

BRITISH DAIRYING

December 2025 Vol 32, No.2

PLANNING FOR 2026

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■ What to expect from LAMMA 2026

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Christmas is the perfect time to reflect on what's good in the world and to tune out of the politics

Selective hearing

I read a lovely quote on X today: "Watching the Budget team deny misleading the public over the past couple of days is like watching a child deny eating a biscuit while their face is covered in chocolate". It was so refreshing to get a light-hearted take on something that has otherwise been so utterly brutal.

This Government seems totally incapable of telling the whole truth – at every turn it seems to select a lone statistic and keep on repeating it, despite the vast body of evidence that proves it is in the wrong. And then to apparently pull rank with the Met Police to cancel – at the 11th hour – the peaceful demonstration that had been organised for weeks was a disgusting abuse of power to silence the rural sector.

Hat's off to those of you who still turned up in London and protested peacefully. Watching farmers being arrested and cuffed made me mute with disbelief – and yet, once again, you held your cool, your dignity, and public appeal.

It will be interesting to see at what point Minette Batters' report on farming profitability – which was apparently 'buried' ahead of the Budget – will be published. Her view that farming is vastly undervalued is spot on – without farming at its heart, there would be no food chain in the UK, just importers and retailers. It's vital that the true breadth of agriculture's value is recognised by those who so carelessly wield their power over our industry and our lives.

Now, onto brighter things. My daughter rolled her car the other day. And no, that's not the brighter thing! She swerved to avoid some deer on our narrow Devon roads, and our steep Devon banks did what they do to errant cars – turn them over. She was fine – the car not so much. But who to call... why the local farmer of course! In fact, two of them – one said to help ourselves to the telehandler in the yard, the other drove 15 minutes to come and resurrect said car onto its wheels. It reminded me of how bloody wonderful farmers and rural communities are. At our local point-to-point not long after, plenty of people asked after her, with a little gentle teasing to boot. Society at its best.

So in that spirit of community, I encourage you to spend some time with others, check in on them and share some banter. Take some time away from the political noise and have some fun – your local pub might thank you for the custom. With Christmas on its way, it's a perfect time to pause and reflect on all that's good in this world – and there is a lot! Wishing you a relaxing and happy festive season.

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Olivia Cooper

Managing Editor

BRITISH
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BRITISH DAIRYING

Published by WB Publishing Ltd
www.britishdairying.co.uk
www.creamawards.uk

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Printed at Warners Midlands Plc

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Available free to selected farmers in the UK who meet the publisher's terms of control.

UK Subscription rate: £70/yr (12 issues), Europe: £90.
Rest of the world: £115 and digital only £30 + VAT.



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ISSN 1356-1561

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Change welcome, but not enough Little good Budget news

The Chancellor announced a welcome change to the Family Farm Tax in last month's Budget, but there was little else for the rural economy to praise.

The change means the £1m tax-free threshold will now be transferable between spouses, enabling married couples to pass on more assets jointly upon death. "It's good to see the Government accepts its original proposals were flawed," said NFU President Tom Bradshaw. "But this change goes nowhere near far enough to remove the devastating impact of the policy on farming communities."

"It's only right that agricultural allowances can be transferred between spouses and it's something we've been calling for. But it does nothing to alleviate the burden on the elderly and vulnerable."

The CLA also welcomed the change, but pointed out it would not help the 46% of farms owned by a single farmer. "This is the first public signal that the Chancellor knows her inheritance tax reforms have been



Rachel Reeves' tax reforms have been a disaster for the farming sector

a disaster," said President Gavin Lane. "Across the country, family businesses have been reducing their investment, at an enormous cost to the economy. It is not too late for her to scrap the entire policy. The Chancellor said this was a Budget for sustainable long-term growth. But it is difficult to understand what measures contained within it were designed for that purpose."

Tenants Farmers' Association Chief Executive George Dunn

said the change was only one of six reasonable asks tabled by the Association. "Sadly, the Chancellor has run scared from meeting farmers and their representative bodies and continues to block that engagement. At the same time as farmers were being arrested for peacefully protesting against her taxation changes, her failure to adequately address their legitimate concerns is lamentable."

Rachel Reeves had one further opportunity to redeem herself by comprehensively amending the draft Finance Bill legislation before its debate in Parliament, he added. The TFA was also disappointed there was no movement on Stamp Duty Land Tax, which impacts much needed longer-term tenancies.

There was little in the Chancellor's Budget to fundamentally change the outlook of farm and estate owners. That's according to Mark Charter, Head of Estate Management at Carter Jonas. "Inheritance tax changes seem to be going ahead as planned next April, so businesses and families who haven't discussed the future need to take advice and make decisions quickly."

The 2% increase in tax on rental income, which will affect rural landlords, is another blow for the rental market, he added. An annual levy on residential properties worth over £2m will catch some farmhouses, and questions remain over how properties will be valued, and how the tax will be implemented.

"However, diversified businesses running retail, hospitality and leisure operations will view the lower business rate multiplier as a positive move," said Mr Charter. "It is a small step, but is a financial gain for those who have diversified."

At Knight Frank, Partner James Farrell said it was incongruous to hear Rachel Reeves claim that she was proud to deal with injustices. "How is making some elderly or unwell farmers feel that it would be better if they die before April next year not an injustice?"

Semex Conference speakers announced

Speakers have been confirmed for the 2026 Semex International Dairy Conference, taking place in Glasgow on January 11-13.

Chairing the event will be Scottish dairy farmer Rory Christie, Chair of the recently launched Association of Dairy Producer Organisations. Dairy farmer speakers include Steffan Richards (South Wales), Claire Beckett (Northern Ireland), Rene Cornelissen (Denmark); Kevin Lawrie (Scotland), and Jack Allwood (Cheshire).

Industry speakers will include Serge Moly, Lactalis; Chris Walkland, market analyst; and Christophe Lafougere, Chief Executive at Gira Foods.

Also joining the panel are NFU President Tom Bradshaw, Liberal Democrat MP Tim Farron and Dairy UK Chair, Paul Vernon. Bringing a global perspective will be Gilles Froment, President of the International Dairy Federation; Melissa Bowere, Semex Alliance; and Manuel Soares, Chief Executive at dairy software company Milc Group.

Plans for 2026 Open Farm Sunday revealed

LEAF has launched the 20th anniversary campaign for Open Farm Sunday. It is calling on farm businesses and supply chain partners to come together on June 7 to champion sustainable, nature-friendly agriculture. "For 20 years OFS has given the public an honest, first-hand view of modern farming and the care that goes into producing their food," said Chief Executive David Webster. "Our focus is on deepening those connections, uniting brands, farmers and communities to strengthen every link from farm to fork."

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King's Award for Shearwell

Shearwell Data has been awarded the King's Award for Enterprise for outstanding short-term growth. This global supplier of animal identification and livestock management systems is the largest employer within the Exmoor National Park.



Richard Webber (L) at Shearwell

In the three years to September 2023, its total overseas sales grew by 69%, representing almost a third of its annual turnover.

The company's products are developed and manufactured in the UK, and rigorously tested for reliability and ease of use on the family's own farms.

The award was presented by the Lord-Lieutenant of Somerset Mohammed Saddiq. "These awards are reserved for only a select number of organisations that truly demonstrate excellence in their field," he said. "You have shown remarkable success, not only through the quality and innovation of your products but also through the impressive growth of your exports."

Emma Thorne, the company's co-Chief Executive said: "We see it not as a finish line, but as a beginning, a call to continue growing with the same spirit that got us here. We're proud to carry forward not just the success of our company, but the values of British enterprise, innovation and excellence that this award celebrates."



A group of rural stakeholders met at Holyrood to tackle cancer care barriers

Collaborative cancer help for Scottish farmers

Inequalities in cancer support for farming and rural communities in Scotland are to be addressed following a meeting of stakeholders at Holyrood.

Attendees shared examples of the barriers to accessing support, including needing to travel long distances, take ferry trips and arrange costly overnight stays for hospital appointments and treatment.

Sheena Horner at the Farming Community Network Scotland, said: "We were encouraged by the spirit of collaboration at the reception. Many charities and organisations from across the rural sector came together to discuss a joined-up approach to address inequalities for people in accessing cancer support and treatment."

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Antibiotics low in UK farming

The latest RUMA Agriculture Targets Task Force (TTF) report has been published, confirming that UK farming remains one of the lowest users of antibiotics in Europe. The industry has also achieved some of the biggest reductions in antimicrobial resistance over the past decade.

The report concludes the TTF2 cycle and precedes the launch of a third cycle of targets. It notes that data from the Animal Plant and Health Agency shows a strong link between reduced antibiotic use and reduced antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in UK animals.

For dairy farms, Medicine Hub data from 3,205 enterprises shows a mean use of 13.94mg per population corrected unit (PCU), representing 43% of the UK's adult dairy cow population.

RUMA Chair Cat McLaughlin said the continued effort and commitment remains clear, with a near 60% voluntary reduction in antibiotic use since 2014. "While reductions have been significant over the past decade, we are starting to see a plateau - which



TTF3 outlines new sector targets

is to be expected. Sectors must still use antibiotics when it is appropriate to do so," she said.

Some increases have occurred in certain sectors due to disease outbreaks, lack of availability of key vaccines and environmental impacts. TTF3 now outlines the next four years of sector targets and commitments. "We must continue to innovate and apply the learnings so far, to ensure

we protect the efficacy of antibiotics long into the future," she added.

"There are many key factors as to why the livestock sectors need responsible antibiotic use, including for trade purposes, consumer confidence, and to demonstrate the UK's high health and welfare farming standards."

Meanwhile, VetPartners' UK practices have reported a continued reduction in antibiotic use. Data included in its 2025 antibiotics stewardship report shows usage has declined by 33% across all species compared to 2024 - a 60% reduction since 2021.

To reduce antimicrobial resistance across Europe, VetPartners is using cross-country collaboration between its UK and European practices. For the first time, the report also includes data from Italy, as the company begins to focus on the challenge of AMR as a group, with practices and associated animal healthcare businesses across the UK, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Reaction to sugar levy is bittersweet

The Government has confirmed that the soft drinks industry levy will be extended to include milk and yoghurt-based drinks, sparking disappointment at Dairy UK.

"Our products play an essential role in providing valuable nutrition," said Chief Executive Dr Judith Bryans. "Milk and yoghurt-based drinks are a convenient, affordable and tasty way for many, especially children, to meet their recommended intakes for a range of nutrients - not to mention the role of some in promoting good gut health."

That said, the organisation is pleased the Treasury has included a lactose allowance, which will ensure dairy companies do not pay for naturally occurring lactose, which is not a public health concern.

"It is also welcome that the Government has increased the sugar threshold, and extended the implementation date to 2028, which gives dairy companies time to reformulate products."

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Dr Alex Brown will chair the British Cattle Breeders' Conference

Details released for BCBC

How research can be successfully put into practice on-farm will be a central theme of the British Cattle Breeders' Conference, taking place on January 19-21 in Telford.

The event will be chaired by Dr Alex Brown, Beef Genetic Services Manager at Genus ABS. She said the theme - 'Joining the dots: From blue skies to green fields', was inspired by growing frustration that valuable research often fails to reach the farmgate.

"Academics are under pressure to publish in peer-reviewed journals to attract funding, but in many cases that doesn't directly help farmers," she said. "We expect this research to trickle down, but various

barriers often prevent innovations from reaching those who can implement change at a practical level. At this year's conference, we're asking how we can better connect research with real-world farming and invite everyone to be part of that conversation."

The programme will feature more interactive sessions than before and includes a breeding workshop and a debate on the pros and cons of using in-vitro fertilisation in cattle.

Elsewhere, Aled Davies from Pruex will unveil findings from a Welsh Government-funded trial investigating how biological treatment of slurry can cut ammonia emissions on dairy farms.

New CEO now appointed at AHDB

Chartered accountant Helen Herniman has been appointed as the new Chief Executive and Accounting Officer at AHDB.

Her experience in leading organisations through growth, turnaround and transformation spans both the public and private sectors. "My predecessors and the

brilliant team at AHDB are making great progress in supporting and championing our world-class farmers and producers, and there is plenty more to come," she said.

"I'm delighted to be joining an organisation that has a key role in an industry that produces safe, sustainable and nutritious food."

Success for Hartpury as students are awarded

Four students from Hartpury University and College have won at the 2025 Land-based and Environment Learner Awards. These celebrate the next generation of skilled professionals across land-based, environmental, animal,

equine, and conservation sectors. The four successful students are: Louis Norman - Animal Science; Mimi Dean - Equine Management; Ellie Hollings - Veterinary Nursing and Ellie Martin - Biodiversity Conservation.



Hartpury students were among the Lantra award winners this year



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Bovaer investigations continue in Denmark

Danish dairy farmers have sparked a social media storm over the required use of the methane-suppressing feed additive Bovaer - and for many the jury over its use is still out.

"Any new product or innovation needs to work in real-life situations and suit a range of farm systems," said NFU Dairy Board Chair Paul Tompkins. "Animal welfare must continue to be our highest priority.

"Following reports of investigations in Denmark into the use of methane suppressants, we will continue to monitor the situation to ensure the impact of any product is known. We continue to apply informed, science-based decision-making when it comes to the use and advocacy of emissions-reducing techniques," he added.

Bovaer manufacturer DSM-Firmenich maintains there is no evidence that it has caused any problems. "Bovaer is given to more



Bovaer is used safely in 25 countries but farmers have raised concerns

than 500,000 dairy cattle in more than 25 countries," said a spokesperson. "It reduces methane emissions from cows by 30% and is the first major

commercial product to do so. The safety has been rigorously tested for 15 years, with more than 110 peer-reviewed scientific studies.

"Some 1,600 Danish dairy farms are covered by the programme," they added. "Of these, 400 started using Bovaer at the start of 2025, without any significant reported problems.

"At the beginning of October, the 1,200 remaining farmers began using Bovaer to meet the obligation of 80 days' mandatory use. A minority of these have reported issues coinciding with the use of the product.

"These are being investigated on a case-by-case basis, and there remains no evidence that Bovaer is a cause of any problems. We continue to work with the authorities and professional organisations to determine the root cause."

The company is continuing to expand Bovaer's adoption across the 25 markets where it is already available, and urges farmers with any concerns to get in touch at info.bovaer@dsm-firmenich.com.

Report displays positive messages for dairy farming

Dairy is playing a vital role in both human health and the nation's environmental ambitions, a new scientific report has confirmed.

The review of scientific evidence was produced by independent nutritionists alongside AHDB experts. "The role of dairy in the UK has received plenty of media attention and debate over the past few years, but the evidence around its impact on the environment is disjointed and often lacking," said the Board's Head of Environment, Rachael Madeley-Davies.

"Our review brings together the evidence to show that UK dairy farming is not only efficient but actively working towards

sustainability targets. It is among the most efficient and sustainable globally, with emissions intensity down 22% since 1990."

On human health, the report cites dairy as a building block of healthy, sustainable diets and an affordable means of addressing nutrient shortfalls.

Environmentally, it finds that well-managed livestock farming doesn't just provide food, but can also deliver benefits for the planet like carbon storage, habitat management and improved soil health, supporting the UK's net zero ambitions.

Kate Arthur, Head of Nutrition and Health at AHDB said: "By providing a

science-led foundation for marketing and policy, we hope this report will

strengthen the sector's position in debates on health and sustainability."



Dairy produce is a building block of healthy and sustainable diets

Conservatives' pledge to farmers at summit

Ahead of Rachel Reeves' Budget, the Conservatives made a series of pledges for agriculture during their emergency farming summit.

The meeting, hosted by party leader Kemi Badenoch with Efra Shadow Secretary of State Victoria Atkins, took place on the Hunter family's farm in Buckinghamshire. Farmers were invited to outline the actions they felt were necessary to secure the future of the industry.

"Only the Conservatives have the plan and the political will to back British farmers, protect our rural way of life and deliver a stronger rural

economy," they claimed. The party billed the event as an emergency summit due to record farm closures, rising food prices, and the need to strengthen the security of food grown to high standards.

Pledges included scrapping the Family Farm Tax, placing food production at the core of government policies and 'fixing the red tape and misguided bureaucracy'. The party also shared a costed plan for cheaper power as well as tackling rural crime.

"The Conservatives have your back," said Ms Badenoch. "Food security is vital; help us to help you."

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Home Office commitment on rural crime

The Home Office's new three-year rural crime strategy, aimed at tackling the growing threat posed by organised crime groups, has been welcomed by the NFU.

Published by the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC), the strategy follows a roundtable meeting earlier this year between the Home Office, Defra and police leads. It identifies nine priority crime areas, including machinery theft, livestock worrying and theft, illegal hunting and poaching, and offences against protected species.

The NPCC said: "These crimes strike at the heart of rural life, undermining the economic and social security of those who live and work there. Farmers need visible policing, swift recovery of stolen



The new rural crime strategy will target nine priority crime areas

equipment and sentencing that deters repeat offenders."

NFU Vice President Rachel Hallos said the launch recognised the serious and organised nature of rural crime,

with its strategic priorities aligned closely with the NFU's asks on the subject. "For too long, criminal gangs have exploited the countryside, targeting machinery, livestock and

land, with devastating impacts on businesses and families," she said.

According to the NPCC, new technology will aid intelligence-led policing through advanced data analytics and crime mapping, with police already using tools like drones to tackle wildlife crime. National training programmes will be rolled out for tackling machinery theft, livestock crime and wildlife offences, with DNA analysis used to support investigations.

The NFU also welcomed recognition of other areas of concern for rural communities, particularly fly-tipping. The Government has also committed to introducing legislation requiring all new ATVs and GPS units to have forensic markings to deter theft.

More interactive Dairy Tech to connect farmers with experts

Dairy Tech 2026 will be more interactive, giving farmers a unique opportunity to engage directly with leading industry experts on issues that matter most to them.

The RABDF said the event, taking place on February 4 at Stoneleigh Park, will also be larger. It will feature a dedicated session on electronic identification, which becomes mandatory for English cattle farmers in 2027. The session will explain what the new rules mean, the timeline across the devolved nations, and how

the technology can support on-farm practices. Milk market trends will also be on the agenda, with analyst Chris Walkland providing forecasts for 2026.

Labour shortages - one of the industry's most pressing challenges - will also be in the spotlight. Attendees will hear how dairy farmers are recruiting from outside the industry, building skills, and creating effective staff retention strategies. There will also be a Question Time and an



Dairy Tech will be larger in 2026

Innovation Hub exploring the latest dairy technology.

"Dairy Tech has become a must-attend in dairy farmers' calendars," said RABDF Chair Robert Craig. "It continues to be a positive way to kick off the year, by bringing farmers together and connecting businesses, suppliers, buyers and the organisations that work for them. I'm excited for next year's event as it marks 150 years of the RABDF and the very first Dairy Show, held in 1876, which we plan to mark in style."

New campaign from Agri-Tech Centre

The UK Agri-Tech Centre has launched a new campaign aimed at championing agri-tech businesses that are bringing new solutions to market and driving economic growth across the sector.

The campaign showcases the latest technologies, from artificial intelligence to robotics, and demonstrates how the Centre has supported these businesses to grow. A dedicated 'Growth Week' is planned for February 2-6, featuring a mix of

online and in-person activities to help businesses expand while addressing barriers to sector growth.

Helen Brookes, Engagement Director at the UK Agri-Tech Centre, which has engaged with more than 300 businesses, said: "We really do mean business when it comes to agri-tech. We support businesses, while ensuring that these solutions have been trialled on-farm and are therefore robust and relevant to meet industry challenges."



Oxford Farming Conference theme set

The Oxford Farming Conference, which runs from January 7-9 and will be chaired by Farming Community Network's Jude McCann, has announced its theme as 'Growing Resilience'.

Held in the Oxford Examination Schools and focusing on agricultural education and knowledge-sharing, the event attracts over 650 delegates every year from the food chain, retail, NGOs, scientific organisations, media, policy-making bodies and governments from around the world.

More than 30 speakers have been announced. **Visit: www.ofc.org.uk.**

Tributes being paid to industry's Bruce Jobson

Well-known industry journalist and fourth generation dairy farmer from Morpeth, Bruce Jobson, died on November 20. He was in Quebec, having attended the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto.

Specialising in dairying matters, his articles spanned both domestic and global farming perspectives, and hordes of tributes have been paid since news of his death. Bruce leaves a wife, Helen, sons Ryan and Shaun, grandsons Brody and Bowie, and daughter-in-law Natasha.



Bruce Jobson passed away in Canada



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Holstein UK awards received

Holstein UK has chosen to honour two recipients from an 'exceptional' entry in this year's Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Recognising individuals who have dedicated at least 20 years to the Holstein and/or British Friesian breeds, the 2025 recipients are Ken Proctor of the Airfield herd, Thetford, and Robert Horton of the Hinton herd at Swindon.

Mr Proctor is renowned as an outstanding stockman and a strong advocate for the breed, with the Airfield herd established in 1980. He has become a familiar figure in the showing with stock, as an international judge and as National Holstein Show Director. In 2009, he served as President of Holstein UK and was Non-Executive Director for Breed Development until 2003. He continues to farm alongside his wife, Rebecca, and sons Robert and Ralph; the Airfield herd now consists of 600 milkers on 1,000ha.

Mr Horton has been farming in Wiltshire his entire life, learning as a teenager from Ben Cooper at Noremead. On returning home, he



Robert Horton (R) won a Gold Cup award this year, and now a HUK award

encouraged his father to develop the herd, which at the time consisted of Shorthorn/Friesian crosses. "Robert has never lost sight of longevity, having bred 50 100-t cows under the Hinton prefix," said the Board. The herd has regularly reached the national finals of the Premier Herd competition.

Meanwhile, HUK has announced three finalists for the President's Medal. Based on their essays and interviews, the finalists are: Samuel Blease, 27, Lancashire; Lauren Gilbert, 27, Northern Ireland; and Jodie Nutsford, 25, Cheshire. The winner will be announced at the Semex conference.

Nuffield and RASE's new bitesize guides

Two bitesize guides; one on leadership in agriculture and the other on communicating with people outside the industry, have been launched by the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust and RASE.

Drawing on key findings from Nuffield scholar reports, the guides offer practical advice, case studies, talking points and action plans. QR codes and links allow readers to access the original reports for more information.

'Leadership and developing your career in agriculture' provides ideas and inspiration for anyone looking to develop their career, from newcomers to those already managing teams. 'Communicating with people outside of agriculture' presents approaches to help the industry engage more effectively with customers, consumers and wider society.

RASE's Technical Director Stephen Briggs said effective leadership is essential across all businesses, but can be challenging in an industry dominated by small and family-run enterprises. Improving communication with those outside agriculture helps build trust, understanding and stronger relationships, he added.

www.rase.org.uk/reports

AHDB celebrates its dairy campaign success

AHDB's Let's Eat Balanced dairy campaign generated £28 in additional dairy retail sales for every £1 of levy invested, independent analysis by NielsenIQ has shown.

Described as a "significant return for levy payers", the Board said the findings highlight the impact of strategic marketing in promoting British dairy products. The campaign, focused on milk, cheese and yoghurt, reportedly achieved £11.9m in incremental dairy sales. Television was the most effective channel,

delivering 44.2% of incremental sales, while digital activity across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and on-demand TV also performed strongly.

When adverts appeared on both traditional and on-demand TV, the impact was even greater, driving nearly 2% additional sales. "This is a great outcome for our levy payers and a clear demonstration of AHDB's ability to drive growth for the dairy sector," said Paul Flanagan, AHDB's Dairy Sector Director. "It shows that when we invest in strategic marketing,

we strengthen consumer trust, build long-term demand, and deliver real value back to our levy payers."

Head of Domestic Marketing, Carrie McDermid, said: "The campaign continues to show how combining clear nutritional messages with real stories from British farmers can make a genuine impact. It not only helps consumers see the role dairy plays in a healthy, balanced diet, but also demonstrates the value of levy investment in promoting food our farmers can be proud of."



Good communication is key

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Wheat hits 18-month low



Jamie Day

Feed market specialist

The past month has seen cereal feed ingredient values continue their 18-month decline, despite a short rally at the beginning of November. In contrast, protein materials have firmed, with China's resumption – albeit tentative – of soyabean imports. The late October talks between US President Trump and China's leader Xi raised the prospect of China buying significant quantities of US wheat and soyabeans. This caused a rally in values, although the actual volumes involved were not enough for the higher wheat prices to persist.

Accordingly, well supplied global wheat markets have continued to drift downwards, although the maize and soyabean markets have proved firmer. The US-led peace negotiations over Russia's invasion of Ukraine are also bearish for values, as any ceasefire or longer settlement would likely see more Russian and Black Sea materials reaching world markets. Russia's aggressive exporting is already the main cause of weaker world values.

The January 2026 London wheat futures opened November at £166.20/t, rising to £171.40/t in the first week, only to slide to £163.70/t, which is a contract low. The May 2026 position opened the month at £173.50/t, peaking at £179.40/t before it fell back to £171.70/t. Grain merchants see little prospect of wheat prices strengthening.

Large grain crops

The already large 2025 production in the Northern Hemisphere has been revised up by the International Grains Council. A good outlook for the Southern Hemisphere, especially in Argentina and Australia, is adding to the bearish outlook. Domestically, trading is subdued, with UK economic uncertainty persisting after the Budget.

UK wheat exports remain slow, while the EU's export activity is also, like last year, behind the pace of recent years. Looking further ahead, the open autumn weather has allowed another large winter wheat crop to be planted for harvest 2026, which is factored into prices. Feed wheat was worth £160-£168/t ex-farm, depending on region, at the end of November.

Feed barley demand has strengthened somewhat. Prices are firm both in the UK and Europe. Although global barley stocks are plentiful, short-term factors like delayed shipments from Australia's new crop are helping to support values. The UK is well supplied too, with a weak malting barley market adding pressure to feed supplies, though there is farmer reluctance to sell.

While short-term demand from feed manufacturers is supportive to values, traders don't see the firmer prices persisting against the reality of good supplies. AHDB data shows barley usage by compounders rose by 6.7% in the July - September quarter, while their wheat usage fell 2.6%. There has also been short-term support for UK barley from

export buyers in the Netherlands, although this is expected to be displaced by German supplies in the second half of the marketing year.

Feed barley was trading at £145-£153/t ex-farm, depending on region. Global corn (maize) prices have followed soyabeans upward, largely through US corn exports and support from the renewed Chinese interest in US grain. US corn exports are running ahead of recent years, and the authorities expect an additional 10m tonnes of corn shipments over the year. UK grain maize values are around £205/t ex-store.

Of the proteins, soya values also firmed on the back of the Chinese demand – although this is only several shiploads, rather than the 12m tonnes pencilled in for this marketing year. But the development is enough to lift the US soya futures which set the global market tone. UK hi-pro soyameal is currently trading in the £328-£343/t range ex-store.

Deforestation regs return

Uncertainty over the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) also persists. This move to restrict Europe's imports to areas which can be certified as not being former rainforests was originally due to come into effect at the beginning of 2025 but was deferred for 12 months.

With the deadline again looming, the EU Trade Commissioner had floated a further one-year delay. But a late proposal from the Commission favours sticking to the January 1, 2026, implementation date, but with six-month concessions for small and medium sized importers.

Unsurprisingly, such brinkmanship is not conducive to orderly marketing, with importers reluctant to charter boats and cargoes until they are sure of their costs and product availability.

The latest AHDB feed usage figures show increases in cattle feed production. September saw total cattle and calf feed manufacture rise by 12.54% to 392,000t. Within the total, dairy compounds were 10.1% higher at 197,700t and dairy blends up 3% to 71,000t. From July to October the total cattle and calf figure is up by 10.8%, while compounds are 7.7% higher and blends up by 3.8%.

Farmer-owned purchasing group AF's annual agflation index measured a 0.81% decrease in dairy farm costs in the year to September 2025, with a 7.4% drop in the cost of dairy feeds and medicines. At the same time, there was a no change in the retail milk prices paid by consumers, which AF believes may be a factor in holding fresh milk sales and cheese consumption stable. The average input cost increase across all farm enterprises was 0.77%. Meanwhile, the Retail Price Index increased to 5.2%, indicating a widening gap between farm costs and the return from the market.

"On the livestock inputs side, proteins and other straights have been at a six-year low," comments AF's Alastair Nottage. "There's a slight upswing in protein prices coming through as the EUDR may take effect. With animal meds there are still savings to be had, although we're starting to see some prices starting to creep up."



Uk Mycotoxin Risk Survey 2025

Volac Scientific Services
Manager for Feed Additives, Robert Furnage

Mycotoxins are naturally occurring toxic compounds produced by moulds such as *Fusarium*, *Aspergillus*, and *Penicillium*. They can persist through processing and storage, making them a potential concern in animal feeds.

Dairy cows have some ability to detoxify mycotoxins in the rumen, but elevated levels or prolonged exposure at even low levels can still affect feed efficiency, immunity, and overall performance.

Volac International has collected and surveyed 472 UK dairy feed samples year-to-date in 2025 through Mycocheck. Using ISO 17025-accredited LCMS analyses, 18 mycotoxins were measured at trace levels.

Results show contamination is common, but risk is varied: 93% of samples tested positive for at least one mycotoxin. Most samples (76%) fell within the low-risk category, while 24% reached medium risk or higher. Cereals tended to present the higher risk, with 44% of samples in the medium-risk category or above, compared to lower levels in forages.

The most prevalent toxins – deoxynivalenol, zearalenone, fumonisins, and T2 toxin – are associated with reduced feed efficiency, reduced fertility, and immune suppression.

Practical steps such as good feed management and reliable supply chains can only go so far to reduce the risk of mycotoxin exposure. These findings highlight the importance of routine monitoring and proactively developing a suitable mitigation strategy to minimise risk and maintain herd health and performance.

The Mycocheck laboratory service is available to dairy farmers in the UK through Volac's partner Trident MicroNutri. In addition, UltraSorb R 3.0, the next generation mycotoxin remediator and endotoxin binder, is available through Trident MicroNutri. Consequently, UK dairy farmers can be confident the right mycotoxin remediation strategy has been selected to counter the adverse impacts of various mycotoxins on dairy cow health and performance.

For further information on mycotoxin remediation visit: www.volac.com/feed-additives/products/mycotoxin-remediation

The pre-Christmas juggle

In this month's RABDF / NMR Gold Cup column, Ruminant Sector Manager Kate Robinson runs through the pre-Christmas planning, and takes a look at some of the research projects coming up at Harper Adams' Future Farm.

As December approaches, Harper Adams' Future Farm reflects on a year of intense activity across its ruminant enterprises, student research, and commercial achievements. While Christmas often brings logistical headaches for farming families, it is no different at Harper, trying to balance rotas to ensure continuity across dairy, sheep, beef, youngstock, and ongoing research projects, while also providing time off to spend with family. For many farming businesses, the festive season is less about planning presents and more about planning people.

November brought biting cold, with temperatures dropping to -5°C . Has anyone else become intolerant of the cold as you have got older? I have been cold to my core these past few weeks, but I am grateful that some of my role involves office time, and I have a very efficient heater in my office. First-year veterinary students have concluded their cattle and sheep handling modules, ready to resume in January.

