to Christmas, as Charlotte Lawder explains.

It's been a busy few weeks here on the farm, and as the year wraps up, we've been balancing everything from breeding to drying off cows, to finishing up some personal learning milestones.

The R1s (heifers up to a year old) are still housed, fully weaned off milk, and settling well on a diet of cake and silage. They're getting 3.5kg/head per day, and since introducing silage recently, they've been thriving. At three and a half months old, they're growing well.

Our spring calves and R2s (heifers up to two years old) are now out on the fodder beet. The R2s had fixed-time artificial insemination (AI) earlier, spent three weeks grazing with the bulls, and have now transitioned to beet grazing for winter. It's a low-input system, but they seem content. They'll get new silage bales daily, and we'll move the break fence daily to ensure they are on fresh ground.

The mild November has enabled the spring calvers to remain outside grazing before they are dried off

Synchronising heifers

Speaking of AI, fixed-time AI (or heifer sync) continues to be a good strategy for us. It costs about £28/heifer, including vet and drug costs, and ensures all the dairy calves from heifers are born around the same time. Any that don't take with AI will be caught by our six Hereford bulls.

It's a big day when we do the AI, but batching them makes it manageable and efficient.

At the end of November, we moved our spring herd to once-a-day milking. In early December we'll start drying off 60 of the earliest calvers, and by Christmas, we'll have the entire spring herd dry.

Thanks to the mild November weather, they're still out grazing, which has been a huge help. We even managed to get down our grass tracks without them turning into a soggy mess, something that's usually a challenge this time of year.

Grass growth, however, has been slower compared to last October, down to 10kg/ha of dry matter per day from 58.4kg last year. A big drop. The wet and cold October likely played a role, but November's warmer weather has helped maintain some growth. We're planning to finish grazing by December 20. The autumn herd is fully housed now, on a diet of cake and silage. One challenge we've faced is avalanches in the clamp, likely due to stormy weather and maybe pushing the feed wires too close to the face. It's been manageable with the scraper tractor, but something we're keeping an eye on.

Two weeks into breeding the autumn group we are pleased with a 65% submission rate so far. We've been using a mix of dairy and beef semen, including some new Charolais genetics alongside our usual New Zealand Friesian, Holstein, Hereford, and Angus.

We'll also introduce short-gestation Blue semen in weeks five and six, followed by the Angus to avoid mix-ups at calving.

Monitoring bulling involves a mix of paint and stickers. Cutting the stickers in half lengthways saves us money without sacrificing effectiveness; they're about 53p each, so the savings add up! We also bring in an AI technician to help with accuracy and save time, especially at the start when we're doing up to 16 cows/day.

On a personal note, I recently finished the Entrepreneurs in Dairying course, and it's been an incredible experience. The course, designed for people looking to grow their dairying knowledge and start their own businesses, ran over seven sessions since September.

The finance module was the most useful, and a visit to see a former delegate who's now thriving with a contract farming agreement was the most inspirational.

Being part of a group of like-minded, hard-working people from a range of farming backgrounds was a highlight.

Charlotte recently enjoyed attending the Entrepreneurs in Dairying course

Ending on a positive note

We recently attended the Avon and Stour Agricultural Society Awards evening, which was a great chance to get off the farm, socialise, and celebrate successes.

We even won three awards around our management of youngstock and cows, which was a fantastic feeling and a nice recognition of our efforts.

In the coming weeks, we'll finish breeding the autumn cows, dry off the spring herd, and move them onto beet.

On the social side, we've got our Christmas do planned - Secret Santa, go-karting, and a meal. It's a nice way to wind down and reflect on the year with the team and their partners.

Farming is always busy, but finding time to plan, reflect, and celebrate is just as important as getting the daily tasks done. Here's to wrapping up the year on a positive note!

Yet another farm F-it factor

Chris Walkland

COMMENT

November has been a pretty tough month for farming, and dairy farming within that, as epitomised by *that* Budget, and *that* march in the Big Smoke. That was as much about the general frustration inherent in the industry on all sorts of fronts as it was about the inheritance tax (IHT) issue itself, I feel.

There can't (surely?) be many dairy farms that will escape from the IHT net. The average herd size in the UK in 2024 is 219 cows, for example, and if I take the average sale price of just over £2,000/head realised at the Market Drayton auction in November the cow value alone comes to £450,000 in its own right. Throw in 100 heifers and a gaggle of calves or so at maybe half the value, plus the usual collection of machinery that goes with a dairy farm, and it doesn't take much to get to the value of the £1m tax allowance on these elements - let alone from any houses, land or anything else.

Leaving out any of the specifics of the tax, allowances and potential mitigations, as I'm not qualified to comment on them, I see the new tax as being yet another 'F-it factor', for want of using polite language as opposed to more earthly parlez, shall I say. I think most readers will understand what I mean.

"They assume food will always be there."

It joins many other issues on a lengthening list of hassle / stress factors – nitrate vulnerable zones, labour, workload, planning permission problems, price volatility, costs, sustainability demands, investment requirements, 'meat and dairy bashing', climate issues and so on. The new fertiliser tax can be added to that list, too. They all conspire to make the decision to quit dairy far more likely.

For the year to April 2024, the exit rate in dairy farmer numbers in GB was 5.8%, which was the highest rate since 2007. Unless the financial returns make all the above hassles and stresses worthwhile it is hard to see that rate declining any time soon.

And it isn't just farmers giving up, either, by the way. This month another seasoned cheesemaker in Lye Cross decided to pack-up, ditch loyal milk suppliers, and change its business model.

I really don't think those in charge of our nation's food strategy (if there is one) really understand quite how weighty the monkey on the back of farmers is becoming – the IHT issue being the latest.

I'd love to be able to say that one day the politicians will wake up, but I'm not sure they will. They assume food will always be there, and they are so hypnotised by emissions that they are blind to their nonchalance towards and neglect of food, farming and farmers.

Amid the negatives, though, there are, happily, many positives which convince me the industry can absolutely thrive if there are the returns, and the political will and policies to allow it to do so.

For starters, major processing companies are investing big, with the three UK big guns in Arla, Muller and Dale Farm all investing heavily in adding capacity and capability.

Last month Muller got the go-ahead to buy Yew Tree and this month the Competition and Markets Authority allowed Arla Foods Ingredients to take over Volac's whey processing. The former will want more milk coming directly into it, the latter will have more milk indirectly coming into it via the whey stream from Arla's greedy new mozzarella plant in Devon.

Dale Farm's expanded cheddar capacity is also on track for a January start. Other processors are doing their bit too, and this, twinned with that exit rate, means dairy farmers will be very much in demand.

A lot of positive action

And there's also a lot of positive action going on in the background which is helping to shape that future. This month alone we've seen several initiatives that I think put us on a much stronger footing to counter the industry's critics, and to take us forward.

I'd include the Arla-Muller-Tesco 'Future Dairy Partnership' in that, which aims "to accelerate the reduction of carbon emissions, enhance animal welfare and protect and restore nature, whilst promoting a shared vision for the dairy industry to collaborate to build a more resilient and sustainable future". It sounds all very noble and needed, but the proof of the pudding will be in what comes now.

All 400 of Tesco's Sustainable Dairy Group farmers across the UK will be part of the initiative. The suppliers and retailer "are also broadening the partnership by reaching out to other organisations across the dairy industry for input and support".

With that in mind, then, it's surely time for First Milk, Ornua, Parkham Farms, and a host of other smaller manufacturers who supply into Tesco, plus their farmers, to get involved too. We shall see if, or when, they do.

Also worthy of a mention is the industry's bigger and bolder efforts to champion dairy's role in nutrition and sustainability. Way too often the finger-pointers just look at dairy's emissions and not the vast quantity of valuable nutrients it supplies. Dairy UK's new report - UK Dairy: More nutrition with fewer emissions - calls for a balanced approach to food system change, which values both nutrition and environmental impacts.

"What we want is a world where there is more nutrition, with fewer emissions, and not a world in which there are less emissions but less nutrition," it states. It's well worth a read, and available from the Dairy UK website, or hear about it on a recent episode of the Kite podcast. Finally on the emissions front, comes the announcement from Arla, which is starting a Bovaer trial with Morrisons, Aldi and Tesco. It's with just 30 farmers, with the idea being to "to provide a better understanding of how these feed additives can be rolled out across a larger group of farmers", especially in light of the costs of the product.

But what an astonishing reaction there was on the social media site X! Over-excited keyboard warriors went crazy in a wholly unpredictable way, with a firestorm of 13,000 mostly negative posts against the story.

(In contrast, M&S issued an almost identical press release in April; The Daily Mail ran it on its website and there were just 26 comments.)

The firestorm quickly spread from Arla to the retailers involved, to other processors who posted that they weren't and wouldn't use the product, to the likes of M&S and Tesco who are also trialling it.

But I'm going to leave this story now and return to it next month to allow some time to assess any long-term fallout and to see how the industry, and Bovaer especially, reacts. As it stands today, after the social media firestorm, its future looks questionable and there's a need for some serious PR from Elanco / DSM.

"We want a world where there is more nutrition with fewer emissions."

Now to Mona Dairy and Ronald Akkerman. Yes, really. Apparently there is now a flurry of activity at the factory once again as equipment that was part of the original plan for the site is being removed by Vergeer, which is one of the partners in the original business that collapsed into administration back in the summer.

Some 30 farmers lost three to four weeks' worth of milk, with 80-odd unsecured creditors owed well over £30m. One of the original backers, David Wynn Finch, lost a multi-million-pound fortune, and the plant's boss Ronald Akkerman disappeared back to the Netherlands, never to be seen again. Or at least that's what everyone thought would happen.

Not so, however, as it seems Akkerman is back as "a deal has been signed" – I think with the administrators. Quite where he will get the finance to re-equip the plant, or the milk to put through it, are two of many obvious practical questions, let alone moral ones relating to the creditors.

What I do know is that talk that a South Caernarfon Creameries tanker was delivering at the site aren't true, and that it has nothing to do with whatever is happening at Mona.

It's all intriguing, eyebrow raising, stuff, especially given the fact that the administrators will free-up and return precious little of the £30m+ back to creditors. Again, more of that next month.

AHDB MILK PRICE LEAGUE TABLE

Milk price league - October 2024

	October price	Annual average
Dale Farm NI	44.92	44.93
Dale Farm GB	43.75	43.81
Arla Manufacturing	44.26	43.61
Müller M&I M&S*	43.24	43.14
Lactalis - Profile	43.17	43.08
Barber's Cheesemakers	42.82	42.82
Pattemores	42.62	42.62
Wyke Farms	42.71	42.60
Crediton Dairy	42.47	42.54
Lactalis	42.42	42.42
Wensleydale	42.12	42.12
Saputo Dairy UK - Profile	41.97	42.07
Leprino Foods	42.22	42.04
Saputo Dairy UK - Variable	43.97	42.01
First Milk Manufacture	41.82	41.88
South Caernarfon	42.04	41.55
Müller M&I Tesco*	41.39	41.34
Lactalis - Seasonal	44.42	41.24
Belton Farm	40.91	40.91
Müller M&I Direct	40.87	40.77
Müller M&I Co-op*	40.73	40.63
Müller M&I Sainsbury*	40.69	40.59
Freshways	40.72	40.49
Arla Direct Manuf.	40.10	39.86

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.
2. Dale Farm NI is paying a winter premium of 2ppl.
3. First Milk manuf. member premium +0.50ppl and F/M manuf. Tesco cheese group +1.82p. Members may qualify for both premia.
4. 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.
5. Müller M&I Sainsbury's pays a sustainability supplement of +0.54
6. South Caernarfon will pay a 13th payment of 0.25ppl.
7. 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.

AHDB

Farmgate milk price changes 2024

	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Arla Sainsbury's*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arla Tesco	-	-	-0.60	-	-	-0.95	-	-	-0.43	-
Arla Direct Manuf.	-	0.84	0.01	0.43	0.43	0.85	0.43	0.85	1.71	2.56
UK Arla Farmers Manuf.	0.88	-0.04	0.43	0.44	0.81	0.74	0.89	1.69	2.66	0.89
Barber's Cheesemakers (1)	-	0.50	0.50	1.00	1.00	0.50	0.60	0.60	1.50	1.50
Belton Farm	-	1.00	-	1.00	1.00	0.75	-	1.00	1.50	-
Crediton Dairy	-	0.75	-	1.00	0.75	0.50	1.00	0.75	1.00	1.25
Dale Farm GB	0.62	0.62	0.18	0.82	1.00	0.36	1.15	0.84	0.98	0.51
Dale Farm NI	-	-	0.25	2.00	0.50	3.00	-	1.50	-	-
First Milk Manuf (2)	1.00	0.75	0.75	-	0.80	0.70	1.00	0.60	1.25	1.50
Lactalis/Caledonian	0.52	0.78	-	1.03	0.79	0.77	0.91	0.85	1.26	0.61
Leprino Foods	1.00	1.00	-	-	1.50	1.00	1.00	0.50	1.00	-
Müller M&I Co-op	-	-	0.12	-	-	0.25	-	-	0.92	-
Müller M&I M&S	-	-0.70	-	-	-	-	-1.12	-	-	-
Müller M&I Direct	-	1.00	-	0.50	1.00	-	1.25	1.00	1.00	-
Müller M&I Sainsbury's	0.03	-0.63	-	0.02	0.20	-	-0.02	-0.04	-	-0.15
Müller M&I Tesco	-	-	-0.60	-	-	-0.95	-	-	-0.43	-
Pattemores	-	0.50	-	1.00	1.00	0.50	1.00	0.50	1.25	-
Payne's Dairies	0.50	1.00	-	-	2.00	1.50	-	1.50	0.50	-
Saputo Dairy UK	1.50	-	-	1.50	0.50	0.75	0.25	1.00	1.00	-
South Caernarfon	1.00	0.75	1.00	-	1.50	-	1.00	1.25	1.25	-
Wensleydale	0.48	0.53	0.16	0.89	1.01	0.77	0.20	0.77	1.14	-
Wyke Farms	-	0.71	-	1.35	0.71	0.35	1.04	0.48	1.55	-

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) There is a guarantee that should the Actual Milk Price Equivalent (AMPE) -2ppl move ahead of the Barbers' price Jul to Dec 2024, Barbers will pay this on the extra litres above the base volume.
(2) First Milk Manufacture Member Premium calculated on a pro-rata basis linked to a member's level of capital payments.

Positive prices drive up deliveries

Most of the key milk buyers on the AHDB league table remained steady to firm for the month of December, with positive sentiment pushing up milk deliveries. GB milk production for 2023/24 is forecast to reach 12.43bn litres, 0.9% more than last year, driven by a combination of both bullish and bearish factors. Milk deliveries in September and October were up by 0.7% and 2.6%, respectively, but we are annualising against a year of lower milk deliveries following poor weather. So far, November looks extremely buoyant, with milk volumes up by nearly 4.5% in the month to date.

Industry sentiment remained mixed in November. Firmness in the market has been driven primarily by weak EU supplies and strong seasonal demand, alongside a strengthening GlobalDairyTrade auction. Although milk supplies are growing, inventory and availability is still weak, particularly on fats.

Butter prices remain at almost record highs, up 2% on the month, and skimmed milk powder (SMP) increased by 0.5%. Bulk cream and mild cheddar eased slightly, by 1.2% and 2.3%, respectively. Farmgate milk prices have also been firming, with the average Defra price at 43.06ppl for September, 18% up year-on-year. Projected prices, based on commodity values, suggest farmgate prices should remain firm until at least February.

In general, inflation in key input costs has eased recently, although they remain at historic highs. In July, the agricultural price index for all inputs was the lowest it's been since December 2021. The easing of key input costs is likely to improve farmers' confidence and support them in scaling up production. The average feed wheat price declined 0.7% in September to £181.40/t and average concentrate prices were down 11% in the year to August, to £301/t.

Dry weather in the first half of November allowed late season grazing for many, supporting November production. Positive price announcements will further incentivise farmers to produce more in the coming months. The market is unusual in that supplies are growing but there is poor availability of stocks, which will take some time to replenish. There is another positive factor, with China potentially returning to the market. Rabobank says China's dairy import deficit is likely to grow 2% year-on-year in 2025, compared to a 17% decline in the year-to-date figures (Jan-Sep '24).

Despite these bullish factors, demand sustainability around higher retail price levels will be important to watch. The recent Budget could also dampen farmer confidence, while increased environmental regulations will have an impact, too. Access to cheap credit has been curtailed, with interest rates sitting much higher than in the preceding decade. Disease outbreaks like TB and Bluetongue also offer a potential risk to the forecast. Bluetongue, in particular, is affecting milk production in Germany and the Netherlands and could impact production in the UK next year as the midge season gets under way.

Conflict in the Middle-East, China/EU tariff-wars and the Trump presidency could also produce additional trade frictions and dampen demand. There is therefore high uncertainty on how the market balances between higher prices, higher volumes and consumer demand around these levels.

Milk price announcements – Dec 2024

December milk prices held mostly steady to firm, although liquid contracts were more mixed. Looking to aligned contracts, the Co-op Dairy Group, M&S, Tesco and Waitrose announced no change to their milk prices. However, Sainsbury's announced a marginal decline of 0.15ppl.

On non-aligned liquid contracts, most members of the AHDB league table held their prices, meaning no change for Freshways, Muller Direct and Payne's Dairies. Conversely, Credition Dairy and Pembrokeshire Creamery increased by 1.25ppl and 1.12ppl, respectively. Pembrokeshire, which only came online this spring, announced its sixth consecutive month of increase and Credition Dairy announced its seventh consecutive price rise.

Cheese contracts also mostly held steady, with some notable exceptions. After increasing prices last month, Belton Cheese, Saputo, Leprino Foods, Parkham Farms, South Caernarfon Creameries, Wensleydale Creamery and Wyke Farms have made no change for December. Meanwhile, Barbers Cheese increased its price by 1.5ppl - the ninth consecutive increase. First Milk Manufacturing made its sixth consecutive increase, up 1.5ppl while Lactalis topped a seventh month of price rises, at 0.61ppl.

On the manufacturing contracts, Arla Direct Manufacturing made the largest announcement, up 2.56ppl. Arla UK Farmers increased by 0.89ppl and Dale Farm by 0.51ppl, while Pattemores Dairy Ingredients and Meadow held steady.

Volumes soar as futures fall

By Chris Walkland

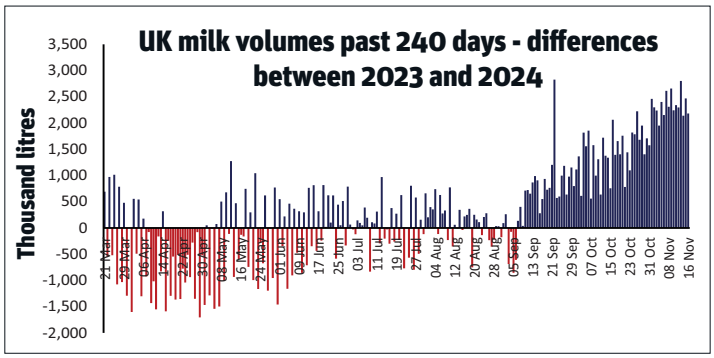
The milk volume surge not only continues but accelerates. This time last month deliveries were up 3.6% across the UK, and up 10% in Northern Ireland, year-on-year. But those percentages are nothing compared to now!

Conventional milk volumes were up by over 5% in the two weeks to November 23, to an average of 40.8m litres/day. That's 2m litres/day more than last year, with GB milk volumes at 34m litres/day, up 1.4m litres and 4.3% more than last year. Northern Ireland is contributing significant extra volumes, up 10% on last year!

The UK has produced record milk volumes every day of the 23 days in November that have been reported at the time of posting this article, and there were also 24 record-breaking days in October. In fact, from October 3 to November 23 there have only been four days which didn't set new records. The same trend is also in play in organic. Back in September organic milk volumes were down 8-10% compared to the previous year and were down around 30% compared to three years ago. But October's volumes were down 4.8%, and the first 23 days in November were up by 2.4%.

Significant moves

Milk prices are obviously a key driver, and we've seen some significant moves in a relatively short space of time – more than in any other time in recent history. For example, in the exceptional year of 2022 the price rise 'count' between July and December was 66. This is the number of times any of the 21 major processors who publish their prices increased values over that six-month period (ie, if all 21 increased every month from July to December the count would be 126). In 2020 and 2021 there was a price move count of over 50, and there were 66 in 2022. But this year the count is a staggering 94! This is just a count of the number of increases, though; it doesn't differentiate between the size of the increases. On this basis 2022 still takes the biscuit, with nine processors moving between 3 and 4ppl compared to one this year, and eight moving between 2 and 3ppl, compared to five (see table below).



I'm not sure there are going to be many more increases, although Arla has moved yet again, by 0.89p on a manufacturing litre to 48.54p. Most processors didn't want it to move for November, let alone January! I'm posting this article before I know of other moves (if any!). Certainly prices won't move much if the current trend in commodity prices sets in for the long term.

Although prices remained high through November, with Dutch butter averaging €7,800/t (£6,494/t) and UK butter £6,700/t, there are signs those giddy heights aren't going to last much into December, and are falling off at a rapid rate. In the last week of November traders were quoting €7,400-€7,500/t (£6,161-£6,245/t) for December, and €7,300 (£6,078) for Q1. Some EU traders say there is a way more bearish sentiment creeping into the market, and some traders are now apparently dropping below that, to €7,200 (£5,995). I've seen Irish prices at below €7,000/t (£5,828). Of all the countries in Europe, Ireland has been selling some of the cheapest product over the past few weeks, not least because the financial year-end for many companies there is at the end of December and there is pressure to sell as much beforehand as possible. On the upside, though, for the UK, there are apparently plenty of buyers needing cover for Q1, and premium UK, Red Tractor butter is still tight, with little chance stocks are going to build between now and the spring. Consequently, some sellers are remaining bullish for the UK, although those insanely high milk volumes will do little for their selling prospects after Christmas. Butter futures are also pointing down.

In mid-November they averaged €7,450/t (£6,203) over the next six months, but by the end of the month they had dropped to €7,100 (£5,912). Next week I expect them to be below €7,000 (£5,828).

Off the boil

Cream prices in Europe have also come off the boil at the very top end, with the range now being €10,200 to €10,500/t (£8,493-£8,742/t). Prices (based on 100% of the fat value) have never been measured in five figures before this autumn. In the UK most traders put the price (based on 40% of the fat value) at between £3.10 and £3.15/kg now.

But prices will almost certainly drop in December, as its price has only been more than November's in two of the past 16 years. Skimmed milk powder (SMP), meanwhile, seems to be edging up with a more bullish sentiment in play, and helped by the positive undertones at a recent trade fair in Europe. Prices are between €2,550/t and €2,650/t (£2,123-£2,206/t), with the latest GlobalDairyTrade (GDT) auction valuing Arla's product at €2,540/t and £2,120/t. The futures are averaging €2,760/t (£2,300/t) for the next six months, down from €2,800/t (£2,331) in mid-November.

Increasing milk volumes, with more to come, are also having an impact on the cheese sector. Whereas mild has been stable at £4,300/t, with sellers having been chilled about their stock positions and not desperate to sell, that looks to have changed now. The air is full of talk of cheddar being as low as £3,900/t, although quite how much volume is available at these prices is unknown, or even if the parcels are just from those sellers closing the books at the end of the year and discounting beforehand.

The range of expectations is as wide as the range of views, with those at the lower end pointing to those milk volumes as a downward driver and those at the top end pointing to the tight stock situation as an upward one. There is little doubt, though, that as milk continues to arrive the more pressure cheese will be under.

Cheese contracts

Mild cheddar has already dropped £100 to £4,200/t, and the cheese futures are dropping on an almost weekly basis. Stone X has cheddar at below £4,000/t for the next two quarters, for example – well below the returns the manufacturers will be paying their farmers now and into Q1 next year.

They won't want to be doing too much discounting unless they have to. Fortunately, many cheese contracts are on milk price trackers, so this will help to maintain a degree of stability and firmness in the market. I wish I could say the same for mozzarella, but alas it's still under constant pressure.

Mozzarella got a beating at the last GDT auction, and is now at €4,100/t (£3,412/t). UK sellers put the price at £3,700/t, dropping (most likely) to £3,600 in Q1, but Stone X's mozzarella futures are as low as £3,400 for Q1. History suggests that its guide price is nearly always lower than the real market price, but there is no doubt the pressure is on and the direction of travel on prices is one way.