The farm also recently completed a trial with the UK Dairy Carbon Network (DCN), investigating strategies to reduce emissions from dairy systems. Results are now under analysis by Professor Liam Sinclair and Dr Jessica Webster.

December will see the launch of a new study examining the role of bacterial phytase in early lactation cows, a collaborative effort between farm and research teams. This work aims to enhance nutrient efficiency and sustainability in dairy production. Final-year honours students are developing diverse research projects for their dissertations, using the farm livestock enterprises. These include the following projects:

- Jazz music and its influence on milking behaviour
- John's disease diagnosis via milk sampling
- Placental growth in ewes as a predictor of lamb performance
- Dairy heifer enrichment strategies
- Fleece utilisation for regenerative soil health
- Wild bird interactions and calf health outcomes



Future Farm balances winter workloads with livestock care and research

These projects highlight the farm's role as a living laboratory, fostering innovation and applied agricultural science.

“It doesn't seem five minutes since we were weaning lambs.”

The farm is midway through a Defra-funded three-year lamb feed efficiency study, with methane capture completed earlier in the year and feed trials concluding this winter.

Preparations are under way to disinfect the sheep housing ahead of lambing in early 2026, once this study has finished. It is daunting to think we are approaching lambing again; it doesn't seem five minutes since we were weaning lambs and sorting the ewes.

Matt is feeling very relieved, having moved the outdoor beef herd along with the in-calf dairy heifers onto their winter grazing this week. After a long dry summer and autumn, the rain hit hard in October and early November, leaving behind muddy fields and gateways. The cattle are

now on fodder beet and back grazed with haylage and grass lying areas. Close monitoring will mitigate the risks of acidosis and oxalate toxicity associated with beet tops, ensuring herd health during the seasonal shift. We have been advised to look for signs similar to milk fever, which would indicate the cattle have gorged on the tops and not the beet, and to treat cattle quickly.

As we moved onto this year's maize it led to a few nutritional issues within the milking herd, and a drop in yields. The maize analysis came back with excellent starch, metabolisable energy (ME) and protein but high dry matter, as expected due to the growing season.

Silage results

Chris has predicted, using the data taken from the forage chopper, that we are slightly down on last year's maize yields. An extra two inches of rain during the growing season would have made all the difference. Consideration is being given to a new maize clamp to improve feed continuity and increase maize production on the farm.

Fourth cut silage also came back with surprisingly excellent results. It does have high lignin, making it slightly less palatable, but the ME, protein and dry matter are very good

for a late cut silage. I am optimistic we have enough home-grown forage to see us through until next year's cuts. Straw is the only commodity we need to ration carefully. Carrie and Erin continue to manage the young stock to exceptionally high standards and as a result we have an excess of milking heifers coming through.

We made the decision to sell 10 heifers through the local livestock market. The heifers fetched good prices and freed up much needed space in the shed. We then had a further nine heifers calve that following weekend!

Strategic herd planning aims to reduce replacement rates from 23% to 20%, improving both our carbon footprint and profitability. Economic analysis shows cull cows delivering higher income-over-feed costs (£13.10) compared to incoming heifers (£9.06), reinforcing the value of extending cow longevity.

“Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.”

The Future Farm's pig unit has been celebrating after winning three awards at this year's National Pig Awards. Huge congratulations to Matt Swaine, the monogastric sector manager, for winning unit manager of the year, and a further two wins for indoor producer and herd productivity. Well done to the whole team.

With lambing preparations under way, forage stocks secured, and new research trials imminent, Harper Adams' Future Farm enters 2026 poised for further innovation and challenges. The integration of academic research, student projects, and commercial farming continues to position the enterprise at the forefront of sustainable agriculture.

From all of us at Harper Adams' Future Farm: Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. May 2026 bring continued progress for UK farming.

When will the milk tide turn?



Chris Walkland

COMMENT

There is one question on every processor's lips these days: Will the savage milk price cuts of recent months (with more to follow for some) be enough to stem the current tsunami of milk flowing into dairies? Talk to farmers and (inevitably) there are mixed views. Those enjoying prices at the top end of the league table will still have a positive milk price: feed price ratio and may well continue to feed, while those suffering at the bottom end on less than 30ppl will not.

Will many voluntarily reduce volumes, for example going from three-times-a-day milking down to two? Or will the psyche that 'my milk price is down therefore I've got to produce even more milk to maintain incomes' come to the fore? If it does then this sorry period will simply drag on even longer.

"It might be cheaper for them to not pick the milk up at all."

Less (milk) will be more (money), remember. As so often is the case in dairying, what is right for an individual business is not right for the industry as a whole. But I'm hearing a lot of cows are being sold now, so I think volumes will soon drop. Surely they'll do so with some milk prices starting with a 'two' and several only just in the 'three' zone.

Good luck with that

In Europe, the European Milk Board (EMB) has recently called for the immediate activation of 'voluntary production reductions' (aka quotas). Good luck with that – I can't see it working. It certainly wouldn't work here. The organisation has also called for "real, compulsory contracts" which "are the only way to strengthen the position of farmers in the supply chain". Really? Well, we've got real, compulsory contracts here under the new FDOM rules and farmers are already questioning what they have done to strengthen their position and to soften the recent fiscal blow. And the answer is nothing.

But then the new rules never were going to affect milk prices. They just give you the opportunity to formally find out why your milk prices have been nuked, and to complain if your milk buyer doesn't play by certain rules. Unlike our contracts, though, the EMB wants its to "prohibit farmgate prices that are below production costs, and the obligatory inclusion of delivery volumes in contracts". Good luck, again, on those.

But with UK milk volumes still way higher than last year, and with UK processing capacity already bursting at the seams (admittedly with

maintenance programmes affecting capacities), processors have to try something to limit volumes, else they'll be swamped with milk next spring. And they'll be burning cash at a rate of knots if they do that, which ultimately you'll pay for. A lot of milk ended up in anaerobic digestion, or spread on land, or in slurry pits this spring. It might be worse next year, too.

"You have a right to know how your B volumes and prices are determined."

Last year the cream value was such that it was worth skimming it off, with only the valueless skim concentrate mainly dumped. But back then cream was £2.60/kg (60% of the milk price) and the cream income to a processor was 14-15ppl.

Now cream is around £1.40/kg (40% of the milk price) and the cream income is just over 8ppl. It might not be too different next spring. If there's 2-3ppl to ship it, and a 3-4p gate fee for a digester, then the economics are pretty borderline, say some processors. It might be cheaper for them to not pick the milk up at all. And this will probably happen.

This volume mitigation is especially important to processors who wish to maintain a high A price, on which some customer contracts are linked. They want to keep the A price high, so they then have to introduce hard financial penalties on B prices or volumes.

And that's what Muller and its dairy producer organisation MMG have agreed this month. It already has an ingredient element (B price) at 12.5% of volumes, but is now introducing a C litre volume and price. This will be the volumes that are 2% or more above spring 2025's volumes, and will apply from March 1 to June 30, provided the firm's total volume in each month surpasses 2025. If farmers stay under the 102% threshold there's no impact, but those over it get 1ppl for that milk. There are other disincentives too – a farmer's ingredients cap is reduced if monthly production stays under 100% of this year's and the cap is increased if a farmer's production exceeds 110%.

A, B or C schemes

Meadow then confirmed its B volume allocation, which I think illustrates the urgency of the volume crisis facing processors – i.e. lots of milk, few profitable market outlets. Its A litre volume allocation has been set between 78% and 83% of a producer's base daily litre figure – producers will get the A price on that, and a B price on litres above it.

Other processors will also be keenly looking at their A, B or C schemes, or their 'exclusive' and 'non-exclusive' litre thresholds. Meanwhile, though, other companies simply battle on with just an A price, and keep reducing that in the hope it will do the job of cutting volumes. It makes milk price comparison way more difficult, because we're in

the theoretical situation where one processor could have an A price of 45ppl for 50% of a farmer's milk and a B price of 15p for the other 50% (resulting in an overall price of 30p) and another processor could have an A price exactly the same. The first would nestle comfortably at the top of the milk price league tables and the second would be near the bottom. Confusing, indeed.

Remember, though, you have a right to know how your B volumes and prices are determined under the new FDOM contract regulations. Everything should be transparent. So far I'm not aware of any major processor trying to pull wool over eyes, but watch for some knee jerk contractual reactions.

Whether these and other mitigation schemes (plus the axing of the A-only price) work or not remains to be seen. Certainly the pain will linger if milk volumes don't drop soon. I think they will do so for individual companies, but the challenge will be if one or two companies continue to pay a moderately healthy price (aka Arla and Muller) and their milk volumes continue to be strong to counter the drops from others. Arla and Muller account for more than 50% of the milk in the UK, for example.

The cycle will turn again

Ultimately (probably), and at a time which we can't yet predict, the price cuts and B schemes will take effect, the cycle will turn again, and we'll be short of milk again! And this is another question on processors' radars! Then I'll be writing about B schemes for another reason, because that will bring about another test of them.

"The tsunami has to fizzle out and turn into a trickle."

Will the schemes pay a premium over the A price (like Barber's has notably done for years) or will processors bin them again? It was exactly this that gave B prices a bad reputation several years ago.

But here, again, the new contract regulations might come into their own, as farmers on non-exclusive contracts (i.e. most farmers) now have the option of selling the milk to someone else if a third party is paying more for B milk than their core processor. Although this is largely a theoretical right (because only a few farmers with scale and a secondary bulk tank will do it) I think this will help keep processors honest, and their B prices high. You will certainly have grounds to complain if you are beaten by a contract stick now, and the carrot is removed next year.

But we're a long way from that now – possibly eight or nine months away. The tsunami has to fizzle out and turn into a trickle. The only people who can do that is you. You now have had the price signals, and the B volumes ones will kick in soon. I hope they work fast!

AHDB MILK PRICE LEAGUE TABLE

No update available at time of press, they will be available at britishdairying.co.uk

Milk price league - September 2025

	September price	Annual average
Arla Manufacturing	46.61	46.09
Barber's Cheesemakers	45.21	45.21
Crediton Dairy	44.94	45.01
Dale Farm GB	44.98	45.00
Müller M&I M&S	44.91	44.83
Lactalis - Profile	44.66	44.62
First Milk Manufacture	44.40	44.47
Pattemores	44.09	44.09
Lactalis	43.91	43.91
Wyke Farms	43.63	43.55
Wensleydale	43.51	43.51
Saputo Dairy UK - Profile	43.31	43.45
Müller M&I Direct	43.50	43.42
Leprino Foods	43.11	43.41
Saputo Dairy UK - Variable	43.31	43.40
Müller M&I Tesco	43.30	43.22
South Caernarfon	43.14	43.20
Müller M&I Co-op	43.02	42.94
Lactalis - Seasonal	45.91	42.75
Belton Farm	42.58	42.58
Müller M&I Sainsbury's	42.65	42.57
Freshways	39.32	39.45
Dale Farm NI	39.23	39.28

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 if the present price schedule remained unchanged, according to AHDB calculations.

Prices listed 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.

Please note the standard litre for 2025/26 has been updated to reflect UK trends. Butterfat has increased from 4.20 to 4.25% and protein from 3.38 to 3.40%. Milk volumes have been slightly reduced in spring and raised for the winter. These changes should be taken into account when comparing April's league table against March.

While the AHDB seeks to ensure that this information is accurate, no warranty is given and the AHDB accepts no liability for any errors.

BONUSES NOT INCLUDED

1. Arla Manufacturing currently has a guaranteed minimum of 1.31ppl.
2. First Milk manuf. member premium +0.50ppl and F/M manuf. Tesco cheese group +1.81ppl. Members may qualify for both premia.
3. Müller M&I Sainsbury's pays a sustainability supplement of +0.63p and Müller M&I Tesco pays a sustainability supplement of +1.46p
4. South Caernarfon will pay a 13th payment of 0.25ppl.
5. Pattemores pays an extra 0.25ppl for thermoduric count below 250/ml.

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

* These prices reflect the milk supplied to the retailer.



Farmgate milk price changes

2025

	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV
Arla Tesco	-0.42	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA
Arla Direct Manufacturing	-	-	-	-	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA	NPA
UK Arla Farmers Manufacturing	-	-	-0.25	-	-	-0.15	-	-0.86	-1.66	-2.63
Barber's Cheesemakers	-	-	-1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-2.57
Belton Farm	-	-	-	-	-1.00	-	-	1.00	-	-1.50
Crediton Dairy Ltd	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-2.00
Dale Farm GB	-	-	-0.59	-	-0.12	-	-	0.13	-0.25	NPA
Dale Farm NI	-	-3.00	-	-	-1.00	-0.50	-1.50	-2.50	NPA	NPA
First Milk Manufacture	-	-	-	-	-0.50	-	-	-	-1.00	-2.00
Lactalis/Caledonian Cheese	-	-	-0.90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-5.19
Leprino Foods	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-1.00	-4.00
Müller M & I - Co operative	-0.18	1.30	-	0.11	-	-	0.01	-	-	0.84
Müller M & I - M&S	-	-	1.54	-	-	-	-	-	0.88	-
Müller M & I - Direct	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.50	-	-1.25
Müller M & I - Sainsbury's	-0.01	0.11	1.88	-	0.06	0.09	-0.13	0.03	2.85	NPA
Müller M & I Tesco	-0.42	2.00	-	0.23	-	-	-	0.50	-	-0.11
Pattemores Dairy Ingredients	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-3.79
Payne's Dairies	-	-	-	-2.00	-	-	-	-	2.00	-4.00
Saputo Dairy UK	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
South Caernarfon Creameries	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-1.00	-3.50
Wensleydale	-	-0.39	-0.25	-	-	1.77	-	0.20	-0.20	-2.55
Wyke Farms	0.20	-1.55	-	-	-	0.40	-	-	-	-5.20

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. NPA - No Public Announcement.

- (1) For Barber's Cheesemakers, B price for milk in excess of the base milk volume plus threshold: Actual Milk Price Equivalent (AMPE) set by the AHDB for the month in which litres are supplied, less 2ppl, subject to contractual adjustments.
- (2) As of March 2025, Arla Tesco farmers receive the UKAF price plus a cost compensation.
- (3) First Milk Manufacture Member Premium calculated on a pro-rata basis linked to a member's level of capital payments.

Supply casts a shadow

This milk year has seen incredible volumes, with deliveries surpassing record highs. Favourable economics have continued to boost yields, despite recent milk price announcements. So far this milk year (April-Nov 22), deliveries are 5.5% ahead of last year. In the month of November (1-22), milk production was up 5.3% year-on-year. We are also annualising against a period of high growth which began last September.

Global milk deliveries have returned to growth, which is adding to the bearish tone. Latest figures for September showed that the EU was up by 4.3%, the US by 4.0%, New Zealand 2.5% and Argentina 9.9%. Of the major exporters, only Australia showed a decline, of 0.5%.

These record milk volumes are pressuring commodity markets. Bulk cream, butter and cheese prices have seen significant losses, of £234/t, £390/t and £150/t respectively in November, month-on-month. Since September, bulk cream, butter, and cheese prices have seen significant losses, of £835/t (32%), £1,250/t (23%) and £460/t (13%). November and December milk prices are falling through the floor, which is affecting farmer confidence.

However, these losses will be felt differently according to the type of contracts that farmers are tied to. Retail-aligned liquid contracts are based on cost of production and won't fall in the same way. Manufacturing contracts and cheese will be hit hard as they are exposed to global markets. Some areas, like organic, which are still trying to rebuild milk supplies, will be insulated from some of these pressures and have seen price holds in the latest announcements.

GB milk production forecast - December 2025

m litres	2024/25	2025/26	2025/26	2025/26	2026/27	2026/27
	Actuals	Actuals	Forecast	Yr-on-yr	Forecast	Yr-on-yr
Apr	1076	1140		6.0%	1135	-0.4%
May	1128	1185		5.0%	1180	-0.4%
Jun	1042	1102		5.7%	1095	-0.6%
Jul	1023	1069		4.5%	1065	-0.4%
Aug	991	1039		4.8%	1035	-0.4%
Sep	969	1026		5.9%	1015	-1.1%
Oct	1030	1100		6.8%	1095	-0.5%
Nov	1018		1070	5.1%	1065	-0.5%
Dec	1052		1105	5.0%	1090	-1.4%
Jan	1045		1090	4.3%		
Feb	953		985	3.4%		
Mar	1115		1140	2.2%		
Year	12443	13051		4.9%	9775	-0.6%

Source: AHDB

Notes: A 28-day equivalent is used for Feb-24. Forecast numbers are in bold.

Our latest quarterly production forecast expects GB milk production for 2025/26 to record a new high of 13.05bn litres, 4.9% up on last year. This growth is likely to continue until the spring flush. From the beginning of the next milk year, the momentum is likely to cool down, and milk deliveries are likely to decline gradually. However, this is annualising against a strong base so still represents oversupply.

Dairy markets will likely see further price falls as demand is unable to cope with oversupplies in the domestic and global markets. However, the levels of decline in milk output will depend on the magnitude of price drops in the coming months. We have based our forecast on the current market conditions. This will be subject to change if there is a quicker than expected deceleration in prices and extreme weather conditions.

The momentum of higher production is likely to continue for some time. Long-term breeding decisions would have been made when prices remained high. However, falling milk prices are likely to encourage herd culling decisions in the coming months, especially when beef prices remain extremely favourable and forage stocks are limited. This could begin to put a brake on production.

Dairy farmers should adapt their future plans depending on what type of contract they are on, ensuring they keep tight control of costs. Making the most of contracts to ensure they leverage any bonuses and avoid unnecessary penalties will be critical. AHDB can keep farmers abreast of latest dairy market developments here: www.ahdb.org.uk/dairy/dairy-markets



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LELY

Prices crash, but cull rates rise

By Chris Walkland

“When you’re going through hell, keep going.” So didn’t say Churchill (apparently), although the quote is falsely attributed to him. It’s also apt for milk processors and their farmers right now, as the milk volume and price crisis shows no signs of abating, and every sign of deepening.

Confidence has been riding high for months in the sector, but it has taken just 10-12 weeks to annihilate it from the producer’s perspective. As we all know prices have imploded in a way that I, and many other observers, haven’t seen before.

The farmgate price range is now huge, with the lowest A price being between 28 and 29ppl (Yew Tree, est.) and the highest currently being (unusually) Grahams at 39ppl. But it will cut its price again for sure, along with others at the top end of the scale. The cream price will guarantee that.

In November the average aligned price, roughly weighted for milk volumes across processors, was around 38ppl, which has fallen to an average of just over 35ppl for December, and to below 34p for January. And this will almost certainly fall further as more price changes are notified.

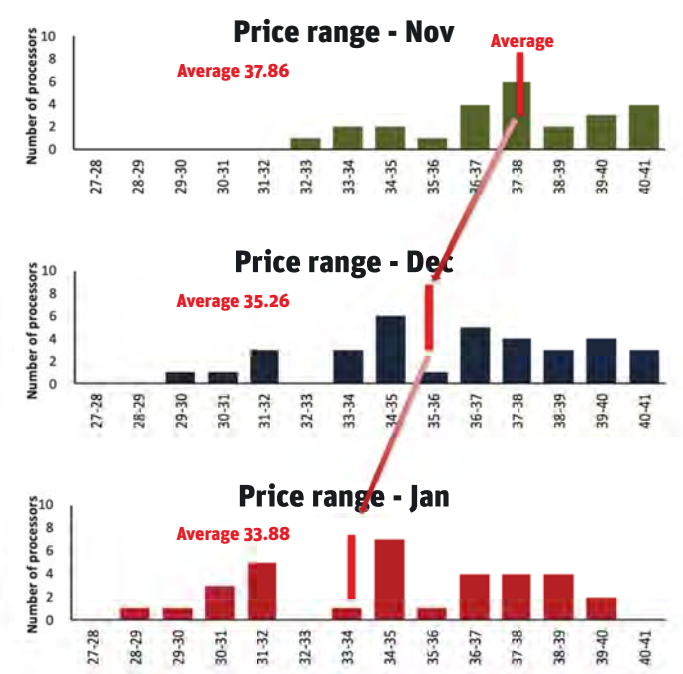
On the cards

Such a price level was on the cards back in early October. In fact, my price predictions back then for a Kite report I did point to a price range for January of 33-36.5ppl, and a lot of companies are in that range (see graph).

However, there are an increasing number of outliers at lower prices now. Back in mid-September my forward prices were around 38p for January and a low of 36p for February and March, so that illustrates how rapidly the situation has changed. My next projections will be lower still, and definitely in the 20s – a level I never thought I’d see again.

Some processors are using their milk price as the only tool to try and blunt their milk flows. Others are using A and B pricing, which I touch on in my comment piece. It is clear that tough decisions are now being taken by companies on B litre volumes and prices. These will change the dynamics of farmer-processor relationships for both good and ill, and for the short and long terms.

(Number of processors paying a price in the different bands)



A lot of processors are within the 33p to 36.5p range but there are outliers

Where, then, are we now on the market? Well, the latest figures put GB volumes down just 0.5% on last week but still up 4.8% compared to last year. That’s on a weekly basis. Over two weeks we’re still up over 5%. In milk volume terms we’re still producing more than 2m litres/day more than last year, and the additional milk being produced would fill 76 reload tankers every day!

Volumes are still growing in Europe, too – September was up 4.4%, and October will be up a similar amount or more. However, I’m now picking up comment that the UK’s auction marts are filling up fast with cows for sale, and the slaughterhouses are busier than they have been in months, so it does look as if farmers are taking some action.

That, of course, is good news. Because it’s hard to imagine a worse time of year for volumes to be high. Christmas is looming, and while there is normally a short-term boost to demand and prices in Q4 that hasn’t happened this year. And with a treble whammy of bank holidays coming up, December is looking very grim indeed. As a result, no-one is prepared to say the floor in the market has been reached, for either fats or proteins.

The first GlobalDairyTrade (GDT) auction of December provided further evidence of that. It carried on

where the others had left off, with a fall of 4.3% to an average price of just over \$3,500/t (£2,654). It’s the lowest average since March 2024. Butter had a shocker, and was down 12.4% to €4,440/t (£3,905), with EU product selling for €4,150/t (£3,650) for March – an indication of just how long these low prices are going to remain. None was offered for January or February. Although cheddar increased by 7.2%, to €3,985/t (3,504) I doubt it will do us much good.

Back in 2018 there was a run of 11 auctions where the price didn’t increase at all (there was one with no change in the index at all, which interrupted a run of four declines, to be followed by a further six). So far we have a decline of eight consecutive ones, from early August until early December, over which time average prices have dropped 17.5%, butter 28%, and mozzarella 32%. Cheddar, remarkably, is now similarly priced after this week’s increase. It’s the worst run on the auction since 2018.

In Europe, the latest Dutch Dairy Board quoted butter at €4,540/t (£3,993), but such a price is fantasy – the spot price is between €4,100 and €4,300 (£3,606-£3,782), but it’s only a matter of time before the price drops below €4,000/t (£3,518). There is a lot of cheap butter floating around, apparently – not least from the Irish who discount at this time of year to

try and make their year-end books look good by converting stock into cash. There’s also a huge range on UK butter, from as low as £3,700/t, say some traders, to as high as £4,200.

Cream is tanking – some processors say they’ve sold this week as low as £1.20/kg, and there’s talk it might fall to a low of £1.00/kg by, or over, Christmas. The lowest cream price in December was 78p/kg in 2008, with the second lowest being 98p in 2015. We are at unprecedented lows for modern times, therefore, with modern-day costs.

Skimmed milk powder (SMP) is under less pressure than fats, but nonetheless is also succumbing. It is at €2,000 to €2,050/t, or either side of £1,800/t in the UK. But whey continues to be strong, and this gives cheesemakers a modicum of good news. But a modicum is all it is, as plentiful stocks of mild cheddar and not plentiful demand combine to build ever higher stocks, which paints a grim picture for the first half of 2025.

“Grit your teeth and keep going until you get out the other side.”

The mild price is said be around £2,800-£2,850/t, but some traders have it below, and there’s talk of Irish availability for as low as £2,700 for Q4 this year and Q1 next year. Mozzarella is as low as £2,600/t. And spot milk prices are generally in the mid to high teens for planned placements, but with breakdown prices in single figures.

Thus the pain is set to go on, I’m afraid. For those committed to dairy there’s just one thing to do: Grit your teeth and keep going until you get out the other side, like Churchill (didn’t) say. Going slower when it comes to milk production, though, will help a lot, and will speed up the journey to better times. Happily, it sounds like farmers have started on that with the cow culling, and that’s a positive to end on at least.

Finally, may I wish my reader the very best for Christmas, and for 2026. It’ll be a tough year, for sure, but it won’t last for ever and then the tide will turn again.



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Investing today for tomorrow

Investing in a farm business is a long-term strategic commitment. It's tempting to put plans on hold amid short-term uncertainty, but it's equally important to ensure those plans are the right ones before moving ahead, as British Dairying finds out.

Modern dairy farming is no longer just about producing milk; it's about running a profitable, sustainable business. Every major investment decision - from milking parlours to feeding systems, and data monitoring tools to manure scraping equipment - can shape your farm's future for decades.

Getting an investment right means looking beyond the purchase price and considering the full picture, says Derrick Davies, Business Development Manager at Dairymaster UK. This includes the return on investment (ROI), hidden costs, financing options, and future-proofing. "Cheap advice is very often the most expensive advice."

Before spending a penny, he suggests that farmers define their objectives. Do you want to increase cow numbers, improve efficiency, or enhance animal welfare? "You've got to set your goals. Where do you want to be, what you want to achieve?" Equally important is market demand. If you plan to boost milk production, will your processor pay as expected for the extra volume? It's important to review your milk contract and local demand for dairy products.

Each farming system; grazing, semi-intensive, or fully housed, affects equipment needs. Grazing systems often suit lower-tech set-ups with less data monitoring, while high-input systems often benefit from advanced technology. Cow type matters, too. High-genetic



Investing in new technology can shape your farm's future for decades, saving labour and improving efficiencies

cows in intensive systems may demand more precise feeding and milking technology. Longevity and replacement rates also influence costs over time.

Infrastructure

A new parlour investment won't necessarily deliver full value if the surrounding infrastructure is poor, warns Derrick. "Look at the infrastructure; it should consider cows and staff. Aim for a comfortable working environment and a layout which allows cows to express their natural behaviour." Stress-free cows and safe working conditions

can improve productivity and staff retention. "You can install expensive equipment, but if you ignore all the other things you could have a bigger problem, which has a bigger impact on profitability."

The purchase price is only the starting point. The true ROI accounts for daily running costs - like electricity, water, and consumables. "Recently we were asked by a farmer planning his next investment what the electricity usage per day would be for the proposed rotary parlour," says Derrick. "That's a figure we could easily supply."

Maintenance

Maintenance and servicing are equally critical. "Milking equipment works 365 days a year - service is paramount." Regular servicing prevents costly breakdowns and protects animal welfare. Replacement parts - liners and wear items - add up over time, so producers should investigate these costs before investing. One piece of kit may be cheaper to purchase than another, but if running and parts costs are higher over time, this will become a false economy.

Labour and time savings also matter. Faster milking reduces labour hours and improves cow comfort and welfare. "Farmers very often don't

put a cost on their time when they're stood in the parlour," Derrick points out. But they should.

Compliance costs are another hidden factor, with environmental regulations tightening. Investing in compliant systems now avoids potential penalties later.

When modelling payback, Derrick recommends using best, worst, and average-case scenarios based on five-year trends. "Don't calculate your payback on the assumption that everything will go well for the next 10 years, because there's no guarantee."

Market volatility is real. Milk prices fluctuate, and global events - from

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Derrick Davies at Dairymaster

pandemics to geopolitical conflicts - can disrupt supply chains. "Nobody has a crystal ball, but you have to be prepared so your business can handle a certain degree of price changes."

Few farmers can invest without borrowing. Funding options include bank loans, finance agreements, and hire purchase. "Look at the best deals; if the finance company offers a competitive deal with lower interest rates, go with them. If the banks give a better deal, go with them."

"Have a system that can record as much data as possible."

Fixed interest rates offer predictability, while variable rates may suit later stages when cash flow stabilises. Payment structures should align with milk income; an initial pause or early lower payments can ease transition costs, he adds.

Flexibility is key - ask the lender if you can adjust payments to suit seasonal cash flow and make extra payments without penalties. "Don't

be frightened of change," says Derrick. The quicker you repay, the less interest you pay, but balance this against other investment needs."

Dairy investments often last decades, so build in adaptability. "Whatever you're investing now, try and future-proof it so you can add on further investment," Derrick advises. For example, choose a parlour that can integrate new technology or expand capacity later. Factor in succession planning - will the next generation want to expand or diversify? Environmental compliance will evolve, and grant schemes may disappear. Planning for resilience means your business can adapt quickly to change.

Scheduled servicing isn't a cost - it's insurance, he notes. "With good regular servicing you should get the best out of your investment - and your cows." Well-maintained equipment can maintain cow performance, boost efficiencies, and retain residual value. It also creates a safer, more motivating workplace. "When you go into a nice dairy unit that's very well looked after it's a comfortable place to be." Poor maintenance can lead to breakdowns that halt milking altogether—a welfare issue as well as

a financial one. "You can't afford to stop milking," Derrick warns. "I'd rather see milk in the tank and money in the bank."

Modern systems can record everything from milk yield to cow health. It's helpful to use this data to track the ROI and adjust the business strategy. "Have a system that can record as much data as possible, to see what's really working for your business," Derrick recommends. Investment isn't a one-off decision, so review performance regularly. This allows



Data capture can inform decisions

quick action if the payback isn't on target - or accelerated repayment if cash flow improves.

Investing in dairy equipment is about more than buying kit - it's about understanding all the costs, and building a resilient, efficient business, says Derrick. "Plan carefully, seek expert advice, and think long-term. The right investment today can secure your farm's profitability for decades."

Smart investments

Before committing, ask these questions:

- What are my business goals for the next five to 20 years?
- Can my milk buyer handle increased production?
- What's the total cost of ownership; purchase, running, maintenance, and labour?
- How will this investment improve efficiency and welfare?
- What financing option offers the best flexibility?
- Is the system future-proof and compliant with upcoming regulations?
- How will I monitor ROI and adjust if needed?



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Plan for finance that fits the farm

December is a good time to plan for the year ahead, whether it's tweaking cropping, replacing machinery, upgrading equipment, or diversifying. And given the backdrop of falling milk prices, financial planning is of critical importance. British Dairying reports.

Nothing stands still in farming. There's always something that needs improving or replacing, with the inevitable demand on financial resources. In good years smaller investments might potentially be serviced out of cash flow, but falling milk prices mean farmers might have to find funds elsewhere.

"The right agricultural finance isn't just about getting a loan to fill a gap," explains Ben Robinson at Peregrine Finance. "It's about creating stability, enabling diversification, and investing in the future of your farm. It's about having the tools and breathing space to make decisions with confidence – not just for this season, but for the next decade."

Right now, producers are trying to plan ahead while balancing rising input costs, falling milk prices, unpredictable weather, and the latest round of government policy changes. "You know the machinery needs upgrading and the electricity bill is creeping higher with every passing month," says Ben.

"Finance needs to work with your land, your life, and your legacy."

"Agricultural finance is designed specifically for farming and rural businesses. Unlike standard business finance, it takes into account the seasonal nature of income, the high value of equipment, and the fact that many farming operations have deep generational roots."

Of course, borrowing money costs money, so it's essential to choose the right type of finance to suit individual needs. It's also important to recognise that reduced government support is pressuring margins, while volatile commodity prices make cash flow harder to manage. "The right finance product recognises these pressures and adapts to them," says Ben. "Where traditional funders might see risk, specialist agricultural finance sees the rhythm of the farming year



Ben Robinson says the right funding can unlock business opportunities

– and structures repayments, terms, and flexibility to match." So what kind of finance is available?

Farm machinery finance

Upgrade to modern, efficient machinery without shouldering the entire cost upfront. This offers the potential for improved productivity, reduced downtime, and long-term savings.

Livestock finance

Manage cash flow for breeding, herd expansion, or restocking. Seasonal repayment options can align with the farm's sales cycle, easing pressure during lean months.

Solar and renewables finance

Finance solar panels, biomass boilers, and other renewable energy projects to cut costs and future-proof your farm.

Agricultural equipment finance

Beyond tractors – finance irrigation systems, storage facilities, and precision farming tools that improve efficiency and yields.

So whether you're looking for a new tractor, herd expansion, or renewable energy project, the options are there – but how do you actually secure the funding? "The truth is, agricultural finance doesn't have to be difficult," says Ben.

Here's how to take your idea to a signed agreement that works for your business:

- 1. Assess your needs:** Decide what you want to achieve and why. Is it about efficiency, expansion, sustainability, or resilience? The clearer your goal, the easier it is to match it with the right finance product.

- 2. Choose the right type of finance:** Different projects need different funding structures. Matching the loan term and repayment plan to your seasonal income patterns is key.
- 3. Gather your documents:** Keep your income records, asset details, and any project plans handy. It speeds up the process and helps lenders understand your business.

- 4. Apply through the right channel:** Specialist agricultural lenders are built around farming life, so can often offer flexible terms that high street banks can't.

- 5. Combine with grants where possible:** Government schemes, rural development funding, and private finance can work hand-in-hand to make your project more affordable.

The right partner will guide you through each stage, keep the terms transparent, and tailor the package to fit your cash flow – not the other way around.

"Finance needs to work with your land, your life, and your legacy," notes Ben. Securing finance is only part of the journey – the

real value comes from how you put it to work. "The right funding can unlock opportunities that strengthen your business today while laying the groundwork for the next generation."

"Whether you're looking to stay competitive, protect your margins, or create new income streams, agricultural finance can be a powerful tool when used strategically."

Consider ways to make your finance work harder:

- **Expand or diversify:** Add agritourism, renewable energy, or direct-to-consumer sales to your income streams. Diversification can reduce dependence on a single market and open new avenues for growth.

- **Improve efficiency:** Invest in automation, irrigation, or precision farming technologies that save time, reduce waste, and maximise yields.

- **Manage risk:** Protect against market volatility, extreme weather, and policy changes by investing in infrastructure, storage, and forward-planning tools.

- **Build sustainability:** Finance regenerative farming practices and climate-resilient infrastructure that protect your land and your long-term productivity.

"Farming is more than a business – it's a way of life, often passed down through generations," says Ben.

"By aligning your finance decisions with your farm's goals, you're not just spending money – you're building resilience, unlocking growth, and securing the legacy of your land."



Finance could be used for buildings

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- TOM, DAIRY FARMER



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Perspective and resilience will be crucial for success in 2026

Focusing on continuing to adapt to the rapidly changing environment will be essential if agricultural businesses are going to successfully evolve. That's according to speakers at the 60th National Farm Management Conference. British Dairying reports.

The world is becoming more volatile and increasingly conflicted. This is an issue affecting farmers, as food security is about trade at a global and local level, said Professor Tim Benton, independent adviser on food systems and sustainability. And food production systems must evolve to produce healthier food in a more sustainable way to meet the demands of politicians, consumers and markets.

Change is usually incremental and small year-on-year, but the rate of change is likely to get faster and farmers need to be alert to this, said Tim.

Drivers of change

"Farmers need to be aware of the drivers of change in their markets. These include protectionism and nationalism, geo-political tensions, climate change and the cost of living.

In recent years we have seen the impact of the conflicts in Ukraine and the implementation of US trade tariffs, which have had a direct impact on sectors of UK farming.

"The reality is that there are hundreds of ways that food production can be disrupted," he warned. "There is a high probability that something will happen, but it



Building resilience into farming systems is important to mitigate against threats to food security

is hard, if not impossible, to predict exactly what and when."

To help mitigate the consequences, farmers need to build resilience into their systems. But in recent years many businesses have reduced resilience as they strive for greater efficiency. For example, intensification and less varied cropping increase the potential impact of problems like market disruption and climate changes.

People are key

"While this is fine when markets and the weather are stable, as these become more volatile diversifying the business can make it more robust," explained Tim.

"Look at your business from the viewpoint of how major disruption to climate, supply chains and political interference might affect it and how you can become more resilient. It is likely policy will encourage changes to cropping as food security becomes more important and moves up the agenda."

One key to a resilient business is people. Arable farmer James Peck suggested the worst thing that can happen to the successful running of any farm business is people leaving. Not only does this result in a loss of

skills and training, it also makes the rest of the team inefficient as it gets back to size and skills are replaced.

"To help address the problem, we have set up a system of loyalty bonuses where team members earn 1% more per year on the farm, up to a 5% ceiling.

"Farmers need to be aware of the drivers of change in their markets."

"This, combined with bonuses paid based on efficiency; whether for saving costs or boosting output, are good for the employee as well as the business, as it encourages everyone to look for better ways to get jobs done," he said. "Bonuses are a motivator and contribute to increased calibre of the overall team."

Increasing business resilience to climate should be on all dairy farmers' minds. According to Professor Pete Falloon, the Met Office's science lead for food security, extreme weather

is one of the highest risk future shocks for UK food production. Extreme weather events will be more unpredictable and current climate adaption planning and policy are insufficient, he warned.

"It is clear the trend is for hotter, drier summers and milder, wetter winters - but it is the extreme events rather than the trend that we need to focus on.

Trends and extremes

"We need to understand the different hazards, what the risks are and where they occur, and then decide what can be done to reduce the impact. We need to prepare for both the trends and the extremes," said Pete.

"How will your herd or farm cope in extended periods of very hot weather or if we see extended periods of intense rainfall, both of which are increasingly likely?"

One option to combat heat and drought causing wheat heat stress at the critical flowering stage might be to bring drilling dates - and therefore flowering dates - forward.

In addition, moving to swards comprising a wider diversity of grass species, and particularly deeper rooting species, could help reduce



Professor Pete Falloon, Met Office

the impact of such conditions on dairy cows. Heat stress in cows is also likely to increase in the future, noted Pete. More parts of the country will experience a higher number of three-day periods when the temperature and humidity index exceeds 72, which will be a significant challenge.

The industry needs to initially focus on ways to adapt to extreme weather that are high impact, easy to implement and low cost. On most

farms there will be options that can be investigated. This could include establishing crops earlier, changing varieties grown and avoiding harvesting at the hottest part of the day. Dairy farmers should consider moving to more diverse, deeper-rooting swards to reduce the effect of drought, and revising health planning with the vet to reflect changing challenges.

On-farm planning

In anticipation of periods of more intense rainfall, planning grazing to ensure spare paddocks are available during wet periods will be essential.

When assessing change at farm level, Nick Shorter, Chief Executive of the Velcourt Group, which manages over 7,500 dairy cows, stressed the importance of defining the risks and opportunities for your business.

“Risks can be market fluctuations, climate, technical, operational, legislative or financial. You need to be clear what the end position might be for your business, as this will let you design the solution to mitigate the risks,” he explained.

It might be growing more crops, integrating livestock, changing how operations are carried out, changing



Professor Tim Benton said diversifying could make businesses more robust

calving pattern, timing of operations or a host of other options. The main thing is that there will be options.

“On one of our managed farms the decision was to widen the crop rotation to capture new markets and reduce the risks of yield and price fluctuations,” said Nick. “Overall, the farm is showing a better average gross margin, although every year one crop will underperform.”

However, this will represent a smaller proportion of total output and have a reduced effect on the

business as a whole. “Financially, the questions that needs to be considered is not what the return on investment will be, but what the implications are of not investing.”

The National Farm Management Conference was organised by the Institute of Agricultural Management, soon to form part of the Society of Agriculture (SocAg) - the UK’s professional home for agricultural leadership and management, launching in January 2026.



Nick Shorter, the Velcourt Group

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A day in the life of ... a plant research manager

As part of British Dairying's Day in the Life series, Grace Welling gives an insight into her role as Strategic Development Manager at Germinal Horizon.

My passion for agronomy was inspired as a teenager by my father, who was a farm manager. I often accompanied him on crop inspections, which sparked my interest in plants. After completing a degree in agriculture with crop management at Harper Adams, I joined Germinal five years ago as Seed Production and Product Development Officer.

Germinal grows 4,000ha of herbage seed, and in my first role I was responsible for inspecting crops and carrying out trials on forage seed varieties in Wiltshire. Our Wiltshire site specialises in husbandry trials – like exploring the impact of different nitrogen regimes or evaluating the benefits of multi-species swards – bringing scientific evidence to address farmers' practical problems.

“Part of my job is to foster cohesion across our teams.”

Over time, my experience and knowledge have broadened to include our research and development, and on that career path, I have learned that plant research is much more than developing new varieties. It is about supporting farmers, anticipating future food production challenges, and finding real solutions that shape sustainable agriculture.

Part of my job is to foster cohesion across our teams, from the plant breeding research at Aberystwyth to the important field trials work, gaining deeper knowledge and working towards shared goals. We have a productive and strategic plant-breeding pipeline, developing climate-resilient traits and testing them across multiple environments, alongside our ongoing focus on improving yield and forage quality.

It's crucial that we can test new varieties under different conditions. From Wiltshire's clay loam to the



Grace Welling says opportunities are plentiful for those willing to learn

sandy-loam soils of Aberystwyth, including diverse soil types and testing varieties under real-world conditions gives our customers greater confidence in our products.

The best thing about my job is the variety – no two days are the same. I love the balance between hands-on fieldwork, scientific exploration and practical problem-solving. A typical morning might involve cutting plots, collecting yield data, or maintaining trial plots through stolon cutting and knapsack spraying. Afternoons can be spent engaging with stakeholders, consulting on future innovation, or preparing grant applications for new projects.

Collaboration

Collaboration is key. I regularly speak with our team at Horizon Aberystwyth, tapping into their deep knowledge of plant biology. These conversations spark new ideas about how different biochemical pathways can be used on farms.

What I really enjoy is working with researchers, funders and farmers to meet today's and tomorrow's challenges, making ruminant farming more sustainable for the planet and the farmer. The biggest challenge farmers face is reducing their carbon footprint in an already challenging climate while

maintaining profitability. Solutions are neither quick nor simple, but we are working on key measures to help reduce the requirement for applied chemical nitrogen, without impacting grass yields. We are also developing varieties that are more resilient to weather extremes.

Developments

One exciting development is a new red clover variety that grows like white clover. Traditional red clover struggles under grazing because when its growing point, the crown, is damaged, the plant cannot survive. Our new red clover, RedRunner, pushes out stolons that grow along the surface of the soil, along which new daughter plants form and establish roots. This ensures persistence and good plant recovery, making it more tolerant under hard grazing conditions.

In common with other red clovers, it has the added advantage of the enzyme polyphenol oxidase (PPO), which is not found in white clover. This reduces ruminant emissions by binding with protein and boosts polyunsaturated fatty acids, improving milk and meat quality.

It is currently in Variety List (UK National List) trials. Before any variety is marketed, it must pass this test to prove it is distinct, uniform

and stable. It must also prove that it provides productivity benefits over current varieties and pass the value for cultivation and use test. It also plays a central role in the multi-partner Defra-funded nitrogen utilisation efficiency-legume (NUE-Leg) project, in assessing how legumes will reduce chemical fertiliser in grassland farming. There are farm-scale plots of this alongside our new hybrid clover, Double Root, which is resistant to drought, and our new birdsfoot trefoil, Lotus, which can reduce methane and prevent bloat.

“What I really enjoy is working with researchers, funders and farmers.”

This is the first year of the project, and I'm supporting the team at Aberystwyth University with on-farm assessments across 13 farms in England and Wales. My role is to ensure correct management under rotational grazing and meticulous data collection. Results will be shared with farmers and industry stakeholders at knowledge transfer events next year. We are also continuing to trial the benefits of existing varieties. For example, trials of our festulolium AberRoot, which has large and deep roots, on a farm with sandy soils in Devon, revealed that it assisted in carrying stock through drought periods.

If you are considering a career in plant breeding or agronomy, my advice is this: Feed your thirst for knowledge! Enthusiasm goes a long way, and opportunities are plentiful for those willing to learn. It is rewarding to help bring real technological innovations to the food production system and know your work will have a positive impact for decades to come.

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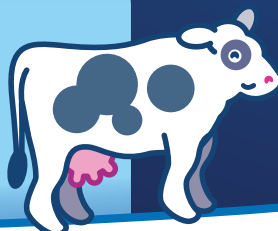
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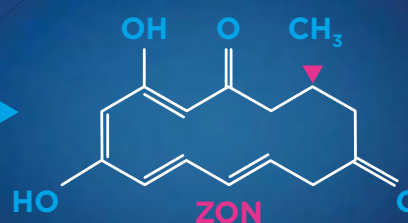
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Ultra early maize delivers best outcomes

Having a high-yielding, high-performing herd of pedigree Holsteins relies on excellent breeding and nutrition. And for one farmer in Wales, this means growing top-quality, early-maturing maize to ensure a consistent total mixed ration. British Dairying reports.

Producing milk without maize isn't something that Flintshire dairy farmer Tom Beltcher would like to consider. Not only is it a vital part of his 450-cow herd's ration, but it has become an integral part of his farming system, fitting into a rotation in which double-cropping is now commonplace.

Success in recent years has come through the use of the earliest maturing varieties available, with continuing progress by maize breeders meaning that an early harvest does not have to result in any compromises on yield, nutritional value or digestibility.

Complementing grass

"We've grown maize for as long as I can remember, but it has become more important to us in the past 10 years," says Tom. "Our cows are averaging around 10,000 litres, so maize silage is essential to complement grass silage."

He makes grass silage using a multi-cut system. "This produces a high quality forage but, with grass, there is always more risk of inconsistencies resulting from variable growing conditions and unpredictable weather at the time you're cutting."

This year's results were very good, with the grass silage coming in at 36.7% dry matter (DM), with a digestibility (D) value of 74.3, 18.2% protein and metabolisable energy (ME) of 11.9MJ/kg. The maize analysed at 34.7% DM, 7.9% protein, 75 D value, 11.7MJ/kg ME and 30.7%



Father and son, Tom and Roger Beltcher have found maize offers stability and consistency to the forage ration

starch. "Maize now typically makes up around half of our forage ration and offers all-important stability and consistency that ensures we keep the cows performing," notes Tom. The ration will also include rape meal, urea treated wheat, Trafford syrup and citrus pulp.

Milk solids have been a breeding priority, which are of course also driven by forage quality. The year-round-calving pedigree Argoedhall Holsteins are grazed over the summer and housed in the winter, with buffer feeding on the shoulders of the season. In the top 1% for genetic merit, they are currently averaging 4.94% fat and 3.87% protein, and are producing all their own replacements with a pregnancy rate of 32%.

The Beltchers are based at Argoed Hall Farm, near Mold, and typically grow around 100ha of maize each year, with a further 61ha usually grown on contract on neighbouring farms. Whether the maize is grown at home or on contract, Tom insists on a responsible approach that looks after the land and minimises the risks of any problems associated with a late harvest in wet conditions.

"The aim is to have the crops off as early as we can, allowing the opportunity to establish another crop in the autumn," he says. "On our farm

that is usually winter wheat, but it can be a grass crop that will provide an early first cut. We apply the same thinking with crops grown on contract, because double-cropping is the best way to manage the land, environmentally and economically. It's about working together for the best mutual outcomes."

Soil conditions

Argoed Hall Farm is predominantly a heavy clay site, so is considered marginal for maize. The policy is to grow the earliest maturing material available, with Limagrain Field Seeds'

ultra early variety Duke standing out in 2025.

LG Duke is an example of the type of genetic progress resulting from an extensive UK breeding programme, says the company. It is focused on producing stable varieties that deliver high yields within a shorter growing window, without compromising on nutritional quality and digestibility.

With up to eight trials sites across the UK, Limagrain is selecting varieties that have the proven consistency of performance required in UK conditions, delivering a number of new improved varieties



Milk solids are a priority for Tom which is driven by good forage quality

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onto the NIAB/BSPB Descriptive List every year. "Overall, we've averaged around 44-47t/ha across all our maize crops this year, and Duke has been the stand-out performer," adds Tom.

Last year he grew Gema and Dignity as well, but given its performance he focused heavily on Duke this year.

"Maize has at times had something of a bad name."

"We drilled about a week earlier than usual, in the first week of April, because seedbed conditions were right. It was something of a gamble, but it paid off because we had moist soils during the critical establishment phase," he explains. "Given the early start the maize had, it's been a good year for the crop, and our earliest harvest ever."

For Tom, maize is his priority, which he admits sometimes means



The pedigree Argoedhall Holsteins are grazed over the summer and buffer fed on the shoulders of the season

the farm is not making full use of cover crops grown over winter. It's a sacrifice he considers worthwhile, however, as it means the maize always has the best possible start.

"We want to have the maize ground mucked, ploughed, broken down and power harrowed by early April, so we can drill as soon as soil temperatures are right," he says.

"That may mean we're taking a very early first cut off a grass crop, and losing potential yield, but I'd rather maximise what we can achieve

from the maize." Maize is drilled with a microgranular phosphate and nitrogen fertiliser down the spout, and receives a further 250 units of nitrogen per hectare when the crop is around knee-high. Crops receive pre-emergence and post-emergence herbicides, but no other specialist inputs.

"It's a great crop, when you consider the amount of high quality dry matter you can put in the clamp, and an ideal complement for grass silage," says Tom. "Maize has at times had

something of a bad name, in relation to issues like soil erosion, but there is really no need for that to be the case.

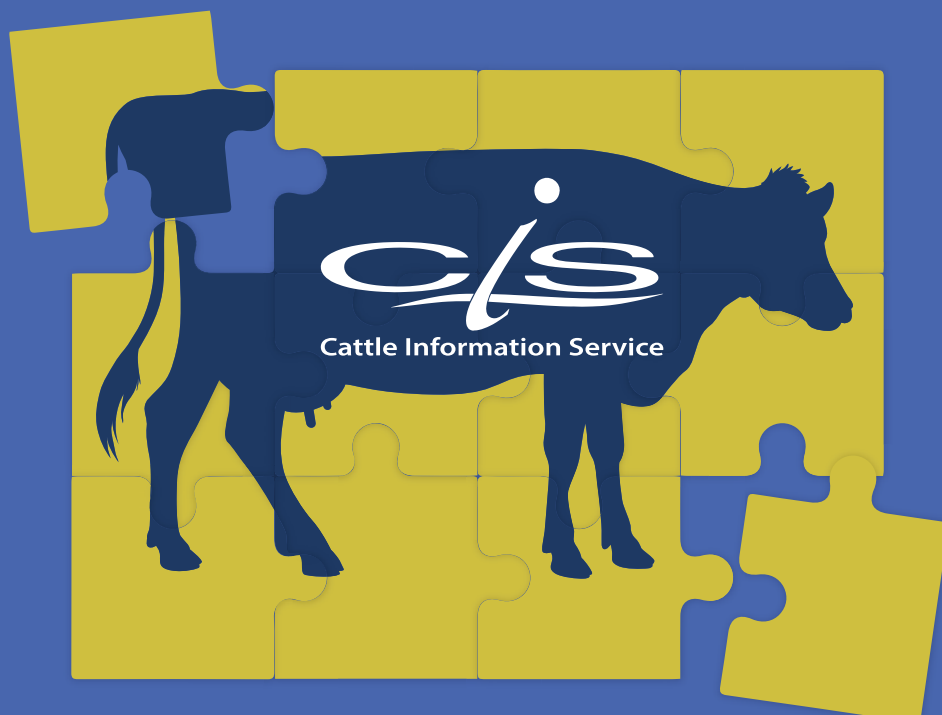
"Growing the very early maturing varieties, which can now deliver great yields and quality, should - more often than not - allow the opportunities to harvest in good conditions and establish an over-winter crop.

"In the majority of cases, this should be a positive for soil health and the environment, as well as producing clamps full of high quality forage."

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Tackling toxins in maize forage

Maize silage is a beneficial feed to support winter rations, but it is notoriously difficult to keep, spoiling in unideal conditions. So how can producers protect against mycotoxin and endotoxin exposure in high quality feed ingredients? British Dairying finds out.

Maize silage is high in energy, slowly fermentable and contains enough fibre to maintain rumen function and health, making it an excellent forage for dairy cows. “However, it can be difficult to store and prone to the development of moulds and fungi, causing spoilage and degradation of nutrient value,” explains Anna Dinsdale, Ruminant Technical Manager at Trident MicroNutri. “Crucially, these moulds can also produce mycotoxins.”

“The cow must use energy to get rid of the toxin.”

Indeed, based on last year’s EU harvest, maize was reported as the most likely crop to contain a high or medium level of mycotoxins, according to the European feed manufacturer’s association, FEFAC.

There are different effects and levels of risk associated with each type of mycotoxin, often working in combination with one another. The most prevalent mycotoxins found in maize across Europe were aflatoxin B1, deoxynivalenol (DON), zearalenone (ZON), fumonisins and T2/HT2. Producers should therefore regularly test silages and put strategies in place to minimise risks to cow health and performance, as well as wastage of ensiled forages.

The UK climate, particularly the warm and wet conditions



Anna Dinsdale says mycotoxins can have a huge impact on profitability

experienced in recent years, lends itself to a greater development of fusarium moulds, producing DON and ZON mycotoxins, particularly in maize silage.

“DON is widely associated with gastrointestinal tract damage,” explains Anna. “Inflammation in the gut can lead to an increased likelihood of leaky gut, resulting in absorption of mycotoxins and endotoxins into the bloodstream.” Endotoxins, like lipopolysaccharides (LPS), are found in the cell walls of gram-negative bacteria. While contained in the bacterial cell, they cause no damage to animal health.

However, upon bacterial death, LPS are released and pass into the bloodstream, where they can induce an inflammatory response - diverting energy away from potential milk production to fuel an unnecessary ‘switch on’ of the cow’s immune system.

ZON is typically associated with disrupted fertility and may be the cause of low conception rates or increased abortion. It mimics the biological activity of oestrogen, and at increased levels can result in loss of the pregnancy.

“This can have hugely negative impacts on herd profitability, due to increased costs of repeat insemination, veterinary intervention and increased time between calvings - and therefore milk yield peaks,” Anna says.

If you think you have a potential mycotoxin issue, the key is to keep an eye on the cows. Common signs within the herd are reduced milk production, poor immunity, increased somatic cell count (SCC) and mastitis, as well as fertility problems and diarrhoea.

“The greatest issue with any toxin is, if absorbed into the cow’s bloodstream, it is a foreign body to the cow,” explains Erin Wray, Ruminant Nutritionist at KW Feeds. “Not only do the toxins potentially result in health and performance issues, but the cow also must use energy to get rid of the toxin.”

“The inflammatory response, as the immune system reacts to the toxic substance, is very costly to nutrients and energy. Instead of the cow putting her energy into milk

production or fertility for example, she must put it into this inflammatory response to get rid of the mycotoxins.”

If clinical signs of mycotoxicosis are noticed, or if animal performance is not as expected, the best approach is to feed a multifunctional mycotoxin remediator. “The unique combination of ingredients in Ultrasorb R, for example, are designed to detoxify and bind the major toxins with the largest effects on animal health and performance,” says Erin. “These include DON and ZON, with a combination of clays, yeast cell wall and yeast extract providing the ideal components to combat those mycotoxins regularly found in silages.”

Binding and detoxification

The formulation has improved fusarium mycotoxin binding, while the addition of new clays has increased the endotoxin binding capacity by over 30%. “By providing mycotoxin and endotoxin binding and detoxification, we can support the cow by reducing the toxin load and likelihood and severity of an immune response,” adds Erin.

Clearly, it is important for farmers to make maximum use of high-quality feed ingredients like maize, and to ensile and store them as well as possible, notes Anna. “But we also need to support cows and prevent the effects of mycotoxin exposure. Don’t waste energy inputs on unnecessary challenges to the herd’s immune system; keep the energy in the system while supporting herd health and productivity.”



Farmers should test silage regularly



Cows will put energy into fighting mycotoxins instead of milk production



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High-yielding farms rethinking grazing

Pushing yields beyond 10,000 litres/cow has traditionally meant moving toward fully housed, high-input systems. Yet a growing number of high-yielding herds are revisiting paddock grazing to cut feed costs and improve cow health. British Dairying reports.

Pressure is mounting on margins, carbon footprints and welfare standards, so even the most intensive herds are questioning whether grass can play a bigger role without compromising performance.

Well-managed grazing demands high levels of skill, investment in infrastructure and careful nutrition planning to protect milk yields, so are there still opportunities for high-yielding herds to consider paddock grazing? One farming family in Cumbria have been adapting their farm to do just that.

“With better planning in autumn it’s possible to start much earlier.”

Their herd of 150 purebred, genomic-tested Holsteins ranks within the top 5% for profitable lifetime index (PLI), producing an impressive average of 10,200 litres/cow annually. With a closed herd maintained for over 70 years, the family rely on replacement heifers from their own milking cows to preserve strong genetics and maintain flexibility in herd management.

Earlier this year, John and Kate Bailey, and their son Chris, worked with vet Owen Atkinson at the Dairy Veterinary Consultancy to evaluate system changes that could better suit their high-yielding herd.



John Bailey has put a focus on grazing and grassland management

Through AHDB’s Strategic Dairy Farm programme, Owen presented several options, including shifting to an autumn block-calving herd with increased grazing, adopting a robotic milking system with year-round housing, or continuing their current seasonal block-calving approach focused on multi-cut silage.

Due to a lack of confidence in getting the fertility tight enough - with their current calving interval at 380 days - and reluctance to sell cows that calve out of block, the family decided that a strict autumn block wasn’t suitable.

Originally tenant farmers in Lancashire, the Baileys purchased Moorhouse Hall Farm in 2022,

prompting them to reconsider their long-standing farming practices and explore ways to improve efficiency in their new setting.

Their previous system - a late summer block-calving herd on heavy clay soils - was shaped by limited grazing options and infrastructure challenges, including the need to walk cows through a village, which required three people to manage. “We knew what we were doing wasn’t quite right, but we didn’t realise the full implications of it,” Chris reflects. While this approach suited their former farm, the move to Moorhouse Hall opened the door to rethinking their system and embracing new opportunities for efficiency.

Timing of grazing

The family have been working with Bess Neil, Pasture for Profit at LIC, to better understand how to adapt their farm to maximise grazing. And one of the greatest opportunities to boost forage intake comes in the spring. “If you want to increase how much your cows are grazing, the timing of when you start can be a significant win,” she explains.

“Many high yielding farms begin grazing after the first cut of silage as this is the priority, but with better planning in autumn it’s possible to start much earlier and get more milk from grazed grass

with very little impact on first cut quantity and quality.”

Chris and John have been learning more about improved grassland management, measuring their pasture with a plate meter, and have started attending a local discussion group.

“When we went to the first session of the discussion group, I felt like I didn’t know a lot about grass, even though I have been farming all my life,” says Chris. “How the farmers on paddock-based systems measure grass and the data that goes behind their decision-making is interesting. I am looking forward to learning more and gathering more data from Moorhouse.”

Fencing issues

At the moment, the infrastructure is making paddock grazing hard because of the number of temporary fences needed to set up a daybreak for the cows. “We’re still cleaning the sheds out and trying to move fences. It’d be a lot easier if we could just open a gate.”

The farm’s new focus on grazing means that they will be putting in better infrastructure - more tracks, gateways, and fencing to make daily rotations easier and more efficient. By splitting the fields up into smaller areas, they will save time putting up back fencing.



Chris aims to increase efficiency

Bess Neil’s top tips for paddock grazing

1. Subdivide fields - this will enable more frequent paddock moves, reduces the requirement for temporary break/back fencing and supports the three-leaf principle that drives grass growth and utilisation
2. Water system - make sure you have enough troughs and water pressure in the smaller paddocks, so the cows always have access to water
3. Understand the three-leaf principle and ideal pre-grazing cover - this will help you know when grass is ready to be grazed and encourage the cows to eat more of it
4. Invest in cow tracks, especially in high flow areas - this will help with cow flow efficiency and reduce damage to paddocks, while opening up more opportunities for grazing on the shoulders of the season
5. Feed 1kg/head DM less inside to encourage 1kg more outside - start by gradually decreasing the ration or parlour cake by 1kg at a time - combine with point three for best effect.

These are not massive changes, but deliberate ones, notes Bess. "Chris and John are measuring what they're doing rather than just doing things because it's what they have always done."

The team have started to measure how much grass is available in the field and using this data to help plan the rotation, instead of guessing how much grass to offer the cows each day.

"Three or four months of the year you can switch that feeder wagon off."

One factor limiting how much grazed grass the cows can consume is that they are already being pushed hard with in-parlour feeding and a partial mixed ration.

The Baileys estimated that the cows were consuming 5kg/head of grazed grass dry matter (DM) per day. In an effort to increase this, they reduced the amount of parlour cake by 1kg/head. The family's longstanding approach at Moorhouse



The Baileys are investing in infrastructure to make paddock grazing easier

has been to prioritise the production of high-quality silage, with particular emphasis on the first cut taken early in the spring. This initial harvest is considered critical, because it's fed to the cows in late summer to support fertility. By October and November, the lactation cycle is under way, and that early silage helps create strong yields throughout the lactation.

Historically, they bought 300 store lambs each year, believing that grazing sheep on the land throughout autumn and winter helped reset the pasture for optimal regrowth. This practice was seen as essential for achieving a better sward in early

spring. But they are rethinking the number of lambs being stored. "This year, there isn't any grass for them - it's all been used by the dairy herd," says Chris.

Shutting paddocks

The cows have always been housed in the autumn, to maintain yields and body condition. And this year, the family are working to aid spring performance by shutting paddocks away. "We've decided to shut off fields at 2,100kg DM/ha, to allow enough growth for a successful early spring," explains Chris. "Our cows used to start grazing in mid-April, after first

cut silage, but this year we are aiming to turn out cows by the end of March."