At the Kite / Scottish Dairy Hub seminar at Agriscot I said that I could see milk prices on a standard 4% fat and 3.3% protein litre holding above 40p for Q1 2025, and dipping below it for Q2. I think the latest commodity price moves reinforce this view.

For the first half of 2025 I can still see the average being over 40ppl, but possibly not by much given some of the forward prices now in play. Hopefully with some decent milk quality and volume bonuses there'll be a few pence margin in it for you, but perhaps not a whole lot.

Price move count and size - July to December

	Total increases	0-1p	1-2p	2-3p	3-4p
2020	52	49	1	1	1
2021	54	45	7	1	1
2022	66	26	17	8	9
2023	10	7	0	3	0
2024	94	63	25	5	1

(21 processors, with a price move per month counting as 1. Total possible 126.)

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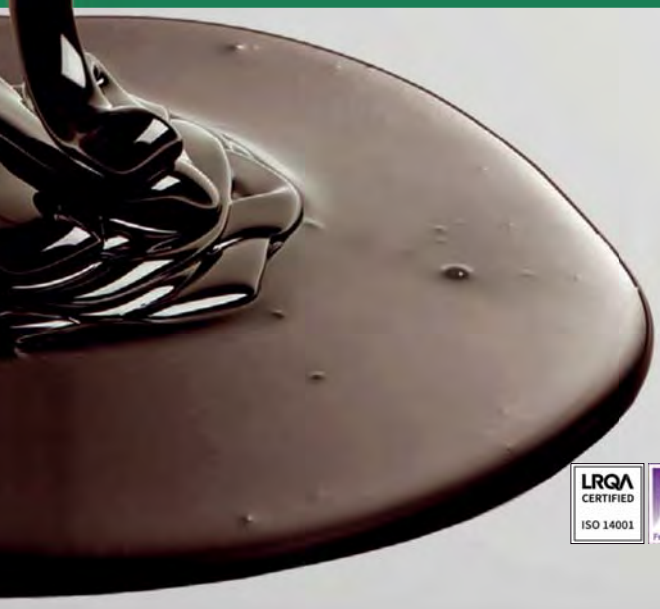

Want to know more?

Richard Dobson	07764 344716
Angela Sutherby	07957 642669
Danielle Goatley	07710 075824

Georgina Chapman 07485 192774
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Dogmatism threatens food security

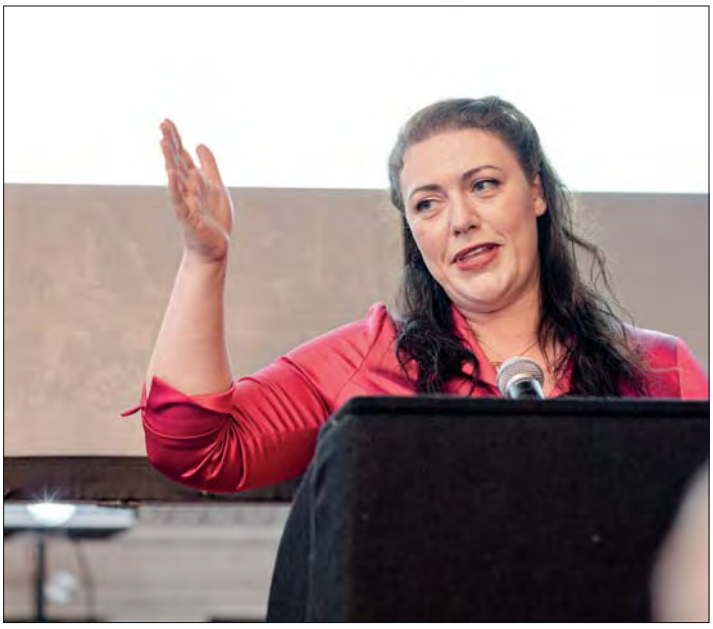
Farmers are the guardians of the UK's natural heritage and its rural way of life, and critical to the nation's food security. So says Alicia Kearns, Conservative MP for Rutland and Stamford, who explains why she is so disheartened by Labour's broken promises.

The Prime Minister once said, "Losing a farm is not like losing any other business, it can't come back". Yet the recent Budget seems to disregard entirely the once words of Labour's Leader, introducing policies which make the sale of family farms a devastating reality for so many of you.

Whilst I did not expect to find myself in agreement with the approach the new Government was trailed to take, I have been deeply disheartened by how dogmatic Labour has been, and I struggle with putting ideology above a practical focus on growth and rural communities.

"Local farmers are deeply worried about the impact."

Labour promised it wouldn't change agricultural property relief (APR), a policy specifically designed to prevent the break-up of family farms. Unsurprisingly this promise followed a similar outcome to so many others in the Budget of broken promises. According to the NFU's analysis with former Office for Budget Responsibility and Treasury advisers, Labour's betrayal of farmers will mean 75% of actual working farms fall above the £1m APR threshold, not the 27% that has been claimed.



Alicia Kearns has long argued that food security is a national security issue

My inbox has been inundated with letters of concerns similar to those I'm sure many of you are experiencing - local farmers deeply worried about the impact this change in threshold will have on their family farms. Under the family farm tax, thousands of you will now have no alternative but to sell generations-old farms to pay the inheritance tax.

Deeper issues

We all saw the strength of feeling from the sheer turnout to the protests in Westminster last month. Thank you to all of you who took the time to make your voices heard. While the media has mainly focused on cutting APR, speaking to farmers who came down to Parliament, I know the issues you are facing run much deeper.

"Food security is a national security issue."

Charging full road tax on double cap pickup trucks, increases to employer National Insurance, raising the minimum wage by almost 7%, carbon tax on fertiliser, and all of this on top of Labour's failure to distribute flood support funds and the full farming support grant funds, create a devastating blow for our rural way of life.

Looking at the national implications of the Budget, Labour does not seem to comprehend the knock-on impact its assault on farmers will have on the wider rural economy and family businesses. Tax hikes forcing farming families to sell their land will leave our rural communities at risk of takeover by big corporations and harm our national food security.

I have long argued food security is a national security issue - you cannot have one without the other. It is time Labour stopped treating farming as the preserve of rural communities, as this only serves to threaten our collective security. We must learn lessons from the renewed illegal invasion of Ukraine, and listen to you, our farmers, to give you the support you need to protect our food supply.

From standing up in the Chamber time and again, to delivering letters to Number 10 to oppose cuts to APR, I will continue to do all I can to push farming and rural concerns up Labour's agenda and to the forefront of national decision-making.

Motion passed

I also support our local Councillors to put forward a motion at Rutland County Council calling on the Government to rescind its Budget reforms to APR and BPR. It is the first Council in the country to have passed such a motion. The recent Budget will have a significantly detrimental effect on Rutland's vital family farms and local economy, so I am pleased this motion has been passed to ensure the future of our farms and food security. Down in Westminster, I will continue to do all I can for our farmers.

Please all take care of yourselves during this difficult time and check in on your neighbouring farmers. I will always be proud to continue to stand with you, the guardians of our natural heritage and our rural way of life, and in defence of our nation's food security. The fight will not stop until you, our farmers, are heard and supported.

Check in with neighbouring farmers

Regenerative farming: What do the consumers actually think?

Regenerative farming is gaining momentum among dairy farmers, with many adopting its principles to improve soil health and biodiversity. But how aware are consumers of the movement? British Dairying reports from the inaugural LandAlive event in Somerset.

A quick glance at the websites and social media platforms of food producers embracing regenerative farming principles shows a clear effort to promote its benefits to customers.

And research has shown an increasing appetite among consumers for understanding the provenance of food. The most recent consumer survey by First Milk has shed light on the co-operative's understanding of regenerative farming.

Online survey

In an online survey of 1,000 Sainsbury's shoppers conducted earlier this year, 26% of respondents said they had had heard of regenerative farming. Among these, 16% associated it with improving land and soil health, and 12% mentioned regeneration and/or prevention of land degradation, displaying a good level of knowledge. However, a third of respondents said they did not know and did not even try to guess.

When asked about the most important outcomes of regenerative farming, respondents prioritised animal welfare, with 25% selecting 'healthy, happy animals'. Other key outcomes included reduced chemical and antibiotic use, protection of biodiversity, and carbon sequestration. Soil health and water management ranked lowest on the list.

Six months later, a similar survey delved into the perceived benefits of regenerative farming, and while there was a deliberate change in terminology, the findings were consistent. Animal welfare once again ranked highest, followed by sustainable dairy products, food security, biodiversity, reduced emissions and countryside stewardship.

Consumers increasingly want to understand the provenance of their food

Increasing consumer trust is vital

"The risks of miscommunication are significant."

Across both surveys, the recurring top priorities - animal welfare, biodiversity and protecting the countryside - indicate what matters most to consumers when they think about these farming practices says Leona McDonald, Marketing and Sales Director at First Milk.

The surveys also explored consumer sentiment towards British farming and farming families. Encouragingly, 60-70% of respondents said it was 'very important' to support British farmers.

"The findings reveal an opportunity to engage with consumers about regenerative farming," says Leona. Indeed, First Milk's consumer brand, Golden Hooves, exemplifies this by emphasising the role dairy cows play in soil regeneration within its product marketing, she claims. "If done right, it can create demand for regeneratively produced food, increase consumer trust and loyalty and help fulfil a consumer need for long-term food security and sustainability.

"However, the risks of miscommunication are significant - done badly and industry integrity is threatened and consumer trust destroyed. Potential knock-on effects include fewer producers and farmers being attracted to adopting regenerative practices, resulting in increased biodiversity loss and dwindling investment or support," she adds.

"We have already seen companies being accused of 'greenwashing', and it's easy to see how this can happen when there is no legal or generally agreed definition of regenerative farming, but that's part of its beauty."

Farming regeneratively is not about following a set of rules. It is about many farmers doing as much as they can on their individual farms and monitoring the outcomes. "It is this that will bring about the change we need to see and cement dairy farming's position as supporters, and champions, of the regenerative movement."

Trust and loyalty

So, the Advertising Standards Authority's new guidance on communicating confidently is welcomed, claims Leona. "There is positivity towards regenerative farming but a lack of understanding. We need to help consumers understand to create a sustained and long-term demand that is based on trust and loyalty. This can only be done by communicating in a way which maintains our integrity, introduces consumers to the wider picture by highlighting the causes important to them and above all is clear, honest and transparent."

Meet the new RABDF Chief Exec

Hayley Campbell-Gibbons has recently taken over the reins as Chief Executive at the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers (RABDF). Bringing experience, energy and vision to the role, what plans does she have in store? British Dairying finds out.

With over 20 years of experience in agricultural policy, advocacy and leadership, Hayley Campbell-Gibbons brings a wealth of experience to her new role at RABDF. And she is keen to hit the ground running.

Her background includes serving as Chief Dairy Adviser at the NFU, where she played a pivotal role in shaping policies and initiatives to support dairy farmers. Most recently she was Head of Sustainability at Kite Consulting.

Hayley has also held several non-executive director positions, including at the AHDB, and is a current board member at the Food Standards Agency.

"The industry is being brought together with shared visions."

So what attracted her to the RABDF position? "I saw it as an opportunity to take an organisation with a long heritage and which is respected, and reboot it to make it fit for purpose for the dairy industry today," she says.

"The brief I have been given essentially gives me a blank sheet of paper to reform the organisation. I'll be taking RABDF forward and reviewing it for members and improving it to make it deliver.

Hayley Campbell-Gibbons brings a wealth of experience in the dairy sector

"I want to listen to the members and the trustees and understand what makes it tick, what works and what doesn't and absorb all of that."

Since she first worked in the dairy industry in 2007 there has been a lot of change, with many farmers leaving the sector due to financial pressures. But Hayley sees positive opportunities despite the downturn in producer numbers.

"There is now a smaller number of dairy farmers, but I think the relationship is better between processors and farmers; it has changed," she says.

"It has been 20 years since Tesco brought out its first milk-specific contract and since then it has evolved. Relationships are going beyond price and are being much more connected with environmental sustainability. The industry is being brought together with shared visions, but it is not without its tensions.

"Everyone is working in the same direction, which has become more important due to the smaller number of farmers," she adds.

"More positive initiatives have been introduced, alongside the opportunity to work together to progress and be innovative."

Biggest impact

As for her focus going forward, she plans to spend the next few months looking at policy, the issues and the areas in which to invest time to lead on and have the biggest impact on.

"We can't be involved in all of the issues; other organisations will lead on some, but we will start to have a presence again."

RABDF Chairman Robert Craig says: "It is an exciting job for Hayley; she will be able to make her mark on the industry and help the RABDF meet its ambitions. It is great to have someone in the job with energy and a vision that fits with our brief.

"Going forward, RABDF will look a bit different; we want to start to collaborate and pull the industry together to make it more efficient," he adds..

"It's important as the sector gets smaller that we all get together."

RABDF Chairman Robert Craig wanted to find the right person for the role

The recruitment process

When appointing the new Chief Executive, the RABDF board decided to take a different approach to hiring. Instead of managing the process in-house, it enlisted the help of agricultural recruitment expert Real Success.

After taking time to understand the association's needs, Recruitment Director James Harris produced the job advert, promoted the position, helped sift candidates and managed the interviews.

"Paul Harris and his team understand RABDF; we had already been speaking with them as they are corporate members, so it made sense to get them involved with the recruitment process," explains RABDF Chairman Robert Craig.

"They put the advert up on websites, social media and LinkedIn; we had a lot of applicants and they helped narrow them down to interview.

"We took our time to find the right person as we wanted to find someone suitable and who fits the role and our aspirations."

As a charity, it was vital that RABDF recruited professionally. "We have a responsibility to do everything correctly, fairly and legally," says Robert. "It was essential for us to get specialists in recruitment in to help with the process and get a successful outcome, with longevity at this executive level."

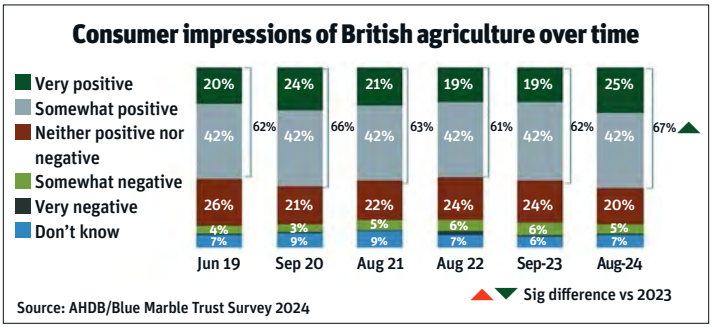
Consumer trust in farming rises again

Consumers value farmers and are feeling the most positive about British agriculture in six years, according to the AHDB consumer trust survey, as British Dairying reports.

Farming remains the most trusted profession after doctors, and consumer impressions of British agriculture have reached unprecedented levels. The AHDB's annual survey of over 2,000 consumers revealed that 67% of people view farming in a positive light - even higher than the 66% peak set in 2020 during Covid.

Positivity was highest in the fruit and veg sector, but the dairy sector, rated at 68%, showed a strong increase on 2019, says the report. Trust in farming has also jumped, from 71% last year to 76% now - just two points behind doctors. The Government scored 46% and politicians 26%.

Trust is highest among older groups, who feel well informed about farming, and describe themselves as omnivores. On the other side of the coin, trust is lowest among those aged 18–24 (66%), who feel poorly informed about farming, and classify as vegan/vegetarian (61%).



Source: AHDB/Blue Marble Trust Survey 2024

"There is also positive news for shopping habits, as 56% agree that they will proactively look for British food/produce over imported foods," says the report. And the proportion of people who feel informed about food origin and production has increased to 70%, from 64% last year. Those who have an interest in, or knowledge of, farming increased from 39% in 2022 to 44% now. The most common sources of information are food labelling and supermarkets, while those who don't feel well informed either aren't sure where to find the information or haven't thought about it.

Digestible messages

"This highlights the importance for AHDB and others in the supply chain to ensure they share information with consumers in a way which breaks down often complex topics into consistent and digestible messages for consumers."

When it comes to influences on food choice, TV and social media were top of mind, with supermarkets and health professionals also considered.

Digging deeper into farmers' values, it's clear that consumers hold farmers in a strong regard. Compared to other food-related groups in the supply chain, more consumers believe that farmers are experts in their field, care about people, deliver on promises, and care about animals and the planet. "The only area where farmers performed relatively weaker was in communication with consumers," says the report.

"With consumers feeling more informed about farming, there remains an opportunity to further enhance the role of farmers in telling the story behind the products consumers see on shelves."

What the Budget means for farmers

A lot has been said – and written – about the proposed changes to inheritance tax announced in the Budget. But there were other changes to consider, too. Iwan Williams and Vivienne Williams, both partners at Michelmores, share advice around its detail.

The big headline in the autumn Budget was what's been dubbed the new 'farm tax'. Radical reforms to both agricultural property relief (APR) and business property relief (BPR), are set to take effect on April 6, 2026. These changes will be significant for farming businesses and estates and the impact should not be underestimated.

Inheritance tax (IHT)

IHT is charged on lifetime transfers, transfers out of trust or transfers on death. The current lifetime rate is 20% (unless the transfer is potentially exempt, for example, as a gift to an individual) and the death rate is 40%. Both rates are subject to the available nil-rate band and various reliefs, notably APR and BPR.

"The proposed changes to APR and BPR are profound."

Where agricultural property is used for the purposes of agriculture and held for the required period it currently benefits from 100% relief. If it is subject to a pre-1995 Agricultural Holdings Act tenancy the relief is reduced to 50%. Where business property has been owned for two years it will also qualify for 100% relief. A reduced rate of 50% is available for transfers of control holdings of quoted shares as well as assets used in - but not owned by - a trading business.

For rural businesses and landed estates, APR and BPR have always gone hand-in-hand. BPR has often been used to 'top up' APR to the extent that the value of property exceeded its agricultural value, or in sheltering investment assets used in a composite business which is mainly trading.

Proposed changes

Key changes to BPR and APR from April 2026 are:

- 100% relief will be limited to the first £1m of the combined value of agricultural and business assets for every person or pre-existing trust. Any agricultural or business assets above that threshold will be subject to IHT at a discounted rate of 20% on death and a maximum rate of 3% for 10-yearly and exit charges from trusts.
- The £1m cap will be divided proportionally between agricultural and business property if the combined value of qualifying property exceeds £1m.
- Certain assets that currently receive 50% relief (eg shares in controlling listed companies) will not count toward the £1m limit. Similarly, AIM-listed shares will be subject to 50% relief starting in 2026 (reduced from the current 100%).
- The £1m allowance will not be transferable between spouses, so careful estate planning will be essential to avoid wasting any of it.
- The Government also introduced anti-forestalling measures whereby transfers made on or after October 30, 2024, where the transferor dies within seven years, will be caught by the new regime.
- The full implications for trusts are still being clarified, but it is expected that each trust will receive its own £1m relief allowance, provided the trust was established before October 30, 2024. Trusts created by the same settlor after this date will share the allowance. The government has confirmed that it will be consulting on how the new legislation will apply to trusts, with further detail expected in 2025.

Careful planning will be required to pass assets on to the next generation

We await the draft legislation which will confirm more precisely how these changes will work in practice.

National minimum wage and living wage

The Budget introduced a 6.7% increase in the national living wage, raising it to £12.21/hour for workers aged 21 and over, effective from April 2025. Workers aged 18-20 will see a 16.3% increase, bringing their hourly wage to £10. While these wage increases are beneficial for workers, they will also result in higher labour costs for employers. Farms with hourly workers will need to plan for these increased payroll expenses.

National Insurance contributions

From April 2025, employer national insurance (NI) contributions will rise to 15%, with a reduced threshold of £5,000/annum. In partial compensation, the Government has raised the employment allowance from £5,000 to £10,500. While this is designed to help small businesses manage the higher costs, the changes will still represent a substantial increase in the cost of employing staff, which could affect staffing levels and payroll management, particularly in labour-intensive sectors like farming.

Capital gains tax (CGT)

The Budget also increased rates of CGT, with the lower rate of CGT raised to 18% and the higher rate raised to 24% with immediate effect. The new rates are aligned with the residential property rates, which remain unchanged.

Changes were also announced to business asset disposal relief (BADR) which reduces the rate of CGT on qualifying gains made on disposals of businesses, subject to satisfying various conditions. The CGT rate for BADR will increase from 10% to 14% for disposals made on or after April 6, 2025, and will increase to 18% for disposals made on or after April 6, 2026.

These tax changes may require farmers with significant capital assets to reassess their tax strategies, particularly those considering the sale of assets.

Stamp duty land tax (SDLT)

The SDLT surcharge on the purchase of additional residential properties (such as second homes or buy-to-let properties) increased from 3% to 5%, starting on October 31, 2024. Similarly, companies purchasing residential property over £500,000 will see the SDLT rate increase from 15% to 17%.

Conclusion

The proposed changes to APR and BPR are profound and will require a review of strategy for many farming and business-owning families. Valuable estate planning tools remain - the ability to gift assets in the hope of surviving seven years, structuring assets efficiently to maximise reliefs, and life assurance, to name a few.

Farming families will have to carefully consider how and when to pass assets to the next generation - and to strike a balance between tax efficiency and retaining sufficient control and comfort in retirement.

Succession is often a delicate subject for families, but the timing of robust business succession planning has never been more important.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Help with planning for succession

Reflecting on the 2024 Budget, now could be an important time to seek trusted advice relating to future business plans and meeting net zero targets. British Dairying reports.

It was Benjamin Franklin who said: "In this world nothing can be certain but death and taxes." Both those come together with the Budget news of a change to agricultural property relief (APR), which means that a significant number of farmers will be unable to pass on their land to the next generation tax-free when they die.

While this has been talked about for several years, this is the first time that any action has been taken on APR since its introduction, says Brian Richardson, Head of Agriculture UK at Virgin Money. And unless concessions are made within the Treasury, it is something that farmers need to consider and plan for.

"Given the hard work and challenges many family farms face in making a sensible living from the job they have done across many generations, and the ongoing demands on farmers to invest and look at efficiency savings, this will be an unwelcome new concern."

Succession is a critically important area and many farming families will be discussing future plans

Careful planning

It will therefore be more important than ever to engage with trusted advisers about individual business implications, and how to mitigate what could be a very big tax bill in the future, says Brian.

"The industry is fortunate in having wise heads across the professional network but, as always, understanding this potential threat properly and the timescales involved will be critical. What this change does highlight is the need to plan carefully for succession on your farm. It's imperative that everyone understands what is going to happen and how it will work, including planning for any costs," he adds.

Brian Richardson, Virgin Money

"The farmland exemption from tax on death through APR undoubtedly meant some of those discussions were left until the last minute in the past, often to the frustration of the next generation waiting to take up the reins.

"Against the tough background of the Budget announcement, if nothing else, it will be worth taking a fresh look at plans for succession, and what each stakeholder wants and needs to achieve. Again, this is an opportunity to involve your advisers to help with this discussion."

The industry needs new ideas and, where possible, to take a longer-term view on individual plans and ambitions.

"Given the uncertainty about markets and future income levels it has never been easy to plan forward," notes Brian.

"Succession planning is a critically important area and helping everyone to understand what they are working towards becomes ever more important. Many farming families will undoubtedly be having this discussion and crystalising their future plans, and hopefully there will be enough time to plan financially for any tax liability that may arise as a result."

"Involve your bank manager at an early stage."

With a large lending book to the agricultural sector, Virgin Money views the industry over the long term and continues to support farming businesses with working capital and cash for investment, he says.

"When putting future plans together, it is always good to involve your bank manager at an early stage to discuss the options."

In recent years, much has been made about food security and how important it is to have a viable and sustainable farming sector.

"The Budget begs the question of where exactly that discussion is going and what it means in practice, given the hurdles and challenges the farming industry faces," notes Brian.

"That said, farmers who are focused on productivity, efficiency and sustainability will always be best placed to take on these challenges, and it is important the industry as a whole does not lose sight of the need for constant improvement and meeting the requirements of changing policy."

Sustainability agenda

The dairy industry has been at the forefront of this in recent years, using data to initiate best practice and sharing knowledge while understanding sustainability requirements that are continuing to rise up the agenda, he adds.

"I am sorry to see so many concerned and worried about the changes to the IHT regime.

"While it has raised some new challenges at a time when so much is already expected of farmers - both to feed the nation and to manage the environment in support of the UK's important net zero ambitions - I remain positive about the dairy sector and its ability to deal with whatever is thrown at it."

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A future-proof Holstein legacy

Significant investments made by an award-winning Holstein cattle breeding family will stand them in good stead for the years ahead. British Dairying reports.