One of the key changes being made is with the grazing infrastructure. "We've got a grant to put some railway sleepers in this winter. We've discussed where the track is going to go to access as many fields as possible."

Improving grazing

And their main focus will be on improving grazing management. After several rounds of grazing, various options to freshen the swards, like pre-mowing, post-mowing or baling, will become more commonplace - rather than just relying on dry cows to reset the grass. At the same time, the long-standing practice of set-stocking youngstock throughout the summer is something that this family will reconsider and adapt.

Ultimately, this farm's journey is about aligning tradition with opportunity, notes Bess. "For a high-production herd, getting to a point where for three or four months of the year you can switch that feeder wagon off and just feed the cows on grass and some concentrate in the parlour - that's a real win."



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Feeding the rumen – not the cow

As scientists unlock the secrets of rumen microbes, they are providing deeper insight on rumen physiology. This is enabling nutritionists to focus on feeding the cow's rumen, with new solutions helping farmers boost milk yields. British Dairying reports.

Improving the digestibility of fibre in forage has a direct impact on dry matter intake and milk production. But it's not always easy to influence this in a growing or ensiled crop as harvest times can be very weather dependant. Fortunately, scientific understanding of how a cow's rumen works has developed at a phenomenal pace, and now nutritionists can target specific rumen bacteria with essential nutrients to improve digestion efficiencies. This in turn will help boost production and minimise waste. So how does it work?

The first step is understanding the different fractions in a diet, and the ways in which they are broken down and utilised by the cow, explains Zinpro's Dairy Nutritionist Dr Luca Fabozzi. "Like all ruminants, dairy cows have the unique advantage of transforming fibre



Fibre plays an important part in rumination, chewing and saliva production

into nutrients. "To optimise rumen function, they need adequate fibre to fuel rumen fermentation by the rumen microbes. This drives milk production and promotes health."

Not all fibre components are equal in fermentative capacity, so nutritionists need to understand how different components interact with the rumen microbiota. Carbohydrates are the main source of a cow's energy and are broadly characterised as fibre carbohydrates (FC) and non-fibre carbohydrates (NFC), like starch and sugar.

Fibre carbohydrates are found in forages, with the quality and quantity affected by growing conditions and ensiling techniques. They ferment more slowly than NFCs, and can reduce dry matter intake when their digestibility is poor or ingredient particle size is larger. "Striking a balance between FC and NFC is the sweet spot for rumen efficiency," says Luca.

Fibre is composed of three main components:

- **Cellulose:** A component of the plant cell wall providing structural strength. It can be fermented in the rumen to produce volatile fatty acids (VFAs), the primary energy source for cows.
- **Hemicellulose:** Provides the plant with flexibility. It is more digestible than cellulose, and is fermented in the rumen to produce VFAs.
- **Lignin:** Provides rigidity and strength to the plant - a relatively indigestible component.

Neutral detergent fibre (NDF) is a method used to estimate the amount of cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin in forage. The NDF in higher quality forage and feed ingredients is typically broken down in the rumen

into energy and microbial protein for use by the animal. The portion of NDF that does not degrade in the rumen passes into the large intestine, where more can be broken down into VFAs - anything that's not digested here is excreted.

Scientists can further analyse the NDF fraction to take elements like resistant starch and ash out of the equation, as these can artificially increase the diet's NDF figure. Laboratories can also simulate rumen fermentation to show how quickly NDF fractions break down, known as NDF digestibility (dNDF), says Luca.

Least digestible

In addition, they can measure acid detergent fibre (ADF) which are the least digestible parts of the plant; the higher the ADF the lower the energy value. "This information is essential for nutritionists to balance feed ingredients in the diet more accurately and effectively."

The physical characteristics of NDF are also very important. "Depending on the physical presentation of the particles and their size, NDF can be more or less effective and have varying ability to drive intake and rumination. This in turn can affect rumen pH stability and fermentation efficiency." In a total mixed ration (TMR), when conducting a Penn

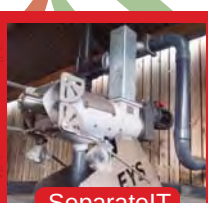




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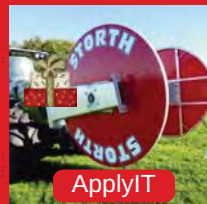
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Dr Luca Fabozzi, Dairy Nutritionist



Processing quickly and consolidating the clamp can ensure that forage quality remains post harvest

State Particle Separator test, at least 8% should be retained by a 19mm sieve, with less than 50% passing through a 4mm hole.

In the cow, fibre has several important functions: It stimulates rumination, chewing and saliva production - which affects rumen pH; provides the 'bulk' to create a stable rumen mat; and is the primary source of energy and protein.

"NDF digestion is driven by the activity of cellulolytic bacteria in the rumen: Increasing dNDF by just 1% can increase dry matter intakes (DMI) by 0.17kg/cow per day and boost energy-corrected milk yields by 0.25kg/day," says Luca. Studies have confirmed that silages with similar NDF and crude protein contents, but different digestibility, can lead to significant differences in DMI and milk yield."

So how can farmers improve the dNDF of their forage? The primary factor is plant maturity; as cell and stem diameters increase, dNDF falls rapidly. Plant genetics, climate and agronomic conditions like soil fertility, plant density and water availability also have a role to play.

"Enhancing ruminal activity reduces the need to feed rumen-protected protein."

"Post-harvest decreases in forage quality can be minimised by careful management," says Luca. This means harvesting at the correct stage of maturity, processing quickly and consolidating the clamp - possibly with the use of an inoculant for optimum fermentation. "If fermentation of sugar in the silo is extended, this can decrease digestibility, while yeast and mould growth can lower the energy value," he adds.

Having optimised their forage, the next step to improving digestibility is to encourage proliferation of the bacteria which break down the NDF. These bacteria feed on branched-chain amino acids (BCAA) and their precursors, the branched-chain volatile fatty acids (BCVFA or isoacids).

"Providing a direct source of isoacids for the fibre-digesting bacteria enhances microbial protein production, contributing to improved NDF digestibility and rumen efficiency. Studies have shown that supplying isoacids to diets increased

bacterial activity by about 7%, boosting dNDF by 10-20%," highlights Luca.

"Isoacids can unlock the diet potential by increasing NDF digestibility and energy supply: Several studies have shown that feeding lactating cows with Zinpro IsoFerm boosted feed efficiency by 5.5% on average and increased milk production by 4.3%."

Source of protein

Increasing the microbe population also boosts microbial protein production. This ruminal source of protein contributes about half of the total metabolisable protein (MP) a cow needs, and its amino acid profile closely matches the requirements for milk protein synthesis. "Enhancing ruminal activity thereby reduces the need to feed rumen-protected protein, potentially reducing feed costs," says Luca.

"Dairy cattle nutrition is both exciting and challenging, as it requires nourishing the microbial ecosystem within the rumen while simultaneously meeting the nutritional needs of the cow herself," he adds. "By improving NDF digestibility, Zinpro IsoFerm allows cows to extract more nutrients from the same amount of feed, increases microbial protein production and ultimately dairy profitability. It is another key to unlocking the genetic potential of the modern dairy cow."



Fibre is needed to optimise rumen function



GENOCELLS WORKS "REALLY WELL" FOR NORTHERN IRELAND FARMER

GenoCells, exclusive to NMR, is rapidly emerging as an effective way of identifying individual culprits causing elevated bulk tank Somatic Cell Counts (SCCs), as well as being a valuable aid to Selective Dry Cow decision making. It also offers the perfect solution for dairy farms milking pure breed herds when individual cow sampling is difficult.

Andrew Sayers who milks 110 cows near Strabane in Northern Ireland, was looking for a way of stabilizing his herd's somatic cell count with minimal disruption to his milking routine.

"I had been thinking about milk recording for a while, but as our parlour is quite small, having someone in there with me during milking would have been quite tight on space, so I had to find another way."

"I'd heard about GenoCells from NMR and I thought I'd give it a go. And it works really, really well."

Andrew has been using GenoCells for just over a year now. Every six weeks he takes his bulk milk sample and mails it off to the NMR laboratory at Four Ashes in Staffordshire. He receives the individual cow SCC data about a week after that.

"It's very quick and easy," he says. "We always see a rise in our SCC level at this time of year because of drying off, but because I've been working with the cell count for the whole year now, managing the cows is a lot easier and our herd somatic cell count has steadied itself."

Of course one requirement for testing with GenoCells is to genomic test your herd. Andrew had never expected to genomic test but he has now discovered how useful it is. He initially used NMR's GeneEze genomic test on his milking cows and has continued to test his replacements since.

"I tested some heifers a few weeks ago," he says. "And I have to admit the results did throw up some surprises. Some disappointing and some quite exciting!"

Using a bulk milk sample to test for high cell count cows offers huge benefits in terms of speed, flexibility, saving on labour costs and minimizing disruption to the milking routine.

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Don't let feed waste erode margins

This winter dairy farmers are faced with having to juggle the pressure of margins with, in many cases, tight forage stocks. With feed the highest cost of milk production, ensuring the diet is used most efficiently is going to be crucial. British Dairying reports.

Recent milk price cuts have come at the worst time for producers, as they will not be matched by feed price reductions.

"While proteins appear to be easing slightly and cereals are similar to last year, supplies of other straights are tightening," warns Alicia Wilson at Trouw Nutrition GB. "In many parts of the UK, straw prices have increased as farmers look to stretch forage stocks further."

Diets will have to be carefully formulated, monitored closely and amended as required. This will ensure optimum yields and feed efficiency to maximise available margins, she says. One area where farmers should focus is reducing feed spoilage and waste, which can increase feed costs per litre.



Alicia Wilson at Trouw Nutrition GB suggests one area farmers could focus on is reducing feed spoilage and waste

"Cows are selective eaters with a particularly strong sense of smell."

A major cause of feed waste is spoilage due to microbial activity, which can have two major consequences. Firstly, the microbes feed off energy in the diet, reducing the energy available to the cow.

Secondly, it can compromise diet freshness and palatability, reducing dry matter intakes (DMI) of the entire total mixed ration

(TMR), not just the forage element. The root cause of feed spoilage is micro-organism activity, particularly yeasts in silage once it is exposed to the air. "In the presence of oxygen, dormant yeasts are activated," explains Alicia. "They degrade lactic acid, producing heat and water. As the pH of the silage increases, moulds, fungi and bacteria further degrade the silage, rapidly fermenting sugars, proteins and starches into CO₂ and heat."

Silage degradation

Unless the problem is addressed, the micro-organisms will continue to proliferate, further degrading the silage as well as other ingredients in the TMR. The longer feed remains

in the trough, the greater the degradation in available energy, and the increased risk of reduced DMI due to feed rejection.

The energy loss can significantly impact milk yields. In the presence of increased microbial activity, sugar levels in silages can be reduced by 10% or more, which lowers the metabolisable energy (ME) content by 0.25MJ/kg DM.

"If a cow is consuming 10kg DM of silage per day, this is equivalent to a reduction in energy intakes of 2.5MJ/day, equating to 0.5 litres of lost milk," notes Alicia. "At 40ppl this is a loss of 20p/cow off daily margins."

However, the impact on DMI can be more significant. "Cows are

selective eaters with a particularly strong sense of smell. They will reject diets that have heated and have reduced palatability. They will sort diets more, spend more time at the trough and less time lying down - and ultimately more feed will be left in the trough."

Consider a typical TMR formulated for maintenance +25 litres, based on 50:50 maize and grass silage and 6kg of a blend. If cows ate the target amount, they would consume 46kg freshweight and 18.05kg DM. At current prices the diet would cost £3.43/cow per day.

A conservative 2% reduction in daily DMI, which is not unusual if diets are affected by spoilage, would curb intakes by 0.38kg DM/cow and result in the loss of 0.8 litres/cow per day. Margins would be reduced by 32p/cow and 1kg of freshweight diet would be wasted.

Adding up the losses

"For a 180-cow herd these losses would add up to 4,320 fewer litres produced per month, margins reduced by £1,382 and 5,400kg of feed wasted," calculates Alicia. If the DM loss was combined with the reduction in energy content due to microbial activity, then yields could be reduced by 1.3 litres, increasing the margin that would be lost. In addition, it is probable that fertility would be impacted, too. It will be



Farmers should regularly check the silage face and shoulders to look for signs of spoilage like discolouration

important to watch out for signs that spoilage may be a problem, as preventative action can reduce the impact. Producers should check the silage face and shoulders regularly and look for signs of spoilage.

Signs of spoilage include white, green or black spots, clumping or discolouration. But remember that micro-organisms can be active without physical signs of spoilage.

“The presence of oxygen in the clamp initiates the spoilage cascade.”

It's also useful to monitor wastage levels in the troughs. If cows are leaving more than usual or is expected, this is a sign of rejection.

Watch cow behaviour; are they sorting the diet more or spending more time standing at the trough and not eating? Inspect the rejected feed, suggests Alicia. Is it heating up and does it have an unpleasant smell? Contaminated feed will have a sour



Monitor wastage levels - if it's higher than usual this is a sign of rejection

and musty smell. “It is the presence of oxygen in the clamp that initiates the spoilage cascade,” she notes. “To help prevent spoilage maintain a tight face, moving across it quickly. Ensure block cutter knives are sharp and only uncover the clamp in small increments.

“Remove and discard any spoilt material in the clamp to reduce the extent of spoilage and avoid contaminating clean material.

“Keep troughs clean, and remove rejected feed to prevent contamination when new feed

is added.” As spoilage-causing organisms are present on all forages, it can also pay to take steps to maintain a low microbial load to reduce fermentation activity. “Selko TMR is a blend of buffered organic acids and acid salts designed to create a hostile environment for micro-organisms, effectively reducing their growth and activity in the TMR.”

The blend of acids inhibits microbial growth by penetrating microbial cell membranes, disrupting their structure and function, ultimately inhibiting microbial

growth, explains Alicia. This results in less heating, improving palatability and reducing losses of dry matter and nutrient value. It can be added to the diet in the mixer wagon or sprayed onto the silage face. In trials it has been shown to maintain feed intakes and milk yields.

“In one trial, cows fed a diet treated with Selko TMR exhibited faster eating, fewer visits to the feed trough and less time in total at the feed trough,” says Alicia.

Increased feed efficiency

“Cows fed an untreated diet were slower, more selective eaters and spent more time at the trough, with less time lying down and ruminating. Cows on the treated diet produced 0.9kg/day more milk and had greater feed efficiency.”

The presence of spoilage organisms increases the risk of mycotoxin poisoning, she warns. If mycotoxins are suspected, she advises screening clamps and using Selko Toxo to bind and eliminate the toxins.

“Reducing feed waste is one practical step dairy farmers can take this winter to help mitigate the impact of pressure on margins and make best use of forage stocks.”

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Redefining modern dairy farming

Embracing robotic dairy equipment and adopting a targeted approach to crop management has redefined modern dairy farming at one unit in Wiltshire. As a result, they have improved milk production and cow health. British Dairying reports.

Located in the heart of Wiltshire, Stowell Farms is a 1,417-ha mixed farming estate that has made impressive strides in both dairy and arable production. Under the stewardship of Farm Manager Neil Ridgway and Dairy Herd Manager Chris Gowen, the farm has become a model of innovation in UK farming.

Since joining the farm in 2019 and 2024, their adoption of advanced robotic milking systems and precision farming techniques has transformed cow welfare and farm productivity. A recent open day delved into the strategies and technologies that have driven this transformation, highlighting the farm's approach to robotic milking, crop yield improvements and overall farm efficiency.



Chris Gowen (far left) and the Stowell Farm dairy team boosted efficiencies

“The robots allow for individualised milking schedules.”

The basis of the pair's strategy to enhance cow health and comfort among the 780-head herd has been the installation of nearly the full suite of Lely robotic systems. This includes 16 Astronaut milking robots, nine Discovery scraping robots, and three Juno feed pushing robots.

This significant investment has allowed the farm to take a more 'hands-off' approach to milking, yet still maintain a close and informed understanding of herd health and productivity. “The farm is owned by the Rothschild Estate and is expected to run as profitably as any of their other businesses,” explains Neil. “Six years later and we can safely say the farm washes its own face.

“I have to ensure that each investment decision is backed by a clear strategy for improving farm productivity and demonstrate a tangible return on investment, just like any other business,” he adds. “The goal was to integrate technology that could reduce manual intervention while ensuring we stayed in close contact with our cows.”

The system provides the team with real-time data on cow health and behaviour, allowing them to identify potential issues earlier and address them swiftly. “The milking systems not only made life easier for the team, but have also had a positive effect on the cows,” notes Chris. “The robots allow for individualised milking schedules, reducing stress and improving comfort levels for the herd.”

Significant improvements

As a result, the farm has also seen significant improvements in key performance metrics, including a 12,250-litre average per lactation and 886kg of milk solids per cow. “We've seen a marked reduction in stress levels among the cows,” adds Chris. “They can choose when they want to be milked, which gives them autonomy and keeps them calmer. They're now averaging 3.1 milkings/cow per day.”

Animal health and comfort extends beyond the milking routine to the cows' living conditions. Keeping the cows' bedding hygienic is crucial for minimising the risk of infections and ensuring that the animals remain healthy and productive.

Previously, the farm had an issue with somatic cell counts and mastitis, running at around 40 cases per 100

cows. “Installing the milking robots started to help us manage this, bringing cases down to around 32 per 100 cows,” says Chris.

“The Astronaut is equipped with a brush cleaning system, designed to remove any encrusted dirt and manure around the teats and the underside of the udders, which ultimately stimulates milk let-down.” After cleaning, the brushes are thoroughly disinfected to minimise the risk of cross-contamination.

In the past year, the farm managers have worked closely with Paul Gilbert at Timac Agro, trialling a number of solutions to improve both crop and animal performance, starting with the bedding sanitiser ActiSan.

This works by keeping the bedding dry for longer, while creating an unfavourable environment for harmful bacteria, due to its slight acidifying benefit and the action of plant-based extracts like cinnamaldehyde and carvacrol.

“Bedding cleanliness is often overlooked, but it's such an important part of maintaining cow health,” says Chris. “The farm is now averaging around 26 mastitis cases per 100 cows and we hope that with a few more tweaks we will get to below 20 cases.”

Stowell Farms has also placed a strong emphasis on growing

high-quality forage to feed the dairy herd. In the past year, Neil has trialled several products aimed at improving maize and wheat yields. These trials have focused on improving crop nutrition efficiency and management practices to enhance both quantity and quality.

“We've been looking for ways to increase the consistency and quality of the forage we grow,” explains Neil. “We've trialled products like PhysioStart starter fertiliser, and Seactive Vital foliar biostimulant, and the results speak for themselves. We've seen up to a 3t/ha increase in maize yields alone.”

This has been achieved by optimising nutrient supply and uptake in the soil, improving the overall health and quality of the crop. This year's maize yields averaged 40t/ha at 36% dry matter - with several treated fields significantly exceeding this.

“Attention to detail has really paid off for us.”

This approach has allowed Stowell Farms to ensure the dairy herd receives a consistent and high-quality feed source, boosting overall efficiencies. “Attention to detail has really paid off for us,” says Neil. “It's about being proactive, understanding influence of soil health, and making sure we're giving the plants exactly what they need.”

In addition to maize, the farm has expanded its lucerne production, growing 80ha annually. It aims to reach 150ha by 2028, as an excellent protein-rich forage for dairy cows. This crop is also benefiting from biostimulant treatment, helping the crop recover from cutting and lifting overall yields.

The farm aims to increase its dairy herd to 1,000 cows by 2026, and with the continued use of robotic milking and improvements in soil health, they are confident of maintaining productivity and sustainability as the farm grows.

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Double box robot fitting the bill

When one family in Shropshire realised it was time to replace their old herringbone parlour, they decided to look into a double box robot system – and they haven't looked back since the beneficial installation. Gareth Jones at Robotic Milking Systems reports.

Family team, Brian, Margaret and Mark Price keep 90 Friesian Holsteins in Asterley near Shrewsbury. By 2022 they had reached the point where they knew they had to replace their existing 6/12 herringbone parlour, installed in 1996, because milking was taking too long and it was at the end of its working life.

Mark was spending a good deal of time off the farm, working as a nutritionist, so could not commit to milking the cows twice a day. And Brian wanted to take a step back from being tied to the cows. So, they decided that the next stage could be robotics, provided they could get the economics to stack up.

“When we started milking in the robot, the cows were very calm.”

The family considered a few different options, but were attracted to the Boumatic Gemini because of support from their local dealership BD Atkins. Plus, the double box offered them the ideal solution for their cow numbers and building layout.

“The nice thing about the Gemini is that the double box can milk up to 100 cows,” explains Mark. “So with our herd of 90 it was a great



A double box milking robot has fulfilled milking capacity without the need for extensive work to infrastructure

fit, as we only needed one machine. It is also modular, so the building work required was minimum. In addition, we liked the rear leg milking feature, which seems to be unique to Boumatic.”

The robot was ordered in March 2023 and Mark set about doing most of the building work himself. “We liked the idea of incorporating a pit into the design as this would make it easier for any manual attachments or treating the cows,” he says. “Apart from that it was only a case of building slurry channels and extending off the existing building.”

The dairy remained in the same place, only 30m from the robot, which avoided any issues for the milk delivery line. However, the bulk tank was replaced as the old one was outdated and unable to communicate with the robot. “

We decided to go for a 7,000-litre DX tank,” explains Mark. “This gave us enough capacity for every-other-day collection and could be totally integrated into the new system. We also considered a buffer tank in the dairy but felt we had enough spare capacity in the double box, so this was another expense that we could avoid.”

New environment

Building work was completed that summer before taking delivery of the robot, which was craned into position, straight off the lorry. Then it was just a matter of completing the installation, before using the robot as an out-of-parlour feeder for a week to get the cows used to their new environment. “This was a great move,” explains Mark. “When we started milking in the robot, the cows were very calm.”

Although the family considered grazing, it was getting a bit complicated. “So we decided that a housed, free-access system was best for us,” notes Mark. “This gives the herd continuity, as every day is the

Robot facts

- Ear tag identification
- Quarter conductivity
- Rear-leg milking

Cost

- Gemini double box robot: **£139,000**
- Air compressor and water installation: **£7,000**
- Building work: **£5,000**

same and intakes are not affected by the weather.” The farm is in a good maize growing area, so the outside ration consists of 50:50 maize to grass silage, worth maintenance +22 litres, before the cows are topped up in the robot to a maximum of 12kg/head of concentrates per day.

The herd is very young and is made up of 70% first and second calvers, giving an average yield of 30 litres/cow per day, with an average daily milking of three.

“The aim is to move the yield up to 35 litres/cow over the next 12 months, and to produce around 3,000 litres/day,” continues Mark.

“We know this is still well within the range of the double box, so we will still have plenty of free time (available milking time when the robot is not being used), without putting huge pressure on us and the cows.”



Robotic milking has taken the pressure off both Mark (L) and Brian (R)



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Data-driven dairy: Breeding for the future

A focus on targeted, sexed breeding of both dairy replacements and beef calves, alongside tailored nutrition, is helping one family to maximise returns from the dairy herd on their sixth generation farm in Cheshire. British Dairying pays them a visit.

The Jones family have been at Hill Farm near Chester since the 18th century. The current incumbents - Adrian and his brother Tristan, parents David and Frances and wife Joanne - are the sixth generation to farm there. For more than 23 years, they have continued the family's long-standing farming legacy while embracing innovation to drive efficiency and herd performance.

Herd Manager James Lloyd, Youngstock Manager Liz Smith and Herdsperson Dan Halliday are also integral members of the team. They help the family push the boundaries of herd progression, whether that's production, reproduction, health, or genetics; a field James is particularly passionate about. They are supported by an exceptional team of milkers, assistants and tractor drivers, who all contribute to the farm's success, notes Adrian.

The farm spans 486ha and supplies milk under a Müller/Tesco contract. The herd's results are a testament



(L-R) Genus's Wendy Ramsey with James Lloyd, Joanne and Adrian Jones

to the team's dedication, with cows averaging 13,000 litres at 4.2% fat and 3.21% protein, alongside an impressively low bactoscan of 12 and somatic cell count of 70,000 cells/ml.

The family run a closed herd, focusing on homebred replacements after previously expanding through buying in additional cows, helping to ensure long-term herd stability

and consistency. They rear all heifer replacements at their dedicated youngstock unit, selling beef calves; a mix of Angus and British Blue, to Meadow Quality.

Breeding decisions are guided by a custom index developed specifically to meet the herd's goals. Priorities are split for 44% production, 40% health and fitness, and 16% conformation, while avoiding undesirable characteristics like excessive stature. "We know what works for our system," says Adrian. "It's about finding that balance between performance, health, and traits that make the cows easier to manage."

The family have worked with Genus ABS for more than 20 years, using its reproductive management system (RMS) to support fertility performance. Around eight years

ago they began using Sexcel sexed semen and the results have been impressive, both in conception rates and gender accuracy.

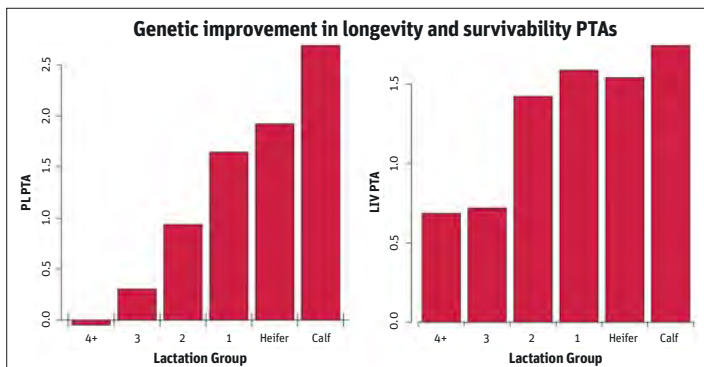
"It is on par, if not better, than conventional semen for conception rates," Adrian explains. "The gender results have been phenomenal - it's very rare we get a male dairy calf." Over the past year, the herd has averaged a 45% conception rate with sexed dairy semen and 41% with Genus' conventional beef semen, allowing the team to plan breeding strategies with confidence and precision.

Transformative move

Seeking to refine herd uniformity after expanding with purchased cows, Adrian introduced GENEadvance to his breeding programme around four years ago, a move that has transformed how he manages genetic selection on the farm.

Through genomic testing and data-driven insights, this system provides a deeper understanding of each animal's genetic potential. Using this, alongside the genetic management system (GMS) the team's genetic service specialist ranks cows based on a custom index. This determines which animals are bred to sexed dairy for heifer replacements and which are put to beef.

Previously, the breeding company manually scored animals to decide cows which should breed



Longevity and survivability have dramatically improved in the herd

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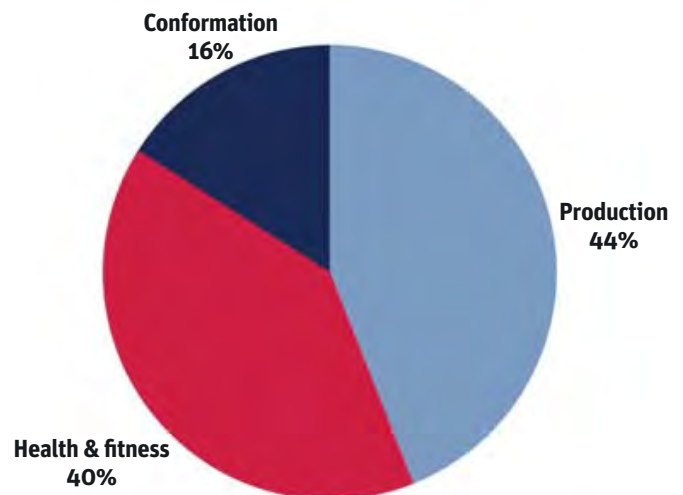
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Breeding decisions are guided by a custom index to meet the herd's goals

replacements and which should go to beef. Now, it uses data-driven insights to guide every decision with confidence and accuracy.

"It takes out the guesswork," says Adrian. "We let the data decide which animals breed our replacements and which go to beef." Even after four years of using the programme, the team are still surprised by which animals are selected for dairy and beef breeding, but they trust the data, which has become an invaluable part of the farm's progress.

"The aim is to help cows reach their genetic potential."

"Before, decisions were based on visual assessment, but it's incredible to see how the data sometimes challenges what you think you know," notes Adrian. "It's helped us create a much more uniform, consistent herd."

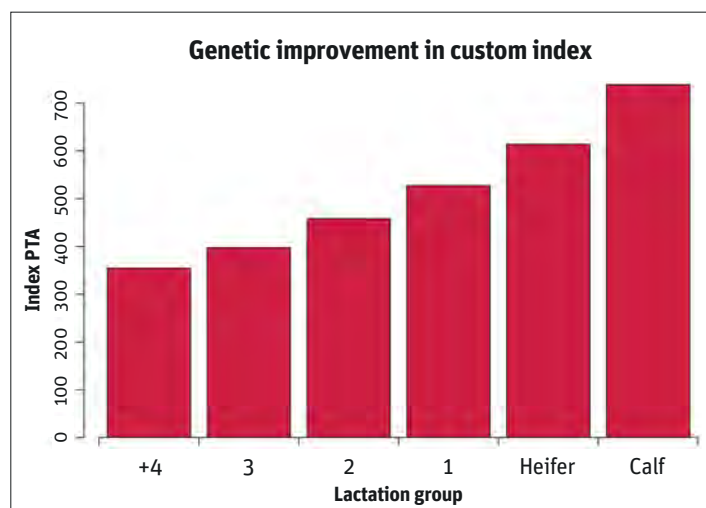
As the graphs show, younger animals entering the herd rank significantly higher for the traits

prioritised in the farm's bespoke index. This highlights how each generation is consistently outperforming the last, reflecting sustained genetic progress aligned to their long-term breeding goals. The longevity and survivability have also dramatically improved.

Building on this success, the family recently introduced Sexcel male beef semen, focusing on sexed British Blue to further enhance the value of their calf crop. "We're happy with the results so far," Adrian says. "We've had no issues with calving ease, and the added value of male calves going to Meadow Quality was a key driver for making this decision."

This approach allows the farm to maximise returns from every calf born while maintaining simplicity in herd management and rearing.

Of course, nutrition is an important pillar to help the cows reach their genetic potential, and the family have worked with independent nutritionist, Pete Davies, for more than 18 years. A central focus is the ability to quickly identify and correct nutritional or metabolic dips immediately after calving, he says. Strong transition management underpins long-term performance across the lactation,



Younger animals entering the herd rank higher in the custom index

and quarterly review meetings involve the farm team, Sandstone Vets, Genus ABS breeding adviser, and Pete.

"The aim is to help cows reach their genetic potential, with peak yield targeted at around 20 days in milk," notes Adrian. Rations are based on high-quality maize and grass silage. When forage is tight, he uses alternative energy/protein sources, including high-starch feeds like bread, depending on availability.

For the past two years, Pete has supplemented the diet with Zinpro IsoForm to support fibre digestion, microbial activity and overall feed efficiency, with consistently strong results. "The target starch level is about 25%," he says. "Over the past 12 months the average has been c.23%, contributing to a slight dip in performance. The ability to pinpoint this so precisely reflects the herd's strong monitoring and data interpretation processes."

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Epigenetics help transform performance

Many farmers selectively breed cows to maximise their genetic potential. But often external conditions prevent stock from reaching that potential. One farm in Finland is using epigenetics to help overcome such limitations, as British Dairying reports.

Fifth generation farmers, Eija and Juha-Pekka Koutonen from Koutonen Ranch in northern Finland, have been managing a 93-cow milking herd for the past 12 years. However, significant changes in their approach over the past two years have enabled them to improve herd performance by accessing the power of epigenetics.

Epigenetics, in a dairy farming situation, simply refers to unlocking the way genes are expressed, to optimise the cows' productivity, efficiency and sustainability. In scientific terms, epigenetics influence how genes (DNA) are both activated and deactivated and by how much, according to the influence of external factors.

"Iron content of the mineral mix and forage was double checked."

"For dairy farmers, unlocking gene expression means seeing animals perform at their potential due to an improved understanding of what is holding them back," says Antler Bio's Sarah Nightingale. "In practical terms, this means payback on the time, effort and resources you have invested in selecting the best-fit genetics and traits for your herd."

In 2016, Eija and Juha-Pekka put up a new barn and invested in two



Strict biosecurity limits the risk of pathogens spreading between cohorts

milking robots as part of their plan to improve efficiency, welfare and cow numbers without needing to add staff. The herd is around 90% Holstein with 10% Ayrshire genetics and the top three traits bred for are milk yield, milking speed, and cow conformation.

The milking cows - who are averaging 13,700 litres/cow - are currently indoors all year, although an exercise yard is being planned. Heifers and calves have access to pasture and outside space and silage cuts are taken from leys comprising 90% Timothy and 10% tall fescue.

The cows' total mixed ration (TMR) comprises grass silage, a

semi-concentrate and minerals; they also have a liquid energy supplement and concentrate at the robot. The dry cows have a similar ration, but their grass silage would typically have a metabolisable energy of around 10MJ/kg dry matter (DM); they also have a customised mineral mix.

The cows calve all year round, with 1.9 inseminations/cow for each successful pregnancy. Other key metrics include a low mastitis rate of 2% and, in 2025, a somatic cell count of 89,000 cells/ml which, thanks to data from the robots, is monitored daily.

An annual vet herd health planning visit is supplemented with monthly routine fertility checks when the vet will also disbud calves. Attention to detail around biosecurity aims to limit the risk of disease being brought into the herd and for pathogens to spread from one cohort to another.

Protective equipment

"We have separate entrances for veterinary staff and visitors, farm staff, and the milk tanker driver," says Eija. "Protective clothing is provided for everyone, and personal shoes are not permitted in the barns. There is a biosecurity room which is divided by a barrier, where hands can be washed and farm clothes changed before entering; this approach has really

helped minimise the risk of disease spreading. Once you are used to it, it's no trouble."

In 2024, keen to understand more about why some cows were performing better than others even in the same on-farm conditions, Eija and Juha-Pekka started using the EpiHerd system from Antler Bio.

"This is the first time the technology of epigenetics has been put into a commercial package capable of delivering easy-to-understand, digestible insights for individual cows and at a herd level," says Sarah.

Blood samples from ten cows were taken and then analysed. "This showed that vitamin D was a limiting factor, fat metabolism could be improved, and that there were issues with immunity and inflammation," explains Eija.

"To help build immunity, we now clean all the drinking troughs daily with a scrubbing brush and have overhauled how we bed the cows and approach cubicle cleanliness. Mastitis was the only inflammatory condition affecting the cows, so we started using a mastitis vaccine, which helped cut subclinical cases and cell counts from 258,000 cells/ml to 89,000 cells/ml," she adds.

Performance limiting factors

Now into the second year of testing, the report has flagged a range of other factors potentially limiting performance:

- Alfa linolenic acid
- Mammary gland
- Fat metabolism
- Protein metabolism
- Linoleic acid
- Inflammation
- Iron
- Immunity
- Selenium

The report colour codes actions in priority order. Some, like addressing issues with linoleic acid, iron or selenium, can be a relatively quick fix, while others can take a little longer. The clear list of actions gives useful insight for farmers to discuss with their advisers, in the knowledge that, once implemented, there will be a profitable outcome.



Eija and Juha-Pekka invested in a new barn and two milking robots

Continued on page 46.

High feed efficiency helping to achieve milk contract incentives

As sponsors of the High Feed Efficiency category at the 2025 Cream Awards, KW's Dr. Anna Sutcliffe outlines why feed efficiency, and the use of co-products and available technology, are key to achieving contract rewards and reducing the carbon footprint of milk, while also being crucial to farm profitability.

Pressure on dairy producer margins means a focus on high feed efficiency and high-performance herds has never been more important, not just on the bottom line, but also on responsible production.

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 greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction strategies.

Supporting a high-performance herd requires excellent attention to detail at all stages of milk production, something clearly demonstrated by Gethin and Eleri Gibbin of Drefach Farms, this year's High Feed Efficiency winners at the 2025 Cream Awards.

One area that really stood out for the judges, alongside the focus on cow comfort and health, was Drefach Farms' focus on making excellent utilisation of the resources available to them, including exceptional forage quality, achieved through the whole harvesting process.

Forage makes up the main proportion of most dairy rations at farms across the country, so making the most out of it is crucial to achieving feed efficiencies.

The use of carefully selected home-produced and sustainably sourced co-products can help achieve that balance, with the correct feeding regime making a significant difference to milk output and quality, as well as the sustainability of the herd.

Of course, it has to be cost effective to move across to sustainable feeds, but many processor contracts are now providing the incentive for producers to earn more, per litre of milk produced, by doing so.

Feed efficiency and protein efficiency, for example, represent two of the top five levers in Arla's Climate Check tool, while rewards for the use of sustainable feeds is also helping to drive action to reduce emissions on Arla farms.

Using Arla's FarmAhead Incentive Guide, producers can earn up to 13 points from producing more milk per feed input unit, up to 11 points by sourcing sustainable feeds, and a further eight points by reducing the protein surplus in the feed ration. Each point leads to an addition to the milk payment.



Where processors are looking to reward their producers for utilising sustainable, and responsibly sourced feeds, it is therefore possible to achieve the highest return, for example when using combinations of home-produced, high-quality protein sources like the soya alternative NovaPro, fed alongside moist feeds, such as brewers grains.

Unlike feeds with embedded carbon, essentially with GHG emissions already built into or associated with producing the feed ingredients, co-products attract a very low carbon footprint, as the carbon follows the head products.

In effect, you only really need to consider the transport costs for that product. This lends itself to helping the dairy farmer to lower the intensity of the carbon footprint of their milk production.

For example, on a Sainsbury's contract, producers can achieve maximum returns on sustainable feeds by feeding NovaPro as the quality protein source, and brewers grains as the rumen degradable protein source, replacing products such as soya (any origin) and imported distillers.

NovaPro's improved protein utilisation, leading to lower milk urea nitrogen levels, also means an improvement in nitrogen efficiency, and therefore less direct and indirect emissions from manure.

Lowering the carbon footprint of a ration, utilising good quality, home produced protein sources, that support high performance and improve nitrogen use efficiency, can therefore bring significant rewards to milk payments.

Technology is also key to supporting feed efficiency. The Feedlync digital feed management system is having a transformative influence on production and feed efficiency, and also now counts towards a further two points on Arla's FarmAhead Incentive Guide.

An increase in milk yield is often attributed to more consistent feeding, while a precise approach to feeding also supports the best possible health for animals. Feedlync enables producers to analyse feed accuracy quickly and easily, not only controlling feed costs and improving accuracies, but also minimising waste, therefore enhancing environmental credentials.

Based on a 300-head herd, with a yield of 11,500 litres per cow per year, even just targeting a 1% saving in feed using Feedlync, it is possible to achieve a feed cost saving of over £4000 per year, or the equivalent of nearly 150 grams of concentrate feed, per cow, per day. That represents an annual return on capital investment of 220%.

On average, the Feedlync system increases feed accuracy by 4%, with less feed used to produce a litre of milk, making a significant contribution to the bottom line, particularly with added processor rewards.

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Continued from page 44.

"A supplement containing alpha linoleic acid is now offered in the robot to help support energy balance," says Eija. "Iron content of the mineral mix and forage was double checked to ensure sufficient iron is being included and, to address the shortfall in selenium, we now have a custom-made mix which incorporates organic selenium, vitamin E and zinc."

"I can't wait to see what the next results will reveal."

To further improve udder health and performance, base minerals were adjusted and zinc added, with vitamin A, E and D levels also upped. And to address issues around fat and protein metabolism, specific nutrition advice was sought. This led to the team altering management around rumen pH, condition scoring and the transition period.

"Further tweaks on cleaning and disinfecting water troughs, bedding



(L-R) Eija and Juha-Pekka are fifth generation farmers at Koutonen Ranch

cubicles twice a day with sawdust and ensuring good air quality has meant immunity has improved," notes Eija. "The facts are now speaking for themselves; somatic cell counts have fallen, cows are calving down in better condition, and milk yields are up."

Since implementing the changes recommended in the EpiHerd report, average yields have increased by 880 litres/cow, helping to generate an

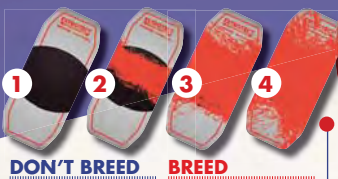
additional €53,064/year (£46,772) income. This represents a return on investment of 4.8:1.

"In many ways, using the EpiHerd platform has helped us to understand what is happening inside the cows long before any visible signs appear," she adds. "It means I can stay one step ahead and work proactively to optimise how the cows perform; I can't wait to see what the next results will reveal."

Understanding epigenetics

- Epigenetics influence how genes (DNA) are both activated and deactivated and by how much, according to external biological and environmental factors.
- In simple terms, RNA reads the animal's DNA; it decides which genes are activated and which remain silent.
- AntlerBio has a database of hundreds of RNA biomarkers linked to performance, which identify why some animals appear to be underperforming compared to others, despite very similar genetics.
- EpiHerd works by analysing small blood samples from a cohort of the herd, which are tested against the database of RNA biomarkers.
- The output is an easy-to-interpret colour-coded report for both individual animals and at a herd level.
- Herds can be tested annually.

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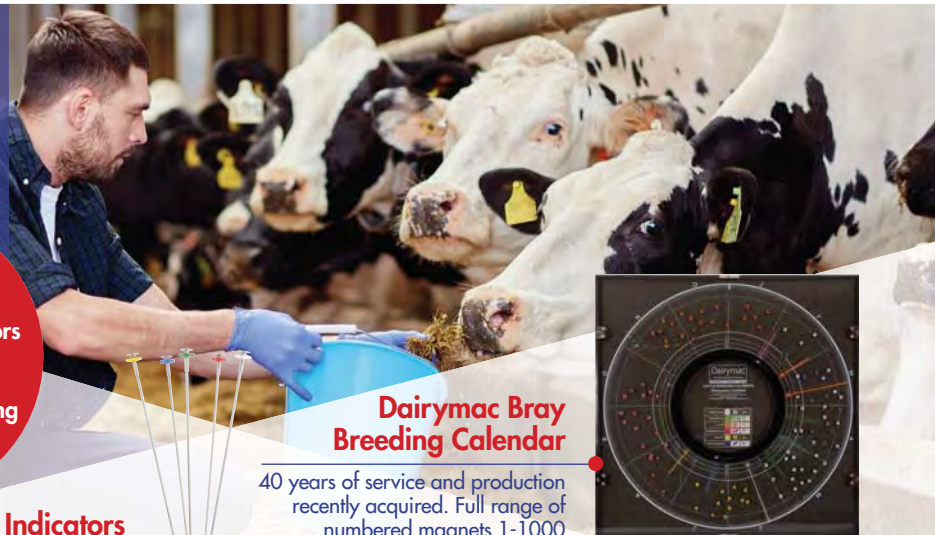
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Beware copper toxicity

In this issue's Farm Vet Opinion, Mia Ellis from WestPoint Farm Vets; part of the VetPartners group, discusses copper.

For years, farmers have supplemented minerals out of fear of deficiencies, but inadvertent over-supplementation is leading to an excess of copper, which impacts production. This is something APHA laboratories are reporting, and we have experienced in practice at Westpoint.

When it comes to copper supplementation, it's important to check your herd's trace mineral status to make sure there's no chronic toxicity building up. This is vital, since excess copper can affect production and immunity, although clinical signs are under-reported.

I've seen cases of acute copper toxicity causing death of dairy heifers, alongside chronic copper toxicity in milking cows. This overuse is a twofold issue, as copper is an expensive additive and toxicity impacts welfare and optimal production.

"Abattoir vets can submit the samples on your behalf."

The issue is being identified globally, with some variation between breeds. Holsteins hold a greater ability to store and process copper than native breeds, meaning they are more likely to have chronic copper toxicity than a native breed, which often shows as acute copper toxicity. Holstein heifers have shown signs of over-supplementation as early as eight months old, before they even start receiving milking feed, due to overloading from both their dam and external inputs.

Often, copper comes in via a number of different routes that haven't been co-ordinated. For example, heifer rearing pellets can be supplemented with copper, with levels within legal limits - but you might also be using mineral licks containing copper. Copper builds up over time, so it's a good idea to monitor the overall picture.

When it comes to spotting physical issues in your herd, if you



Mia Ellis says copper can build up

are seeing blood in urine, a dazed, drunken appearance and seizures, these are signs of acute copper toxicity. If you are seeing poor growth, lower-than-expected milk production and general suboptimal production, these can be chronic signs, as are delays in growth and infertility.

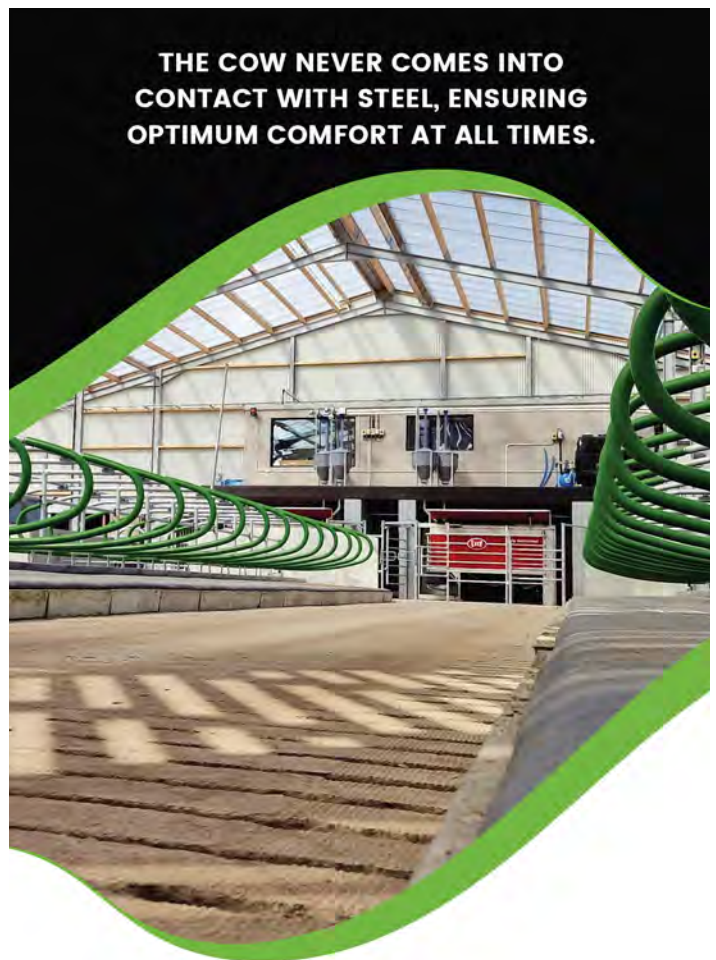
Taking liver samples and sending them for analysis gives the most accurate picture of the herd's copper toxicity status. It's a low-cost, straightforward option done on cull animals, as abattoir vets can submit the samples on your behalf. Copper levels on blood testing can be inaccurate, but testing liver parameters can give an indication of chronic copper toxicity.

Level management

If copper levels are too high or too low, think about adjusting feed and management and reassessing in six months. For farms with a history of copper toxicity, checking annually through blood samples is a good idea.

Another issue that's emerging is over-supplementation with iodine, so it is worth knowing that trace mineral testing can also help monitor this.

Anything that impacts growth from the start will cost you throughout the animal's life, as well as paying for expensive supplements, so it's worthwhile speaking to your vet about trace mineral testing.



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Pembrokeshire farm embraces change

When facing challenges in calf health and forage management, one team has now implemented practical changes to strengthen resilience. British Dairying learns more.

A classic 'family farm', Mountain Park Farm in mid-Pembrokeshire covers 300ha, and runs a milking herd of 340 all-year-round calving Holstein Friesians. They have an average annual yield of around 9,000 litres/cow selling to Leprino. The workforce includes Lottie Wilson, who has recently returned home after studying agriculture at the University of Nottingham, alongside both grandparents (Gill and Richard), and dad (Paddy), as well as two full-time and two part-time members of staff.

Objectives and strategy

Working with vet Alex Cooper from Fenton Vets, the farm's objectives and strategy are developing over time, and striving for resilience is key in all aspects of management.

"We need to be climate resilient," says Lottie. "We were fortunate over



Lottie Wilson has been working to ensure calves achieve their full potential

summer 2025 to be one of the few to have rain, meaning we could get five grass silage cuts and maize was up at 42-45t/ha.

"In the future, we may not be so fortunate, and need to make

plans now to future-proof forage supplies," Lottie explains. "For example, we have established 24ha of Italian ryegrass following an early maize harvest, with the intention of creating an early grass cut to mitigate a potential forage shortage in the spring.

"We are also adapting the way we manage nutrition to optimise home-grown forages and cereals, and have reduced compound feed. So we're relying less on inputs with variable costs that are out of our control."

With a view to improving calf health and robustness, Alex identified issues with poor colostrum management and lower-than-expected quality. He suggested an Optimax farm walk with input from Becca Cavill, vet adviser at Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health.

"Optimax is a guided farm walk with the vet and as many members of the farm team as possible," explains Alex. "By going around all the key areas on the farm, from dry cow yards to calving area, and from the milk

prep area to calf pens, we can evaluate what is working well and what could be improved. Some fresh pairs of eyes and open discussion can often spot areas where a small tweak can make a huge difference."

The transition cow shed was the first area examined and, by looking at the diet and adding urea, colostrum quality improved. "At the same time, we calculated that at peak calving time the available space on the straw yard was less than ideal," adds Alex.

The dry and transition period has remained the same - but an extension to the straw yard is now under construction. The cows now spend five to six weeks in cubicles before going onto straw loose housing for the final two to three weeks before calving.

Colostrum management

"This ensures each cow has a good amount of space," says Lottie. "We also added fans this summer, which we could see they clearly liked. Cows are now observed lying and ruminating for longer and colostrum yield and quality has improved."

A key focus following the walk was to alter the way colostrum was managed, as well as altering calf nutrition. "Calves stay with the dam for up to 12 hours, depending on when they are born. We now bottle feed everything with two colostrum feeds that have measured 25% or more on the Brix scale, regardless of whether or not they have been seen sucking," Lottie explains.

"Colostrum is harvested, tested, stored and defrosted in a water bath of the correct temperature, which is rigorously monitored. Previously, the temperature had been too high sometimes, denaturing the antibodies within the colostrum."



Cows go onto straw for the final two to three weeks before calving



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The buckets are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected then left to air dry

Calves are now fed transition milk for their first 10 days of life. Transition milk is that which follows colostrum and comes before the main lactation milk; it includes higher levels of milk solids, vitamins, and bioactive components like antibodies. It can be helpful in calf gut development, helping to produce a resilient and robust calf. Milk feed quantities have also been increased from 2.5 litres to four litres twice a day.

“Despite upping the milk, we haven’t had issues with nutritional scours,” says Lottie. “In fact scour rates are very low as we vaccinate ahead of calving, which helps to stimulate the development of valuable antibodies which are passed on to the calf.”

“The aim is to retain temperature in colder months.”

Fencovis is an inactivated rotavirus, coronavirus and E. coli K99 scour vaccine available from vets in the UK. Adopting a preventative approach, Alex also incorporates vaccines for bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD), salmonella and cryptosporidium into the herd health plan. “However, as we walked around the calf area, we identified that there was an issue with managing the temperature in the pens,” he explains. “Individual pens with concrete panels between each were hard to keep warm in the autumn, winter and at night.”

Deeper straw bedding is now used, with a plan to remove every other separating panel to allow calves to be housed in pairs for their first 10 days. The Wilsons are also considering investing in heaters to make it easier to keep calves at 15°C or above for the first 15 days of life.

“The calves are currently housed individually until around ten days of age and then move into group

pens,” adds Lottie. “We had used igloos before, but it was always quite difficult keeping an even temperature; they either seemed too hot, cold or wet. These have been replaced with a continuation of the existing calf shed to create a fully enclosed environment. The aim is to retain temperature in colder months, with the option of opening sheeted gates and wind breakers for increased airflow in warmer months.”

Disinfecting protocols

To improve hygiene around calf feeding, 24 new buckets have been bought, meaning there is one per pen, reducing the chance for pen-to-pen contamination and allowing more time for effective cleaning and disinfecting between feedings.

“All feeding equipment is now washed with hot water, scrubbed and cleaned with disinfectant and detergent after feeding,” Lottie remarks. “Post washing, we now air-dry buckets and store bottles upside down to help with drainage, so reducing the chances for bacteria to grow.”

“The farm walk exercise has been really helpful to identify small changes that didn’t cost a lot but have helped deliver huge benefits, allowing calves to fulfil their genetic potential. The work hasn’t stopped yet, and we are excited to continue to make changes and see the improvements which result.”



Alex Cooper, Vet at Fenton Vets

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Managing performance at scale

From multi-site dairies to new expansion in Wales, Will Holmes is building a farming business designed to endure change and to grow through it. Danusia Osiowy reports.

For Dorset farmer Will Holmes, becoming resilient is not just surviving the tough years but creating a business that thrives in them.

At just 30, Will manages a complex, multi-site dairy and arable operation in South Dorset, balancing profitability, sustainability, and people-first leadership in a way that's quickly establishing him as one of the sector's most forward-thinking young farmers.

Farming is in Will's blood, but it's innovation that drives him. After graduating from Reading University in 2017, he returned to Dorset to take on the management of a 400-cow, autumn-calving contract farming agreement with the Russell family. But the system needed rethinking, and Will set about redesigning it for long-term efficiency.

Today, that business sits within a much broader farming structure that covers 2,500 acres across the region, all tenanted, contract-farmed or under grazing licences and includes three dairy farms and an arable unit. The dairies milk nearly 1,000 cows across 982ha, supported by 115ha of arable land producing feed wheat.

When Will's father stepped back from day-to-day operations in 2022 to take up an Arla UK director role, Will stepped forward. "Succession has been an important process for us," he says. "It pushed me to focus on the continued success of the business as a professional operation with systems, data and people at its core." Across three core units, the system is delivering consistent, measurable



Will Holmes is striving to become an employer of choice

performance. Lower Dairy runs 440 cows at peak, averaging 7,724 litres per cow and producing 3.27m litres annually; Longlands, a 315-cow herd, achieves 5,032 litres per cow for 1.46m litres a year and Littlewood, is home to 260 autumn calving cows, delivering 1.73m litres at 7,145 litres/cow. The latter two dairies are run on a day-to-day basis by contract farmer Jon Hurford.

Together, the herds combine strong productivity with sound system design, reflecting Will's philosophy that consistency beats extremes. His team monitors and manages the details on each of the farms and runs monthly margin-over-feed calculations, lean management spreadsheets, and compliance and cost-control trackers. "We want everyone to see how their work impacts the bottom line," he explains. "It keeps people engaged and helps us make smarter, faster decisions." Resilience, says Will, is built one

decision at a time. The business has made significant progress in reducing inputs and boosting environmental performance. Around 72% of intensive grassland is now in herbal leys, cutting fertiliser use dramatically from more than 200kg N/ha to under 100kg N/ha.

Manure and slurry management have also been transformed, three slurry lagoons have been built in the last four years, giving six-seven months' storage capacity on every farm. Cattle are fenced out of watercourses, improving water quality, and nutrient recycling has become a central pillar of the system. "We're not perfect yet," Will admits. "But we're proud of how far we've come. The goal is to farm profitably without compromising the environment we depend on."

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Will's leadership is his approach to people. Across the business, Will and Jon together work with 20 staff and partners, from school leavers and college students to experienced herdsmen and line managers. Each farm now has its own management structure, giving key staff autonomy over cows, youngstock, and fieldwork. "We're trying to become an employer of choice," he says. "That's not just about pay. It's about trust, communication, and creating a workplace where people feel proud to belong." The emphasis is on delegation, ownership and outcome-based management, supported by clear standard operating procedures.

The result is a culture of engagement and accountability that many larger businesses would envy. "Our team buy into what we're doing," he says.

"They care about the farms and about the job they do, and that's a big part of why we're successful."

Will's commitment to improvement extends beyond his own business. He's an active - and current chairman - of Summit, an LIC grazing discussion group, and also takes part in the Carslaw autumn calving group. Benchmarking and open discussion with peers play a major role in driving progress. "Comparing ourselves with others helps us focus on what really matters, which is performance, efficiency and animal welfare."

Preventative focus

Underpinning that are robust herd health and welfare metrics, achieved through a close partnership with Synergy Farm Health. Vet Josh Swain provides ongoing support on herd health and fertility, ensuring a strong preventative focus. Cow performance is monitored constantly, with low levels of lameness, mastitis, and mortality underpinning consistent output. Recent structural changes have also allowed Will to look beyond Dorset. Having relocated with his wife and young family to South East Wales, he now manages the business remotely, supported by his line managers and profit-share agreements.

Expansion is already underway, the spring-calving herd at Longlands will rise to 350 cows following some new land becoming available to the business this year. Beyond that, Will hopes to expand the business into South Wales and continue the businesses success there. "The goal now is to build growth that's sustainable for our people, for our environment, and for our profitability. Everything we do is about creating a business that lasts."

"I'm not sure we're doing one thing outstandingly better than everyone else," he says. "We are always picking up new ideas from visiting other farmers in Summit, the Carslaw Group and outside farmers we visit. We just try to do a lot of things well and put a lot of good ideas together. We're running a resilient, growing business that tries its hardest to look after its cows, its environment, and its people, and I'm really proud of that."

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LAMMA: It's not just tractors!

The LAMMA Show returns to the NEC, Birmingham, on January 14-15, with a large showcase of cutting-edge agricultural machinery, technology and equipment.

Whether you're looking for a compact multi-purpose telehandler, the latest electric tractor or bespoke dairy technology, LAMMA will have a huge amount to look at. Here we profile a selection of new kit and advice for the dairy sector.

Spot weed sprayer

A computer operated spot spraying system, designed to target individual weeds in grass swards, has been put through its paces for the first time in the UK and Ireland. The tractor-mounted RumboJet 880 sprayer was developed in Germany by Allgäu Automation, and 130 systems are now operating across Europe.

It is now available in the UK and Ireland through CW Agri, which recently hosted a demo event near Cookstown, Co Tyrone. The system combines modern lighting with a camera, computer software and spraying technologies that work together to identify weeds in a grass sward, and selectively spray them with a herbicide. "It is controlled from the tractor cab using a simple control panel," explains co-designer Andreas Breher. "It features six high performance cameras, which can take up to 90 pictures per second. The 8.8m sward width is photographed at 3cm spacings, based on the tractor travelling at 10km/hr."

The computer software can identify all the main weeds that feature in grassland swards at their various growth stages. These include docks, ragwort, thistles, dandelions



The RumboJet precisely spot sprays weeds within a grassland sward

and buttercups. The 600-litre main spray tank comes with an optional 200-litre mixing tank, which allows the operator to mix additional herbicide solution in the field. It can also be used as a cleaning attachment.

"All the spray jets have a 20-degree spray width which ensures that the herbicide is fully concentrated on the weeds identified."

The system weighs 1,650kg unladen and can be operated by a 100hp tractor, attached via the pickup hitch. Spot weed spraying significantly reduces herbicide usage and grass growth checks, says Stephen McKeown at CW Agri.

"This is critically important as agriculture responds to growing environmental challenges. A traditional sprayer means that all plants in a sward receive herbicide, so

grass growth is impacted negatively for weeks to come."

Forage and straw spreader

Spread-a-Bale is launching its first dual-function machine, featuring a new head which combines feeding forage and spreading straw in one. The system is designed to save producers time, labour, and capital investment.

The Combi-Bale's side-mounted design features a head with one horizontal rotor and bladed-edge tines. A new diverter valve and dual-speed motor control the rotor's direction; anti-clockwise chops and feeds out silage into the feed passage or mixer wagon, while the clockwise rotation throws straw up to 15m.

Performance has been upgraded with new high-flow hydraulics, enabling the machine to deliver 46% more power and 27% greater efficiency. Compared to a conventional turbine combination machine, it has a much reduced power requirement, claims the firm.

Compatible with both round and square bales, the system self-loads from a stack or floor, requiring only one loader and operator. Once de-twined or unwrapped, one bale can be fed out or spread in less than a minute. "The Combi-Bale has been designed in response to producers seeking to streamline their operations," explains the firm's Michael Hughes. "Performing two essential jobs; feeding and bedding, and switching within seconds,

it removes the need for separate machines, improving efficiency and reducing capital investment."

Digital access to renewables

Farmers looking to generate a new income stream from onshore wind developments can benefit from a digital platform connecting landowners and developers across Europe. Caeli matches project developers with pre-screened sites, through its Wind Energy Site Check. Launched in the UK in September, this provides landowners with instant insights into a site's potential, with information on wind conditions, grid access, planning constraints and expected turbine yield.

This information can then be matched with qualified investors and developers in a transparent process that saves resources and increases project visibility. It can also fast track the development cycle and significantly increase leasing rates, says the firm's Georg von Lewinski. "On a typical onshore wind development in the UK, landowners would expect to receive £5,000 to £8,000/MW per year. In Germany, we have been able to double those rates."

Caeli also supports landowners on planning, contractual terms, community benefits and co-operative projects. "Our digital platform brings structure, speed and reliability to onshore wind development," adds Georg. "The result is a stronger exposure for projects, shortening the development cycle and making transactions faster, more efficient and more profitable."

Soil data: Nutrient needs

Farmers need to balance macro and micronutrients to suit soil and crop conditions and improve nutrient use efficiency. At a time when margins are under pressure and legislation requires soil testing for each field in England and Wales from January, it makes sense to optimise any fertiliser used. "With some farmers yet to purchase nutrition for the season ahead, now is the time to tailor these to the soil and crop requirements," says Guillaume Franklin at Origin Soil Nutrition. The firm's Nutri-Match service uses soil test data to influence nutrition applications and correct



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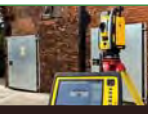
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any deficiencies. "For example, if potassium is above optimum levels, we may suggest reducing it in favour of molybdenum, which improves nitrogen use efficiency."