The cows in the Budworth Holsteins herd can be traced back to 90 heifers imported from Canada in 1968. Originally dairy farming on the Wirral in Merseyside with his brother Mark, Ivan Shepherd moved to Hill Top Farm, Aston by Budworth, Cheshire in 1989. He registered the herd as pedigree in 1992.

"In total we bought 97ha and there were 100 cows milking through an 8/16 herringbone parlour," says Ivan. "We doubled this up to a 16/16 in 1996 and upped cow numbers to almost 200. But milking became very labour intensive and took a long time, from 4am to 9am and from 3pm until 7pm - we were getting fed up with it."

In 2019 Ivan and his son Richard travelled to the Netherlands to the Lely headquarters to discuss the possibilities of robotic milking. In particular they were keen to know if they could have four robots side-by-side at one end of a purpose-built cow house. Following the trip, they submitted a planning application in winter 2020 and the building was up by December 2021. But it took until the following summer before the concrete and cubicles were installed.

L-R: Ivan and Judy Shepherd, with Zoe and Richard Shepherd

Introducing robots

Initially, the cows spent their days in the new building but were still milked in the herringbone parlour. The groundwork for the four new Lely A5 robots started in June 2023, and the site was completed in March 2024, ready for the first cows to go through the robots in April. The total investment for the shed and robots was £1.5m, of which £135,000 was comprised of grants for the robots.

"Training the cows to go and be milked was a bit of a trial," says Richard. "There were at least three people in the shed 24/7 for a fortnight, guiding them into a robot as well as the usual farm jobs. We were only getting five hours sleep. The cows all reacted very differently – number 289, a 92-point third calver by Kingpin, went through first because she is so greedy and knew that was how to get the food. At two and a half weeks, half the cows were going through on their own at night. Once they had been through a couple of times unaided, they didn't forget."

After six months, the cows were averaging 3.7 milkings in 24 hours and annual milk yields had risen from 11,509 litres to 12,565 litres. That's despite 40% of the milking herd being heifers.

Maize is half of the forage ration

"Despite the lack of sunshine this summer, the maize still matured well."

Projections suggest the herd will be achieving between 13,500 and 14,000 litres within 12 months.

While either Ivan or Richard have to be on call all the time in case something goes wrong with the robots, they have been released from the unending drudgery of twice-a-day milking – allowing them to focus their time on other elements of the business.

Homegrown forage

One of these elements is homegrown forage, as the farm now extends to 116ha with 12ha of maize grown each year on a neighbour's farm. The 220 milking cows are housed and calve all year, while the dry cows, in-calf heifers and youngstock graze from spring until autumn.

Five cuts of grass silage are taken and mixed 50/50 with maize in a total mixed ration (TMR) with 6kg of a concentrate blend. The cows are then fed to yield when they visit the robots, with an annual feed rate of 0.31kg/litre. Milk from forage stands at 4,500 litres/year.

The grass fields are sown with Fortress from Oliver Seeds, a long-term cutting mixture containing predominantly late heading perennial ryegrass varieties and the festulolium Fojtan, which can cope with weather extremes across the farm's variable soil conditions. Debalto forage maize is grown on

The new cubicle shed, taken from above the robots, cost £1.5m

the same fields every year with high yields of 18.9t/ha dry matter (DM) and a high grain/ stover ratio which provides an energy-dense silage.

"Despite the lack of sunshine this summer, the maize still matured well and was harvested in October - it is providing high-quality feed," says Richard.

"To prevent soil erosion, we now drill Jivet, a westerwold ryegrass, immediately after harvest, which will be cut for silage in mid-April. Then the field will be ploughed, cultivated and planted with maize again."

Maximising efficiency

To maximise the robots' efficiency, the family plans to increase cow numbers to 240, with up to 210 milking at any one time by the end of 2024. This will maintain enough free time and cow comfort, with high welfare standards in the cubicles.

The milk is sold to Co-op Muller, and current annual milk production stands at 2.5m litres with a target of 3m litres by mid-2025.

Breeding is a key part of the business, and there is a big emphasis on creating good cow lines with an emphasis on type. Ivan and Richard have had 13 100LP cows (those which have a lifetime yield of 100t or more) to date and have won many regional breed competitions. The herd has a 379-day calving interval and a 20% culling rate. Surplus breeding heifers have recently been introduced into the herd, but once at capacity, half will be sold either privately or via Market Drayton or Shrewsbury markets.

Future plans

"There is some more building work to do," Richard explains. "We need to extend the slurry store and two of the silage pits. We would also like to build a purpose-built calving shed and convert the current calving shed into youngstock accommodation.

"However, we were shocked by the news of the Budget and went on the protest march in London. Knowing what we know now, I don't think we would have been through the building programme we have over the past five years.

"That said, we are now on the other side and, going forward, maybe it was the best thing we ever did to secure our cows and our family's future."

Breeding achievements

- Master Breeder herd
- Current classification: **48** EX, **68**VG (**24**VG two years), **59**GP
- Cow families include: Queen (**200** in herd today), Gloria (**50** in herd today), Confucious, Margaret, Lena, Consort, Cavalier, Marie, May, Forbes, Ruby.

Heifers, youngstock and dry cows graze from spring until autumn

A youngstock product manager

In a bid to profile the breadth of opportunities that are available in the dairy sector, British Dairying is a launching a new series: 'A day in the life of...' And to kick off, Ann Coombes shares her working day as a Youngstock Product Manager at ForFarmers.

I usually start the day on my computer by 8.00am, catching up on emails and messages. My role takes me across the country, working with the ForFarmers youngstock team delivering products and services. I know it's a cliché, but no two days are ever the same in this role; you never know what's coming around the corner.

I chose to work with youngstock because of the integral role they have in the success of all dairy herds. They are the future of the herd, but they are also often the animals farmers spend most time looking after, assessing or having to manage on a day-to-day basis. Get your youngstock rearing right and you are building the strong, healthy, efficient, easy and productive cows of tomorrow.

Ann chose to work with youngstock because of the integral role they play in the future success of dairy herds

9:45am

This morning I followed up an inquiry from a customer about whether it would pay for him to increase the quantity of milk powder fed to his calves. I explained at this stage in a dairy calf's life, long-lasting effects are made on the future productivity of the animal. Research has shown that for every 100g of average daily weight gain in the first two months of life, you can expect approximately 225kg of extra milk in the first lactation. We went through the figures to see if they stacked up.

Two litres of extra calf milk replacer (CMR) mixed at 135g/litre at the current farm recommended retail price of £2,500/t comes to 33.8ppl. An extra two litres of CMR costs an additional 67.6p/calf per day or £28.39/calf more, based on a feeding regime of eight litres/day for eight weeks pre-weaning. If feeding eight litres/day to wean at 10 weeks, it is an additional £37.86/calf.

The extra 225kg in the first lactation, based on a milk price of 39ppl, equates to £87.75, while the risk of calf illness is also reduced. A case of scours is estimated to cost at least £80 per animal, not forgetting the lost growth in the ill-health period.

We finished the phone call feeling confident about increasing the concentration of that farm's milk replacer and I look forward to catching up with him again to see how things progress over time.

10:30am

Much of my work has refocused around sustainability in the past few years, as research shows a heifer that calves down at 24 months is the most sustainable of animals. Heifers calving at 24 months will have used less inputs and produced fewer emissions by the time she starts milking than heifers that calve later. Research has shown she is more likely to have better fertility, milk yields and longevity than her older herd mates.

Sustainability is about stripping out waste. With many heifer calves never reaching their first lactation, and yet another group dropping out before their second lactation, rearing healthy, fertile animals is crucial.

And of course there is the financial impact of growing calves well. Royal Veterinary College research, funded by AHDB, shows that calving at 24 months rather than 26 months reduces average rearing costs by 16%.

On any dairy unit, good youngstock management is essential in laying the foundation for the future herd, as well as securing extra revenue if rearing beef calves.

And we know every part of that process needs a different nutritional and management approach, with different timings and growth targets.

11:30am
As a wider ruminant team, we are in regular contact with each other so we can keep abreast of what is going on, both within the business and the marketplace. This morning I am spending time with colleagues across ForFarmers talking about product changes. Our products are adapted and adjusted as research changes and the market moves, so this time is always really valuable.

"My job sees me enjoy a mix of time."

One of the newest products to the youngstock portfolio is Vitamilk NRG. This new milk replacer has a high skimmed milk powder content of 56% and consists of 100% dairy proteins. It has a high fat and crude protein content, both of which stimulate growth, and has a low lactose and sodium content with low osmolarity, reducing the risk of scours.

12:30pm
I live close to my family's dairy farm in Somerset. Lunchtime can sometimes be a good opportunity to call in and catch up with what's going on - and the kettle is usually hot.

1:00pm
I was excited to have the chance this afternoon to meet up with our new team of youngstock specialists. As well as getting some photographs for press and social media, it gave me a chance to catch up with the team and see how they're settling in. A really enthusiastic group; Kitty, Olivia and Charlotte, have joined the company with the aim of focusing on enhancing youngstock performance, weighing calves and heifers, developing bespoke feed plans and colostrum protocols.

Our youngstock technicians also offer a Target 24 service and can help with the correct management protocols, nutritional plan and a weighing regime that tracks progress and highlights any issues before they become a problem.

L-R: Charlotte Smith, Ann Coombes, Kitty Smith and Olivia Parker comprise the team of youngstock specialists

4:30pm
Before the end of the day I head back to the office to catch up on some last e-mails. I love the fact that my job sees me enjoy a mix of time on-farm and at my desk. However, after the cold weather this week, I am pleased today to get back inside.

Feeding calves well will pay back in increased first lactation yields

How a Yorkshire dairy farm has boosted yields and cut mastitis

Sharing knowledge and ideas through the AHDB Strategic Dairy Farm programme has enabled one Yorkshire family dairy farm to improve cow space and comfort, leading to higher yields and reduced cases of mastitis. British Dairying finds out more.

Making farm improvements often requires balancing positive outcomes with the associated cost and effort involved. For Willow Tree Farm, a high-yielding dairy farm in north Yorkshire, participating in the AHDB Strategic Dairy Farm (SDF) programme has been instrumental in tackling mastitis cases while maintaining milk efficiency.

"We get advice from many people."

Located near Northallerton, the Pattison family farm, co-run by father Howard and son Tom, spans 162ha and fully houses 280 Holstein Friesian cows. The herd averages 13,500 litres/cow at 4.2% butterfat and 3.4% protein – a 1,000-litre increase since the family joined the SDF programme in 2022.

Although already using high genetic index sires, they subsequently made various changes, including improving the cows' environment and tackling mastitis.

The family have changed the sand bedding and given the cows more space and light, with great results

In addition they have been working with Arla to reduce their carbon footprint and have tweaked the nutrition, dropping soyameal from the ration in favour of rapemeal.

Combined, these changes have helped the cows to reach their high genetic potential. The three-year SDF programme is driven by farmers for farmers, using open meetings to help levy payers share knowledge, as well as offering support from industry leaders.

The objective is to expose different methods and give farmers the confidence to explore new ideas and adopt change in their own businesses. Working with their local Knowledge Exchange Manager, each farm identifies particular challenges and sets goals within the context of its local environment.

Willow Tree Farm spans 162ha and houses 280 high-yielding cows

Like-minded farmers

"We have benefited by getting extra help, support and knowledge from the meetings," says Tom. "We get advice from many people, including industry experts and other like-minded farmers; ideas get thrown around."

At Willow Tree Farm, the Pattisons' primary focus has been on addressing mastitis, identified as the biggest challenge on their farm due to their highly productive herd. They also explored recent advancements in the use of slurry and fertiliser, with an emphasis on better nitrogen utilisation and reducing fertiliser usage.

"Since entering the programme, we have increased the frequency of soil sampling and are exploring the potential of variable rate spreading," notes Tom. "We're also testing the slurry to better understand its nutrient content."

Working with vet James Breen, the changes to address mastitis successfully reduced the total number of new cases by 40% year-on-year. One of the most significant changes was merging two groups of milking cows into one by opening up four sheds, which provided the cows with additional space.

"It showed us that maybe there was an issue."

Tom and his family also transformed an empty area next to the parlour into an extra collecting yard. This allowed for relocation of the footbath, enabling the cows to pass through it twice a day after leaving the parlour. Keeping the

yard open between milking times increased the available loafing space by 2.6m2 per cow. The team also changed the bedding sand to a larger-grained variety to reduce compaction on the beds. Despite regular digging, the beds were becoming hard and black underneath.

After switching to the new sand, they conducted multiple bacteriology tests, which showed results that were better than or at least as good as average.

The new sand also eliminated the need to dig out the beds entirely, as they now only add more sand when needed, saving significant time and cost.

Cell counts too low

As a result of the changes, the cows' cell count dropped dramatically, to around 80,000 cells/ml. However, at this level cows can respond more slowly to infection, and they suffered an increase in cases of toxic E. coli mastitis, resulting in the loss of a few cows.

To address this and reach a target cell count of 100,000, Tom has been working with James to reduce the use of antibiotic tubes when drying off cows - only tubing those with counts above 200,000. A mastitis vaccination programme has also been implemented, though it is still too early to determine its effectiveness.

Howard (left) and Tom have enjoyed discussing fresh ideas with others

Looking ahead, there will be a focus on the buildings to promote herd health and comfort. "Ventilation wasn't really mentioned as one of the goals when we first started the programme," says Tom. "Our first year suffered the very hot summer and we saw temperatures of 35–36°C. Ventilation was mentioned by one of the farmers on our open day, and this set the ball in motion.

"The cows were starting to bunch up more and they preferred different sheds at different times of the year. There is plenty of airspace and it is quite airy to start with, but with the cows bunching, it showed us that maybe there was an issue."

Temperature humidity sensors were installed, so they could start by assessing the temperature and humidity in different places in the sheds to help find the best solution.

"The cows were starting to bunch up more."

There are a lot of different options for increasing air flow, and the Pattisons want to be sure they are doing the right thing. Work has started by installing ventilation tubing in one of the calf houses, and they are considering a complete revamp.

The Pattisons now plan to meet James again to review their mastitis cases and actions. They are hopeful they will see good results from the milk recordings and mastitis case data.

Developing a resilient dairy enterprise

In the quest to develop a more self-sufficient farming enterprise on the Somerset-based Dillington Estate, Farm Manager Ollie Blackburn and his team have embraced a range of new ideas, technologies and improved farming practices. British Dairying reports.

A desire to create an economically and environmentally sustainable farming enterprise has been at the heart of Ollie Blackburn's management plans over recent years. And he's had strong support from the Dillington Estate's owners, the Cameron family.

"To farm in an environmentally sustainable way, we need to be economically resilient too," explains Ollie, who oversees the farm operations. These comprise 840ha of dairy, beef and arable enterprises. "To achieve this, we're working to reduce inputs - including fertiliser, feed and energy - by developing a diverse cropping rotation, growing as much homegrown feed as possible, and embracing renewable energy.

"The dairy herd is an important part of the wider Dillington Estate and has benefited from this new approach," he adds. "The cows' diet now comprises a high percentage of homegrown protein resulting in high-quality milk yields. The slurry produced is used to power a Biolectric micro anaerobic digestor (AD) unit to generate electricity, as well as driving soil performance."

"It offers an eco-friendly solution."

Knott Oak Dairy comprises a herd of 355 crossbred Holstein/Norwegian Red cows, with 312 cows in-milk, producing an average of 11,800 litres annually at 4.2% fat and 3.6% protein. All cows are milked robotically using six Lely Astronaut A4 robots, with average visits standing at 3.2 visits/cow per day. Milk is supplied to Muller on a Tesco contract and the dairy is part of the AHDB Strategic Farm network. Ollie has also been highly commended in the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) Farm of the Future award, recognising his commitment to combining food production with environmental management.

One of the biggest changes across the farm has been a broadening of the cropping rotation over recent years. "Across the farm, every field parcel benefits from the addition of 15m-wide GS4 (countryside stewardship) herbal ley headlands," explains Ollie. "With the inclusion of bi-cropping as part of our rotations - where we grow two crops alongside each other - this means that within each field parcel, there are no longer monoculture crops.

"Traditionally, these headlands were inefficient and required higher inputs to achieve okay yields. By using the herbal ley margins we've increased crop yields - by an average of 1.5t/ha for wheat - as well as boosting biodiversity and providing extra forage for youngstock, dry cows and beef."

Slurry from the dairy cows is used to power a micro anaerobic digestor, which produces electricity and digestate

As one of the strategies to boost the amount of homegrown protein and reduce reliance on purchased feed, Ollie grows around 60-70ha of short-term red clover leys. "This past year, we've also grown 20ha of bi-cropped peas and beans, which we cut for silage for the dairy cows, as well as 30ha of a pea and barley mix, which is direct drilled after first cut grass silage. The legumes help fix nitrogen, but also provide a good source of protein."

The dairy herd's diet is homegrown protein heavy, with the current milking ration comprising 3kg/head of rape blend, 1.5kg of milled homegrown wheat, 1.5kg of homegrown beans, 8kg of red clover silage, 3kg of pea and bean silage, 0.8kg of straw, 30kg of homegrown maize (freshweight), and water. This is topped up with an average of 7kg of concentrate via the robots.


Ollie Blackburn oversees the dairy, beef and arable enterprises

Focus on homegrown feed

"It's a strong mix and fuels excellent levels of milk yield," explains Ollie. "The focus isn't on milk from forage, but milk from homegrown feed." With the support of the Cameron family, Ollie hasn't been afraid to experiment with new ideas, including extensive use of AB9 winter bird food mixes under the mid-tier countryside stewardship scheme.

"We've established 110ha of these mixes on traditionally poorly performing arable ground, as well as 180ha of cover crops," continues Ollie. "These mixes will benefit soil health and organic matter. All these actions are improving soil health, locking in nitrogen and sequestering carbon."

Adapting genetics within the dairy herd has also been an important focus for improving the overall environmental footprint of the dairy. "We need to breed cows that will use our homegrown feed most

Ollie hopes to breed for greater feed conversion efficiency and milk yield

efficiently," says Ollie. "My aim is to be producing 12,000kg of milk/day from the six robots on the dairy, but with as few cows as possible. This is good for cow welfare as there are less cows in the shed, but also reduces the herd's overall carbon footprint. By focusing more on the Holstein genetics, we hope to breed greater feed conversion efficiency and milk yield potential."

The herd is currently achieving a 368-day calving interval, with a conception rate of 45.5%, and sexed semen used across all replacement heifers. Heifers are calving down at an average of 22 months, with cows served to Aberdeen Angus, to produce calves for the beef enterprise.

"The actual unit was constructed in a matter of days."

Alongside adopting new farming practices, Ollie has also embraced new renewable energy technology. "We've had solar panels on the dairy sheds for a long time, but six years ago, we came across Biolectric, which produces micro-scale AD units that run on slurry, and decided to install a unit on the dairy," he explains.

The small-scale biogas plants use slurry to capture methane and convert it into electricity and heat. "Featuring a stainless steel tank with a combined heat and power (CHP) unit, in addition to producing energy, the AD unit generates digestate and helps cut methane emissions from slurry storage," explains Gary Hague at Biolectric. "It offers an eco-friendly solution that reduces energy costs, produces fertiliser to enhance soil health, and lowers carbon emissions."

The micro AD system at Knott Oak Dairy powers two CHP units that can generate a total of 44kW of electricity per hour. "We installed a pipe from the slurry reception tank to a new holding tank that feeds the AD unit," says Ollie. "The actual unit was constructed in a matter of days and we're now feeding it an average of 32t of slurry a day. The digestate can then be used as a fertiliser on our arable and grass crops, so we're getting a double benefit from this 'waste' product."

Although getting to grips with the system did take time, Ollie is pleased with it. "We've had excellent backup and it's a great little system if you've got housed cows and a ready supply of slurry. It's saving us around £3,000-£4,000 every month on electricity costs for the dairy and fits in with our wider sustainability goals."

While pleased with the progress made so far, Ollie is keen to continue trying new things and refining the farm system in the future. "We want every part of the farm to work together seamlessly, including the dairy," he says. "Our goal is to keep pushing the dairy to be as efficient as possible while harnessing the strengths of the entire farm to support and elevate it."

The farm produces a lot of homegrown feed, as well as winter bird feed

Mixed maize prospects revealed

The results of the first 750 maize silages analysed by Trouw Nutrition GB this year demonstrate the effect of the growing season on feed quality. British Dairying reports.

Many good feeds have been made this year, but there is greater variability than usual, indicating that careful balancing will be required.

According to Nacia Bonnick, Ruminant Technical Advisor at Trouw Nutrition, many crops were drilled later as a consequence of the wet spring. This, combined with the cooler summer, increased the risk of immature crops being harvested, or of delayed harvest.

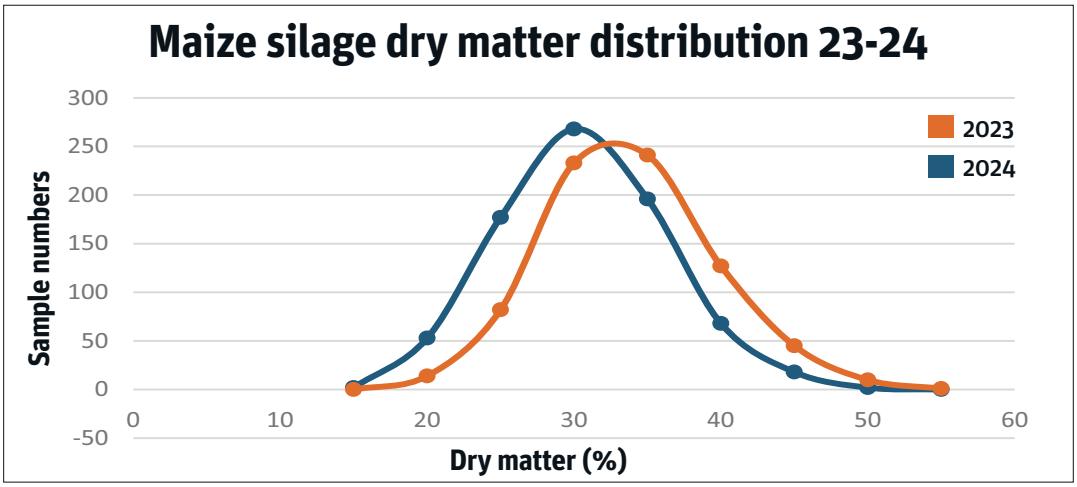
"The growing season has clearly impacted many crops, and while the average analysis is similar to recent years, we are seeing a greater proportion of poorer analysis, indicating some feeding challenges," she says.

"Get clamps analysed at least monthly."

The average dry matter is down 3% compared to 2023, at 30.7% (see graph). Typically, maize silages average 33-34% and this year's reduced level indicates younger, less mature crops have been harvested. The lower dry matter will clearly have an impact on inclusion rates in diets and management of forage stocks over winter, notes Nacia.

Average metabolisable energy (ME) and crude protein contents are virtually unchanged. However, while average starch levels are marginally improved at 28.4%, the range of data shows that there aren't as many high starch crops compared to last year, which is another indication of immature crops.

"Starch degradability is slightly higher, which, combined with higher fermentable carbohydrates, results in a higher acid load than in 2023," explains Nacia. "Since starch degradability increases with time in the clamp, crops will need regular monitoring to allow steps to be taken to mitigate any acidosis risk."



The average maize silage dry matter is down 3% compared to 2023, at 30.7% due to younger, less mature crops

Available energy

The trend in rising neutral detergent fibre (NDF) contents seen over the past three years has continued, with NDF in the dry matter increasing by 2.1%. However, lignin levels have reduced, reflected in slightly higher energy content, with DyNE, the energy actually available to the cow for milk production, rising.

By accounting for the higher propionate yield from the increased fermentable carbohydrates in this year's maize, producers will be able to utilise more of the energy coming from maize silage.

"When including maize in diets this winter, the key will be to avoid overloading the rumen with starch to minimise the acidosis risk," says Nacia. "The increased energy availability may allow cost savings, especially as starch degradability increases. Regularly reviewing rations will allow this opportunity to be realised.

"Most importantly, make sure to get clamps analysed at least monthly so you know the actual quality of maize being fed - and watch for signs of mould in the clamp as many crops will be at increased risk of mycotoxins this winter," she adds.

"Feeding a mycotoxin binder like Selko Toxo as standard practice in diets containing maize silage will help minimise the risk."

Maize silage analysis 2022-2024 (Source TNGB)

	2022	2023	2024
	Average	Average	Average
Dry matter (%)	33.9	33.6	30.7
Crude protein (% DM)	7.9	7.9	7.9
D Value (%)	72.4	69.9	70.9
ME (MJ/kg DM)	11.4	11.0	11.1
Starch (% DM)	35.0	27.8	28.4
Starch degradability (%)	77.5	79.7	80.8
Bypass starch (g/kg DM)	77.6	55.4	53.5
NDF (% DM)	38.8	40.0	42.1
Lignin (g/kg DM)	23.2	40.1	34.2
pH	3.8	4.0	3.9
Rapidly fermentable carbohydrates (g/kg DM)	212.7	205.6	209.7
Total fermentable carbohydrate (g/kg DM)	510.6	498.3	504.7
DyNE (MH/kg DM)	6.9	6.5	6.7

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TRIAL DATA

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Transition milk-fed heifers put more milk in the tank

Amanda Dunn
Technical Manager

Heifers fed a transition milk replacer in their first 10 days of life produced a remarkable 947 litres more milk in their first lactation compared to a similar group fed a skim-based milk replacer, new research has shown.

A recent trial at Harper Adams University investigated the long-term effects on Holstein Friesian heifer calves from feeding a transition milk replacer.

It involved 36 animals, evenly split into two groups according to their birthweight and dam parity.

All received four litres of pasteurised good quality colostrum at birth.

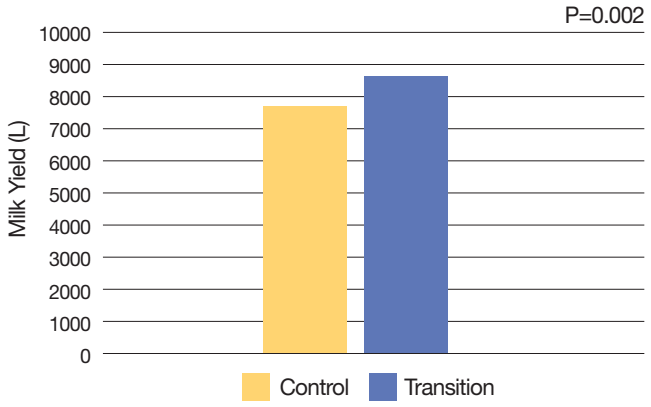
In their first 10 days, one group was fed Transformula, a transition milk replacer manufactured by Bonanza Calf Nutrition, and the other a skim-based calf milk replacer (CMR), as the feed plan in Table 1 shows.

Table 1: *Harper Adams University trial carried out by Dr Emma Bleach and Carrie Gauld*

Days	Control	Transition
0	4L colostrum	4L colostrum
1-10	5.2L CMR @ 15% solids **Shine Twice a day**	5.2L transition milk replacer @ 15% solids **Transformula**
11 - 42	7.6L/day Shine CMR	7.6L/day Shine CMR
42 - 49	Reduced to 5.2L/day Shine CMR	Reduced to 5.2L/day Shine CMR
49 – 56	Reduced to 2.6L Shine CMR once a day until weaning on day 56	Reduced to 2.6L Shine CMR once a day until weaning on day 56
All calves were also offered ad libitum calf starter pellet with chopped straw and water from birth.		

On average, heifers in the transition milk group produced 8,625 litres a head in that lactation (See Figure 1), or 617kg of milk solids (See Figure 2), compared to the standard CMR group who produced 7,678 litres a head at 532kg milk solids.

Figure 1: *Effect of feeding transition milk to calves on their first lactation milk yield*



That equates to an additional 947 litres of milk and 85kg of butterfat and protein.

Dr Amanda Dunn, of Bonanza Calf Nutrition, calculates that at current prices, there was a 100:1 payback from feeding Transformula.

The trial showed no significant differences in growth rates or health scores in the two groups of calves during the pre-weaning period and at weaning. However, in a recent French trial, when Transformula was fed for the first 3 weeks, calves were 5kgs heavier (see figure 3) and healthier than calves fed a high skim calf milk replacer, she added.

Transition milk-fed calves grew at 0.63kg/day and the control group at 0.61kg/day.

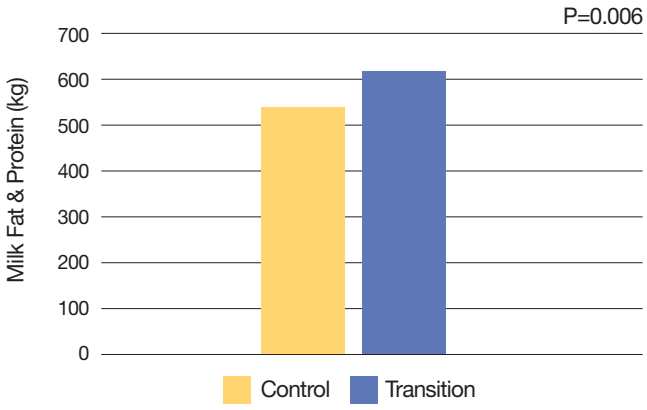
"These findings indicate that although feeding transition milk for the first ten days of life did not impact the calves growth during the milk feeding period it did have a positive effect on their long term development in terms of milking performance as an adult cow," says Dr Dunn. This is why growth should always be a measure of development but growth cannot replace it, she explained.

Celebrating 10 Years of Transition Milk

The study followed all the animals through to their first lactation – and the results were astounding.

Heifers in both groups had a similar calving age, which was 26 months. That is much earlier than the UK average, which a 2018 study (Eastham et al., 2018) showed was 29.1 months. Forty per cent of heifers in that study were in fact 30 months or older at time of first calving.

Figure 2: *Effect of feeding transition milk to calves on their first lactation milk fat and protein yield*



Dr Dunn says a lower age at first calving has been associated with better reproductive performance, increased survivability and reduced somatic cell counts.

"First lactation milk production tends to be much lower among younger heifers but lifetime daily milk yield significantly greater," she says.

"Every dairy farmer should be aiming for a heifer's milk yield to be approximately 80% of their second lactation yield which would leave the transition milk-fed heifers in this study producing well over 10,000 litres of milk in their second lactation."

The bioactive components found in transition milk play a huge role in the development of the baby calf and are exactly what nature intended to set up the foundation for health and development for future performance in the milking herd.

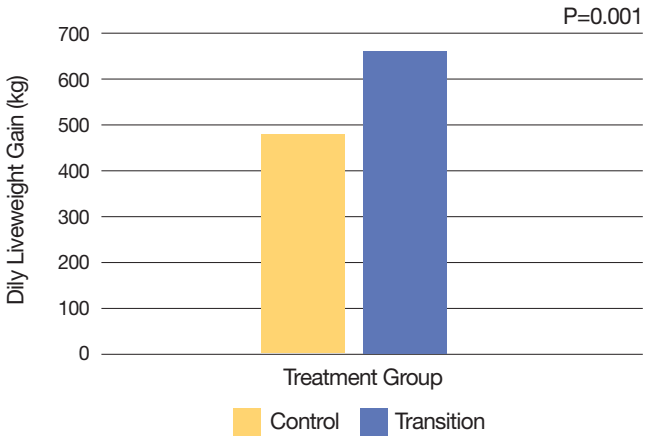
But not all farms can feed their own transition milk because of the risk of transmitting Johne's or mycoplasma, or issues with storage; in situations where there is inadequate storage, large volumes of transition milk are often stored in buckets from one feed to the next but bacteria flourishes in that environment. As a result, calves are then fed a bacterial soup.

Pasteurisation is an option, but it is unknown as to whether it can undo poor hygiene practice and may also have a negative effect on the beneficial bioactive ingredients found within fresh transition milk.

Some herds don't produce enough either - often there are insufficient cows calved at a given time to supply the quantity of transition milk required to feed to calves for this length of time.

Dr Dunn says Transformula offers the perfect consistent alternative to a cow's own transition milk.

Figure 3: French Transformula Trial 2023



ADLWG for 1st 4 weeks, Control calves were fed a high skim calf milk (23% CP, 19% fat) after colostrum. Both groups achieved 800g/day growth from 4 weeks to weaning.

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HIGH FEED EFFICIENCY SUPPORTS FOOD AND FEED SECURITY... AND FARM PROFITABILITY

As sponsors of the High Feed Efficiency Award at the 2024 Cream Awards, KW's Georgie Croxford outlines why feed efficiency, and the use of co-products, are key to reducing the carbon footprint of milk, supporting food and feed security, while being crucial to farm profitability.

Growing pressures from various influences have meant that food and feed security has never been more important, particularly here in the UK, as we strive to feed a growing population.

From climate change, including sea reclamation and long-term temperature shifts, to the requirement for more land to grow crops for energy, we are facing the prospect of less and less land to grow crops for feed.

When combined with global political instability, and the numerous policies UK farmers have to adhere to, from government, processors and retailers, there is a need to focus on increasing outputs, while using less inputs, if we are to achieve food and feed security. Maximising feed efficiency is therefore becoming ever more critical for UK dairy farmers, given the constraints on available agricultural land, and pressures on farm profitability.

PERFORMANCE, PROFITABILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

"Feed efficiency is key not only to productivity and margins, but also to meeting commitments to reduce farm carbon footprints, particularly with the growing number of contracts aligned to GHG strategies," explains Ms Croxford, KW's head of ruminant technical & quality.

Some sustainability requirements from processors or retailers can be difficult or costly to implement. However, feed efficiency has the benefit of improving performance, profitability and sustainability. "Feed makes up around 45-60% of the cost of production and taking into account a number of industry reports across the UK, between 24-37% of emissions on farm are from feed," she explains. "It is therefore essential that we should aim to improve the feed efficiency of the animals, to help improve the profitability of the farm, as well as lower the carbon footprint."

Make the most of homegrown forages

As is evident with this year's High Feed Efficiency Award winner Charlie Hughes at Southview Farms, his focus on increasing milk from forage, maximising forage quality and its use, is vital to responsible and

sustainable feed production. "Enhancing forage digestibility and fibre utilisation is key to optimising animal health and productivity, with the aim to improve the quality of the forage to ensure it drives animal performance and delivers optimal value," says Ms Croxford.

"Taking the opportunity to make the most out of homegrown forages and improving feed efficiencies should be a key priority, and this in turn opens opportunities to look at best options to balance diets, to meet both performance and responsibility targets," she adds.

CO-PRODUCTS

The use of co-products in ruminant rations, such as those generated from the production of beer, whisky, ethanol, starch and sugar, can be used to provide a large proportion of nutrients required to balance homegrown feeds, whilst driving down the footprint of the ration significantly.

The key is to marry-up those environmental benefits, while ensuring homegrown feeds and co-products support animal performance, and meet milk contract targets.

The rapeseed expeller NovaPro, made from UK rapeseed, is a good example, bringing performance benefits, including improving intakes and yields, while removing soya from dairy rations. Its carbon footprint is only around 1/7th of the carbon footprint of soya*.

MANAGE CRUDE PROTEIN

Producers often overfeed crude protein, which is environmentally and financially inefficient. Balancing rations by managing crude protein levels, can therefore benefit farm profitability while helping reduce carbon footprints. "Depending on the ration, NovaPro can be used to lower the crude protein of ruminant rations whilst still meeting metabolisable protein requirements for high yielding cows, leading to improved emissions per litre of milk, and lower MUN levels due to improved protein efficiency, as demonstrated in trials at the University of Nottingham," Ms Croxford explains.

CARBON VALUES OF FEED

Many feeds fed to ruminants are co-products from the processing of primary crops such as, brewers' grains, DDGS, reprocessed food products like bread, 'biscuit' meals, rape and soya products, sugar beet pulp and the moist feed C*Traffordgold, making effective use of the co-products left behind after wheat is processed for the food, pharma, drink, aquaculture, and pet food industries.

"In order to reduce their carbon footprint, producers need to know the carbon value of the feeds they are purchasing," says Ms Croxford.

"As a business we are in a position to provide these figures, enabling producers to use the feed figures in their lifecycle assessment to calculate the entire carbon footprint of their operation.

"Once benchmarked, we can then work with producers and their nutritionists to look at opportunities to reduce the footprint, as well as improving feed efficiency and the use of co-products can play a key role in achieving those goals as we head into 2025 and beyond.

"With a favourable milk to feed price ratio, producers really have an opportunity to 'milk' their contracts, whether focused on liquid milk or constituents," she concludes.

Details of all the winners at www.creamawards.UK. Thinking of entering, then look out for the 2025 Cream Awards campaign launching March 1st 2025.

** GFLI figure for soya coming into the UK including Land Use Change, NovaPro figure as per independent LCA*

Analyse forage after challenging season

Challenging weather conditions have impacted the quality of grass silage being fed this winter, so it's more important than ever to get it analysed. British Dairying reports.

Wet weather and delayed cuts have resulted in a huge variation in the quality of silages available for winter rations. This means that dairy farmers across the country face the prospect of having to balance poorer quality grass silage in rations this winter.

Regular forage analysis is therefore more important than ever to understand the true feed value of home-grown crops and how best to supplement them to maintain cow health and performance.

Regular analysis is key to inform concentrate choices, says Mark Holliday

Overall health

"Forage is the bread and butter of the cow's diet, and concentrates are the cake on top," explains Mark Holliday, Nutritionist at Carr's Billington. "The quality of forage makes a massive difference to how the cows perform – not just in terms of milk production, but their overall health too."

Initial forage analysis results for 2024 have shown a huge variation in first-cut crops. "First cuts taken in early May are great quality; however, those made towards the end of May and early June - following a deluge of rain - are full of woody fibre, making them harder to digest," says Mark. "This is an example of how weather and timing can create two radically different diets."

Failure to understand the true value of silage crops can be costly if the wrong supplementary feeds are added to the ration, he notes. "The difference between having the wrong kind of concentrates and having the right ones could be an extra two litres a day of milk production."

For a 200-cow herd, this is additional daily production worth an average of £172.24 - based on Defra statistics which put the average UK milk price at 43.06ppl in September 2024. "Many dairy farmers will have two, three - or even five - cuts of grass silage, as well as maize and wholecrop, and they'll feed these each at different times of the year in different combinations," says Mark.

"This means once you've got a diet set for the winter, it could be very different a month later because a new crop has become available, or the quality has changed. Regular analysis is essential because until we know what we're dealing with in terms of forage quality, we can't make a proper recommendation for supplementation."

Initial forage analysis results for 2024 have shown huge variation

Rule of thumb

As a rule of thumb, producers should have forages tested every four weeks, or more frequently if there is a marked change in herd health or performance which could be linked to nutrition.

Some of the key parameters traditionally measured during grass silage analysis are dry matter, protein and energy. "There's a huge variation in everything this year, but from a nutritional point of view it's the energy and protein that are key as they determine what you're going to feed to balance the ration," says Mark.

"We also need to look at the fibre content of the silage too; this matters because to keep a cow healthy, we need a minimum amount of fibre going into the diet because the rumen bugs just can't function without fibre."

More recently, a new set of more advanced forage values has been created to give farmers and nutritionists a better understanding of how a particular forage will perform inside the cow's rumen. In a similar way to how estimated breeding values can predict how certain genetics are likely to perform in an animal, the NutriOpt values from Carr's Billington predict how a certain feedstuff will perform in the rumen.

"NutriOpt looks at what's going on inside the rumen, which enables you to assess how the diet is going to perform and how the rumen is going to react to the diet much more precisely than we've been able to before," Mark explains.

"As an example, dynamic energy is a prediction of how much of the energy in the silage is actually available to the cow for milk production."

"Choose the right concentrate to balance changes."

Other NutriOpt values include acid load, which helps when considering the risk of acidosis posed by some silages. "These parameters are key to understanding more accurately how a silage is going to behave as the cows digest it and what you need to feed to balance it," says Mark.

Once silage is analysed and feed value figures are available, a nutritional plan can be devised based on what the farmer requires from their cows - whether that's a desired milk yield or a specific butter fat content, for example.

"If a farmer is spending money on concentrates, it's key that they take a big picture view and make sure they're getting the most out of what they're spending," adds Mark. "Regular analysis is key to this so we can then choose the right concentrate to balance changes in the diet from different home-grown forages."

DUP boosts both yields and weight

Young heifers fed with a high level of digestible undegradable protein (DUP) show higher milk yields and increased liveweight gain. British Dairying reports.

The heifers offered a higher DUP diet produced 3.5kg more milk per day

A three-year study at the University of Nottingham, looking at heifer diets, has produced significant results for the dairy industry.

The trial involved 76 Holstein heifers, which were fed two diets from 12 months old, for 84 days. Both diets were based on a 50:50 mix of grass and maize silage, with 2.5kg/head of concentrate per day. The control diet featured pellets of a lower DUP concentration, with the other having a higher DUP concentration comprising prairie meal, protected soy, wheat and sugar beet.

"The heifers offered the higher DUP diet for three months produced 3.5kg more fat-and-protein corrected milk per day, during their first lactation," says Lizzie Thacker, nutritionist at Mole Valley Feed Solutions, which partnered the study.

This equates to an increase of 1,450kg over a 305-day lactation.

Dr Jean Margerison

This extra milk more than makes up for the additional cost of the diet, equating to an increase in margin over total purchased feed of over £500/head across the first lactation compared to a standard rearing regime.

"There's huge potential for farmers to improve their efficiency and sustainability by thinking about how heifers are fed," says Lizzie. "Heifers could calve earlier and pay their rearing costs back more quickly." This is a vital opportunity, considering many heifers are not reaching their target calving age.

Development and function

So why the yield uplift? Dr Jean Margerison, Associate Professor of Ruminant Nutrition at the University of Nottingham, says: "The uplift in yield is likely down to improved mammary gland development and function, most likely through better cell signalling."

And there are carbon footprint benefits, too. The university calculated that dairy heifers contribute 48.5kg CO2e per percentage point of replacement rate. Heifers fed a higher DUP diet demonstrated a greater probability of reaching their second lactation compared to the lower DUP group, says Jean. "This translates to lower replacement rates, which was equivalent to 412kg less carbon footprint, compared with heifers offered lower DUP diets."

Building Stronger Herds with Every Generation

by
Marco Winters,
AHDB Head of Animal Genetics

AHDB genetic evaluations form the backbone of dairy farmers' breeding strategies, serving as a trusted tool for producers across the UK. While these evaluations may appear routine, the intricate process behind their creation ensures their accuracy, reliability, and relevance. This ongoing work involves ever-growing computing power – linked to international systems – and a network of people and processes.

These culminate in the proof runs – like the December run reported in this magazine – and weekly genomic updates. These evaluations begin roughly two months before a scheduled proof run, where a team at AHDB collaborates closely with our partners at EGENES-SRUC.

The process starts with data collection from milk recording organisations and merged into a unique national dataset which we check and validate before evaluations start. This dataset, which covers a combined pedigree of over 15 million animals, undergoes rigorous checking and validation to ensure its accuracy before the evaluation begins.

From there, the UK evaluations are then submitted to INTERBULL, the organisation responsible for international validation. Here, they are integrated with results from other countries in order to produce a comprehensive global picture of genetic performance of dairy bulls. Once INTERBULL completes this stage, the data returns to the UK team for the next phase of work.

AHDB finalises updated genomic evaluations for all genotyped animals. Progeny proofs for older animals are also refreshed, ensuring that data from every generation remains relevant and actionable. At this stage, the system's computational power truly shines, working tirelessly—even overnight and on weekends—to process the most accurate and timely data. This supports farmers in making informed breeding decisions and enables AI companies to update their bull catalogues.

The genomic indexes purchased by farmers through commercial companies are also calculated by AHDB. This ensures consistency, independence, and the provision of unbiased genetic data that farmers can trust.

We are proud of the contribution AHDB is making to help UK farmers breed the cows of today—animals with better genetics for production, health, fertility, longevity, and a lower carbon footprint.

Visit **ahdb.org**.uk for the latest bull proofs.

AHDB is wishing all our levy payers a merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. Look out for our **Let's Eat Balanced** campaign in January!

AHDB

Milder winters need new silage strategies

As milder winters extend growing seasons, farmers are rethinking traditional silage strategies to maintain high-quality feed. Danusia Osiowy looks at how farmers can adapt to maximise their silage's nutritional value.

The earlier the cut, the higher the potential quality but, as with most things, planning is crucial

Silage management on farms used to revolve around a single, high-quality cut in spring to capture nutrient-dense forage with any later cuts destined for non-milkers. Historically, cool, wet winters helped keep grass growth in check, making spring the ideal season for the first cut. But, with winters becoming milder and wetter, the strategy is shifting.

With grass maturing earlier, more farmers are having to adapt silage management practices to ensure feed quality and maximise yield in what is now an increasingly unpredictable climate.

> **"Be consistent in ensuring good consolidation across the clamp."**

This year, due to poor spring weather, many silages in the UK were cut later than usual, which caused quality problems. In an analysis of over 500 samples, Massey Feeds found that late-cut silage averaged a metabolisable energy of 10.5MJ/kg dry matter (DM) for first cuts and 10.7MJ/kg for second cuts. Protein levels also decreased to around 12.5%, down from 13% last year.

"Due to weather delays, many silages were cut when plants were more mature and nutrient-dense profiles were not optimal," says David Wilde, National Ruminant Manager at Massey Feeds. He highlights the importance of balancing rations carefully to address these low energy levels.

To maximise feed efficiency, he advises regular analysis through a Forage Analytical Assurance (FAA) accredited lab. "Farmers should also watch for alcohol levels in silage, a result of poor clamp consolidation and fermentative bacteria, which can negatively impact rumen health," he says. "We recommend careful management when opening the clamp to prevent aerobic deterioration, and ideally working the silage face across within three days."

To keep pace with changing weather, more farmers are turning to multi-cut systems, aiming for four or even five cuts per year. This approach aims to maximise the quality and nutritional profile of silage, with the first cut often taking place in mid to late April, allowing for higher-quality forage, as Richard Simpson, Development Director at Kingshay, explains.

"We are dealing with more variable and seasonal weather conditions and farmers need to have more robustness in their systems," he says. "A lot of farmers have made good progress with a multi-cut system, where the first cut is done earlier. The earlier you cut, the higher the potential quality but, as with most things, planning is more crucial than ever."

From the practicalities of repairing equipment and buildings to co-ordinating with contractors and planning slurry and fertiliser applications, there are steps to be better prepared. "You might traditionally take first cut on May 10 for example,

but if it's a kind spring you may realise it's ready 10 days sooner; however, if you aren't prepared you are going to miss the opportunity," says Richard. "It's about achieving a balance because farmers want to maximise the growing time available."

The multi-cut approach isn't without its challenges, and there can be issues with clamping and slippage. "The silage can all be clamped fine but then as it's fed through the winter a section can suddenly slip forward, leaving a three-plus metre depth of silage open to air infiltration and spoilage."

Chop length

Managing this can involve adjusting chop length and ensuring proper consolidation within the clamp, says Richard. "It seems to be a problem for those doing multi cuts. Generally, if you can ensure the chopped length is appropriate to your silage dry matter, layer the silage and be consistent in ensuring good consolidation across the clamp to avoid different densities, this will help reduce it."

With grass varieties maturing around their set heading dates, strategic planning in the previous season plays a role in quality silage production, notes Richard. "The management you have available for the first cut of grass starts back in the autumn."

Warmer winters allow grass to continue growing, so carryover can be more abundant by spring, potentially impacting the quality of the first cut. "If that autumn carryover is excessive, it might need managing through grazing or cutting later in the season, or grazing with youngstock or sheep over winter," he adds.

While early grazing allows for a cleaner first cut, free from over-mature grass that would otherwise reduce quality, he warns farmers to look out for the yellowing of sward bases, which can compromise silage quality.

Grazed grass

Where ground conditions allow, grazing-focused herds have the option to graze swards in early spring, before locking the field up for silage. "Although the last two springs have been wet, if we get a dry season there will be the opportunity to get out and graze and, within the right system, we would always recommend grazing ahead of silage.

"Grazed grass is by far the cheapest forage, with one litre of milk costing just under 4p to produce. As soon as you ensile it, the cost nearly doubles."

Beyond traditional grass, some farmers are revisiting the balance of other crop options like maize and wholecrop cereals, which can bring added starch to the silage mix. However, shifting entirely from grass to maize hasn't become the norm, despite seasonal changes.

Maize comes with its own set of challenges, and for many, grass remains the most cost-effective choice. "There are pros and cons with anything," explains Richard. "If maize is harvested early enough in autumn, farmers can follow it with a fast-growing Italian ryegrass, allowing for an early spring cut. This double-cropping approach maximises land use and keeps soil covered with living roots through winter, reducing bare stubble and supporting environmental goals."