Visitors can also see how adding an electrostatically charged micronutrient powder to a macro nutrient granule ensures application across the full spread width, he adds. "Micronutrients are required in small quantities, but that doesn't make them any less important."

Range of telehandler choice

Merlo will have a large range of smart, energy-efficient telehandlers on display, from compact options to high-capacity machines. For farmers who need high performance in confined environments, the TF27.6 and TF30.7 offer low cab heights, tight turning circles, and excellent visibility. For mixed and larger farms, the TF35.7 CS 140 has a 3.5-t lift capacity and 7m lift height.

Delivering exceptional operator comfort, powerful hydraulics, and an intuitive joystick it is an ideal all-rounder. For true versatility, the telehandler/tractor hybrid; the MultiFarmer 44.9 CS CVT, combines power take-off, a three-point rear linkage and hydraulic pick-up hitch with telehandler capability. Powered by a 170hp FPT Stage V engine, it's ideal for anyone seeking a multi-purpose machine, says the firm.

If energy efficiency is important, the award-winning 100% electric eWorker offers a 2.5-t lift capacity, a 5m lift height, and an eight-hour battery life. It is ideal for indoor use, with ultra-quiet, zero-exhaust performance.

Swath management

Kverneland is to unveil a new ROC belt merger – the RS920 – a two-belt machine offering increased flexibility for swath production. Featuring a new frame, improved suspension and a larger opening at the back for increased swath clearance, it has Isobus functionality and control



Kverneland's new swath merger

through a load-sensing hydraulic system. With a variable working width of up to 9.2m, the RS920 uses two 3.65m belt assemblies. These can be used as one continuous belt to move crop fully in either direction or split, so 3.65m of grass can be belted to either side. They can be parted for central swath production, or use just one belt, with the other folded horizontally for transport.

It affords fully independent speed settings for both belts and pickup reels, to deal with virtually any crop conditions.

Silage operations

New Holland has a new wheel loader specifically designed for silage clamping. "For silage contractors, standard wheel loaders often struggle with speed on steep ramps, fuel autonomy during long working days, and drive comfort during farm-to-farm travels," says the firm's Gaston Le Chevalier.

The W170D+ Forage Power is built to address these challenges. With an operating weight of 16.4t, it delivers 1,300Nm of engine torque, and a peak power output of 255hp. A 350-litre diesel tank ensures full-day fuel autonomy, while a top speed approaching 50km/h supports efficient transport. Additionally, its 4.54-m hinge pin height enhances loading capabilities. "Other key benefits include stability, high effectiveness cooling, and exceptional comfort."



Merlo will have a wide range of telehandlers on display, to suit all farms

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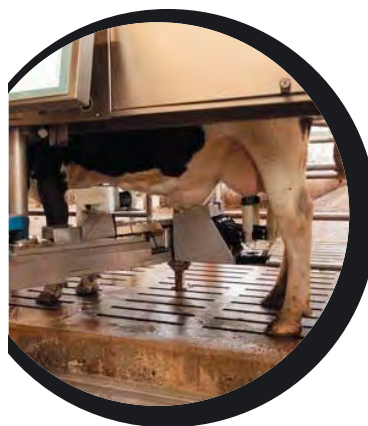
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A close run for Denovo Coyote

A new leader heads the pack in the latest AHDB bull proof run. Independent breeding consultant Kevin Lane looks at the new December genomic Holstein proofs.

The December 2025 proof run, released by AHDB, is close at the top, with the top five bulls spanning less than £10 in profitable lifetime index (PLI). A new leader at the top is **Denovo Coyote P**, a UK-bred heterozygous polled bull from the Denovo programme run by Genus. This new entrant starts with a PLI of £871, helped by many production and health traits needed by the modern dairy cow.

Coyote P offers 859kg of milk, a huge 62.2kg of fat at +0.30% and 32.6kg of protein at +0.05%. He also has -11 maintenance and +209 FeedAdvantage, indicating smaller, efficient cows; his EnviroCow value is also high at +4.7 (second highest in the breed).

His HealthyCow value is £157 with +128 days lifespan and +5.4 fertility, -11 mastitis and +1.5 LamenessAdvantage. He is a son of



Denovo Coyote P is a new leader at the top of the genomic table. He has a PLI of £871, with good health and milk

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Growing the value of precision dairy farming

Winstar Klassic P (Perfect P x Mendel P) out of a Denovo Benefit dam.

Up to second from sixth is **Badger Siemers Day Trip** (£870) offering solid production with 982kg of milk and 81kg of combined fat and protein (CFP). He has -22 maintenance, +221 FeedAdvantage, +£220 HealthyCow, +6.4 fertility, +4.6 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 grandam by Kings-Ransom Big Dollars (x Frazzled).

Up one place is **Progenesis Preston** (£867) who has a similar production profile to the others at the top table, offering 978kg of milk, 55.9kg of fat at +0.18%, 41.7kg of protein at +0.10% and -9 maintenance. FeedAdvantage is a decent +173 with +4.6 EnviroCow, but he has just £107 HealthyCow, in part due to a small negative for fertility. Like Day Trip he too is a Sheepster son.

Also up one from August is former number one **Denovo 20723 Columbia**, a Leeds son with £864 PLI, 1,140kg of milk, and 89.9kg CFP with +0.03% for fat and +0.04% protein. He offers a -14 maintenance figure (smaller cows) and +240 FeedAdvantage (daughters

are predicted to require 240kg less dry matter in each lactation than daughters of a bull with a score of zero and at the same level of production). He has +4.6 EnviroCow, £143 HealthyCow, -14 somatic cell count (SCC), +101 days lifespan and +1.8 fertility.

In fifth is **Adaway Beyond Fitness** (£862), a solid production bull on 822kg with 45.7kg of fat at +0.14% and 35.3kg of protein at +0.09%. His HealthyCow is £205 with EnviroCow at +4.4, fertility on +10 and lifespan on +137 days.

In sixth is his maternal half-brother, **Adaway Beyond Faithful** (£860), up from 18th with 762kg of milk, 44.9kg of fat at +0.16% and 35.4kg of protein at +0.11%. EnviroCow is +4.3 with FeedAdvantage on +174, HealthyCow £194, +5 fertility and +125 days lifespan.

Also on the same value is high health trait bull **Peak AltaValuepack** (£860) who is sired by Peak Excitement out of a Peak AltaSeverus. He offers a moderate (by top PLI bull standards) 762kg of milk with 44.9kg of fat at +0.16% and 35.4kg of protein at +0.11%, and a CFP of 80.3kg. His HealthyCow value is £194; this includes +4.3 EnviroCow, +5 fertility, +2.2 CalfSurvival, +125 days lifespan, -16 SCC and +2.4 LamenessAdvantage. Daughters



A daughter of OCD Trooper Sheepster, who sired Badger Siemers Day Trip

are very efficient, as shown by his -16 maintenance value and +174 FeedAdvantage.

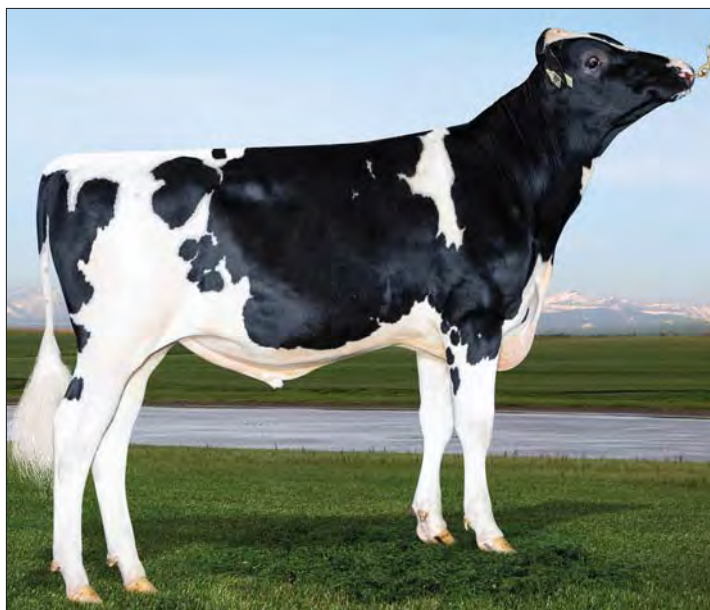
Two new bulls fill eighth and ninth places. **Denovo Charisma** (£856) is a son of Koepon Simply Red out of the same dam as the number one bull Coyote. He is an exceptionally high milk bull with 1,122kg, 83.7kg CFP and a HealthyCow value of £221. FeedAdvantage is +162, EnviroCow +4.4, LamenessAdvantage +1.6, SCC -27 and -2 mastitis. Fertility is +4.7 with an excellent +165 lifespan.

Just behind him is **Hendel Manson** (£853) who is lower on milk but with the same CFP, and therefore higher percentages. He offers 946kg of milk, 83.2kg CFP with +0.12% and +0.04%. Maintenance is good at -15 with FeedAdvantage on +214, EnviroCow +4.5 and HealthyCow £189. A son of Denovo Leeds, he scores well for lifespan on +146 days, CalfSurvival on +2.8 and LamenessAdvantage on

+3.1. Down to 10th is former number one **Denovo 20893 Harmony** with a PLI of £845. He offers 1,068kg of milk, and is just over 91kg CFP with +0.10% and +0.05%. He has a very low -29 maintenance, with +291 FeedAdvantage, +4.8 EnviroCow (breed leader), a low £93 HealthyCow (mainly due to breed average udder health and fertility) and +92 days lifespan.

Just £1 lower is the popular **Denovo 20771 Segment** (£844) who offers 954kg of milk, along with 88.2kg CFP at +0.15% fat and +0.05% protein. His HealthyCow is reasonably good on £153, with +3.6 fertility, +2.8 CalfSurvival, +116 lifespan and +2.3 LamenessAdvantage. He too is a transmitter of feed efficiency, with -13 maintenance and +209 FeedAdvantage.

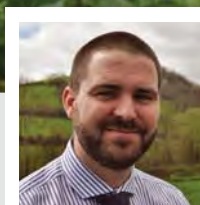
Continued on page 56.



Peak AltaSeverus is grandsire to Peak AltaValuepack, who ranked sixth



Plan Now for Forage Resilience in 2026



JOHN SPENCE
Limagrain UK
Forage Crops Manager

John Spence highlights why planning ahead and choosing the right varieties, are key to building resilience into forage strategies and keeping dairy

businesses profitable in 2026.

Forage is the cornerstone of any profitable dairy system and the more you can grow yourself the more control you have over cost, quality and supply. As 2025 draws to a close, it is the ideal time to **review this year's performance and plan a stronger, more resilient forage base for next season.**

Buying in forage is always an option but it comes at a premium and leaves you open to market swings. The past season has shown how unpredictable weather, input costs and commodity prices can quickly affect margins. **Forward planning and smart varietal choice are essential to protect both yield and consistency.**

Selecting varieties with proven performance under different conditions helps create a buffer against the extremes, whether that is a dry spring or a wet autumn. **The right genetics deliver reliable yields, feed quality and cost control when it matters most.**

Spring crops offer an excellent opportunity to strengthen forage supplies. Two proven options stand out: **Fodder Beet** and **Forage Brassicas**. Success starts with choosing the right variety for your system.

Fodder Beet remains a firm favourite for its exceptional energy density and ability to drive milk yields. Top of the list is **Fosyma** which combines seed priming and high yields, giving a reliable to establish, high energy feed source that reduces the need for bought-in concentrates.

Skyfall Bounce Back Brassica is a fast-establishing catch crop that produces high quality feed in as little as 5 to 7 weeks, with potential for multiple grazings. It fits easily into rotations and provides valuable flexibility to bridge summer forage gaps or extend grazing.



The key is to plan now. Assess your current stocks, review your cropping options and prioritise varieties that will build resilience into your system for 2026.



For more advice on planning your forage strategy and to explore our range of spring crop varieties, visit

www.lgseeds.co.uk/crops/grass-and-forage

Continued from page 55.



Dairy campaign delivers strong returns for levy payers

AHDB's Let's Eat Balanced dairy marketing campaign delivered impressive results from the January 2025 burst. Independent analysis shows the campaign generated £28 in additional dairy retail sales for every £1 of levy invested (Source: NIQ 2025 Marketing Mixed Model result).

This significant return for levy payers highlights the impact of strategic marketing efforts in promoting British dairy products.

The research carried out by NielsenIQ, focused on the Total Dairy category (milk, cheese and yoghurt). It revealed that the campaign achieved £11.9 million (Source: NIQ 2025 Marketing Mixed Model result) in incremental dairy sales, showing a strong return for investing levy payer funds in this area and ultimately shaping consumer attitudes to dairy.

Research into campaign performance showed television was the most effective channel for driving incremental sales, accounting for 44.2 per cent of the total (Source: NIQ 2025 Marketing Mixed Model result). Activity across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and on-demand TV also performed strongly, delivering excellent returns. When adverts appeared on both traditional and on-demand TV, the impact increased further, with combined activity driving nearly two per cent additional incremental milk sales.

This joined-up approach helps keep British dairy visible and relevant to today's consumers, connecting with families where they find their information and inspiration.

Paul Flanagan, AHDB's Dairy Sector Director, said: "This is a great outcome for our levy payers and a clear demonstration of AHDB's ability to drive growth for the Dairy sector. It shows that when we invest in strategic marketing, we strengthen consumer trust, build long-term demand, and deliver real value back to our levy payers."

Carrie McDermid, Head of Domestic Marketing, said: "We're delighted to see such strong results from the Let's Eat Balanced dairy marketing mixed model research. The campaign continues to show how combining clear nutritional messages with real stories from British farmers can make a genuine impact. It not only helps consumers see the role dairy plays in a healthy, balanced diet, but also demonstrates the value of levy investment in promoting food our farmers can be proud of."

Let's Eat Balanced champions the nutritional benefits and great taste of lean British meat and dairy as part of a varied and balanced diet. The campaign showcases British beef, lamb and dairy as natural sources of essential nutrients, such as protein and vitamin B12, which helps to reduce fatigue. The campaign also promotes the environmentally friendlier practices of some British farmers, showing their dedication to producing food of world-class standard.

For more information about Let's Eat Balanced and other AHDB marketing campaigns, visit ahdb.org.uk/marketing



The great grandam of former number one sire Denovo Harmony, who now ranks 10th in the table

This release sees the usual stability at the top alongside newcomers offering some fresh genetics; there are three other new bulls in the top 20 alongside those already mentioned.

A summary of this genomic proof run sees 49 bulls over £800 PLI, a further 149 bulls over £700 and 165 (out of over 650) over £600, giving farmers plenty to choose from irrespective of system. The top 100; £751 PLI and above, shows lots of new entries as usual - some fallers, some risers and some from the last run holding their positions.

High milk bulls

As usual we break down the key areas to see which bulls are performing well should farmers wish to initially select for particular traits, starting with the high milk sires. There are 50 bulls offering over 1,000kg predicted transmitting ability (PTA) for milk and 32 over 1,100kg.

Newcomer **OCD Radical Lief** (£807 PLI) is one of three over 1,300kg. Alongside his high milk kg, he offers 94.2kg CFP with very small negatives on percentages. His maintenance is good on -12, with +249 FeedAdvantage and +4.4 EnviroCow. Given this exceptional production he scores well for udders with 1.45.

In second is **Denovo 2776 Leeds** (£788) with 1,320kg and 88.4kg CFP (almost identical to August) and +95 days lifespan. He now ranks 60th on PLI as newer genetics come to the fore, but is an influential sire of sons. Third in this ranking is **Genosource Jefferson** (£620) offering 1,308kg and 72.7kg CFP (although negative for percentages). His health traits are moderate but he is almost 1.8 points type merit. Next are two full brothers **Genosource Yesterday** (£733) and **Genosource Yessir** (£722), sired by SDG-PH Delux Dominance out of Genosource Yoshi, by Captain. They are quite similar, with Yesterday offering 1,283kg of milk, a huge 103.7kg CFP with +0.09% and +0.01%, -15 maintenance, +237 FeedAdvantage and +4.4 EnviroCow. But his -£13 HealthyCow indicates poor fitness traits.

Yessir has 1,258kg of milk but only 85.1kg CFP, just -3 maintenance and +164 FeedAdvantage; his

HealthyCow value of £112 is much better than his brother - so one has more production, the other better health. It shows the value of genomic testing, as without it these would be two full brothers with an identical parent average.

Next is **Denovo Charming** (£806) followed by **Peak Altayoshi** (£819), another exceptional production sire with 1,209kg of milk and another tonne-topper, hitting 101.7kg CFP with +0.12% fat and +0.02 protein. **Peak Altamakover** (£773) is just shy of the 1,200kg mark with 1,195kg of milk, 96.9kg CFP with positive percentages, -22 maintenance, +270 FeedAdvantage and +4.4 EnviroCow; health traits are moderate.

Denovo Colter (£808) is a top 40 PLI sire with 1,179kg of milk, 90.5kg CFP, -12 maintenance, +195 FeedAdvantage and a slightly better £135 HealthyCow.

Only three of the 32 1,100kg or more bulls on milk kg offer over £160 HealthyCow, but 13 have a FeedAdvantage value over +170. The average lifespan for the 50 bulls over 1,000kg for milk is +80 days, set against +122 days for the top 37 fertility bulls (with a value of +10 excluding the Irish Holstein Friesian bulls). The fertility average of this high milk group is +2.1 and the HealthyCow average is just £110.

High fat and protein bulls

There are 86 bulls with over 80kg CFP, and 17 over 90kg; nine of these are in the top 50 PLI. The top bull is the aforementioned Genosource Yesterday on 103.7kg, followed by Peak Altayoshi on 101.7kg.

Denovo 22192 Sector (£843), the 12th placed PLI bull, with 98.2kg CFP offers 881kg of milk with +0.27% fat and +0.10% protein. He has +210 FeedAdvantage and -19 maintenance. He is then followed by Progenesis Preston on 97.6kg and then Peak Altamakover on 96.9kg. The only other bull over 95kg CFP (95.7kg) is **OCD Thorson Darth Vader** (£726) on 1,178kg of milk, -25 maintenance and +285 FeedAdvantage.

There are 62 bulls with over 50kg of fat, with Denovo Coyote P the highest at 62.2kg followed by Genosource Yesterday with 60.3kg and

OCD Thorson Fanatic (£680) on 60.2kg. There are 11 bulls offering over 40kg of protein, and the top bulls by kg are Genosource Yesterday on 43.4kg, OCD Radical Liev on 42.9kg, **Denovo 20370 Logic** with 42.4kg and then Peak Altayoshi on 41.9kg and Progenesis Preston on 41.7kg.

High fertility bulls

Some 14 Holstein bulls have a PTA for fertility index of +12 or greater (34 if you include the Irish Holstein Friesians) and 37 Holsteins of +10 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 just three in the top 20). Most, although not all, have more moderate production levels but good scores for other health and fitness traits: The HealthyCow average for these top 50 is £217 (fertility is a component of HealthyCow), and the PLI average is just shy of £700 at a respectable £694.

Once again there are a number of Irish-bred bulls in this fertility ranking, including 17 out of the top 30; this number has increased significantly over the past couple of years due to the continuing popularity of Irish genetics.

“Lifespan enhances profitability through extra lactations.”

The highest value of the Irish contingent is with **Stamullen Mozart** (-£78) on +19 followed by **Oldcastletown Mojo** (-£10) on +15.2, then **Glenaboy Allstar** (£137) on +14.9 and **Highmount Stark** (£5) on +14.8. Virtually all the Irish are at least minus 500kg of milk on the Holstein base, so will be discounted by most bar grazing enthusiasts.

However, the best Holstein fertility bull with +15.7 is the aptly named **Denovo 23176 Highfert PP** (£708), which places him second overall. He's a low milk sire with 275kg but offers 60.1kg CFP with +0.37% fat and +0.10% protein, £277 HealthyCow including +162 days lifespan and -15 SCC. Third overall is **Progenesis Triggerpoint** (£782) and ranked 63rd on PLI. He offers a similar fitness profile to Highfert with +137 lifespan, -12 SCC, and +1.3



Peak AltaValuepack has a PLI of £860 and his daughters are very efficient, with a +174 FeedAdvantage score

LamenessAdvantage. But production is much higher at 681kg of milk, 38.3kg of fat at +0.12% and 27.2kg of protein at +0.05%.

Winstar Elixir PP (£538) has been in the high fertility lists for a while now, and he is a high health trait bull with a very high £252 HealthyCow. He also offers -115kg of milk and 34.2kg CFP, -21 SCC and -3 mastitis, +140 lifespan days and +2.3 EnviroCow.

The next two bulls are both in the top 50 PLI, with **Denovo 22727 Homerun** (£807) offering +13.7 fertility, +134 lifespan, -26 SCC, -2 mastitis and +1.8 CalfSurvival. This gives him a HealthyCow value of £258. He also offers 580kg of milk and 58.7kg CFP with positive percentages (including +0.14% protein).

Next is **Aurora Sheepster Poplar** (£802), a son of OCD Trooper Sheepster, the number one proven sire. He offers 724kg of milk, 65.7kg CFP and positive percentages, with £286 HealthyCow including -17 SCC and -2 mastitis, +149 lifespan and +13.6 fertility. Close up on +13.5 is **Denovo 19915 Veejay PP** (£660) offering 49.1kg CFP, 60kg of milk at +0.41% and +0.13%, £239 HealthyCow, +128 lifespan and of course, the homozygous polled gene.

Sitting in the top 20 PLI bulls, **Denovo Mascot** (£833) offers a balanced mix of production and health, with 847kg of milk and 77.2kg CFP at +0.13% and +0.03%

respectively. He is also a high fitness bull with £214 HealthyCow, +12.9 fertility, +2.2 LamenessAdvantage, +137 lifespan and +199 FeedAdvantage.

High lifespan bulls

Lifespan is another key trait and one that enhances profitability through extra lactations and a reduced replacement rate. There are 33 bulls offering +150 days or more lifespan and 16 over +170 days. The high correlation between lifespan and HealthyCow is evident, with the +150-day group averaging £234 HealthyCow (the top 100 PLI bulls average £158 HealthyCow).

Of the two bulls over 200 days, the best is **Delta Borax Red** (£554) with +204 days; he's a good all-rounder with 245kg of milk, 36.2kg CFP at +0.14% and +0.07%, £276 HealthyCow, -30 SCC (top three) and -4 mastitis.

The other bull over 200 days is **Denovo 22702 Burlap** (£685) on +201 days. He offers a nice balance of production and fitness with 488kg of milk, 5.7kg CFP at +0.12% and +0.11%, -13 maintenance, £221 HealthyCow, +2.2 LamenessAdvantage, -16 SCC and +8.3 fertility.

Delta Primetime PP Red (£531) with +198 days is a low production sire with 52kg of milk and 24.4kg CFP, with plus percentages of +0.12% and +0.13%. HealthyCow is £295 and SCC is -26, with mastitis at -4.

Denovo 19493 Epsilon PP (£555) offers +192 days as well as a production proof of 42kg of milk, 35kg of CFP with positive percentages (particularly fat at +0.31%), good udder health at -24 SCC and -3 mastitis, +12.6 fertility and £282 HealthyCow.

The highest PLI ranked bull in the top five is **Trophy** (£800) with +192 lifespan, +10.5 fertility, +2.5 CalfSurvival and +2 LamenessAdvantage.

Production is solid at 551kg of milk, 39.5kg of fat at +0.20% and 25.7kg of protein at +0.09%. He is also a high type sire, with 2.35 type merit, 2.66 udder composite and 2.18 feet and leg composite.

Also on 192 days is **3Star OH Marsman Red** (£707) who has higher production than some of the high lifespan bulls, with 852kg of milk, 57.2kg CFP, £243 HealthyCow, +7.4 fertility, -17 SCC and +2.3 LamenessAdvantage.

High HealthyCow bulls

The HealthyCow index is a useful composite of key fitness traits and a quick selection filter: Just one bull is over £300 and 27 are over £240. Most of the top half-dozen also have other strong health traits and have been mentioned in previous criteria, but the top bull with a stand-out £312 is **Vox Pedri Red** (£637).

Continued on page 58.

Continued from page 57.

He's not the highest production bull, offering 381kg of milk, with 35.2kg CFP at +0.01% and +0.08%, but his HealthyCow value is reflected in +8.7 fertility, +2.9 CalfSurvival, +168 lifespan, -27 SCC and +3.3 LamenessAdvantage. He is a -6 maintenance sire with two points udder and 1.7 type.

Second is Trophy on £296, followed by Delta Primetime PP Red on £295 and VH GG Nippon (£555) on £288. The remaining two over £280 are Aurora Sheepster Poplar (£286) and Denovo 19493 Epsilon (£282). All bar one of the top 40 HealthyCow bulls are all over +100 days lifespan, and the one under is +98 days (average +151 days), and the top 125 bulls for this index are all negative for SCC (average -17).

Best FeedAdvantage bulls

There are 22 bulls over +230 for FeedAdvantage (each point is a kg dry matter intake saving per lactation for adjusted milk yields) and only 10 of these are outside the top 100 for PLI. There is a strong correlation between FeedAdvantage and maintenance and therefore PLI, and there are 47 bulls with a PTA of over +200 for FeedAdvantage. None of the



Progenesis Preston is one of the best EnviroCow bulls, at +4.6

bulls in the top 25 FeedAdvantage rank scores greater than -12 for maintenance (negative indicates a smaller but more efficient animal) and only eight more than -20; the average maintenance for the top 25 is -23.

The ranking starts with **Lars-Acres FB Wellness** (£771) with a very high +304 FeedAdvantage.

This 72nd ranked PLI bull is also a 1,103kg milk bull, with 71.1kg CFP, +4.2 EnviroCow, +88 lifespan and -34 maintenance.

Second ranked is **Harmony** (+291), then **Darth Vader** (+285) and **Winstar Reggie** (£791) on +274. He is a top 60 PLI sire with good figures across the board, including 69.1kg CFP at +0.30% and +0.11%, £185

HealthyCow, -42 maintenance and +6 fertility.

Next is **Peak Altamakeover** (£773) with +270, followed by **Denovo 19495 Hargrove P** (£735) on +265 - he is 730kg milk bull with 79.5kg CFP and -26 maintenance.

Best EnviroCow bulls

There is a high correlation between EnviroCow, FeedAdvantage and PLI. Of the top 28 bulls for EnviroCow, with a value of +4.3 up to +4.8, 16 are in the top 25 for PLI, only two are outside the top 100 PLI and their average FeedAdvantage value is +219.

The previously mentioned **Harmony**, **Sector P**, **Coyote**, **Columbia**, **Day Trip** and **Preston** are in that 16, and some 75 bulls score +4 or more for this trait - with all bar one of these over +100 on FeedAdvantage.

Marco Winters, Head of Animal Genetics at AHDB, says: "All top bulls in this young sire ranking are predicted to transmit improved feed maintenance thanks to smaller body sizes - a highly desirable trait that reduces feed costs and contributes to a lower carbon footprint."

• An article covering the proven bulls will be published in the January issue of British Dairying.

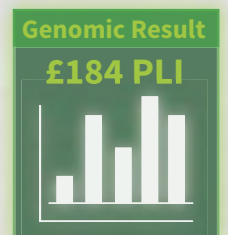
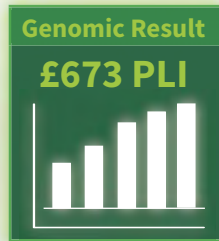
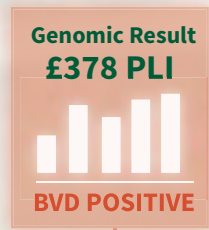
TOP 20 HOLSTEIN BULLS WITH GENOMIC INDEXES RANKED ON PROFITABLE LIFETIME INDEX (£PLI) DECEMBER 2025

EPLI	Bull name	Milk kg	Fat kg	Ptn kg	Fat %	Ptn %	SCC	Mast	LA	LS	FI	£HC	Feed Adv	TM	Sire x maternal grandsire	From
871	DENOVO COYOTE P	859	62.2	32.6	0.3	0.05	-11	-1	1.5	128	5.4	157	209	0.76	Klassic P x Benefit	GEN
870	BADGER SIEMERS DAY TRIP	982	48.2	32.8	0.09	0	-20	-1	2	180	6.4	220	221	-0.4	Sheepster x Upside	WWS
867	PROGENESIS PRESTON	978	55.9	41.7	0.18	0.1	-9	-1	2.1	88	-1.4	107	173	0.93	Sheepster x Jalapeno	SMX
864	DENOVO 20723 COLUMBIA	1140	48.8	41.1	0.03	0.04	-14	-1	1.1	101	1.8	143	240	0.83	Leeds x Lift Off	GEN
862	ADAWAY BEYOND FITNESS	822	45.7	35.3	0.14	0.09	-5	1	2.8	146	10	205	159	1.08	Sheepster x Parsly	SMX
860	PEAK ALTAVALUEPACK	762	44.9	35.4	0.16	0.11	-16	-1	2.4	125	5	194	174	0.3	Excitement x Altaseverus	ALT
860	ADAWAY BEYOND FAITHFUL	928	44.1	36.6	0.08	0.07	-13	-1	1.7	119	7.1	219	137	1.4	Enclave x Parsly	SMX
856	DENOVO CHARISMA	1122	48.2	35.5	0.03	-0.02	-27	-2	1.6	165	4.7	221	162	0.47	Simply Red x Benefit	GEN
853	HENDEL MANSON	946	48.8	34.4	0.12	0.04	-12	-1	3.1	146	3.4	189	214	0.16	Leeds x Gameday	GEN
845	DENOVO 20893 HARMONY	1068	51.8	39.5	0.1	0.05	-4	0	1.8	92	1.1	93	291	-0.41	Leeds x Modelo	GEN
844	DENOVO 20771 SEGMENT	954	51.9	36.3	0.15	0.05	-6	0	2.3	116	3.6	153	209	0.63	Leeds x Mendel P	GEN
843	DENOVO 22192 SECTOR-P	881	59.6	38.6	0.27	0.1	-3	1	0.9	79	4.3	58	210	-0.94	Adventure x Mendel P	GEN
837	DENOVO 80406 ARCADE	735	42.6	33.2	0.15	0.1	-17	-1	2.5	140	7.4	207	164	0.69	Hotwheels x Alsonso	GEN
833	DENOVO MASCOT	847	46.2	31	0.13	0.03	-9	0	2.2	137	12.9	214	199	-0.29	Brighton P x Modelo	GEN
832	PEAK ALTAMAXIMINO	481	38.8	33	0.22	0.2	-22	-2	2.3	119	11	225	74	-0.2	Altasolace x Altamagnifique	ALT
830	PEAK ALTAUPGRADE	472	55.3	30.9	0.42	0.18	-12	-1	1.2	110	5.3	121	195	-1.32	Olympus x Altakevlow	ALT
828	BOMAZ PORTLAND	708	55.5	31.8	0.3	0.09	3	1	1.7	125	6.9	140	185	-0.47	Hotwheels x Gardner	GEN
827	GENOSOURCE YOU DONT SAY	913	52.5	40.4	0.17	0.11	-5	1	0.8	67	0.1	76	211	0.97	Dominance x Upside	CBL
826	PROGENESIS PERSIMMON	743	51.1	36.2	0.24	0.13	-8	-1	0.8	64	5.7	135	163	0.79	Dominance x Jalapeno	SMX
826	ADAWAY BEYOND EL FOUGHTY	459	43.7	29.2	0.29	0.16	-11	-1	2.9	131	8.6	242	89	1.2	Elvin x Parsly	WWS

Source: AHDB Dairy. ALT = Alta Genetics; CBL = Cogent Breeding; GEN = Genus ABS; SMX = Semex; WWS = World Wide Sires UK. EPLI = Profitable Lifetime Index; Rel = Reliability; Maint = Maintenance; SCC = Somatic Cell Count; Mast = Mastitis; LAdv = Lameness Advantage; CS = Calf Survival; LS = Lifespan; FI = Fertility Index; GL = Gestation Length; £HC = HealthyCow; Feed Adv = Feed Advantage; Env Cow = EnviroCow; TM = Type Merit.