For those using maize silage, the risk of mycotoxin contamination increases with warmer, wetter weather. "If cows aren't performing as expected, or if you notice reduced intakes, consider testing for mycotoxins - even without visible mould," he suggests. This proactive testing can ensure healthier silage and better herd performance, keeping farmers ahead of potential issues.

"Ensure any supplement or additive has a clear purpose."

As for fine-tuning silage quality with supplements, Richard advises a targeted approach. "Always ensure any supplement or additive has a clear purpose," he says. "Monthly forage analysis will show you how quality changes over time, and a seasonal mineral analysis helps identify any nutrient gaps."

With shifting weather patterns, proactive management is essential for maintaining high-quality silage. Frequent quality checks, an adaptable multi-cut system, and thorough autumn planning all contribute to a feed strategy that provides the necessary nutrition required for forage without incurring unnecessary costs.

But Richard is quick to remind producers that much is dependent on the milk production system in question. "There is nothing wrong with a traditional first cut, and while you may tend not to achieve the very high-quality silages that you would achieve with an early first cut, it is also about balance and understanding what is right for your system.

If cows aren't performing as expected, or have reduced intakes, consider testing for mycotoxins

Survey seeks path to overcome the blocks to genomic testing

Independent data and clear explanation of results will accelerate the uptake of female genomic testing, according to a recent new survey commissioned by British Dairying.

Since its introduction in 2012, dairy female genomics testing has had a significant impact on the genetic merit of herds engaging with the technology. Improving the precision of breeding decision-making has widened the gap between those that test and those that do not, with AHDB suggesting the difference is around £190 in profitable lifetime index (PLI).

"AHDB reports that 20% of dairy calves born in milk-recorded herds are now genomically tested," says British Dairying publisher Alan Whibley. "However, it also suggests many herds breeding their own replacements could be missing out on using a proven technology which can deliver a significant return.

Genomic testing needs to be affordable, with clear data insights and independent choice of semen use

Key areas for the industry

"For this reason British Dairying commissioned a survey to try and identify the factors that are contributing to the low level of uptake. It has highlighted some key areas for the industry to consider in order to grow the uptake of female genomic testing."

The survey showed that 34% of the respondents have engaged with genomic testing at some stage. Over the next two years they expect this to increase to 43%, suggesting that more producers are gaining confidence and beginning to understand the benefits.

34% of farmers have used genomics

There was a range in the frequency of how often farmers are testing, with 50% of those herds that are testing only doing so annually or less frequently. As animals only need to be tested once in their lifetime and can be tested at birth, this indicates a delay in getting the information upon which to base decisions.

Furthermore, 9% of respondents had only tested once. This could be because they had just started using the technology, or had lost interest in the data, perhaps not realising the need to test all calves to build a full herd picture.

Those farmers not currently genomically testing calves gave a number of reasons, one of the most commonly quoted of which was cost, which was a concern to 35% of respondents.

Difficult to interpret

A significant proportion said they were put off using genomics as they did not know enough about the technology and its benefits, while others suggested the data produced was too difficult to interpret. Clearly a genomic evaluation produces a detailed picture of an animal and how it compares with its herd mates, and it is beholden of test providers to ensure the results are easy to use.

This education point also applies to the 25% of respondents who still rely on traditional breeding methods as opposed to the greater precision of genomics. A better understanding of the benefits of genomics may encourage some of these producers to look more closely at testing females.

Looking forward, the survey explored what is needed for farmers to engage more broadly with genomics. "It was interesting so see what farmers would be looking for from testing suppliers," Alan notes.

> **"There needs to be better education and support."**

The survey highlighted that farmers want a good-quality service embracing rapid turnaround of results and value for money. They also want data reported in a clear and easily understood format, reflecting the earlier comments about lack of knowledge. If a technology is providing data to improve decision-making it is fundamental that the data is easy to understand and interpret, supported by clear explanation and back-up as required.

Understandably, given that the data will be used to make fundamental breeding decisions affecting the future of the dairy herd, producers are looking to work with businesses they trust.

A strong message from the survey was that farmers want the data provided independently with no restrictions on sires that can be used. This will allow the female genomic data to be used to make the best breeding decisions from the full pool of available sires. Currently around a third of survey respondents buy genomics testing bundled in with some form of semen supply arrangement, typically restricting the sires that can be used.

"The survey highlighted a willingness among respondents to engage more fully with genomic testing, but there were also some clear messages for the industry," says Alan. "The first is that there needs to be better education and support for producers so that they can understand how to maximise the benefits of genomic testing.

"Then it is vital that the data is provided with clear interpretation so that farmers can make the best decisions, whether this is in the form of league tables, tailored indices or other methods which improve understanding of the results. Finally, it will be important to make data provision independent of semen supply so as not to restrict choice."

BTV-3: How does it impact UK farmers?

Farmers have experienced recent serious financial and emotional impacts from Bluetongue, but over half remain undecided about vaccination. That's according to a survey by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). British Dairying reports.

The risk of Bluetongue (BTV-3) is increasing year-on-year as infected midges blow across from the Continent. As of November 2024, 139 cases of BTV-3 have been confirmed in the UK, and more are anticipated in 2025. Vaccination is expected to play a key role in reducing the virus' impact, but farmers are unsure about its use, according to an anonymous survey carried out by Ruminant Health & Welfare, Flock Health, the AHDB and University of Nottingham.

As of November 2024, 139 cases of BTV-3 have been confirmed in the UK

Financial impact

Multiple farmers highlighted the significant financial impact experienced when in the restriction zone. "I had store cattle which should have been sold, but with no market access," said one farmer. Another added: "We have experienced considerable financial loss, which was horrible; physically, mentally and emotionally."

Over half of respondents remain undecided about vaccination, due to questions regarding efficacy, impact on trade, price and duration of immunity.

"German research shows a marked difference in outcomes between vaccinated and unvaccinated herds and flocks," notes Fiona Lovatt at Flock Health. "Findings indicate that unvaccinated sheep flocks have experienced mortality rates as high as 30%, whereas vaccinated flocks show significantly lower mortality, with some reporting only 1-2% losses." Clinical signs of BTV-3 include lameness, swollen faces, nose and mouth ulcers, nasal discharge, and mortality, says Dr Vanessa Swinson, who led the APHA research. It also has an impact on fertility - which can be protected by vaccination.

APHA plans to use the survey and subsequent feedback to build a UK case of evidence that farmers can trust. It is now running a study with APHA vets discussing, in detail, the long-term impact of BTV-3 on premises where it has been confirmed.

"APHA's research is starting to provide essential insights that will help us develop practical support, but we need to hear from more affected farmers," says Fiona. Farmers who suspect the disease should contact their vet and report it to the APHA on 03000 200 301.

Research into practice: Lameness

Lameness is a complex, multi-factorial issue – but by understanding the latest research and advice, producers can get on top of it. British Dairying reports on seven key messages to take away from the Lameness in Ruminants conference in Venice, Italy.

There may not be many cows in Venice, but that didn't stop it from hosting the 22nd International Symposium on Lameness. Bringing together researchers, vets and industry experts from all over the world, the event shared cutting-edge insights for improving mobility and reducing lameness on farm.

Eoghan Mullery, Technical Director and Greg Leishman, Ruminant Nutritionist at Advanced Ruminant Nutrition attended the conference as part of their commitment to translating the latest research on lameness prevention into practical solutions on farm.

"Lameness affects nutrition, cow performance and profitability, so a whole farm, whole team approach is needed," says Eoghan. "There is a huge amount of evidence to show that we can significantly reduce lameness, yet it remains a bottleneck on many farms."

"The sheer volume of information can be overwhelming."

Even where farms are making progress, it can be a slow process, notes Greg. "We encourage our clients to invest in facilities to improve cow comfort and walking surfaces, and educate staff on cow handling. However, we need to keep pushing for more and understand why it isn't always progressing on farm."

A collaborative approach to tackling lameness can certainly help, explains Eoghan. "Working together with the farmer, herd manager, vet, foot trimmer and nutritionist, enables everyone to create a plan and work towards the same goals."

Farm Dynamics' Sara Pedersen, whose extensive research on lameness has been pivotal in translating scientific findings into practical solutions for UK dairy farms, agrees. "The sheer volume of information can sometimes be overwhelming, and contrasting views confusing, when it comes to farmers knowing where to start tackling lameness on their own farm," she says.

The conference brought together experts from all over the world

"This is why it's so important that the whole team is on board and there is consistency in messaging. Conferences like Lameness in Ruminants are fantastic at bringing forward fresh ideas and perspectives. However, a collaborative approach is then needed to firstly consider whether these will be beneficial for the individual farm and, if so, how to practically implement them."

So what were the key messages to take away?

1. NSAIDs in treatment

"If we go back 10-15 years, there was a real emphasis on antibiotics for treatment, but this has now really shifted," notes Sara. "The conference provided further evidence of the benefit of using non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) not just for improved recovery, but also in reducing the knock-on effects on fertility."


Eoghan Mullery at ARN

2. Easy wins through genetics

These are primarily through incorporating lameness indices into genetic selection, she explains. "In the UK we are lucky to have Lameness Advantage and Digital Dermatitis Advantage, with work presented in Venice demonstrating just how impactful incorporating these indices into bull selection can be in helping prevent lesion development."

3. Focus on heifers

Once heifers enter the herd lame, the battle is lost, says Sara, who presented her own research on the benefits of pre-calving trims. "Greater emphasis needs to be put on our growing heifers to ensure they enter the herd as resilient as possible to hoof health challenges."

4. Mobility scoring

Mobility scoring enables early detection and prompt effective treatment. "By mobility scoring, we work together with the farm team to pick out cows that would benefit from treatment before they are obviously lame," says Greg.

5. Pressure and the pedal bone

Reducing pressure on the pedal bone is vital for maintaining long-term hoof health. The fat pad, which cushions the pedal bone, plays an essential role in this. When ketosis or other metabolic conditions compromise the fat pad, hoof pressure can lead to significant problems. The 'big model' trim technique is designed to alleviate pressure on the sole and is particularly useful for cows housed on concrete. However, it's not a one-size-fits-all solution.

6. Bandage or not to bandage?

Interestingly the research showed evidence of the potential negative impact that bandages can have on recovery from lesions. Farmers and vets need to consider how long to leave them on or indeed if they should be bandaged at all.

7. The role of nutrition

Zinpro presented some interesting research that examined the effect of the Omega-6 to Omega-3 ratio in transition cow diets on fat pad health, says Eoghan. "Additionally, isoacids were highlighted as a promising nutritional tool and one that we've been using on a number of our client's farms with good effect.

"These compounds have been shown to improve digestibility, increase blood glucose, and enhance fibre digestion, which is particularly important during periods of heat stress or for transition cows. If we can reduce the effect that heat stress has on cows through nutrition, then we increase the ability for the cow to maintain performance, body condition and rumen health, leading to less pressure on the cow. In turn this increases her lying time, reducing the pressure on the feet."

Mineral supplementation and calcium management around calving plays an important role in reducing hoof inflammation, he adds. "We should always be aiming for 0% lameness in the dry cow group."


Nutritionist Greg Leishman

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Coronavirus vaccine programme helps prevent calf pneumonia

Problems with pneumonia in calves led one family to introduce neonatal vaccination on their Staffordshire farm last winter – so how have they got on? British Dairying reports.

Rearing the best possible replacement heifers is a key focus for the Hollins family, who milk 210 cows at Bate Farm's pedigree Barmick Holstein herd, near Cheadle, Staffordshire.

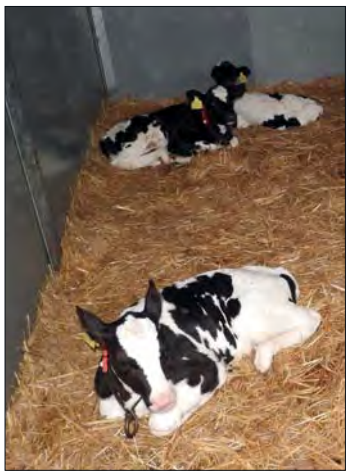
Selecting top genetics, including on occasions flushing their best cows for embryo transfer, is a key starting point, but this only fully pays dividends if they ensure the highest health standards for young calves.

Effective solution

Staying ahead of potential challenges is an essential part of this, so when pneumonia symptoms became evident during the winter of 2023/24 the family were quick to call in their vet Chris Wilkins of McMurtry and Harding. He investigated the cause and subsequently recommended an intranasal vaccine, which has proven to be a very effective solution.

"This is a farm where calf management is at an exceptionally high standard, with all the correct procedures followed and recent investment in a purpose-built enclosure ensuring an optimum environment," says Chris.

"The calves were already receiving an intranasal vaccine at birth to prevent respiratory syncytial virus and parainfluenza 3, but when pneumonia presented itself, the symptoms initially suggested Mycoplasma bovis as the potential cause. So we took swabs and blood samples for analysis to be sure. What we actually found was bovine coronavirus (BCov).



Calves have a bespoke enclosure

Barbara Hollins, who oversees calf rearing at Bate Farm, with Chris Wilkins

"We knew coronavirus had been on the farm, as we'd seen it in the cows previously, causing winter dysentery, so we were fairly sure that this virus was playing a part in the development of pneumonia in young calves," he adds.

Chris is seeing quite a lot of BCov on farms, but usually with other pathogens present too. "This case was relatively unusual, with only the one main pathogen present."

Coronavirus is recognised as a 'gateway' respiratory pathogen, and while unlikely to be significant on its own, allows other pathogens to cause pneumonia symptoms. "All the youngstock protocols we had put in place at Bate Farm were being adhered to, and blood samples consistently demonstrated excellent colostrum management, but there were still too many calves receiving treatment for pneumonia."

Chris suggested introducing the intranasal vaccine Bovilis Nasalgen-C, designed to reduce clinical signs of upper respiratory tract disease and nasal viral shedding from infection with BCoV. "It can be given from the day of birth onwards, which can be significant as it will provide protection against this particular pneumonia pathogen at a very early stage," he explains.

"We know lung damage occurs even before symptoms are evident in some cases of pneumonia, so the earlier the intervention, the better chance there is of avoiding any long-term damage to the health of the animal."

"These calves are the future of the business."

Barbara Hollins, who is mainly responsible for the calf rearing at Bate Farm, alongside daughter-in-law Sally, says the number calves treated for pneumonia dropped significantly after starting to vaccinate.

"We tend not to see any significant health issues in the calves during the summer months, but the winter can be more challenging. These calves are the future of the business, so we'll do everything we can to keep them healthy." Chris agrees: "At some points during the winter, although mortality rates were low, morbidity rates approached 100%, but following commencement of the vaccination programme mortality and morbidity rates fell to below target levels of 5%."

The usual protocol at the farm is to leave the calves on their dam for the first 24 hours after birth, ensuring that they suck colostrum within the first few hours. They are then kept in individual pens in a newly constructed building which is kept scrupulously clean, as well as being light and well-ventilated.

The calves continue on their dam's milk for a week, being offered hay and weaner pellets from the start, before moving onto machine feeders in small groups. The automatic milk feeders help facilitate the weaning process, with milk feeding finishing at 10 weeks old.

Uplift in yields

Heifers are reared to calve at around two years and three months, on average. And since 2015 the herd has been milked through four robots. "Yields have risen from around 10,000 litres/cow to 12,500 litres in that time," says Michael Hollins. "We certainly saw a significant uplift in yields when we started robotic milking, but we're also continually improving the genetics, selecting sires mainly from Semex and Cogent."

Michael and Barbara's son Paul manages the artificial insemination, and is consistently achieving conception rates to first service of over 60%. The farm uses sexed semen to breed replacements, achieving well over 90% heifer calves.

Other cows are served naturally by the farm's own Longhorn bull, with these crossbred calves going on contract to the Buitelaar beef supply group.

Cows are housed all year round, receiving a mixed ration with grass and wholecrop silage as the base components, with additions like pressed pulp depending on forage quality.

Sustain a spirit of innovation

In this issue's farm vet opinion, Dr Tim Potter from Westpoint Farm Vets explains why farm innovations in science and technology need producer input to achieve success.

As I write this, farmers are rallying in London to protect their farms, businesses, and livelihoods for the future. Many will return home to the ever-increasing pressures of maintaining high animal welfare standards, managing rising input costs, adapting to shifting consumer trends, and striving to keep their businesses viable.

Yet having just returned from the Hannah Dairy Research Foundation's Next Generation Data-Led Dairying conference at the Moredun Research Institute, I felt encouraged by the positive sentiment and excitement about what the future holds.

Proactive discussions

The event provided a superb platform for researchers to present to key stakeholders. It was evident that all parties - farmers, vets and scientists alike - benefited from the robust and proactive discussions on the industry's priorities and the practicalities of transitioning the research onto farm.

I have also been involved with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) Endemic Livestock Disease initiative, which actively involved farmers in the identification of research needs and project design. So I find it heartening to see the importance of real-world scenario sense-checking and the co-design of research becoming more commonplace.

Dr Tim Potter, Westpoint Farm Vets

For new tools and technologies to make a meaningful impact, they must be designed with input from farmers, ensuring they address genuine challenges, rather than existing simply because the technology is available.

We already know that farmers have long been pioneers of innovation. Over the past century, the pace of change in agriculture has been remarkable, driven by changing trends, supply chain demands, and the need to adapt. But to remain future-focused, we must sustain that innovative spirit.

> **"Consider making the time to contribute."**

It's critical to ask, what will the next 10 to 15 years bring? And what innovations should we be supporting today to secure success for the industry tomorrow?

It's a timely reminder of how important it is for farmers to engage with questionnaires, surveys, research initiatives, and trials led by levy bodies and research organisations. By sharing your expertise and experiences as farmers, you can help ensure that the research behind new dairy innovations is practical, effective, and suited to on-farm realities.

So, the next time you receive an email or call asking you to participate in research, consider making the time to contribute. Your insights could play a vital role in shaping tools and technologies that will benefit future generations of farmers, which is more pertinent than ever during this challenging period for the sector.

Clarity on continuous rodent control

When it comes to recurring and severe rodent infestations, it can be a minefield to determine the best approach to staying in control. Whether it be a permanent method or a long-term baiting programme, both come with risks. British Dairying reports.

Permanent and long-term rat baiting both have limitations and precautions to consider before going ahead. And with guidance frameworks ever-changing, it is easy to become unclear on what is considered the most suitable approach.

"I think the easiest way to explain the meaning of permanent baiting is to use the term 'insurance baiting'," says Laurence Barnard, Country Business Manager at BASF Pest Control Solutions. "You're placing bait in areas with no current issues, but where you deem the risk of infestation or reinfestation as very high.

"Not all products are authorised."

"This could be due to neighbouring buildings or farms that you do not have access to having a rodent problem, regular incoming goods from infested sites, or simply the nature of the site you are trying to protect. This approach helps alleviate the risk of a full-blown rodent infestation occurring by pre-empting and targeting areas that are most vulnerable to rodent infestation," he notes.

"The aim for permanent baiting is to prevent and protect, by baiting target points using secure tamper-resistant boxes." Only trained professionals can undertake permanent baiting inside and outside buildings, and if permanent baiting is to be implemented outside, some extra precautions should be taken.

Insurance baiting pre-empts and targets areas vulnerable to infestation

"When baiting outdoors, non-chemical methods should be considered first. These include non-toxic monitoring products, traps and increased preventative measures like proofing and environmental management as part of an ongoing integrated pest management strategy," Laurence says. "Not only is this much more cost-effective, and offers a more targeted approach, but it also reduces the risk to non-target species as well.

"If a chemical approach is required, it's vital to know that not all products are authorised. Cholecalciferol rodenticides like Selontra are authorised for use when permanent baiting, whereas only a selection of rodenticides containing the actives bromadiolone and difenacoum are approved for this use, so always ensure you refer to the product labels before proceeding," he adds.

"It is also vital that the user completes a full environmental risk assessment prior to any work on the site, to determine the most appropriate form of action."

"Follow the product label conditions."

When it comes to long-term baiting, it's usually a strategy employed if an infestation hasn't been cleared in at least 35 days. "This could be due to the volume of rodents, the nature of the site, or neophobia to new bait or bait boxes," says Laurence. "In some cases, it could also be due to rodenticide resistance, making it difficult to reduce the infestation using some second-generation baits containing difenacoum and bromadiolone. "If you notice consistent bait uptake but no decline in activity after the 35-day mark, it is vital to review and establish the likely cause," he continues. "When other elements have been excluded, like new entry points or access to preferred food sources elsewhere, consider using an alternative rodenticide with a different mode of action. It might also be beneficial to implement traps as an additional method of control. Just ensure you are referring to product labels when using a new product and continue to follow the product label conditions for long-term baiting."

Consider the risks

When using both the long-term and permanent baiting strategies, it is crucial to consider the risks to non-target species.

"If it becomes evident that any non-targets, or a species not outlined as the intended target on the product label, like voles, field and wood mice have consumed the bait, then the rodenticide should be removed immediately to protect wildlife and the reputation of the individual," Laurence says.

"Farmers are required to carry out an environmental risk assessment, with consideration to potential poisoning of non-target species, the potential risk to human health and to determine if the site is high risk. Also ensure that the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU) documentation and advice is adhered to, to reduce the risks to wider wildlife, secondary-toxicity and to protect yourself and your reputation."

Farmers are required to carry out environmental risk assessments

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LAMMA 2025: What's in store?

LAMMA returns next month, taking place on January 15-16 at the NEC in Birmingham. So what attractions can visitors expect from the event? British Dairying finds out.

The popular machinery show LAMMA will feature over 600 exhibitors from across the agricultural sector and this year includes an expanded exhibition space.

As well as halls packed with new equipment, the event will be a hub for knowledge-sharing and professional growth, with a comprehensive seminar and workshop programme discussing hot topics like sustainability, artificial intelligence, automation and market trends.

The Demo Arena will also offer farmers the chance to see state-of-the-art machinery in action, while the internationally acclaimed Farming Simulator series returns to the event, enabling visitors to explore the game's latest virtual farming features.

For the first time since 2020 Kuhn Farm Machinery is attending. "The show's increasing popularity and wide-ranging audience were major factors in returning to the event," says Kuhn UK Managing Director Sian Pritchard. Top manufacturers like JCB and Valtra will also be demonstrating their newest developments.

"LAMMA is the UK's premier platform for agricultural machinery and innovation," says Sarah Whittaker-Smith, Event Director. "With more exhibitors and product debuts than ever, this year's show is an unmissable opportunity for learning, networking, and discovery."

Attendees will also have the chance to win a Polaris Ranger Diesel, a vehicle valued at over £24,000. For more information and tickets visit: www.lammashow.com

Hi-Spec's new 4000 TD-R slurry tanker has a capacity of 4,000 gallons

Tramspread launching much requested larger hose reeler

Slurry and digestate management specialist Tramspread has added a new larger-capacity random wrap hose reeler to its range.

The model will be shown for the first time in the UK at LAMMA 2025 and is designed to handle bigger diameter spools which can comfortably accommodate 1400m of five inch or 1200m of six inch diameter drag hose.

"This introduction is primarily in response to customer demand," explains Tramspread sales manager James Peachey. "Everything is steadily getting larger, and we had already increased from 600m to 1000m, so we see 1400m as a natural progression. We've had requests from the Continent, and the first five off the production line have already been sold to France, but it is now available in the UK too."

Grange Machinery showcasing versatile new innovations

Grange Machinery will also present a number of new innovations at LAMMA. A brand-new development from the East Yorkshire company is the Front Mounted Disc Bar, designed to be fitted to the front linkage of the tractor to allow the user to add a pre-cultivation pass ahead of a drill or to aid in a primary cultivation system.

"This year's show is an unmissable opportunity."

The bar consists of a full width set of wavy discs, able to cut through trash and cover crops in front of the drill, clearing a path for the drill to both improve seed-to-soil contact and aid in trash flow. It can also prevent crop residue adhering to the coulters and causing blockages.

Grange Machinery will also show its new Tine-Drill Toolbar, designed to work with a variety of different front tanks supplying seed and fertiliser to the drill coulters. Unique features include individual ground contour technology, hydraulic seed depth control, the option of a hydraulic levelling board system and rear double harrow.

Also fresh from being put through its paces for the first time this year is the new Top-Tilth Cultivator. This features a dual disc system which is hydraulically lifted/lowered into work independently of the frame to offer a three-in-one cultivation implement. It can be used as a low disturbance loosener with the discs lifted out, as a full width shallow disc cultivator with the legs hydraulically lifted out, or as a seedbed preparation tool with all components engaged. It has also been put to good use with a seeder.

Hi-Spec Engineering unveiling larger, tougher muckspreader

Next year will see a new 20-t Xcel rear discharge manure spreader on the market from Hi-Spec Engineering. It features the same chain and disc spreading system as the 12-t model, which is contained within a full-width deflector. This means it can handle a wider range of manures. The shredding action of the rotor-mounted chains and Hardox steel flails ensures that even the densest of manures are completely broken down prior to being evenly spread by the spreading discs. It also means that any solid objects which would potentially damage a vertical beater can pass through.

Also on display will be the 4000 TD-R slurry tanker, which has a capacity of 4,000 gallons. It features a sprung hydraulic drawbar and sprung parabolic tandem recessed axles, complete with a forced steering rear axle, fitted with 750/60 R30.5 tyres. The tanker is fitted with a weight transfer system, air hydraulic brakes, a spoon type hitch and electro-hydraulic controls, plus a fixed rear linkage.

Grange Machinery will be showing its new Top-Tilth Cultivator

James Peachey at Tramspread

FROM DREAMS OF DAIRYING TO AWARD-WINNING SUCCESS

Josh and Lauren Fincham were the winners of this year's Cream Awards Young Dairy Farmer of the Year category, sponsored by Kite Consulting, and are proof that you don't need to come from a farming background to succeed in the dairy sector.

Having their own cows and establishing a forage-based dairy herd had always been a dream for Josh and Lauren, but it wasn't until they had the opportunity to establish a contract farming agreement that this dream became a reality.

"Lauren and I don't come from a farming background, but I started working on a farm part-time before then going to agricultural college, and gradually progressed to managing dairy herds for various businesses," explains Josh, who alongside Lauren runs a herd of 260 cross bred cows in Hamperton, Dorset. "Having our own dairy business was always the goal and thankfully a friend put us in contact with Guy and Anne Trehane who were looking to setup a joint farming venture.

"They've been incredibly supportive ever since we started farming with them in 2018. Over the years we've developed a successful extensive grazing system where we aim to have cows out grazing 300 days a year, minimise input use, and maintain a tight nine-week autumn calving block."

With the help of herdsman David White, Josh and Lauren manage their dairy herd on 460 acres, with the aim of producing as much milk as possible from grazed grass. Current yields stand at an average of 6,500 litres, at 4.7% butterfat and 3.6% protein, with all milk going to BV Dairy, part of the First Milk family.

"Up until 2015, the farm had one of the longest-established Holstein herds in the country, and high input, high output," continues Lauren. "Guy was keen to develop a simpler, more resilient and profitable system and that's what we're aiming to do. Cows rotationally graze a series of 8.5 acre-sized paddocks, with cows out from mid-January to mid-November. With careful grazing planning, we aim to use as much grass as we can, for as long as we can."

When cows are housed, they are fed silage using a simple self-feed system at a ratio of 30% grass to 70% maize, with the addition of 1.5kg rapemeal and then 6kg of concentrate through the parlour.

"The aim is to keep everything simple – both for the benefit of the cows and the people looking after them," continues Josh. The herd had previously been calving across a 14-week block, but it's now down to just nine weeks. "We have a lot of land that gets flooded so need to have cows calved and out grazing this ground, before it's underwater later in the season," explains Josh. "Calving starts 10th August, with all dairy replacements born in the first three weeks and beef in the last six."


Josh and Lauren Fincham

Cows achieve a 90% submission rate within three weeks, with an empty rate of just 10% after nine weeks. Heifers are served a week earlier than the main herd.

To help improve the efficiency of slurry management and use on the farm, one of the big investments that Guy and the couple made two years ago was in a new slurry separator. "It's been a game changer," says Josh. "Not only can we transport and store solid material more easily - targeting maize ground with this – but we can also quickly empty the liquid from the slurry tank. Previously it used to take a couple of days of tractor tanking and associated diesel use to empty, but now we can use umbilical systems and empty the tank in just a few hours."

As new entrants from a non-farming background, Josh and Lauren are very keen to encourage the next generation of dairy farmers and provide them with opportunities they themselves have benefited from.

"We're always welcoming students, vets and young farmers onto the farm for work placements and visits," explains Josh. "We've benefited massively from the help provided by Anne and Guy, so we want to give something back. Winning the Young Dairy Farmer of the Year category was also a great 'thank you' to them as a couple, and we we're proud to be given the award."

Becki Reay, from Kite Consulting, who sponsored the Young Dairy Farmer of the Year category at the Cream Awards this year, believes that Josh and Lauren are a great example of the wider pool of young, ambitious dairy farmers working in the sector. "This award continues to highlight excellence in the dairy industry, celebrating businesses that represent the future of farming with detailed, innovative, and well-rounded approaches," says Becki. "Kite Consulting has seen first-hand how this mix of skills helps dairy farmers confidently adapt and succeed in a rapidly changing industry.

"The standard of entries improves every year, which is a testament to the incredible talent and commitment within the sector. Josh and Lauren demonstrated how thoughtful, forward-thinking choices can significantly elevate a dairy enterprise. Their determination, optimism, and passion are shining examples of the qualities that will drive the success of dairy farming in the future."

Details of all the winners at www.creamawards.UK. Thinking of entering, then look out for the 2025 Cream Awards campaign launching March 1st 2025.

A la carte forages – choosing wisely

Broadening the range of homegrown forages can build more resilience into dairy businesses. British Dairying looks at the forage options for dairy producers to consider.

There's plenty of choice - and plenty of benefits to be had - when it comes to selecting forages for dairy cattle. Producing more forage by 'filling the gaps' between reseeds, and reducing fields left fallow will boost milk from homegrown crops. And there are many options that promote productivity and soil health, while meeting sustainable farming incentive (SFI) criteria.

"King of the forages is grass," says John Spence, Forage Crop Manager at Limagrain. "Growing other forage species within the grass rotation will support the longer-term productivity of these grass crops by breaking the grass pest and disease cycles."

After a wet cold spring in 2024, which disrupted reseeding on some units, conditions have been more favourable for autumn reseeds. "But there will be more to do in spring 2025 to get back on track," he adds. "In these cases, tempting as it may be to follow grass with a reseed immediately, a highly nutritious brassica could be a better option."

Brassicas slot into the grass rotation on dairy units very successfully, either for summer feed, or in autumn and winter.

"The consistency of the crop adds to its attractiveness."

One of these is the summer brassica Skyfall, which has two or three re-growths in a season. "Skyfall is unique as it is sown from May and can be grazed five to six weeks later, then closed up for about six weeks to allow it to bounce back before grazing again," explains John. "In many cases, this cycle can be repeated a third time. And, thanks to its fast growth and re-growth, there's still time for an autumn reseed."

Fodder beet is also worth considering as a break crop and is popular because of its high feed energy value. This fodder crop is the highest dry matter (DM) and energy yielding crop per hectare available among commonly grown forages in the UK.

Brassicas offer the flexibility of a summer feed or autumn / winter grazing

The average metabolisable energy (ME) content for fodder beet varieties trialled annually by Limagrain is consistently 12.5 to 13MJ/kg DM.

Sown in spring, possibly after a first cut or early spring grazing, fodder beet can be grazed in-situ by youngstock or dry cows, or lifted and chopped for use in a total mixed ration (TMR). It can be stored in a clamp or in the ground and fed through the winter - offering a lot of flexibility.

"Once farmers introduce this forage, they rarely move away from it, particularly where it's chopped and added to a TMR," says John. "It's appetising and brings an energy boost to diets, but the consistency of the crop adds to its attractiveness.

Trial data

"We've got more than 25 years of trial data comparing long-standing UK fodder beet varieties like Robbos, and five years of data on more recent varieties like Fosyma. Results all show that dry matter and energy yields are consistent, regardless of growing conditions," he adds.

Even in the challenging conditions of the past few years, with long dry periods and, at times, very wet conditions, yields and feed value have not wavered much. Robbos and Fosyma have both yielded more than 18t/ha DM consistently. Fosyma consistently heads the ranking with an average DM yield 12% above the control variety.

Returning to brassicas, those looking for a forage crop to sow later in the season, possibly after multiple silage cuts or grazing rotations, can consider forage rape and stubble turnips. Sown any time from May to September, the two crops can be drilled separately or together.

"The high protein forage rape and high energy stubble turnip are ready for grazing 12 to 14 weeks after sowing," says John. "So, if it's sown in late May, the crop is grazed in late summer as grass growth slows up. If it's sown later, these hardy crops can be grazed through to January if conditions are suitable, which will reduce winter feed costs."

Both forage rape and stubble turnips should be introduced to cattle gradually with a run back onto grassland. Variety choice will influence feed value, with newer varieties, like Unicorn forage rape, being selected for improved digestibility while maintaining protein levels of 15%. The new stubble turnip Hector brings extra energy, with an ME of at least 12MJ/kg DM. "These forage crops might be less fashionable, but trials using these modern varieties show off their value in the forage rotation on dairy units," he says.

Surge in popularity

Herbal leys feature strongly in many forage plans for dairy and livestock units. There has been a huge surge in popularity and they are now becoming mainstream. "But I'd recommend making careful choices."

While a basic herbal ley might qualify for SFI payments, there's a wide range in performance between these and better-quality mixtures. "If you choose cheap and cheerful, you'll pay for it," notes John. "There's a lot to be gained from a well-formulated mixture suited to the farm, conditions and feeding system."

A herbal ley mixture qualifying for the payment must contain one grass species, two legumes and two herbs - this is the minimum requirement. Further guidance set out by Defra to encourage growing a high-quality herbal ley recommends five grass seed varieties, three legumes and five herbs.

Herbal ley mixtures should be designed with their use in mind

"I'd encourage livestock farmers to go for a high-quality herbal ley," says John. "Not only does it qualify for the payments, but it will also outperform the basic mixes when it comes to animal performance.

"We've designed herbal ley mixtures that are robust, productive and offer high feed value. We've achieved this by using species with proven performance on farm and in UK trials, to ensure the full benefits are achieved."

"We've selected varieties that can achieve production goals."

For example, plantain and chicory herbs are screened at Limagrain's innovation site, with the best varieties selected based on their yield and complementary growth pattern. These species are also deep rooting to provide drought tolerance and have anthelmintic properties.

"Proven species of legumes are also used, and we've selected varieties that can achieve production goals as well as meet environmental targets. These mixtures do far more than simply meet the payment criteria."

Fodder beet is a very consistent, reliable crop with multiple uses

John also encourages farmers to consider the purpose of the herbal ley before choosing a mixture. "If it's for cutting it should include hybrid and earlier heading ryegrasses, but not include chicory because this loses its persistency under conservation management.

"But for a grazing mixture, chicory works well alongside plantain, white clover and other species that tolerate more regular defoliation, along with later heading grasses."

But herbal leys aren't for all dairy farmers. "There are clear benefits to herbal leys but their productivity can sometimes struggle to match that of a well-managed perennial ryegrass and white clover ley, particularly in intensive systems," he adds.

Establishment rates

Those growing high-production grass swards that are missing white clover can opt to over-sow it, to meet the SFI criteria for legumes on improved grassland. This will bring nitrogen-fixing benefits, improve protein content and add to the ley's production in drier months. Using a pelleted clover, which is heavier, will significantly improve establishment rates.

With more unpredictable weather patterns, planning forage rotations may seem more complex. "But careful and thoughtful planning on the choice of forages and opting for proven varieties will add resilience and boost production from home-grown crops," says John.

"The aim is to keep a good supply of high-quality homegrown forages and reduce the vulnerability caused by the season and situation."

Trial suggests considering fertiliser use on herbal leys for best results

A new grass trial drilled in autumn 2023 has revealed some of the secrets to successfully managing a variety of different herbal leys. British Dairying reports.

Herbal leys are often espoused as enabling farmers to cut out fertiliser while enjoying bountiful yields – but that's not always the case. A recent trial looking at different grass mixtures found some still perform best with nitrogen application.

The trial, run by grass breeding company DLF last autumn, saw a block measuring 55m by 25m drilled with 15 varieties of grasses. These included early to late perennial, hybrid and Italian ryegrasses, festuloliums and other species including fescues, Timothy and cocksfoot.

These were cross-drilled with individual legumes and herbs at a 90-degree angle to the grass to investigate the interaction between the different species, with one plot receiving 250kg/ha of nitrogen and the other getting no fertiliser.

The legumes included a selection of different sized white clovers, a red clover blend and Relish, a new red clover which has been grazed successfully in New Zealand.

"It was clear to see the rows which had red clover in them."

The herbs on trial were Ecotain (plantain), Choice chicory, birdsfoot trefoil, Luzelle lucerne and sainfoin. There were also full herbal ley mixtures with white and red clover with Ecotain, and one with the clovers, Ecotain and chicory.

The trial took place at Pinvin, Gloucestershire. "The soil at the site is heavy, silty clay and can lie wet in winter," says Monty White, UK Agricultural Project Manager at DLF.

"It was interesting that the legumes and herbs did not establish well with the faster growing Italian and hybrid ryegrasses and festuloliums, because these were so competitive in early growth - they shaded the broad-leaved plants out. If farmers are just looking for a lot of early feed, these are the species to go for. With the slower-growing grasses, like tall fescue, meadow fescue, Timothy and cocksfoot, the herbs and legumes established well."

Peter Done has experimented with a range of different grass mixes

Half the grid received 80kg/ha of nitrogen fertiliser in early spring and then 30kg/ha after each cut, which mimicked a grazing regime.

Plate meter yields were then taken on July 24, 19 days post cutting. This provided a snapshot of nearly three weeks' summer regrowth (see graph).

Significant difference

As expected, there was a significant difference in yield between the fertilised half of the trial and the non-fertilised half. For example, the perennial ryegrass (PRG) on its own with fertiliser yielded 154% of the untreated PRG.

More interesting results come from where the white and red clover species were cross-drilled. PRG and white clover with no fertiliser yielded 90% of the PRG on its own with fertiliser. The small deficit in yield of 364kg/ha dry matter (DM) came without the cost of buying and applying any artificial nitrogen.

The PRG with Relish red clover and no fertiliser was similar, yielding 88% of the PRG only with fertiliser. "It was clear to see the rows which had red clover in them - they looked a lot greener, meaning there was a lot of nitrogen fixation going on," says Monty.

The chicory and plantain results highlight the fact that they are both hungry for nitrogen to perform well, whether that comes from a fertiliser source or legumes. "There is a general feeling amongst farmers that herbal leys do not need fertilising - leaving it all to the legume component to feed the crop," notes Monty.

"This is compounded by elements of SAM3 of the sustainable farming incentive (SFI) specifying a nitrogen fertiliser limit of 40kg/ha. But it is important to have 30-40% of a mixture as legumes, white and red clovers, to keep the chicory productive."

The fertilised PRG and PRG with chicory came top of the yield table at 3,524kg DM/ha, closely followed by PRG, Ecotain and clover with fertiliser, yielding 3,412kg DM/ha.

"This trial plot highlights the importance of perennial ryegrass to provide high yields of high-quality feed," says Monty. "But it also highlights the benefits of having enough and the right type of legumes to feed the system.

"Farmers buying an off-the-shelf herbal ley with 5% white clover and a little bit of lucerne will be disappointed with the growth if they do not apply fertiliser, particularly in early spring. A herbal ley must have a good content of red and white clover to reduce the requirement for artificial nitrogen," he notes.

"As soon as the soils warm up, the clovers will get going and the bacteria in the soil will start breaking down the nodules on the roots, giving a big boost of nitrogen. This means less fertiliser will be needed over the summer."

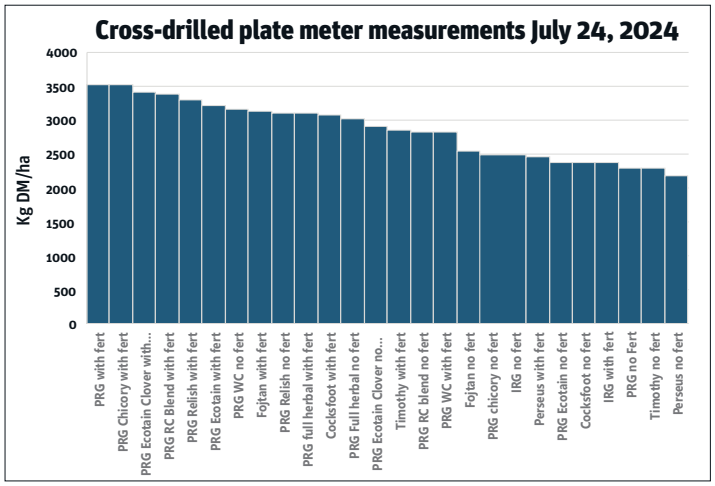
Larkton Farm, Malpas, Cheshire

Peter Done runs a herd of 180 all-year-round-calving Friesian dairy cows on 106ha in south Cheshire. The cows produce an average of 6,250 litres of milk at 4.44% fat and 3.34% protein, with 62% coming from forage.

Peter rotationally paddock grazes the cows, starting in late January, when grass silage is also offered. Concentrates are fed only in the parlour and the protein content of these decreases as feed quality of the grazed grass rises.

The cows are all housed in late October/early November, minimising housing costs.

Peter was recently announced as a close runner-up in the British Grassland Society Grass Farmer of the Year Award in 2024. Originally basing his system on PRG and



Fertilised PRG came top, with unfertilised PRG / white clover 90% of that

white clover swards, he has for the past three years been trialling some additional forage species in his grazing leys.

"I became interested in increasing the diversity of my swards and went to an evening meeting about them," explains Peter. "But tales of reduced yields, crop rejection and tricky management put me off - so I started slowly by growing some plantain in one two-hectare field.

"The cows did not selectively graze - they ate them all."

"In the dry summer of 2022, it really helped us out and grew when the white clover and grasses stopped. So in terms of building resilience against weather extremes, plantain certainly wins."

In 2023, Peter met New Zealander Monty White at DLF, who encouraged Peter to drill a two-hectare field with five different diverse mixtures to test them out in front of the cows. These contained different percentages of white and red clovers, including a new grazing red called Relish, and one full multi-species sward containing grasses, legumes and herbs.

The grazing fields, including this trial area, received slurry early in the year and 42kg/ha of nitrogen fertiliser every four to five weeks after grazing, to a total of 180kg N/ha. The presence of nitrogen-fixing white clover means the total rate can be reduced but not eliminated.

"We drilled the different mixtures in strips and then grazed the field as one," says Peter. "It was interesting to see the differences in growth, but the cows did not selectively graze them - they ate them all.

"This autumn we drilled another small field with PRG, white clover and plantain, with a further four hectares earmarked for a more diverse ley with up to six species next spring, after a winter hybrid brassica crop has been grazed. This will be the first mixture of ours to qualify for SFI.

"We are trying to develop a system that gives us everything we need for our low-cost, high-grazed grass operation," Peter says. "I believe a grass, white and red clover and plantain mix will add diversity and mitigate against extreme weather, while still being manageable on an intensive rotational basis."

Strong red clover growth in the centre, with paler chicory to the right

Demonstration site trials focus on getting the most from maize

Fast and even establishment is essential for productive maize crops, and is something that has been the focus of 2024 trials at Hutchinsons' most south-westerly demonstration site at Trethick Farm. British Dairying looks at what we can learn from the results.

From strip tillage to late foliar nitrogen, 16 different trials and treatments have been put under the spotlight this year at Helix Cornwall, hosted by Martin Dairy near Bodmin.

Much of the focus has been on maize establishment and nutrition, as well as finding ways to improve conventional practices, explains Hutchinsons agronomist James Whatty. He manages the trials alongside the farm's Richard Martin.

"We know a lot of maize yield is determined right from the start," says James. "Seeds should ideally all germinate and establish evenly within a day or so of each other. You don't want germination spread out over a week or more across the field as it makes crops harder to manage throughout the season and limits yield potential."

Hutchinsons' agronomist James Whatty who manages the trials in Cornwall alongside host farmer Richard Martin

Strip till trial

Currently, the farm's maize ground is ploughed, cultivated, and sown using a combination drill fitted with a maize seeder on the rear, which provides an effective approach that covers ground quickly and utilises existing equipment.

However, with soil health at the forefront of many decisions, and reduced tillage now widely used for establishing the farm's cereal crops, this season two field trials were set up to see whether a lower disturbance strip tillage system could challenge traditional plough-based maize establishment.

One trial area was in a field of winter barley stubble, the other followed a three- to four-year temporary grass ley. Both fields are predominantly sandy clay soil with relatively high stone content, and all land received slurry and manure over winter to replicate farm conditions.

In the strip-till plots, ground was first worked using a specialist strip tillage machine featuring low disturbance subsoiler tines and a rotavator, before being drilled with either the farm's standard combination drill, or a Lemken Azurit 10 precision drill loaned by a local dealer. Row widths of both drills matched the strip-till bands.

A key difference of the Azurit drill is its twin disc coulters which place seed in a 'DeltaRow' configuration, comprising two staggered twin rows arranged at a distance of 12.5cm. The firm claims this gives individual plants more space to grow than in a standard single row system.

"It was interesting to see that the establishment in the Azurit-sown plots was considerably better, probably due to the seed placement and good soil coverage/consolidation," says James.

Omnia analysis of yield mapping data collected from the forager generally showed little difference between the drills where strip-till was used in the stubble, however some differences were identified when comparing strip-till against the farm's standard plough-based approach. In some places, strip-till yields were 4t/ha down, although in other areas they were on a par.

Strip tillage showed mixed yield results but soil structure was better

"There's a lot of detail to consider."

"We've cross-referenced yield maps with Terramap data from the same block of land in Omnia, and the variations seem to match quite closely with phosphate indices," notes James. "The thinking is that in the strip-till areas there is less soil movement, which means less mineralisation, and it makes it harder for young maize plants to access

There was a 14% increase in cob weight where placement P was used

the phosphate. We also noticed soil was visibly wetter and colder in the strip-till areas that were worked and left for 24 hours before drilling, which may also reduce phosphate availability."

Extreme test

Little difference in establishment speed was observed where strip-till was used in stubbles, however in the strip-till areas following grass, maize was slower to get going. "It's likely that the dying grass on the surface was using up some nitrogen as it broke down, just as the maize needed nutrients to get away," James continues. "That was quite an extreme test, but we wanted to identify the limits for some of this machinery."

However, in terms of soil structure, there were clear benefits from using strip tillage, with land being noticeably easier to travel on at harvest in mid- to late-October, and with higher worm counts. "It's quite a balancing act. There's a lot of detail to consider if you are thinking about going down the strip-till approach, and it is a big move to make, which involves extra cost in terms of the equipment, so certainly won't be for everyone."

Looking ahead to next year, trials are likely to focus more on the finer details around existing drill set-up, nutrition and establishment.

"Cost of specialist equipment is a big consideration."

Phosphorus (P) is an essential nutrient for strong root development in many crops, and maize is no exception. Another trial at Helix Cornwall showed promising results from using placement P compared with traditional seedbed applications of diammonium phosphate (DAP) at drilling.

The work compared a 10kg/ha application of Primary-P microgranular fertiliser with seed

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Farm Facts:

Martin Dairy, Trethick Farm, Bodmin

- **950** dairy cows + **800** followers (Swedish Red cross Holstein dairy cows averaging **9,000** litres)
- **750**ha of cropping (**110**ha owned, rest rented)
- Cropping includes maize, winter wheat, winter and spring barley, forage rye, grass
- Soil type is mainly light loams with some heavy clay
- Currently hosts Helix Cornwall demonstration
- Using Terramap and Gold soil testing to tailor management and input use.

Continued from page 57.

at drilling to a standard approach involving 125kg/ha of DAP to the seedbed.

Placing a smaller amount of fertiliser exactly where it is needed boosted root development and improved subsequent scavenging ability, which carried through to higher grain yield and slightly higher dry matter. There was a 14% increase in average cob weight where Primary-P was used.

"Maize needs the bulk of its nitrogen at tasseling."

Regular soil sampling and Terramapping can help avoid nutrient deficiencies in what is a hungry crop

"That's a substantial reduction in the quantity and cost of fertiliser required, while delivering improved cob weight," says James.

Even where the soil index is relatively high, maize may not be able to access those reserves until roots are developed enough, so kick-starting growth with a placement fertiliser can be beneficial.

"Unless the root physically touches phosphate in the soil, it's not going to access it," he explains. "DAP is an expensive way of doing this, which is why we're looking more at concentrated phosphate starter fertilisers like Primary-P, although, again, the cost of specialist equipment is a big consideration."

Reducing artificial fertiliser use could be particularly important if rules around phosphate use are tightened in future, he notes. Regular soil sampling and Terramapping shows P and potassium (K) deficiencies can flare up very quickly, particularly where growers are on more intensive multi-cut systems.