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New app system shreds paperwork burden

An app built by two Scottish farmers - cousins John and James Fairlie - aims to replace hand-written timesheets, holiday forms and invoicing information. Yokit, available on mobiles and computers, offers one simple system that the whole team can access.

Operators log jobs as they go, providing real-time data on fuel efficiency, equipment hours and labour costs. Integration with common farm accounting software allows invoices to be generated in seconds.

The app was born from the pair's own frustrations with running family farms in Angus. "If one of



The app was built by two Scottish farmers - cousins John and James Fairlie

my operators was out drilling for a neighbour, I'd get a note scrawled on a bit of paper, and two weeks later

I'd be trying to remember what it meant," says James. "Now everything goes straight into Yokit. The data's

there, the invoice goes out faster, and everyone's paid correctly. It saves hours every week."

Yokit also turns daily work logs into usable data. "We had two ploughs doing the same job, but one tractor was using six litres of fuel per hectare more than the other," says James. "A quick tweak of the settings fixed it. That's money straight back in the business."

All data is encrypted and stored in the cloud, backed up across multiple sites, so nothing is lost if a phone or computer is damaged.

Farmers can sign up for a free trial on the Yokit website. www.yokit.co.uk

Scout spheres new update

Drone Ag has unveiled Scout Spheres Version 2, a major upgrade to its advanced field visualisation tool within Skippy. It introduces a redesigned user interface, developed to deliver a cleaner and faster experience for users.

Improved navigation and layout not only simplifies use, but also strengthens decision-making by providing clearer insights at a glance, says the firm. Users can now calibrate more accurately, zoom into images, view scout point AI images, and access all-new indexing tools for deeper analysis.

Indexing allows crop health indices to be applied in real time; combined with close-up scouting and AI-based analytics - this helps farmers gain a deeper understanding of their crops. It shows which areas are healthy and which may need

attention, making field assessments faster and more precise.

"More useful features will be following shortly, like comparing imagery across time, area measurements and more," says Alex Macdonald-Smith, COO at Drone Ag. Further upcoming features include a field and date selection list, comparison tools, crop zoning, additional layers like infrastructure and OS map features, one-click calibration, annotations and area measurement.

www.droneag.farm



Faster installation for durable fencing

A Perry has launched QuickClip, a new steel fencing system with superior strength, fast installation, and long-term durability, marking an alternative to traditional timber posts.

The Y-profile posts feature a reinforced plate for greater rigidity, and are hot-dip galvanised to provide a 40-year lifetime guarantee



against corrosion. The clip-on wire can be secured effortlessly by hand, with no tools required, speeding up installation while maintaining a consistent, secure fit for high-tensile fencing.

"After nearly two years of design, testing and refinement, we're delivering a system that not only performs beyond expectations but does so at a highly competitive price point," says Guy Perry, Managing Director at A Perry. The firm has also partnered with Portek, which has developed a petrol post driver for use with the QuickClip intermediate fence posts.

www.quickclip.co.uk

Bunge and ForFarmers agreement

Bunge and ForFarmers have announced a new strategic agreement to supply sustainable soyabean meal throughout Europe.

The deal will provide around 100,000t of low carbon soyabean meal to ForFarmers, starting in the Netherlands.

Brazilian soyabeans will be sourced from farms participating in regenerative, deforestation-free programmes, with supply chain traceability and verified carbon

footprint calculations through blockchain technology. This will enable farmers to make sustainable choices that support both their business and societal expectations.

"This partnership is a fundamental step in providing low-carbon solutions that meet the specific demands of our markets," says Paul Stam at Bunge. "Together, we are doing our part to build more transparent, traceable soy flows."

www.bunge.com

Golden Hooves launches prized new salted butter

Golden Hooves has launched its first ever butter produced from regeneratively-farmed milk, winning prizes at the Royal Welsh Show and the International Cheese and Dairy Awards. Produced as part of the Big Food Redesign Challenge, created by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and the Sustainable Food Trust, the salted butter is now stocked by Waitrose, Booths and Ocado, as well as independent retailers across the UK. www.goldenhooves.co.uk



Data-based emissions reduction wins UK tech award

Fermentrics UK has won the UK Dairy Carbon Network's 2025 Measurement Technology Competition for its innovative approach to measuring and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on dairy farms.

Fermentrics Carbon enables on-farm and in-lab measurement of methane emissions in total mixed ration (TMR) samples, giving farmers and their nutritionists real-time data to optimise feed strategies.

It has received £5,000 prize to further develop and implement the technology.

"Fermentrics Carbon delivers data farmers can use immediately to cut GHG emissions, improve feed efficiency and boost herd performance," says Paddy Tarbuck at the UK Dairy Carbon Network. "This kind of innovation can drive real progress in achieving beneficial environmental outcomes."

www.ukdairycarbonnetwork.co.uk



Yeast boosts calf gut health

Lallemand's probiotic yeast, ProTernative, is now authorised for use as a feed additive in calves, helping with digestion and immunity.

The live yeast strain, *Saccharomyces cerevisiae boulardii* CNCM I-1079, stands out from the company's existing rumen-specific yeast, Levucell SC, as its mode of action is specific to the lower gastrointestinal tract. "In young ruminants, where the rumen is not yet developed, the lower gut plays a vital role in terms of both digestion and immunity," says Mark McFarland at Lallemand Animal Nutrition. "The association between a healthy gastrointestinal tract and animal performance is very clear, especially in youngstock."

Good gastrointestinal health in ruminants is reliant on three pillars - the microbiota in the rumen, the gut epithelium, and the mucosal immune system. "The mode of action provides key components to control detrimental microbes, while allowing good microbes to flourish, maintain epithelial integrity, and stimulate and balance immune responsiveness."

"The result is a young animal with boosted protection against common challenges, including scours, digestive and respiratory disorders, and weaning stress."

The additive is suitable for calves from birth to about four months of age.

www.lallemandanimalnutrition.com

Shelbourne Reynolds upgrades feeders

Shelbourne Reynolds has upgraded its Powermix Wide Body 24-30m³ diet feeders with features designed to further improve wear resistance and longevity.

The bolt-in sidewall panels, centre auger tube, auger flighting and floor are all now made from stainless steel. This means that all areas of the lower tub and auger that come in contact with feed are stainless steel, welded with stainless steel wire.

A new optional centre-mounted rear door has also been introduced, enabling operators to discharge pre-mixes into bunkers from the rear of the machine. The diet feeders also feature an 850mm-wide front-mounted webbing conveyor, capable of elevating feed to both sides

of the machine while maintaining a clear view of material as it leaves the door.

"Stainless steel has significant benefits over Hardox and other higher-grade steel in a diet feeder application," says Neil Smith at Shelbourne Reynolds. "These upgrades will further enhance the system's performance and durability." www.shelbourne.com



Genetic insights as Zoetis and Uniform-Agri join forces

Zoetis is partnering with Uniform-Agri to make it easier for dairy farmers to access and act on genetic information. The collaboration will integrate Clarifide Plus' genetic results directly into Uniform-Agri's MyHerd management software, streamlining how producers use genetics to guide herd decisions. "Integrating results

gives dairy farmers practical access to genetic insights alongside their everyday herd data," says Brett Bristol at Zoetis.

"Our goal is to make information clear and actionable, so producers can make confident decisions for their animals and their business."

www.zoetis.com

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Where's the farm support?



Abi Reader

Political comment

Budget day has passed and once again farmers were left checking the small print to see if the Government remembers we exist. The UK Government has made that many U-turns over the past few months I think the majority of us were watching with cross-eyed wonder as the Chancellor's Budget speech rolled out.

Sadly, hopes for the U-turn we all wanted to see were dashed, a bit like our current milk price. As the sounds of tractor horns blasted from within London's zone one the Chancellor gave only a minor concession - the spousal transfer of the £1m relief cap.

This means following the first death of a married couple/civil partnership a surviving spouse can use up to the combined £2m relief at second death in limited circumstances. This is a signal, with neon lights on, that Treasury has admitted it may have got it wrong. All along it has insisted the reforms were 'fair and balanced'. Actually, they're about as fair and balanced as a three-legged milking stool on a windy day.

For a large proportion of our farming community, however, this microscopic change is about as much comfort as a bull in the wrong field. For those caught in the eye of this storm - the elderly and terminally ill - the nightmare continues. On the eve of the Budget at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair NFU Cymru organised a 400-person mosaic display around the cattle ring to spell out the letters NO IHT.

It was a very emotive demonstration for all involved and a strong message from rural Wales that this problem hasn't gone away, only the excuses have. For anyone who watched our contribution on Countryfile, where one of our members battling with cancer reduced presenter Charlotte Smith to tears whilst telling his story, then it's difficult to fathom how people in this predicament can be so easily, and heartlessly, ignored. There is still hope



At the Royal Welsh Winter Fair, farmers stood together to demand a reversal of the Family Farm Tax

common sense prevails; it would make a refreshing change. All eyes are now on a potential amendment to the Finance Bill. But to lift the tone a little, let's turn our attention to exports - because despite everything, there are opportunities for the dairy sector... provided the basics at home aren't kicked out from under us. We do, however, need the UK Government to understand just how sensitive the UK dairy sector is in global negotiations.

It's not all doom and gloom

In recent trade talks, it has been a bit too keen to hand out concessions to countries whose production standards make ours look like the gold-plated Rolls-Royce version of dairy farming. India, for example, was granted free trade access despite being one of the world's largest and lowest cost-of-production dairy producers - hardly ideal when you're trying to keep British family farms afloat.

Yet, oddly enough, that same UK-India free trade agreement (FTA) does offer a real opportunity. India may be the world's biggest dairy-producing nation, but with over a billion people to feed, they consume almost everything they produce.

And crucially, Indian consumers trust British dairy for its quality, traceability and safety. It's not all doom and gloom: We already export over £2.7m worth of dairy products to India each year, and with work through the UK Dairy Export Taskforce, there's potential to expand market access even further. Under the new FTA, UK infant formula

and certain dairy protein concentrates will now face reduced tariffs - a chance, we hope, that domestic processors seize and that the Government actually supports rather than trips over. And then there's the UK-US trade deal.

This one feels slightly more... sinister (in the way a bull watching you climb the gate feels sinister). The US is extremely serious about exporting dairy to the UK - which is alarming, given their scale and standards - but, again, there is opportunity on the flip side.

The US is a vast market, and British dairy has a reputation that can open doors, if we're given the right tools and not expected to compete with one arm tied behind our backs.

Getting the balance right

What we need now is for the UK Government to deliver fair, sensible, future-proofed trade deals: Ones that champion our exports while never sacrificing UK dairy standards or British farmers. If we can get that balance right, exports really could be one of the bright spots in what has otherwise been a very gloomy year.

And finally, back here at home, the UK milk price continues its unwelcome slide, which tests the patience of even the most optimistic dairy farmer. But if we can get the right support, the right trade deals, and the right decisions, then perhaps - just perhaps - the only thing left sinking will be Westminster's excuses.

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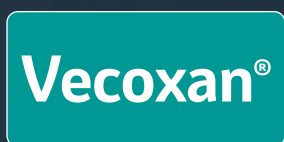
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Reference: 1. APHA 2012-2019 Neonatal, Prewean, Postwean calf groups. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/veterinary-investigation-diagnosis-analysis-vida-report-2012>

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UK-VCN-240900001

Strength in unity

Through teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved

Following other successful British Dairying supplements and requests for more stories showing the relationship between farm and vet team, we have produced this special supplement for our December British Dairying issue.

Inside, leading dairy vets talk about their relationship with customers and how through 'teamwork, skills management and knowledge-sharing,' UK dairy farmer businesses are developing strategies to ensure long term success.

Leading dairy farmers give insight into their team meetings and discuss their goals on achieving the highest standards of health & welfare, whilst pushing the production envelope yet further. Discussions such as - strategies for fertility, nutrition and vitality.

Articles focus on customer case studies, disease management issues & knowledge transfer.

This Winter supplement for 2025 will reach all our dairy farmer and vet readers, and important advisors and trade representative.

Tell us what you think, and I hope you enjoy the issue.

Keep warm

Caroline Calder
Editor



BRITISH DAIRYING

Published by WB Publishing Ltd.
www.britishdairying.co.uk
www.creamawards.UK

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Thank you to all
our contributors.

Design Surface Creative Ltd.

Print Warners Midlands Plc

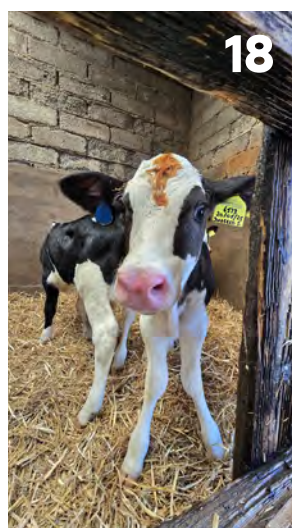
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It's all about teamwork

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"It's been great to be involved with a new technique and redesigning calf housing to improve outcomes."

Synergy Farm Health, Neil Baker Page 12

Beyond sick cows: how strategic vet partnerships drive performance

Sarah Bolt, Technical Knowledge Exchange Manager at Kingshay provides some insight.

Modern dairy farming is a team effort. Dairying is a complex business where margins are tight and efficiency is everything. To thrive, farmers need a strong team, built on collaboration between everyone involved in the dairy herd management. Placing a forward-thinking vet at the heart of your team means that you have a trained professional when animals are sick, and a proactive consultant to prevent sick animals before they arise.

Mindset change: from firefighting to forward planning

Traditionally, many farmers have called out their vet only when an animal is sick or for calving issues. This reactive approach can be costly; whether that is actual costs of the vet's time whilst on farm, the medicines prescribed or indirect costs such as lost milk, or on-going poor fertility, not to mention the additional labour costs associated.

In recent years, scheduled fertility visits have become a standard part of a vet's role; however, today's best-performing farms take a different view: they see their vet as a trusted herd health adviser. By involving them in regular planning and decision-making, you move from firefighting to forward thinking.

Proactive consultancy means setting clear herd health goals and co-designing an action plan to achieve them with the entire farm team. Today, that team extends well beyond the farm gate, including the farm consultant, the nutritionist, foot-trimmer, and other advisers alongside the vet, all vital cogs in the 'farm wheel'. For any farming business, it is essential that every adviser is aligned with the farm strategy, so everyone is driving in the same direction.

Regular meetings with this wider team create a joined-up approach, ensuring decisions are based on accurate information and long-term objectives, not firefighting.

Vets play a crucial role in making this cohesion work.

Modern vets drive the use of data; milk records, fertility figures, mobility scores, etc., to spot trends early and act before issues escalate. Tools like Kingshay's Dairy Manager health



DIY AI Training in small groups

“Traditionally, many farmers have called out their vet only when an animal is sick or for calving issues”

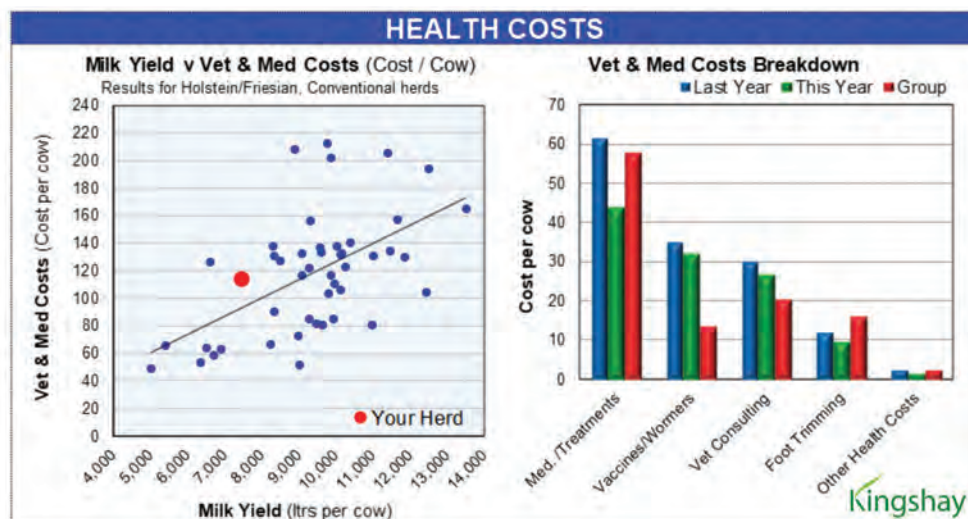
manager services make this easier by breaking down vet and medicine costs into categories such as treatments, consultancy, and preventative care like vaccines and wormers (see chart).

Kingshay's data shows that farms investing more time in vet consultancy often achieve lower overall 'vet and med' costs. Understanding where your money goes helps focus attention on prevention rather than cure. This approach doesn't just improve animal health; it boosts productivity and profitability.

Consistency counts

Even the best plan fails without consistent execution. That's where Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) come in. Clear, practical SOPs for tasks like calving, milking hygiene, and dry cow therapy ensure everyone follows the same steps every time.

Your vet, or a trained facilitator can help you and your team design these protocols based on best practice and



“Kingshay’s data shows that farms investing more time in vet consultancy often achieve lower overall ‘vet and med’ costs”

your farm-specific needs. SOPs reduce mistakes, improves attention to detail, and makes training new staff easier.

Training: Building skills and confidence

When everyone on the farm understands not just what to do, but why it matters, they are far more likely to get it right. Training staff alongside vets builds confidence and practical skills, which in turn strengthens team morale and helps retain valuable people on the farm.

Well-trained teams work more effectively, reducing mistakes and improving consistency. Investing in training pays back through healthier cows, fewer treatments, and better overall performance, for both staff and herd.

Bringing in specialist expertise

There are times when it makes sense to bring in a specialist adviser for a specific project, whether that is building design, yard layout, or improving cow flow. These areas often require highly focused knowledge, and using the right expert for a fixed task means you can access the best advice when it matters most. This isn’t about replacing your vet or suggesting they don’t have the answers; it’s about complementing the skills already within your team.

By working together, vets and other specialists can ensure that every decision supports herd health, efficiency, and long-term farm success.

The bottom line

Proactive planning, regular reviews of data, and clear protocols reduce disease, improve fertility, and protect margins. Treat your vet as part of your management team, and you will see the benefits in healthier cows and a more profitable business. Working with your vet as a consultant is not an extra cost, it is an investment in your farm’s future.

FARMER CASE STUDY: BUILDING A TEAM FOR SUCCESS

Phil Kent, a dairy farmer near Wadebridge in Cornwall, started dairying in 2021 and runs an autumn block-calving, grass-based system.

From the outset, Phil recognised that success depended on teamwork. He worked closely with his vet, Michael Head (known to many as Spike), who acted as a herd health adviser working closely with the farm’s nutritionist. Regular team meetings focused on long-term goals, from infectious disease control to maintaining milk quality, and improving diet efficiency through better nutrition and mineral balance.

Phil was passionate about bringing his staff along on the journey. “If the team understands the ‘why’ behind what we do, they take pride in getting it right, and that makes all the difference,” he explains. Spike supported this by delivering practical training: a 3-day AI course enabled the team to carry out inseminations themselves, saving the cost of an external technician.

He also trained three key staff members in emergency first-aid hoof trimming, reducing reliance on outside help and improving response times.

Although Spike no longer provides routine veterinary services, he continues to work with Phil and other farmers in his new role as Lead Training Consultant for Kingshay, helping train the next generation of dairy professionals.

When proactive planning, regular meetings with your wider farm team, and targeted training come together, they don’t just improve herd health – they transform farm efficiency and future profitability.



Emergency Foot First Aid Training Course

The Livestock Partnership: A team approach to herd fertility

How collaborative veterinary practices boost reproductive success, writes vet **Claire Walker**

Fertility is one of the most critical drivers of profitability on any dairy farm. Every open day costs money, and every missed conception delays milk production and replacement planning. However, achieving consistently high reproductive performance is not simply a matter of pregnancy diagnosis or administering synchronisation programs—it requires a coordinated, team-based approach involving farmers, veterinarians, nutritionists, and farm staff.

Veterinary practices are increasingly embracing this model of teamwork to deliver comprehensive herd fertility services that go far beyond the traditional “firefighting” role, by integrating expertise, data, and communication. Historically, veterinary input on many farms revolved around routine fertility visits—checking cows for pregnancy, diagnosing reproductive issues, and treating problem animals. While these services remain essential, fertility performance is influenced by many interconnected factors: nutrition, cow comfort, transition management, disease control, heat detection, and labour routines, among others.

A single professional, no matter how skilled, cannot effectively oversee all these areas alone. That’s why progressive veterinary practices now operate within multidisciplinary teams. Vets can specialise in different areas to maximise the expertise they can bring to the herd; with a potential focus on bull fertility, artificial insemination techniques, mobility, or youngstock health. Practices will also utilise TB testers, technicians, nutritionists, and data analysts. Together, they form a



“A single professional, no matter how skilled, cannot effectively oversee all these areas alone”

cohesive support network that works alongside the farmer’s own team.

This shift from individual service to collaborative partnership transforms herd fertility management from reactive troubleshooting to preventive and performance-focused planning.

The Core Team: Roles and Responsibilities

1. The Veterinarian

The veterinarian remains central to fertility management, but their role expands under a team-based model. Beyond reproductive exams, they act as coordinators and advisors, integrating information from multiple sources to create herd-level fertility plans. Their focus is on identifying systemic issues, designing reproductive protocols, monitoring results, and training farm staff in procedures like AI timing or heat detection.

2. Nutritionists

Energy balance, mineral status, and body condition all play crucial roles in reproductive success. A nutritionist’s input ensures that the ration supports the fertility goals set by the team. Coordinated communication between the vet and nutritionist helps align diet formulation with reproductive and health data—especially during the transition period when cows are most vulnerable.

3. Technicians

A veterinary farm technician in the UK supports farm animal veterinarians by carrying out routine herd health tasks such as disbudding, vaccinations, sampling, and data collection. They assist with herd management programs, promote preventive health, and help implement protocols to improve productivity, welfare, and biosecurity on livestock farms.

4. Farm Staff and Management

The people who handle the cows daily are vital members of the fertility team. Milkers, breeders, and herds people observe behaviour, heat signs, and health issues before anyone else. Training and empowering these employees ensure they understand not just the “how,” but the “why” behind fertility routines. Clear protocols, regular feedback, and open communication are key to maintaining motivation and accuracy.

5. Data and Decision Support

Modern herd management software, milk recording, and on-farm sensors

Pregnancy diagnosis





On farm meetings for training

produce a wealth of fertility-related data. A team approach ensures that this information is used effectively—identifying trends, benchmarking progress, and highlighting problem areas before they affect performance. Veterinary practices with trained data analysts or software support can interpret these figures and turn them into actionable insights for farmers.

Communication

Even the best technical expertise is wasted without strong communication. A team approach succeeds when information flows freely between everyone involved.

Effective communication might include:

- Regular team meetings or virtual updates to review performance indicators.
- Shared access to herd data platforms.
- Agreed-upon reporting formats and timelines.
- Constructive feedback loops between farm staff and advisors.

Transparency and mutual respect among the team foster accountability and shared ownership of results.

Data-Driven Fertility Programs

Data collection is only useful if it leads to improvement. A coordinated team can analyse key metrics such as:

- **Submission rate** (the percentage of eligible cows bred in a given period)
- **Conception rate** (the percentage of cows that become pregnant per service)
- **Pregnancy rate** (the product of submission and conception rates)
- **Days to first service and calving interval**

Tracking these KPIs helps pinpoint weaknesses. For example, low submission rates may indicate poor heat detection or inadequate staff training, while low conception rates could point to nutritional imbalances or disease issues. The team can then prioritize interventions that deliver the greatest impact.

Training and Continuous Improvement

Education is another benefit of the team approach. Many veterinary practices offer on-farm training sessions in topics such as:

- Transition cow management
- Heat detection and AI
- Lameness prevention
- Record-keeping and data interpretation
- Medicine use

When all stakeholders understand the reproductive goals and the reasoning behind protocols, compliance improves—and so do results. Regular reviews ensure the program adapts to seasonal changes, herd size growth, and evolving farm systems.

In today's dairy industry, managing herd fertility requires more than routine vet visits—it demands an integrated, data-driven partnership. When veterinarians, technicians, nutritionists, and farm staff unite around shared goals, communication strengthens, problems are caught early, and fertility results improve.

www.livestockvets.co.uk

Q Fever

Do you recognise these signs?

Weak newborns

Abortion

Infertility

Metritis

Retained placenta

Premature calving

Stillbirths



A disease that has the potential to have significant impact on livestock health and production.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Q Fever is endemic in GB dairy herds¹
- It causes reproduction and fertility issues to cattle, sheep and goats²
- It is also a zoonosis, risking the health of those working with livestock
- It is caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii*
- Animals shed bacteria at calving in vaginal mucous, also in milk and faeces, with infection caused through inhalation of the bacteria.
- *Coxiella b.* can be carried on the wind^{3,4,5}
- *Coxiella b.* is persistent, surviving up to 5 months in soil⁶

Speak to your vet about diagnosis and vaccination if you are concerned about Q fever.

This information was provided by Ceva Animal Health Ltd, makers of Coxevac® COXEVAC® suspension for injection for cattle, sheep and goats contains inactivated *Coxiella burnetii*, strain Nine Mile 272 QF Unit/ml. Q fever Unit: relative potency of phase I antigen measured by ELISA in comparison with a reference item. LEGAL CATEGORY: UK [DVM]. For further information, please refer to the product SPC, data sheet or pack insert. Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone. Use medicines responsibly (www.noah.co.uk/responsible)

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COX30AD



Simplicity at the heart of medal-winner's approach to herd management

"Simplicity really is at the heart of everything we do, from managing cow health to what we feed them and from breeding decisions to grazing management," says **Jamie Pottow** from East Farm, Knook near Warminster.

But don't let this fool you; the 350-strong milking cow herd - Eastknook prefix - is milked three a day with an average yield of 13,000 litres/cow at 4.2% butterfat and is a top performing herd according to GTPI (Genomic Total Performance Index Holstein Association USA's classification equivalent to the UK's PLI). Jamie was also the proud recipient of the Holstein UK President's Medal Award in January 2025.

The 1,700 acre family farm is split into different enterprises with Jamie's father and two uncles taking responsibility for leading on: arable - dad Robert, the cows - uncle, Richard and all things machinery - uncle, Nick. After some time milking a 2000-cow herd in Canada, Jamie returned home in 2021 and now looks after the cows on a day-to-day basis as well as doing the 4.30am morning milking 10 days out of 14.

Edging Salisbury Plain, the free-draining farm has 600 acres of arable, while the rest of the land is down to either grass, maize or wheat for the dairy enterprise. "Like most, we try to optimise home-grown forage to control costs and we usually aim for two grass silage cuts for the clamp and up to three baled for the youngstock and dry cows. This year, despite the dry weather, we managed three cuts in the clamp and a final baled grass silage cut in mid-October; none of us can remember one that late before!"



Vet Chris Mangham

"Traits we look for in sires include milk production, fertility, cell count, strength and legs and feet"

The milking cow ration is 40% grass silage, 60% maize, caustic wheat and ground wheat, both from the home-grown wheat, and rape as the only bought in straight. Minerals and vitamins are also added.

The herd is on an M&S Muller contract and has been for five years. Part of this means that anything 90+ days in milk (DIM) must have access to grazing for 110 days. When housed, they are in a cubicle shed bedded on sand with auto-scrapers to help ensure high standards of cleanliness.

"Traits we look for in sires include

milk production, fertility, cell count, strength and legs and feet," says Jamie. "The cows are large, strong Holstein cows - not the biggest you'll see, we don't need that - with good conformation. Since M&S required the 110-day grazing period in each lactation, we do prioritise hoof traits and management, as there's obviously more walking. We carry out routine trimming at 100 DIM and 200 days pregnant by an external hoof trimming contractor, should there be any lame cows in between, we will step in and trim as necessary.

"You can have the highest yielding, best looking cow in the world, but if she can't walk to and from the parlour, or out to grass, she's no use to you," he adds. "Our cows will typically have four productive lactations in the herd, and part of the reason for this is that lameness issues are low."

Vet Chris Mangham from independent vet practice, Wyvern Farm Vets in Frome has been working with the herd for nearly 18 years, and attends regular weekly visits. "The herd is a well-organised, well-run herd which is evident by its superb performance and the lack of issues around mastitis, fertility, calf and cow health.





Jamie Pottow and uncle Richard

“Calves are relatively unbothered with the commonly-seen health issues typically affecting them - scour and pneumonia - and Emily, who looks after them, does an excellent job with great attention to detail,” adds Chris.

“Mastitis levels are low with only around 15% of the cows being double-tubed at drying off and cell counts are typically 90,000 cells/ml. Fertility is equally strong with conception rates in excess of 45% and a 30% pregnancy rate. Vaccinations are also given for BVD, IBR and Leptospirosis although, what has been a challenge, has been managing the logistics of that especially for BVD,” Chris explains.

Once born, the dairy replacement calves are housed in hutches until eight weeks of age when they move into larger weaning groups in pens until six months of age. They are then moved to a parcel of land a few miles away which already had a shed on-site. Beef calves are sold to Meadow Quality Calves at under 42 days of age.

“We aim to bring the replacements back to the main farm at 11 months of age when we will put heat detectors on and plan their first vaccination which will be for BVD,” says Jamie. “My uncle and I do all the AI ourselves and I like to see one active heat prior to service. As a year-round calving herd and due to the fact we were bringing a few heifers back over a few days and weeks, as opposed to all at once, we struggled to manage vaccine timings, especially the second dose. If something cropped up, or we had to prioritise a different task in the moment, it was all-to-easy to get to service unsure if everything had received its full primary course and was protected.”

As members of BVDFree when it was up-and-running, the herd has always been clear of BVD previously, tag testing, bulk milk sampling and blood sampling to ensure this was the case.