"Even where you're applying bagged fertiliser alongside organic manures, it can be hard to maintain indices when there are high levels of crop offtake." Knowing what's in your soil with accurate sampling and mapping using a system like Terramap could therefore be really beneficial in helping to avoid deficiencies occurring, says James.

Elsewhere, different approaches to boosting late nitrogen have been trialled to see if it can improve yield by delivering more nutrition

closer to the period of peak demand. "Maize needs the bulk (c.75%) of its nitrogen at tasseling, so we're trying to put foliar nitrogen on as close to that as possible to see if there's an extra benefit," James says.

"People expect to see big visual differences in crop height or biomass."

Three foliar products were compared, including a bacterial nitrogen biostimulant, one that converts nitrous oxide to nitrate, and an advanced liquid nitrogen formulation.

As seen in the placement P trial, while there was no significant difference in fresh weight yields between treatments, there was an increase in kernel weight, with two of the three treatments delivering up to a 10-18% benefit.

"When you do these trials, people often expect to see big visual differences in crop height or biomass," he notes. "That wasn't the case, but if you can increase cob weight by a few percent, and multiply that across the whole maize area, which in Richard's case is 220ha, that's a huge amount more grain and starch you're producing." This benefit equated to a margin over input cost of between two and 4.5 on the foliar products.

Maize needs c.75% of its nitrogen at tasseling, so consider foliar products

A notable observation from 2024 maize crops has been the level of eyespot pressure many have faced, exacerbated by wet summer conditions, James says.

"Some crops did senesce very quickly, which definitely hit yield in places. One big issue with eyespot in maize is the fact that once you see a problem, crops are usually too big to treat."

"Debris from affected maize can increase the eyespot pressure."

Pressure is generally greatest where maize is grown continuously or close in the rotation, so the main way to reduce risk is by extending the gap between cropping, and/or selecting more resistant varieties.

Large amounts of crop debris from affected maize crops can increase the eyespot pressure in a following wheat, so growers need to be aware of this risk when selecting varieties and planning spray programmes.

Navigating through the maize maze

There are almost 70 varieties on the NIAB UK Descriptive List for forage maize and many new unlisted varieties in trials. So selecting the right maize variety from such a large talent pool can be a potential minefield for growers. British Dairying reports.

Maize is the top performing forage crop with significant potential for market growth under the sustainable farming incentive (SFI). That's according to Hutchinsons agronomist Jim Clark, who's based in Cumbria and South West Scotland.

It's still the key break crop for wheat, due to its ability to achieve higher gross margins than most other crops, he says. However, when it comes to selecting the right variety, the path isn't always clear.

"Maize doesn't travel well, so you often find that varieties which perform well in one region of the UK don't necessarily replicate that performance elsewhere due to differences in weather and soil types," Jim explains.

Variety choice

"The agronomic standard of maize varieties has also improved tremendously during the past 10 years and, while that's a positive, it also makes variety choice more difficult given there's now a bigger talent pool for growers to consider.

"When I began regional maize trials 20 years ago, we would trial 30-40 varieties from which possibly six to eight varieties would perform well and go on to be recommended for on-farm trials with customers. Now, we have to look far more closely at year-on-year consistency, separating the very good varieties from the good ones by extending regional trials over two years before recommending a new variety to farmers." Following some challenging growing conditions for maize in recent years, where a lack of summer sunshine has often resulted in the FAO maturity date of many maize crops stalling, growers once again faced difficult late season harvesting conditions.

Daniel Ott at Saaten Union

Growers should look at early maturing varieties for 2025, says Jim Clark

"Given these weather patterns could become the 'new normal' I would certainly advise growers to look at earlier maturing varieties for 2025," says Jim. "I can also see a future trend towards earlier maturing, dual-use varieties and predict that many maize growers may even trade-off a small percentage of yield in order to lift their crops two to three weeks earlier if adverse harvest conditions continue to persist in the future.

"When weighing up the key statistics on the Descriptive List (DL), I'd advise growers to look at both starch content and dry matter (DM) yield rather than focusing solely on fresh-weight yield," he adds. Other key considerations should be usage: Grain, biogas or feed - and what growers intend to sow after the maize, whether it be wheat, a cover crop or something else.

"If you're intending to grow maize on rented land, then you must soil sample before planting and get the nutrition strategy right from the get-go," notes Jim. "Ultimately, it's all about what suits your farming system best and managing expectations.

"With results in from this year's maize trials it's worth highlighting the new variety Hagrid, marketed by Elsoms Seeds. High yielding, with an excellent DM percentage, it definitely looks one to watch."

"We know we have the right tools."

Daniel Ott, Product Manager for Maize at German breeder Saaten Union, says there's a strong historical link between successful maize varieties bred in Germany which then prove well adapted to UK conditions. This makes it a good starting point when selecting the right variety, he claims.

"We have a trials network of over 70 locations across 16 countries, including three in the UK, with over 6,000 trial plots, so we know we have the right tools to breed varieties that can thrive in UK soils and climatic conditions," Daniel says.

"We also deliberately trial in locations where we can expect stressful conditions. This includes very light and sandy soils, cold heavy soils and sites with little annual rainfall to test drought stress during flowering. Having access to a large, diverse range of new varieties, we are then able to tailor these to specific end use markets like energy maize, silage or grain."

Decision-making process

While the number of varieties on the UK DL is significant, Germany has 252 silage and 184 grain varieties, along with many other EU registered varieties available to growers. "So the decision-making process is just as, if not more, complex from a numbers perspective," explains Daniel. "For UK growers, usage, FAO maturity dates and yield are still key factors supported by an understanding that the UK climate may mean later harvest dates now becoming the new normal, with growers leaning towards earlier maturing varieties.

"Having experienced a lot of success in the UK with Neutrino; a high-yielding biogas variety, we have now successfully launched Addition, a multi-use earlier maturing variety that produces high-energy, highly digestible quality silage for feeding, biogas and corn-cob mix," he notes. "It's UK registered, available for the 2025 season and specifically bred to perform consistently in UK conditions."

New maize variety - SU Addition

Early maize mitigates wet weather woes

This year saw a second consecutive maize harvest significantly hampered by a wet autumn, meaning growers should choose varieties wisely to ensure their 2025 crop is ready to be harvested in good time and condition. British Dairying reports.

Farmers no longer have to sacrifice yield or crop quality in order to secure an early maize harvest. That's according to Tim Richmond, Maize Manager at Limagrain, who says maize breeding programmes have advanced significantly in recent years. "Modern varieties like Gema, Dignity and Skipper enable growers to produce a high yielding crop in a shorter growing season," he explains.

The Limagrain trial plots allow for testing and screening to assess all new varieties in UK conditions

Very early variety

"Likewise, Duke - the latest 'very early' variety to come out of Limagrain's UK testing programme - also offers a significant improvement in terms of earliness of maturity, yield and quality in both favourable and less favourable maize growing regions."

Despite being one of the earliest maturing varieties on the 2024-25 BSPB/NIAB Descriptive List, Duke (which has an FAO of 140) delivers a dry matter yield of 18.1t/ha, combined with very high quality, claims Tim.

Tim Richmond at Limagrain

"Its starch yield of 6.96t/ha is the highest of all varieties on the less favourable list, and the highest of all very early varieties on the favourable list. It also has superior feed value thanks to its improved cell wall digestibility, which increases its metabolisable energy yield - something that is unusual for such an early variety. It also has good potential as a crimping or grain variety, and, thanks to its very early vigour and good standing ability, is less likely to be impacted by another wet year as it can be drilled later in the spring but will still be ready to harvest in good time," he notes.

"Should the 2025 maize harvest be hampered by another bout of wet weather, its excellent disease resistance and stay green genetics will ensure it's still in premium condition even if harvesting is delayed."

As well as enabling growers to exploit optimum harvesting conditions, choosing an early maturing variety also gives growers more time to establish a following crop.

"Undersowing does need access to the right equipment."

"Planting a winter cover crop after maize is now the recommended best practice, as it delivers important soil health benefits," says Tim. "It can also allow growers to access additional payments through the sustainable farming incentive (SFI). Italian Ryegrass and Westerwolds are proving popular as winter cover crops after maize, as are forage rye varieties like Humbolt which performs well in most scenarios."

Undersowing maize with a companion crop is another potential SFI payment opportunity, and it has the added benefit of ensuring the cover crop is already established when the maize comes off. "Undersowing does, however, need access to the right equipment and must be done at the correct timing to avoid the risk of affecting the primary crop's performance," Tim says.

"Alternatively, a multi-species cover crop including forage rye and common vetch will provide the ideal combination of a crop that mops up residual nutrients while fixing nitrogen for future cropping rotations."

Leeds sires the top four bulls

Leeds sons dominate the December bull proof run produced by the AHDB. Independent breeding consultant Kevin Lane examines the new proofs and what they mean.

The December 2024 proof run released by AHDB sees Denovo 2776 Leeds siring the top four bulls ranked on profitable lifetime index (PLI). These are all in the Genus stud, alongside three others in the top 10.

Taking top spot - up three places from August - is **Denovo 20893 Harmony** with a PLI of £928 (not to be confused with the number two from August, T-Spruce Harmony, who drops to 24th position).

Overall, this genomic proof run sees 58 bulls over £800 PLI, 240 bulls over £700 and 457 (out of over 730) over £600, giving farmers plenty to choose from, irrespective of system.

The top 100, £772 PLI and above (almost exactly the same break point as August), sees lots of new entries as usual, some fallers and some risers, and some from the last run holding their positions.

Denovo 20893 Harmony's great granddam AOT Jared Haskel

Genus has 12 sires in the top 20, Cogent has four, WWS three and Alta one. The August proof run saw 10 new bulls fill the top 10 spots – so how have they fared this time? Seven of the 10 remain in the top 10, with one in 20th (Atlas), one in 24th (Harmony) and only one who has 'bombed' down to 67th from 10th, Holysmokes Simon, who has lost £87 PLI.

Harmony has just over 1,100kg of milk, and is just shy of 99kg combined fat and protein (CFP) with +0.13% fat and +0.05% protein. He has a very low -29 Maintenance, +300 FeedAdvantage, +5.2 EnviroCow (breed leader), a low £120 HealthyCow and +113 days lifespan. New in second is **T-Spruce Denovo Zest** (£920) with a similar profile, offering 976kg of milk, 95.1kg CFP at +0.19% fat and +0.06% protein, -11 Maintenance, +205 FeedAdvantage, £176 HealthyCow and +4.7 EnviroCow. LamenessAdvantage is +2.8 and CalfSurvival is +2.1, along with

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TOP 20 HOLSTEIN BULLS WITH GENOMIC INDEXES RANKED ON PROFITABLE LIFETIME INDEX (PLI) DECEMBER 2024

PLI	Bull name	Milk kg	Fat kg	Ptn kg	Fat %	Ptn %	SCC	Mast	LA	LS	FI	HC	Feed Adv	TM	Sire x maternal grandsire	From
928	DENOVO 20893 HARMONY	1109	57	41.8	0.13	0.05	-6	0	1.5	113	2.3	120	300	0.04	LEEDS X MODELO	GEN
920	T-SPRUCE DENOVO ZEST	976	56.7	38.4	0.19	0.06	-14	-1	2.8	110	3.3	176	205	1.24	LEEDS X GAMEDAY	GEN
902	DENOVO 20723 COLUMBIA	1187	51.1	42.2	0.03	0.03	-16	-1	1.2	110	2.7	159	245	1.06	LEEDS X LIFT OFF	GEN
901	DENOVO 20771 SEGMENT	1005	54.2	37.6	0.15	0.05	-9	0	2.3	140	4.9	188	203	1.24	LEEDS X MENDEL	GEN
895	BADGER SIEMERS DAY TRIP	960	49	33.6	0.11	0.02	-20	-2	1.4	180	5.2	225	228	-0.03	SHEEPSTER X UPSIDE	WWS
890	COGENT B ADVANTAGE	853	40.2	36.6	0.06	0.09	-9	0	2.6	137	13.1	251	167	0.66	ALTAALANZO X CAPTAIN	CBL
879	DENOVO 20668 HIERARCHY	864	58	33.6	0.25	0.05	-18	-1	2.4	110	7.2	199	138	1.23	VENOM X MENDEL	GEN
873	BADGER SSI ELVIN PENAROL	755	56.2	32.9	0.28	0.09	-9	0	3.4	122	5.5	177	188	0.58	ELVIN X RASHAN	WWS
864	WINSTAR REGGIE	627	47.8	28	0.25	0.08	-16	0	2.3	131	7.2	217	280	0.78	HEISMAN X MENDEL	GEN
862	BOMAZ LAMBERT P	1281	50	40.6	-0.02	-0.02	-7	1	2	110	5.5	142	245	0.13	LEEDS X MENDEL	GEN
861	COGENT B HIGH PACE	884	54.8	36.7	0.21	0.08	-3	0	1	64	6.4	128	199	0.69	CLASS X CAPTAIN	CBL
858	DENOVO 19845 BRIGHTON P	869	59.1	32.5	0.26	0.04	-13	0	0.8	116	6.8	160	194	-0.62	BENEFIT X MENDEL	GEN
857	GENOSOURCE MAUI	1046	49.3	33.8	0.08	-0.01	-12	0	1.9	113	6.6	191	261	0.99	CAPTAIN X GOLD MINE	CBL
853	DG PEACE	1111	45.9	40.1	0.01	0.03	-11	-1	2	85	3.7	137	269	0.52	CAPTAIN X KLUTCH	CBL
852	PEAK ALTAMORPHEUS	651	44.7	28.2	0.21	0.07	-19	-2	2.1	159	11.2	262	148	-1.58	CURFEW X CRIMSON	ALT
849	DENOVO 20173 ERAGON	1045	56.4	38.8	0.15	0.04	-10	0	2.1	107	-0.7	104	201	1.05	BENEFIT X ALADDIN	GEN
848	WINSTAR KLASSIC P	392	60.6	20.7	0.52	0.09	-12	-1	1.8	137	11.2	230	196	0.59	PERFECT X MENDEL	GEN
848	HUL-STEIN NAIL	1025	55	38.4	0.15	0.05	-12	-1	2.4	128	-0.4	136	144	0.82	BENEFIT X ENDEAVOR	GEN
845	S-S-I PR BOOF BONSER	947	44.1	37.7	0.06	0.07	-11	-2	1.5	156	7.9	221	81	0.89	ELVIN X AHEAD	WWS
845	DENOVO ATLAS P	722	56.6	33.5	0.31	0.11	-7	0	2.3	98	5.3	159	125	1.14	GALLOWAY X ALADDIN	GEN

Source: AHDB Dairy. ALT = Alta Genetics; CBL = Cogent Breeding; GEN = Genus ABS; WWS = World Wide Sires UK. PLI = Profitable Lifetime Index; Rel = Reliability; SCC = Somatic Cell Count; Mast = Mastitis; LAdv = Lameness Advantage; LS = Lifespan; FI = Fertility Index; Length; HC = HealthyCow; Feed Adv = Feed Advantage; TM = Type Merit.

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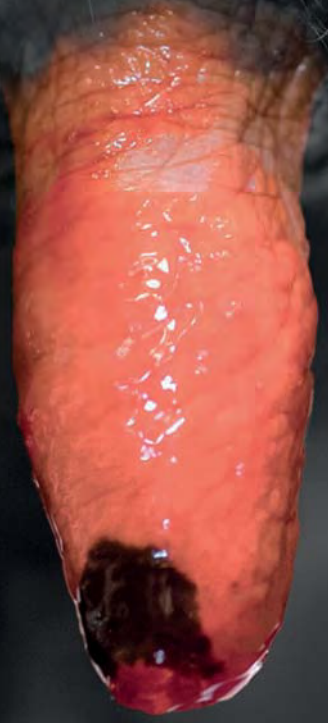

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+110 lifespan and 1.24 Type Merit (TM), the joint highest in the top 20.

Dropping to third is the former number one **Denovo 20723 Columbia** at £902 PLI, with 1,187kg of milk and 93.3kg CFP, with +0.03% for both fat and protein. He has the qualities that reflect the modern dairy cow: A -13 Maintenance figure (smaller cows), +245 FeedAdvantage (daughters are predicted to require 245kg less dry matter in each lactation than daughters of a bull with a score of zero and at the same level of production), +4.8 EnviroCow, £159 HealthyCow, -16 somatic cell count (SCC), +110 days lifespan and +2.7 fertility.

Fourth is **Denovo 20771 Segment** (£901) with 1,005kg of milk, 92kg CFP +0.15% fat and +0.05% protein, -10 Maintenance, +203 FeedAdvantage, +4.7 EnviroCow, and £188 HealthyCow. He has +2.3 LamenessAdvantage, +2.8 CalfSurvival, +140 lifespan and +4.9 fertility. A new entry in fifth is **Badger Siemers Day Trip** (£895), another high production sire with 960kg of milk and 82.6kg CFP.

He has -3 gestation, -24 Maintenance, +228 FeedAdvantage, +£225 HealthyCow, +4.7 EnviroCow and a very high +180 days lifespan. He offers something a bit different in his pedigree, being a son of OCD Trooper Sheepster (a Renegade grandson) out of a dam by Farnear Upside (x Charl) with a granddam by Kings-Ransom Big Dollars (x Frazzled).

Sixth is AltaAlanzo son **Cogent B Advantage** (£890) who is out a dam by Captain – he is already producing bull mothers and there will be many more to come. He offers 853kg of milk, 77kg CFP at +0.06 and +0.09% and +167 FeedAdvantage. He also scores well for HealthyCow at £251 along with +4.3 EnviroCow, +2.6 LamenessAdvantage, +137 lifespan and a huge +13.1 fertility.

Also remaining in the top 10 is **Denovo 20668 Hierarchy** (£879) an A2A2 kappa-casein BB bull offering 864kg of milk, 91.6kg CFP at +0.25% fat and £199 HealthyCow. LamenessAdvantage is +2.4 with lifespan on +110 days and fertility at +7.2.

New in eighth is **Badger SSI Elvin Penarol** (£873), another A2A2 bull with 755kg of milk, 89kg CFP at +0.28% fat, and -23 Maintenance. He has +188 FeedAdvantage, +177 HealthyCow, +4.5 EnviroCow, +3.4 LamenessAdvantage, +122 lifespan and +5.5 fertility. The genomic proofs are generally stable, but occasionally a bull disappoints, and this proof run it is sons of **Cookiecutter Holysmokes** that have taken a tumble. Holysmokes himself has a daughter proof and was ranked second in the proven rankings last time with a PLI of £797, but now drops to 49th and £635, a fall of £162.

Genosource Captain, whose grandson Cogent B Advantage is sixth on PLI

This has had a knock-on effect on his sons, like **T-Spruce Harmony** (£934 down to £842), and **Progenesis Pineapple** (£768 down from £843; 22nd down to 106th).

High milk bulls

As usual, we break down the key areas to see which bulls are performing well for farmers who wish to select for particular traits, starting with the high milk sires. There are 55 bulls offering over 1,000kg predicted transmitting ability (PTA) for milk and 23 over 1,100kg, with **Genosource Jefferson** (£707) offering a huge 1,458kg and 81kg CFP (although negative for percentages). His health traits are moderate but he is over two points TM. **Denovo 2776 Leeds** (£842) sits second with 1,339kg and 92kg CFP and +119 days lifespan. He now ranks 25th on PLI but is now an influential sire of sons.

He is followed by **Bomaz Lambert** (£862) with a high 1,281kg of milk and 91kg CFP, and he also offers -23 Maintenance, +245 FeedAdvantage, +4.6 EnviroCow, +110 days lifespan and +5.5 fertility.

Next is **Sandy-Valley Esquire** (£661) with 1,242kg of milk and a high HealthyCow value of £226. He is followed by **Level-Plain Fide Venom** (£765) on 1,227kg, who offers 86kg CFP, +4.2 EnviroCow and +107 lifespan.

Only three of the 23 1,100kg or more bulls on milk kg offer over £200 HealthyCow but 11 have a FeedAdvantage value over +200. The average lifespan for the 55 bulls over 1,000kg for milk is +100 days, set against +146 days for the top 17 fertility bulls (over +12), excluding the Irish Holstein Friesian bulls. The fertility average of this high milk group is +2.9 and the HealthyCow average is £141 (both slightly down from August).

High fat and protein bulls

There are 49 bulls over 85kg CFP, with 21 over 90kg; 11 of these are in the top 20 PLI, 17 in the top 40. The top bull is **Peak Altamakover** (£827), the only one with 100kg (100.8kg) CFP; he is also offering 1,199kg of milk and positive percentages.

Next is #1 PLI bull Denovo Harmony on 98.8kg and then **OCD Thorson Darth Vader** (£796) on 96.8kg and 1,165kg of milk, with -22 Maintenance and +272 FeedAdvantage.

Pen-Col AltaSnazzy (£830) is another Sheepster son and shows 942kg of milk, 96.7kg CFP with +0.23% fat, and +4.3 EnviroCow. **Peak Powerhouse** (£834) completes the top five with 96.2kg and 1,095kg of milk, and +4.4 EnviroCow.

There are 71 bulls with over 50kg of fat, with **Denovo 20027 Luca** (£818) the highest at 61kg, followed by AltaMakover on 60.9kg and then **Winstar Classic** (£848) on 59.5kg. He is a lower milk sire on 392kg but with excellent percentages of +0.52% fat and +0.09% protein, plus £230 HealthyCow, +137 lifespan and +11.2 fertility. **Denovo 2826 Cash** (£736) is next on 59.7kg and then AltaSnazzy on 59.3kg.

There are eight bulls offering over 40kg of protein and the top bulls by kg are Powerhouse and Logic with 44.3kg, then Columbia on 42.2kg, Harmony on 41.8kg and Lambert on 40.6kg. There are 19 bulls over 38kg of protein and only three have a small minus for protein percentage, with all over 950kg of milk.

High fertility bulls

Some 17 Holstein bulls have a PTA for fertility index of +12 or greater (more if you include the Irish Holstein Friesians) and nine of +13 or more. Fertility is a key selection index for many farmers given the influence that the trait has on farm profitability. Of interest is that, of the top 50 genomic Holstein bulls ranked on fertility, only 15 are in the top 100 for PLI, and most, although not all, have more moderate production levels. But they have good scores for other health and fitness traits: The HealthyCow average for these top 50 is £236, and the PLI average a respectable £717.

Once again there are a number of Irish-bred bulls in this fertility ranking, including 11 out of the top 12; this number has increased significantly over the past couple of years due to the continuing popularity of Irish genetics. The highest value is **Stamullen Mozart** (£37) on +20.5, followed by **Shandangan Rex** (£196) on +18.3 and then Holstein **Denovo Ryden** (£524) on +17.5. Whilst a low production sire with only +51kg of milk and 23.5kg CFP, he does offer +0.12% fat and +0.11% protein and £290 HealthyCow.

The other two bulls over +17 are **Santry Lion King** (£54) on +17.4 and **Highmount Stark** (£95) on +17.3. All of the Irish are at least minus 500kg of milk on the Holstein base, so will be discounted by most bar grazing enthusiasts.

The next best Holstein fertility bull after Ryden, with +14.9, is **Progenesis Thriller** (£768), a nicely balanced sire with 432kg of milk, 66.6kg CFP at +0.29% fat and +0.11% protein, -22 Maintenance, £220 HealthyCow, +3.9 EnviroCow and +143 days lifespan. Also on +14.9 is British-bred **Huddlestone Sindon** (£696), who offers 51kg CFP, 239kg of milk at +0.27% fat and +0.12% protein, £229 HealthyCow and +3.4 LamenessAdvantage.

Winstar Elixir PP (£662) is a high health trait bull with a very high £270 HealthyCow. He also offers 111kg of milk and 48kg CFP, -24 SCC and -3 mastitis, +156 lifespan days and +3 EnviroCow.

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TOP 20 DAUGHTER-PROVEN HOLSTEIN BULLS RANKED ON PROFITABLE LIFETIME INDEX (PLI) DECEMBER 2024

PLI	Bull name	Milk kg	Fat kg	Ptn kg	Fat %	Ptn %	LAdv	CS	LS	FI	HC	Feed Adv	TM	Sire	From
847	BOMAZ KETTLE	665	52.6	41	0.29	0.21	1.6	1.8	73	-2.4	58	144	-0.5	KENOBI	GEN
799	GENOSOURCE CAPTAIN	1235	49.4	35.6	0	-0.06	1.5	2	92	5	146	274	2.08	CHARL	CBL
782	WESTCOAST RIVER	745	31.8	28.4	0.02	0.04	2.8	2.4	128	12.5	326	57	1.33	GUARANTEE	SMX
779	BOMAZ PLATT	518	46.6	31.5	0.29	0.16	-0.8	-3.4	82	13.5	172	57	0.68	PRINCE	GEN
778	HUL-STEIN COWBOY	709	48.9	28.5	0.22	0.05	0.4	2.3	92	6.3	194	108	-0.48	CRIMSON	CBL
762	WINSTAR GRAZIANO	352	43.7	23.5	0.34	0.13	1.3	2.7	104	12.5	230	103	-0.55	ALTAZAZZLE	SMX
750	FB KENOBI TARGARYEN	933	30	41.2	-0.08	0.11	3	0.9	104	-1.2	138	89	0.67	KENOBI	GEN
741	PROGENESIS WIMBLEDON	129	32.5	23.9	0.32	0.23	2.2	-0.4	95	19.1	278	-50	0.16	ALTAROBSON	SMX
723	DENOVO 14744 GINETTA	968	49.2	38.8	0.11	0.07	2	2.3	49	4.2	86	18	-0.19	GUARANTEE	GEN
722	DENOVO 16219 ALADDIN	961	50.5	36.1	0.13	0.05	1.2	1.8	61	0	44	164	1.43	ACURA	GEN
718	PLAIN-KNOLL RENEGAD TROOPER	756	43.1	31	0.14	0.06	1.9	1.6	149	4.3	178	15	2.29	RENEGADE	WWS
714	DENOVO 15158 ADMIRAL	453	47.8	21	0.34	0.07	1.9	0	101	7.9	181	156	0.08	TORQUE	GEN
712	PEAK MAUNEY	442	31.5	22.4	0.15	0.09	2.8	2.2	146	13.5	274	65	-0.45	ALTAROBERT	UKD/AIS
712	DENOVO 16767 PINEDALE	339	47.2	24.3	0.39	0.15	-0.5	0.5	95	5.5	171	65	1.35	PRINCE	GEN
704	DENOVO 14566 CROSBY	838	41.9	29.8	0.09	0.02	5.1	5	67	0.8	159	99	-1.08	CHARLEY	GEN
701	WINSTAR GREYCUP	523	40.9	26.4	0.22	0.1	1.7	1	122	7.5	164	134	-0.88	ALTAZAZZLE	SMX
700	PEAK BREAKING NEWS	304	22.7	19.9	0.12	0.11	3.5	0.5	174	12	310	140	-0.68	ALTAZAZZLE	UKD
699	DENOVO 15826 KNIGHT	774	34	31	0.03	0.06	2.4	1.8	122	-3.3	143	156	1.64	KENOBI	GEN
691	WINSTAR MENDEL P	550	56.7	25	0.39	0.08	1.7	1.7	58	4.6	104	116	0.58	ENTITY	GEN
690	OCD MARVEL	759	31.8	28.3	0.01	0.03	2.3	2.2	101	5.8	217	35	1.93	KENOBI	GEN

Source: AHDB Dairy. AIS = AI Services; CBL= Cogent Breeding; GEN = Genus ABS; SMX = Semex; UKD = UK Sires Direct; WWS = World Wide Sires. PLI = Profitable Lifetime Index; LAdv = Lameness Advantage; CS = Calf Survival; LS = Lifespan; FI = Fertility Index; HC = HealthyCow; Feed Adv = Feed Advantage; TM = Type Merit

Continued from page 64.

High lifespan bulls

Lifespan is another key trait and one that reflects profitability through extra lactations and a reduced replacement rate. There are 66 bulls offering +150 days or more lifespan and 27 over +170 days. The high correlation between Lifespan and HealthyCow is evident, with the +150 days group averaging £242 HealthyCow (the top 100 PLI bulls average £183 HealthyCow).

The leader for this trait – the same as in April and August - on 207 days is **Koepon Simply Red** (£808), a top 50 PLI bull with 1,111kg of milk, 58.3kg CFP, -17 Maintenance, and a huge £337 HealthyCow. He has -36 SCC, -3 mastitis and +9.1 fertility; he has big negatives on milk constituent percentages.

Delta Primetime PP Red (£639) is joint top and is a moderate production sire with 221kg of milk and 37.5kg CFP, with plus percentages of +0.13% and 0.11%. HealthyCow is £312 and SCC is an exceptional -28, as is mastitis at -5 (breed leader).

Delta Borax Red (£583) is third, ranked on +204 days, and he too offers a nice balance of 255kg of milk, 40kg CFP, positive percentages, £272 HealthyCow, -31 SCC and -4 mastitis. **Delta Taskforce Red** (£511) is in third at +201 days and again is a moderate production sire with 217kg of milk and 31kg CFP with plus percentages. HealthyCow is £229, CalfSurvival is +2.5 and TBAdvantage +3.5.

Denovo 19493 Epsilon PP (£670) completes the top five and offers +195 days as well as a production proof of 256kg of milk, 48.9kg of CFP with positive percentages (particularly fat at +0.28%), good udder health at -25 and -3, +12.7 fertility and £287 HealthyCow.

Bomaz Bob 6207 is great granddam to Bomaz Platt, fourth in proven bulls

The previously mentioned **S-S-I Holysmokes Simon** (£792) who dropped from 10th to 67th on the PLI list is still good on health and is 10th on the lifespan rank on +186 days.

High HealthyCow bulls

The HealthyCow index is a useful composite of key health traits and a quick selection filter: Six bulls are over £300 and 36 over £250. Koepon Simply Red is the breed leader at £337. Second is Delta Primetime PP Red on £312 followed by Holysmokes son **T-Spruce Harmony** (£842), mentioned at the beginning, at £305.

Next is **Peak AltaMick** (£756) on £301, a lower production but high health bull with figures of 233kg of milk, 59kg CFP at +0.35% and +0.14%, +2.5 LamenessAdvantage, -32 SCC and -3 mastitis, +156 lifespan and +11.7 fertility.

The two bulls on £300 are Holysmokes Simon and **Lars-Acres George Miller** (£802) who has production values of 461kg of milk and 60kg CFP at +0.16% fat and +0.13% protein. SCC is -26, mastitis -3, lifespan +189 days and fertility +11.

Best FeedAdvantage bulls

There are a dozen bulls over +250 for FeedAdvantage (each point is a kg dry matter intake saving per lactation for adjusted milk yields) and only two are outside the top 100 for PLI.

There is a strong correlation between FeedAdvantage and Maintenance, and therefore PLI, and there are 44 bulls with a PTA of over +200 for FeedAdvantage, starting with **Lars-Acres FB Wellness** (£834) on +303. He is a 1,200kg milk bull with 79kg CFP and -31 maintenance, and also scores well for lifespan on +122 days.

Next is Denovo Harmony on +300 and then **Pine-Tree Cruzer** (£791) third best on +292, followed by **Denovo 19495 Hargrove** (£817) at +285 and then **Winstar Reggie** (£864) on +280. Three more bulls bunch up with Darth Vader on +272, Peak AltaMakeover on +270 and then **DG Peace** (£853) on +269. Nothing in the top 200 for FeedAdvantage is positive (bigger than average) for Maintenance.

Best EnviroCow bulls

The previously mentioned Denovo Harmony, Columbia, Day Trip, Zest and Segment are the best for EnviroCow on +5.2 to +4.7, with five other bulls on +4.6. The top five for this trait are the top five on PLI, with six of the next eight in the top 30, indicating that there is a very high correlation between PLI and the EnviroCow index. Some 79 bulls score +4 or more for this trait, with all bar one of these over +100 on FeedAdvantage.

Commenting on the genomic young sire ranking, Marco Winters, Head of Animal Genetics at AHDB, says: "The top of this PLI ranking is where breeders can go to find the Holstein breed's most outstanding production, health and efficiency bulls for use in their herds, but they can also find many more exceptional bulls further down the list.

"Those who have already used Leeds may have to dig deeper but, as always, they can re-rank bulls on the AHDB website for traits they particularly wish to improve, whether that be fertility, cell count, feed efficiency or any other parameter for which a genetic index is calculated."

Proven bulls

The December 2024 proven sire proof run released by AHDB sees long-time leader **Genosource Captain** (£799 PLI) drop one place to second after **Bomaz Kettle** steams into the top spot. This son of De-Su Kenobi has a PLI of £847, with 208 daughters in 20 herds in his figures. Kettle transmits 665kg of milk with 52.6kg of fat at +0.29% and 41kg of protein at +0.21% - an exceptional 93.6kg CFP. Surprisingly, his HealthyCow is low at £58 – only one other bull in the top two-dozen has a lower value – so he scores moderately on most health traits.

Captain is well-known, and he adds more daughters to his figures,

both in the UK and globally. He now has 1,274 daughters in 105 herds in this country and thousands more worldwide, giving him an extremely stable proof. He is now transmitting 1,235kg of milk with 49.4kg of fat at +0% and 35.6kg of protein at -0.06%.

His FeedAdvantage value is +274; the best available, and he also scores +4.3 for EnviroCow and -29 Maintenance. He has good scores for CalfSurvival at +2 along with +92 days lifespan and +5 fertility, which contributes to his HealthyCow value of £146. Persistence is exceptionally high at 74%.

Back up to third is **Westcoast River** (£782), who now has 615 UK daughters in 84 herds. He is an exceptionally high health trait sire with £326 HealthyCow, which includes +2.8 LamenessAdvantage, -34 SCC, -4 mastitis, +128 lifespan and +12.5 fertility.

He is a good production sire too, with 755kg of milk, 31.8kg of fat and 28.4kg of protein with positive percentages and 73% persistency (the second highest in the top 20).

A new entry in fourth is **Bomaz Platt** (£779), graduating from the genomic list. He is a solid production sire with 518kg of milk, 46.6kg of fat and 31.5kg of protein; at +0.29% and +0.16%, based on 197 UK daughters in 44 herds (and others globally elsewhere). He transmits reasonable health traits with an overall value of £172 for HealthyCow, made up of -22 SCC, +82 days lifespan and +13.5 fertility; he is also 70% for persistency.

Hul-Stein Cowboy (£778) now has 117 daughters in 17 herds and sits in fifth, transmitting 709kg of milk with 77.4kg CFP, +0.22% fat and +0.05% protein, and 69% persistency. HealthyCow is £194 with -28 SCC and -3 mastitis, indicating excellent udder health.

In sixth is **Winstar Graziano** (£762), another which has risen in PLI, this one by £29. He is a moderate production bull with good components: 352kg of milk, 67kg CFP at +0.34% and +0.13%. He is a low Maintenance sire at -11, with +103 FeedAdvantage, -25 SCC, +2.7 CalfSurvival, £230 HealthyCow, +104 lifespan and +12.5 fertility.

In seventh is **FB Kenobi Targaryen** (£750) who has increased his PLI in the past two proof runs and now has 687 UK daughters in 100 herds. He is high in milk, at 933kg, as well as offering 30kg of fat at -0.08% and 41.2kg of protein at +0.11%. He has sound, if unspectacular, figures across the board, with +3.6 EnviroCow, £138 HealthyCow and -30 SCC. Lifespan is +104 days and fertility comes in at -1.2 along with 70% persistency.

Former number one **Progenesis Wimbledon** (£741) is still a high-ranking bull some three years after making top spot. Now with 200 UK daughters in 36 herds he is a low milk, high component and high health bull, transmitting 129kg of milk, 32.5kg of fat at +0.32% and 23.9kg of protein at +0.23%, with a £278 HealthyCow value including an exceptional +19.1 fertility index.

Staying in the top 10 is **Denovo 14744 Ginetta** (£723) with 605 UK daughters in 62 herds. He has 968kg of milk, 49.2kg of fat at +0.11% and 38.8kg of protein at +0.07%. LamenessAdvantage is +2, CalfSurvival +2.3 and fertility +4.2; he also offers 69% (high) persistency.

Completing the top 10, down from third last time, is **Denovo 16219 Aladdin** (£722), an equally high production sire offering 961kg of milk, 50.5kg of fat at +0.13% and 36.1kg of protein at +0.05%, based on 153 UK daughters in 18 herds; almost double his August numbers. His low Maintenance score of -15 is also reflected in his high FeedAdvantage value of +164, and he also scores above average for LamenessAdvantage at +1.2, CalfSurvival at +1.8 and EnviroCow at +3.9. He is, however, positive (undesirable) for SCC and mastitis.

In joint 13th is newcomer **Denovo 16767 Pinedale** (£712) offering 339kg of milk and 71.5kg CFP at +0.39% and +0.15%. HealthyCow is £171 and SCC is -25. He also scores well at almost two points for feet and leg composite. Just below him is **Denovo 14566 Crosby** (£704) who now has a 99% reliable proof with 2,260 UK daughters in 268 herds, and still offers 838kg of milk and 71.7kg CFP. Also new is **Peak Breaking News** (£700) in 17th place, who has one of the highest HealthyCow values available at £310, including +3.5 LamenessAdvantage, -39 SCC and -3 mastitis, +174 days lifespan and +12 fertility.

"Daughters of proven bulls continue to excel in UK herds, as seen through improvements on the ground for virtually every trait – whether milk, fat or protein production, fertility or cell counts," says Marco.

"Many of the leading bulls also score well for EnviroCow, as many of the improvements being made are feeding through to the reductions in carbon footprint the industry strives to achieve."

Methane project sparks public storm

Arla has joined forces with some major retailers to tackle methane emissions. The project will see a collective effort to trial the use of Bovaer, a feed additive said to reduce enteric methane emissions from cows by 27% on average.

However, the announcement has triggered a social media storm, with some people questioning the safety of the product in milk, given it's not licensed for use in humans. See Chris Walkland's comment on p15 for more details.

It's unclear what the impact of this pushback will be. But the initial announcement said that, as part of its FarmAhead Customer Partnership, Arla will work alongside Morrisons and Aldi, and with Tesco on its new Future Dairy Partnership, to highlight how feed additives can be introduced to normal feeding routines.

The project aims to improve understanding of how these feed additives can be rolled out across the industry. "Reducing methane is a big opportunity," says Paul Dover at Arla Foods. "Bringing partners together from across the industry highlights the support there is for British farmers in transitioning to more sustainable farming methods." Arla farmer Andrew Barraclough adds: "Feed additives can be expensive, which adds to the cost of producing milk. Farmers are trying to accelerate the transition to more sustainable dairy farming, but we can't do it alone – we need the wider industry to support us." www.arlafoods.co.uk

Bovaer is said to reduce methane emissions from cows by 27% on average

New strategic partnership announced

John Deere and Dinamica Generale have announced a strategic partnership, with Dinamica also becoming the first partner for the Milk Sustainability Centre which helps bring field, feed and animal data together.

Dinamica Generale manufactures precise feeding technology which is available for most feeder mixer wagons. This includes a weight-based entry solution and an advanced weight and constituent-based option.

The partnership aims to help farmers optimise their feeding operations, reduce environmental impact, and meet demands for sustainable practices.

It will start as a pilot in the Netherlands and will include the existing precise feeding portfolio, as well as testing future solutions to enhance automated data communication between John Deere tractors and feeder mixer wagons.

"Feed costs sum up to about 60% of the total production costs per kg of milk or beef and can exceed €2,000/ head (£1,665) per year," says Alexander Berges at John Deere. "Feeding animals more precisely offers great potential for farmers to reduce a large portion of their input costs."
www.johndeere.co.uk

Quicke launches new N-Series front loader

Quicke has launched a new N-Series front loader, engineered to fit tractors ranging from 80 to 180 horsepower and available in both mechanical self-levelling and non-self-levelling versions.

The loader ensures maximum visibility with a low-positioned parallel bar to make work safer, an easy attach and detach system, strong pivot points, galvanized pins and advanced bushings, says the firm's Cyril Thibaut. "We have returned to the essentials, focusing on what truly matters for farmers - reliability, simplicity, and efficiency. We have built a loader based on understanding the core needs of farming, and which is designed to last through the toughest jobs." www.quicke.com

Feed's environmental impact management

DSM-firmenich and Format Solution have announced a partnership aimed at quantifying and managing the environmental impact of animal feed.

The collaboration brings together Format Solutions' formulation software with the comprehensive life cycle assessment platform, Sustell. This means feed producers can now report the environmental impact of their feed with a single click, utilising existing data from their formulation software.

This integration helps prepare for future feed labelling requirements and supports farmers and processors by providing accurate and ISO-compliant feed footprints to help determine the environmental impact of eggs, meat, milk, and farmed seafood.

The move is a step towards full supply chain transparency, says DSM's David Nickell.
www.dsm-firmenich.com

Freshways rebrands

Freshways is undergoing a comprehensive rebrand aimed at modernising the company's identity. The firm says this marks an important milestone in its growth, following a series of UK acquisitions and mergers, including Capital Dairy Company, Medina Dairy, Kent Dairy Company, and Coultons.

Freshways now produces 8m litres of milk per week, as well as providing cream, eggs, bread, juice and alternative milk to retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and businesses. "We felt our previous branding wasn't effectively communicating who we are as a company," says Freshways CEO Bali Nijjar. "With this rebrand, we are not only modernising our look but also showcasing the Freshways values."
www.freshways.co.uk

Versatile dual front tank

The front tank enables farmers to apply nutrition while drilling crops

Kuhn Farm Machinery has launched a dual seed and fertiliser front tank, offering growers greater flexibility for establishment and the option to apply nutrition in the same pass.

The new pressurised TF 2300C features a 2,360-litre tank with a 60/40 split for seed and fertiliser. "It can be used with a wide variety of implements, from dedicated drills to cultivators with seeding kits," says the firm's Edd Fanshawe. The TF 2300C features Kuhn's Optiseed metering unit, with interchangeable cassettes and a pressurised hopper, allowing distribution rates up to 500kg/ha at 15kph. The two hoppers are individually dosed and can be mixed into the same delivery tube, or kept separate, depending on the machine and crop.

"Applying seed and fertiliser in one pass not only reduces passes but places nutrition in the right place to provide the crop with its best start," says Edd.

www.kuhn.com

Latest ingredient data out

The latest data behind 250 animal feed ingredients and more than 40,000 nutrients, including new amino acids, insect proteins and processed animal proteins, is now available. Atlas 2025, created by Premier Nutrition and consultant Mick Hazzledine, provides the most current and precise ingredient values for efficient feed formulation.

"The nutrient matrix has not only been updated using recent quality control data, but we have added fibre fractions - non-starch polysaccharides, total dietary fibre and their solubility - on the back of global research," explains Premier Nutrition's Dr Lorraine Salmon. "This indicates benefits from soluble fibre found at higher levels in ingredients like barley and rye."

Premier Atlas provides a comprehensive description of listed ingredients, as well as their production, anti-nutritive factors and processing details.

"Providing nutritional data across the widest range of raw materials in one document allows nutritionists to optimise nutrition inputs more efficiently and can lead to increasingly sustainable outcomes." says Lorraine.

www.premiernutrition.co.uk

Cathedral City relaunches price-marked packs

Cathedral City has relaunched its 200g price-marked packs (PMPs) in both its mature and extra mature varieties.

Recent consumer insights revealed that 66% of consumers are actively seeking to extract more value from, or reduce the cost of, their weekly shopping trips.

www.cathedralcity.co.uk

Farms deserve Parliament's support

Harriet Cross

Political comment

"You're going to have to do more with less." These words from Environment Secretary Steve Reed stand out as a stark example of the disconnect between Whitehall thinking and farming reality. Having worked with farming families as both a rural surveyor and now MP for Gordon and Buchan, I know that farmers have been facing headwinds and challenges for generations. There comes a point where "less" simply means "stop."

Just days before the Budget, I led a Westminster Hall debate on agricultural property relief (APR) and business property relief (BPR). The chamber was full of genuine concern from MPs of farming communities across the UK. The message was clear: APR and BPR are lifelines, not loopholes. They are the generational foundations upon which our rural communities, economies and food systems stand. As MPs shared stories from their constituencies, we saw a picture emerging of farming communities already stretched to breaking point. That debate now seems a warning of what was to come.

"The farming community's response has shown remarkable unity."

The Budget announced, from April 2026, a combined £1m cap for assets eligible for APR and BPR, after which a 20% rate of inheritance tax (IHT) would be due. While the Treasury presented this as targeting wealthy landowners, the reality is that this strikes at the heart of ordinary family farms.

One of the most concerning aspects was the revelation that Defra reportedly learned of these changes only the night before the Budget. This strikes me as a troubling example of policy disconnection. How can we expect sound agricultural policy when Defra learns of fundamental changes only the night before the Budget? Farming cannot be seen as a line on a Treasury spreadsheet - major changes require proper consultation with Defra, ministers and the sector.

During Prime Minister's Questions last week, I shared a story from my Gordon and Buchan constituency about the real impact of this policy. A farming family in my constituency lost their mother very suddenly and unexpectedly at the beginning of the year - she was just 58. As they continued to come to terms with this devastating loss, the changes to APR in the Budget came as another blow. These two events have thrown plans for one of their daughters to continue the farming legacy into flux. Their story shows, as I am sure

Harriet Cross, MP for Gordon and Buchan

everyone reading this already appreciates, just how unpredictable farming is and how you cannot plan for every eventuality.

The concern, anger, and anguish regarding the changes to APR and BPR are not about wealthy tax avoidance; it's about families facing impossible choices at their most vulnerable moments. With an average farm generating annual profits of less than 1% of their capital value, these are not margins that allow for tax planning or building capital reserves. Some 19% of farms were shown to have not made a profit, and 24% made less than £25,000 per year in recent Defra figures.

As I asked the Farming Minister in the chamber recently, for a family farm to pay an IHT bill, does he suggest that "farmers sell the land used to grow the food, sell the machinery they use to harvest the food or sell the buildings they use to store the food?"

Misleading figures

The CLA's analysis shows how a typical 81-ha farm, with an annual profit of £27,300, could face an IHT liability of £435,000. That's 159% of their yearly profit - impossible to pay without selling assets.

Using Treasury figures, the Government says only 25% of farms will be affected, suggesting just 500 farms annually. Yet Defra's own figures tell a different story, showing 49% of farms are worth more than £1.5m, and there are 70,000 farms of more than 81ha. The CLA estimates capping agricultural property relief at £1m could affect 70,000 UK farms, with even modest family farms exceeding the threshold. Average GB agricultural land values are £20,254/ha, with typical arable farm values ranging from £21,489/ha to £24,947/ha depending on land grade, and that is before buildings and other assets are considered.

The farming community's response has shown remarkable unity. The rally in Whitehall on November 19 saw around 20,000 farmers gather outside Parliament, including some of my constituents who had travelled down from Aberdeenshire that morning. Their presence, alongside farmers from across Britain, illustrated that these changes threaten not only wealthy landowners, but ordinary farming families worried about their and their family's future.

In the days after the Budget, I co-ordinated a letter to the Chancellor, signed by 117 parliamentarians and rural organisations, including British Dairying, which was hand-delivered to Downing Street, urging the Chancellor to think again. I am yet to receive a response.

The way this policy emerged is particularly concerning. While the previous Government's Agriculture Bill involved extensive consultation with the farming community, this fundamental change to farming's financial framework was introduced with minimal sector engagement.

The implications for tenant farmers are especially worrying. Without the required capital to purchase farms outright, many young and new entrant farmers begin their careers on tenanted holdings. With the tax incentive for letting farmland effectively removed, these changes will disproportionately affect the very generation we should be encouraging into the sector.

"The expertise passed down through generations are all put at risk."

As we all understand, a farming business does not operate in isolation. Each farm supports an extensive network of rural businesses. The combined impact of changes to APR and BPR is particularly severe for diversified farms which have developed additional business enterprises to remain viable, as had long been encouraged and seen as a sensible endeavour for diversifying incomes.

The careful environmental stewardship that comes from long-term family ownership, the social fabric of rural communities, and the expertise passed down through generations are all put at risk.

My Conservative Party colleagues and I continue to challenge this policy through every parliamentary avenue available. While the Government remains committed to its course, opposition grows, supported by clear evidence of the policy's wider implications. The farming community has responded with dignity and unity - exemplified by the peaceful yet emotional rally in Westminster.

For those of us in Parliament who understand farming's role in our lives, our job is to highlight that current policy decisions and Treasury assumptions do not reflect the reality, and the real-world impact this will have on family farming. Behind each affected farm is not a tax-avoiding investment vehicle but a living, working enterprise that produces our food, sustains our countryside and is the cohesion of our rural communities.

Family farms sustain our rural economies, protect our natural environment, and underpin the nation's food security. They deserve nothing less than our full support.


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