“As we know the herd is free of the BVD virus, this has now been pared back to tagging and testing everything and swapping to the Bovela vaccine which is easier to manage due to its one-shot primary dose and flexible booster regime plus the fact it delivers 12 months’ protection,” Chris adds.

“Opting to use Bovela also helps with our ethos of keeping things simple when it comes to BVD management,” concludes Jamie. “Coupled with tag and testing, we are confident that we will be able to keep the herd clear of BVD ahead of the next eradication scheme which is due to come in summer 2027.”

FARM FACTS

- 1,700 acres adjacent to Salisbury Plain
- 13,000 litres/cow with 3x a day milking through a 30:30 herringbone parlour
- 90,000 cells/ml SCC
- 30% pregnancy rate
- High health status herd, part of M&S’s own Select Farm Assurance scheme and Red Tractor assured
- The online timing tool at www.makebvdhistory.com helps review vaccination dates with service dates to plan vaccination timing to prevent any gaps in immunity
- Swapped to Bovela vaccine for BVD for ease of management and timing



Vet sense – Torch Farm Vets and You Achieving more - together

It is not uncommon for a farm to have a group of ‘trusted advisors’ and one of these is usually a vet.

We find that we have many different relationships with our farms and farmers, from the fire brigade ‘see you at a 3am calving’ to the weekly routine and meetings with the whole farm team.



Often cost and value get confused here with some being proud that the vet is only called upon when most needed. But by far the most value for all involved are where we know and work closely with the team to allow proactive advice, ideas sharing and regular monitoring to be employed and analysed.

In this way we can prevent problems before they occur.

Risk management strategies are key - rather than being called in because we are using ‘a lot of mastitis tubes,’ we would prefer to have noted a slight spike or be aware that there is increased risk due to stocking challenges or seasonality and work to monitor and manage these so that those blips in disease are not seen.

Being part of the farm team with other advisors or consultants allows different viewpoints to be explored and discussed often with solutions that come from ‘outside the box’ but will work best for the farm.

Learning more together.



This sort of discussion potentially also allows the upskilling or identification of areas where some members may want more knowledge - which is another area that as a practice we have found rewarding to get involved.

A bespoke or more ‘one-on-one’ plan can be employed, or learning may be as part of a training course aimed at identifying, monitoring or managing a more specific area for the farm.

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A proudly independent farm practice, shows us how it's done

Mike Sandiford of the George Farm Vets in Malmesbury has been working with Manor Farm as their primary vet for over 20 years.

Manor Farm is a 450-cow autumn block calving herd near Pewsey in Wiltshire. They are a Holstein herd averaging 8800 litres. The farm is family owned and run by Charlie Maidment, a fifth-generation dairy farmer.

The George Farm Vets run a system whereby every dairy has a nominated first and second vet. They have also implemented lead roles allowing staff to develop in their specific areas of interest, with lead vets now being appointed in youngstock, technical training, mastitis, fertility as well as a lead vet tech. This approach ensures that all farms have a consistent point of contact but can access more specialist advice when required.

At Manor Farm, Mike has been backed up by Ellie Body as his second on the farm for the last 3 years. They encourage a team approach, involving all members of staff, consultants and paraprofessionals in optimizing performance. This collaborative approach helps to give the whole team ownership in decision making, which helps ensure that planned actions are completed.

Mike and Charlie take time to discuss nutrition and welfare.



“The George Farm Vets run a system whereby every dairy has a nominated first and second vet”

Historically, Mike’s main involvement was during the breeding period, with weekly fertility visits, but only limited contact at other times of the year. When Charlie took on running the farm in 2021, the decision was made to broaden the scope of Mike’s veterinary involvement with more regular visits throughout the year and to make more use of the specialist knowledge of the George Vets team in specific areas.

While quarterly reviews suit all year-round calving herds, in block calving herds seasonally focused meetings are more useful. At Manor Farm, these

include a pre-breeding meeting to analyze fertility data from the previous year, agree future targets and actions to achieve these. There is also agreement between the breeding advisor, Mike, and the farm team on bull selection for future heifer replacements.

Ellie has taken responsibility for working with the farm on youngstock, with additional advice from Kathryn Hart, one of the George Vets youngstock consultants.

They use use health and growth rate data alongside colostrum quality and total protein results to monitor and develop protocols for vaccination, nutrition, scour/pneumonia prevention and treatment. All farm staff are present at these meetings and invited to contribute to ensure that the whole team are on board with the decisions being made and that actions are practical and achievable.

Ellie also has an interest in grazing and sustainability, particularly around parasite control. The farm has implemented a routine of monthly weighing of first season grazing heifers to assess growth rates, alongside regular worm egg counts. This has significantly reduced wormer use, from whole group



Discussing the TB plan, now in place.

routine ivermectin pour on to selective worming of only 20-60% of animals using benzimidazole or levamisole. In addition to the environmental benefits, it has allowed more proactive nutritional management of heifers to ensure they reach growth rate targets for serving.

The farm also now has a year-round monthly visit following milk recording. This meeting maintains veterinary contact with staff, allows assessment of the milk recording data to make decisions on targeted bacteriology, treatment and culling decisions. It also enables farm staff to chat through any other emerging issues with Mike and provides an opportunity for him to check any stock that may not have warranted a specific vet visit.

A Nedap collar system has also been fitted recently, and these meetings have been a useful opportunity to look at health alert data and set protocols for checking flagged cows.

Disease management

One of the main challenges encountered by Manor Farm has been endemic TB, which has led to significant losses over the last 20 years. Ben Sellick, lead vet in TB at the George Farm Vets, has worked alongside APHA, Mike and the farm team to design a bespoke TB control plan for the farm.

Ben has a breadth of experience in TB including carrying out visits for the TB Advisory Service. He sits on the NFU TB Advisory Group and Bovine TB Partnership Strategy Refresh Group which provide opportunities to help shape future national TB policy.

Initially, high risk cows were identified using bovine reaction reports generated from past skin test data. This has now been supplemented by targeted Enferplex testing, with the intention of trying to understand the disease dynamics specific to this farm. This information helped to flag up close dam to offspring disease association.

INITIAL TESTING

This initial testing has been developed into a system of 3 x yearly Enferplex testing (milk testing of cows and blood testing of all youngstock over 12 months old). The Enferplex positive cows are managed in a similar way to Johnes positive animals:

- All positives and their offspring are marked as do not breed.
- High positive Enferplex cows are culled.
- High risk animals (Enferplex positive and Bovine Reaction positives) are managed as a separate group and milked last.

“One of the main challenges encountered by Manor Farm has been endemic TB, which has led to significant losses over the last 20 years”

Many changes have also been made to infrastructure to help reduce disease spread, including cleaning protocols for in-parlour feed troughs and slurry management. Set surveys, CCTV and fencing of latrines are also being implemented to manage wildlife risk.

The development of this whole team approach by Charlie combining advice from a wide range of consultants and ensuring farm staff are part of the decision-making process has been instrumental in significant improvements in many aspects of herd performance and profitability.

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Synergy Farm Health: Driving dairy success through teamwork and innovation

2025 Cream Awards Dairy Vet Practice of the Year winner – Synergy Farm Health. The award is sponsored by Virbac.



Dairy Vet Practice of the Year - Synergy Heath

Virbac is well known and respected for its commitment to the future of veterinary medicine, believing that this rests in innovation, dedication and genuine partnership with farmers. That is why Virbac is immensely proud to recognise practices that embody these values, through their support of the Cream Awards Dairy Vet Practice of the Year.

Against this challenging backdrop, and particularly during an era when the dairy sector faces complex and mounting pressures, from falling milk prices and disease management to the critical need for sustainability, one name consistently rises to the top: Synergy Farm Health.

Founded in 2009 by merging the farm animal divisions of two mixed practices, Synergy has established itself as a true beacon of progressive veterinary care, supporting over 250 dairy farms across the Southwest. Their success is rooted in a powerful philosophy of teamwork, continuous skills development, and collaborative knowledge sharing, principles that not only resonate with their clients but also drive tangible, positive results.

It is for this commitment to excellence that Synergy Farm Health was named Dairy Vet Practice of the Year at the 2025 Cream Awards.

A partnership model that works

At the heart of Synergy's approach is a genuine partnership between vets and farmers. Neil Baker of Leaze Farm in Somerset, a long-standing client, describes how the relationship has evolved over time: "We now have a great team of staff who work alongside the team of young vets who are really enthusiastic about the future of dairy production. They challenge us, and we challenge them - it brings new ideas and helps us evolve together."

This collaborative ethos is reflected in Synergy's buddy system, where each farm is supported by two dedicated vets. This ensures continuity, deep farm knowledge, and a joined-up approach to herd health.



"it's been great to be involved with a new technique and redesigning calf housing to improve outcomes."

Innovation in health planning and data use

Synergy's proactive health planning goes far beyond annual paperwork. Their vets harness data from platforms like Interherd Plus, Dairy Comp, and Cow Manager, transforming raw metrics into actionable insights. Custom dashboards and KPIs help farmers monitor progress in real time, while bespoke tools developed in-house allow for rapid assessment of SCC, mastitis, fertility, and Johne's disease.

This data-driven approach has led to tangible improvements. Lung scanning of calves, for example, has

revolutionised pneumonia management, significantly reducing antimicrobial use. "Disease and treatments have plummeted," says Neil Baker, "and it's been great to be involved with a new technique and redesigning calf housing to improve outcomes."

Vet Techs: Extending the reach of veterinary care

Labour shortages are a persistent challenge in agriculture, and Synergy's Vet Tech team offers a practical solution. With 15 Vet Techs and 5 Clinical Vet Techs, they provide services ranging from foot trimming and freeze branding to vaccination and AI.

Farmers like Will Frost of Childhay Farming Ltd rely on these skilled professionals to help manage large herds efficiently, which in his case is focused on dairy goat production: "They provide extra trained assistance when workloads require extra help, particularly when disbudding kids and dealing with large numbers of animals."

The Vet Techs are also integral to health planning, ensuring vaccines are administered correctly and monitoring their effectiveness. Their presence on farm allows vets to focus on strategic oversight while maintaining high standards of care.

A HEALTHY HERD STARTS WITH CALF CARE SOLUTIONS

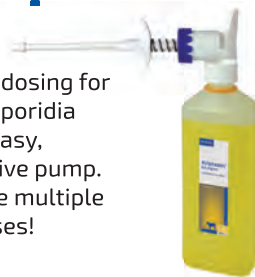


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1. Arthington J, Havenga L. Effect of injectable trace minerals on the humeral immune response to multivalent vaccine administration in beef calves. J Anim Sci. 2012;90(6):1966-71. 2. Teixeira AGV et al (2014) Effect of an injectable trace mineral supplement containing selenium, copper, zinc and manganese on immunity, health and growth of dairy calves. J. Dairy Sci. 97:4216-4226. Kriptazen 0.5 mg/ml oral solution for calves contains halofuginone. Bovigen Scour emulsion for injection for cattle contains inactivated antigens: Bovine rotavirus strain TM-91, serotype G6PL, Bovine coronavirus strain C-197, Escherichia coli strain EC/17 (F5 / K99 antigens). Multimin solution for injection for cattle contains Zinc, Copper, Manganese and Selenium. Kriptazen and Multimin [POM-V] Bovigen Scour [POM-VPS]

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Training for the future

Synergy's commitment to education is evident in their extensive training offerings. From practical calving and cattle handling to Red Tractor-accredited medicine courses, they ensure farmers and staff are equipped with the skills needed for modern dairy management. Their bespoke online training platform, available 24/7 with multilingual subtitles, has already been adopted by 150 farms, offering tailored content filmed on-site for maximum relevance.

Pete O'Malley, one of Synergy's vets, has played a key role in developing this platform, even filming training videos on client farms. "It adds huge value," says Neil Baker, "especially when a large proportion of new staff have very little farming knowledge."

Supporting farmers beyond the cow.

Synergy's role extends beyond clinical care. Their "Hotel Fridge" medicine delivery system ensures compliance and saves farmers time, while their TB support services, which include data analysis and advisory visits help tackle one of the industry's most persistent challenges. Farmers like Ollie Blackburn of Dillington Estate appreciate Synergy's commitment to innovation: "Their technical knowledge is of the highest quality, and their work on developing a new TB test will benefit the whole industry."

"Their technical knowledge is of the highest quality, and their work on developing a new TB test will benefit the whole industry."

Mental health support is also a priority. Many Synergy vets are trained in mental health first aid and will be able to identify and signpost farmers who may need support. The practice regularly partners with groups like FCN and Women in Dairy to provide community support.

Synergy are dedicated to nurturing the future of the dairy sector and actively support Young Farmers Groups across the South-West.

A trusted name in the Southwest

Synergy's reputation is built on trust, professionalism, and results. Jono

Smales, a dairy farmer in Wiltshire, sums it up: "Synergy are dedicated farm vets, and it's easy to see why farms use them over mixed practices. We haven't looked back since switching."]

Their independence allows them to remain agile and farmer focused. With 21 employee-shareholders, including Vet Techs and non-vets, Synergy ensures that those delivering the service have a stake in its success.

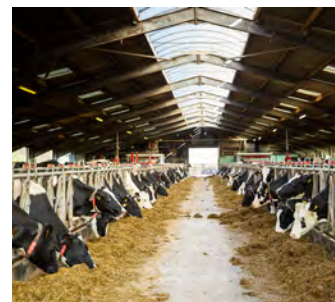
Virbac are proud to support practices like Synergy, who exemplify what modern veterinary care should look like: collaborative, data-driven and deeply embedded in the farming community.

Calf lung scanning with Synergy Farm Health



Nutrition: the building blocks of herd health

The power of good nutrition can at times be understated. ForFarmers' **Alison Ewing** explains how a collaborative approach to herd health can pay dividends on any dairy unit.



Alison Ewing

While herd management, genetics, and veterinary advice all play vital roles, nutrition remains the foundation upon which a healthy and profitable dairy system is built.

When cows receive the right balance of nutrients at the right time and in the right form, their fertility, immunity, transition success, and overall lifetime performance improve dramatically, explains Alison Ewing, Technical Development Manager at ForFarmers.

She says: "Despite its importance, nutrition isn't always treated as a strategic part of herd health planning. Farms where the vet and nutritionist work together as part of a wider, cohesive team are often the ones which achieve the greatest long-term success."

"A collaborative approach ensures nutritional decisions support veterinary goals, and vice versa, creating a unified strategy. When both disciplines feed into decision-making, it becomes easier to optimise fertility, minimise metabolic disorders, and maintain consistent levels of productivity throughout the year."

Feed remains one of the largest variable costs on a dairy unit but also the area with enormous potential for return on investment.

Alison says: "Suboptimal nutrition can have far-reaching consequences, from reduced conception rates to increased disease pressure and compromised milk yield. Choosing the right feed inputs is an essential component of herd health planning."

ForFarmers offers a range of nutritional solutions that integrate well into herd health plans. One product which continues to stand out is Lintec - widely recognised for its high levels of Omega-3 fatty acids and its significant influence on fertility outcomes.

Lintec helps elevate progesterone levels while naturally suppressing prostaglandin production. This hormonal shift is particularly valuable for maternal recognition of pregnancy. By balancing hormones, boosting progesterone levels, and inhibiting prostaglandin production, Lintec reduces early pregnancy loss and improves conception rates.



ForFarmers' account managers are often part of the wider farm team

"A collaborative approach ensures nutritional decisions support veterinary goals"

Lintec also supports overall cow health and performance by stabilising rumen pH, reducing acid loading in the rumen, and helping improve rumen function, which in turn enhances feed efficiency.

Getting transition right

The transition phase is one of the most critical stages in the production cycle, and energy shortfalls at this time can set the tone for health issues in the following lactation. Managing transition nutrition correctly is essential for reducing problems such as milk fever, ketosis, retained cleansings and displaced abomasums.

Alison says: "When cows enter calving in optimal metabolic condition with balanced mineral and energy intakes, they transition more smoothly into lactation and are more resilient during periods of stress. This is where targeted nutritional inputs, such as TRANSLAC can make a meaningful difference."

TRANSLAC provides a simple, complete solution for close-up transition cows. This product delivers basic and complex nutrients for optimum cow performance pre and post calving, aiding calcium capture, liver health, rumen development and colostrum quality.

Foetal development

It is important to ensure adequate nutrition not just for the cow, its yield and fertility, but also foetal growth, Alison notes.

Restricted dry cow nutrition, particularly in last 30 days, leads to lower birth weights, more still births and reduced growth rates. Limiting intakes at this time can result in reduced colostrum quality and quantity and poor calf intestinal and respiratory function.

Alison says: "If nutrients are restricted during late gestation, muscle fibre numbers produced by the foetus are hampered, and calf growth performance following birth might be negatively affected as a result."

"In addition, maternal nutrient restriction may also compromise cells responsible for generating intramuscular fat resulting in carcasses with lower quality and marbling scores."

Early lactation

Even after calving, an energy gap can persist, particularly in high-yielding cows. At the same time, feeding to support oestrogen production becomes important as cows approach their first post-calving ovulation.

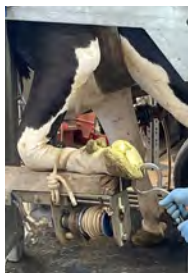
"A failure to address this dual challenge in feeding for the energy balance and reproductive hormone support can delay cycling, increase the calving index, and compromise future fertility," says Alison.

"Ultimately, nutrition is not just another cost on the balance sheet but instead a powerful tool for improving health, fertility, and performance."

"When nutritionists, vets, and farmers work together to prioritise nutrition, the results speak for themselves: healthier cows, fewer problems, better fertility and stronger financial outcomes," Alison concludes.

The lifetime approach to improving mobility

Dairy cows can benefit from non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) as part of a gold standard approach to improve mobility.



Using a hoof tester can help to identify hidden problems in the foot

Lameness is one of the most common issues seen in the UK dairy herd with clear repercussions on animal welfare and productivity. After infertility and mastitis, lameness is the third most important cause of economic losses in the dairy industry.

Katherine Timms, veterinary surgeon and ruminant veterinary advisor at Ceva Animal Health, advises that improving mobility is a lifetime process from point of insemination to leaving the herd. When problems do occur, intervention should be carried out as soon as possible to reduce the consequences and cost.

Managing heifers

“Environmental measures such as biosecurity and hygiene to reduce infectious lesions will help ensure better mobility. Routine foot inspections and trimming, regular foot bathing and mobility scoring are also essential factors and heifers should be trained on concrete and cubicles before they enter the milking herd to promote the development of a resilient digital cushion (fat pad) in their hooves and acclimatise them to the environment,” says Ms Timms.

Milking animals

She says that milking animals should be monitored and managed with a defined programme of mobility scoring, foot bathing and routine foot inspection and trimming, as required. Comprehensive records should be kept to allow



Katherine Timms from Ceva Animal Health

“Environmental measures such as biosecurity and hygiene to reduce infectious lesions will help ensure better mobility”

decisions to be made on individual cows and to enable trends to be analysed. For example, a high incidence of cases in the first 100 days in milk can indicate problems with transition management.

Dry cows

Ms Timms adds: “Dry cows are often overlooked, but mobility issues while dry will continue during the next lactation. Cows should be checked and may need trimming prior to dry off. Whether housed or at pasture, dry cows should be checked daily for lameness and regular foot bathing may be required.

“Body condition score (BCS) management is crucial as loss in BCS can affect the digital cushion and lameness in the subsequent lactation.”

Transition cows

Transition cows returning to the herd may be challenged by the stress of calving and a return to milk production, as well as the stress of moving groups, a return to concrete and a change of diet, she says. Ensuring the cow's foot is balanced, BCS is optimal at calving and the transition diet prepares the cow for the next lactation and will reduce the likelihood of lameness in early lactation. Even subtle cases of lameness in the first 90 days after calving can lead to reduced conception rates and increased calving intervals.

Prevention and treatment

“Routine preventative and prompt treatment are key in maintaining good foot health for each cow and treatment will depend on the individual lesion with EDPET (early detection and prompt

STRIDE NATIONAL MOBILITY SURVEY

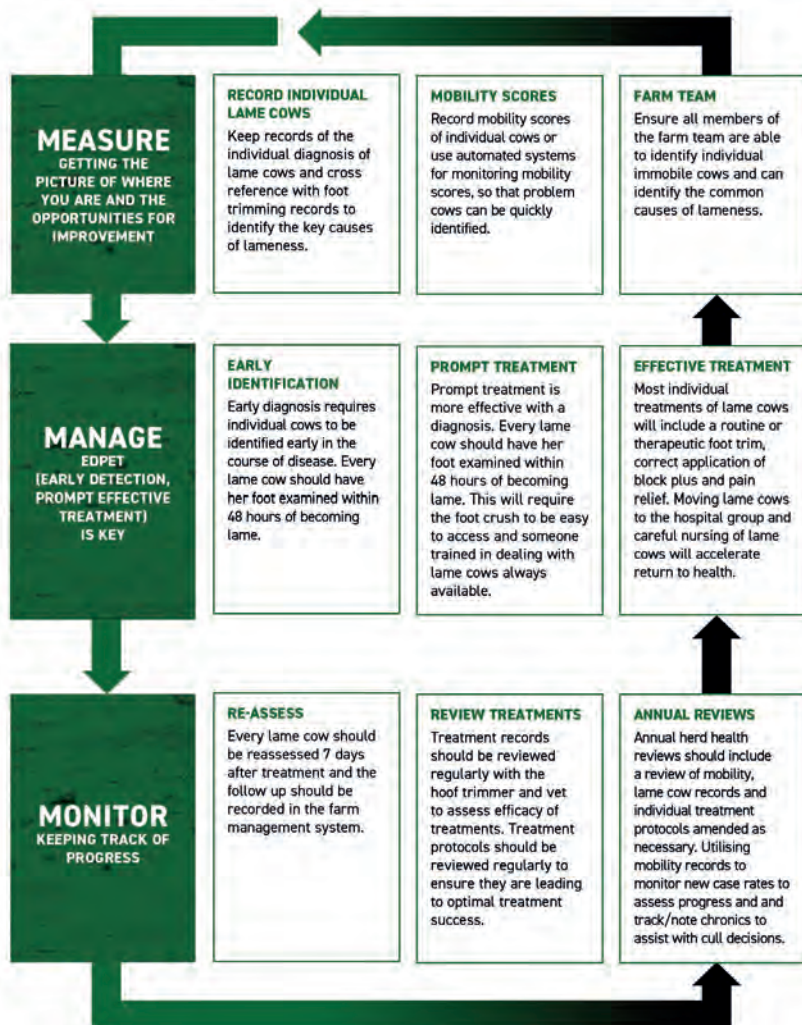
Stride is the UK dairy mobility initiative to identify producer's views on mobility, its impact on herd health and welfare and, ultimately, the business bottom line.

The 2024 Stride National Mobility Survey revealed that on many dairy farms routine preventative measures are not carried out as routinely as they could be:

- 22% foot bath milking cows less than weekly
- 60% only lift feet and trim cows when necessary, rather than having a set routine
- Only 53% trim feet at drying off
- 24% do not mobility score cows, while 53% do so quarterly or less frequently
- 23% use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) for all lame cows, 55% use them for severely lame cows, 8% of respondents never use pain relief when treating lame cows

THE MODEL TO IMPROVE MOBILITY

Review your current management protocols against the model and identify where improvements can be made and then look to make improvements using the Measure; Manage; Monitor approach.



Credit: Stride Initiative

effective treatment) essential to the health and welfare of individuals within a herd.” She says that the ‘measure, manage, monitor’ approach is a good model to follow to improve mobility and current management protocols can be reviewed to identify where improvements can be made.

The effective treatment of individual lame cows will ensure they return to productivity quickly. The priority is early detection and prompt treatment of lesions, with all affected cows treated within 48 hours of identification. Clearly written treatment protocols should be followed for all lesion types to ensure consistency of care with staff trained in the identification of different lesions and their specific treatments.

Ms Timms says: “Ideally staff should be trained to identify lesions, provide effective and appropriate trimming, apply blocks and to correctly apply bandages. Blocks can deliver significant improvements if applied correctly as they give the affected claw rest from being weight bearing and lift the claw clear of slurry.

Use of NSAIDs

“By addressing lame cows by hoof trimming alone, the five-week cure rate is 69%. This rises to 85% cure rate when a combination of hoof trimming, block application and painkillers, such as NSAIDs, are administered.”

NSAIDs play a crucial role in reducing inflammation and the subsequent recovery rate, returning the cow to walking soundly and optimum milk production. Using a zero-milk withdrawal NSAID means that milk does not have to be thrown away.

Speak to your vet about effective pain relief for lame cows.

LLM Farm Vets on farm...

Shropshire farmer James Willis shares how working closely with his farm vet has benefited both his staff and his cows.



Close collaboration with his farm vet on staff management and herd management protocols has paid dividends for Shropshire farmer James Willis.

Together with his father Neil, James milks 300 cross-bred cows across 500 acres at The Willey Farm, near Whitchurch.

The spring-calving herd is milked twice-a-day through a 15-aside herringbone parlour, producing average milk yields of 5,000 litres at 5.77% butterfat and 4.16% protein for Muller.

James, who also runs a property business, returned to the family farm two years ago at a time when problems with staff retention were an ongoing challenge for the business.

He says close collaboration with his vet Hannah Batty from LLM Vets, part of the VetPartners group, has helped improve this and he now has a great team of staff in place at the farm.

“Hannah and the LLM Farm Vets team are integral to our business,” explains James.

“Following her recent Nuffield Farming Scholarship where she looked at how teams should be run on farms, Hannah offered to help.

“She’s been a rock in helping me deal with previous staffing problems; luckily we’ve got a good team in place now and that’s largely thanks to Hannah.”

As well as providing assistance with staffing – which has included interviewing members of staff and holding staff meetings after key times such as calving – he says Hannah has also helped develop several herd management protocols.

“She has put a number of protocols in place around the likes of calving, monitoring bulling cows, and how to effectively administer drugs,” explains James.

“As a result, we don’t see her as much and our vet costs are down. There’s also much more confidence within the team about what to look for in the cows and how to administer treatments when necessary.”

He says having a good team in place, backed by strong herd management protocols, provides peace of mind while he is away from the farm for his property business.

“Running a farm, as well as another business, means I rely on the people around me and this work on staff management and protocols has truly helped the team,” adds James.

“It’s something that really sets Hannah and LLM as a practice apart from the rest. Hannah has a theory that happy cows mean happy people, and happy people mean happy cows. This is true for us – the herd and staff are much healthier and happier now.”

www.llmfarmvets.co.uk

Fresh focus on calves drives Cumbrian demonstration farm success

Completing a Calf Health Checklist has helped sharpen calf-rearing practices at Greenrigg Farm near Wigton, Cumbria — allowing the team to fine-tune protocols and improve youngstock performance.

Johnny Graham runs the 460-head all-year-round calving Holstein Friesian milking herd alongside his father John and is one of five farmers involved in MSD Animal Health's newly launched Demonstration Farm Network. Rolled out earlier this year, the initiative is designed to provide actionable insights and highlight the value of proactive herd health management to the wider farming community.

Johnny and his youngstock team — including youngstock manager Bev Hennessy and farm manager Macie Graham — first completed the MSD Animal Health Calf Health Checklist in July 2024.

Developed in collaboration with vets and nutritionists, the Checklist, which is available for farms through their vets, consists of 10 targeted questions across five core areas, helping farms benchmark against best-practice standards. It provides a practical tool for identifying areas for improvement and monitoring progress over time.

The five core areas assessed are:

- 1 Setting goals and measuring performance
- 2 Colostrum management
- 3 Nutrition
- 4 Infection pressure
- 5 Healthy environment

Bev says the exercise has been instrumental in driving improvements. "The checklist focuses on key areas and helps highlight where changes can be made to further fine-tune performance," she explains.

Following the 2024 review, two main actions were prioritised:

- 1 **Introducing calf jackets** to reduce heat loss and cold-related stress in the winter months.
- 2 **Enhancing record-keeping**, including tracking mortality trends, reviewing data regularly with their vet, and recording specific causes of calf losses.

In May 2025, the team completed a follow-up Checklist and improved their score by actioning the priorities highlighted in 2024.

Bev says using calf jackets up to four



"The checklist focuses on key areas and helps highlight where changes can be made to further fine-tune performance"

weeks of age has made a noticeable difference, reducing cold stress and supporting calf health. The team also introduced a 'big sheet' to monitor calf mortality trends more clearly.

They've also recently invested in SenseHub Dairy Youngstock — a 24/7 monitoring system that uses ear tags to detect animals needing attention. It's the first solution specifically designed to monitor dairy calves and heifers during their first 12 months of life.

Johnny says early detection is crucial. "Anything we can do to pick up problems before they become serious benefits not just the calves but the entire dairy system — helping us hit target bulling weights and bring heifers into the milking herd more efficiently."

Current age at first calving is around 25 to 26 months.

Johnny adds that calf losses have reduced in recent years. "Most of our losses now occur at birth. In the past, we'd lose calves at various stages, but

now we've brought that down to just the first 24 hours."

Data is now reviewed regularly with vet Iain Steele from Belle Vue Vets, who conducts quarterly reviews of calf health, supported by the vet tech team. Calves are weighed every 3–4 weeks to monitor growth rates, and blood samples are taken to assess passive immunity transfer. Total protein levels are typically above 6, with serum total protein over 5.2 g/dL the threshold associated with adequate colostrum transfer.

Dry period focus

However, Johnny believes the foundations of good calf health begin before birth — in the dry period.

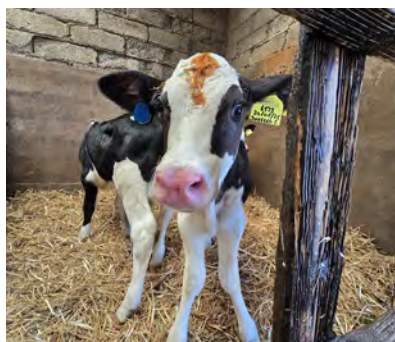
"We've learned that calf health starts with the dry cows. For example, at one-point, high potassium levels in our silage led to more milk fevers, which impacted colostrum quality and caused retained placentas," he explains.

Hygiene is another priority, adds Bev. "Cleanliness in the dry period is vital. If the system gets under pressure and standards slip, you start seeing issues like navel ill and scour creeping back in. We begin with clean teats and keep everything spotless."

Vaccinations also play an important role in disease prevention. Cows are vaccinated with Bovilis Rotavec Corona, which helps to:

- Reduce the severity of diarrhoea caused by *E. coli* F5 (K99) and F41
- Reduce the incidence of scours caused by rotavirus
- Reduce the shedding of virus by calves infected with rotavirus or coronavirus.

The Calf Health Checklist helps identify focus areas to improve youngstock health.



Cows are also vaccinated with Bovilis Cryptium, which allows passive immunisation of calves to reduce clinical signs, including diarrhoea caused by *C.parvum*. For passive immunity the calf must receive adequate good quality colostrum.

“No one thing solves calf health,” says Johnny. “It’s like a big jigsaw, and every piece plays a part.”

The team has recently installed fans in the dry cow and milk cow shed, which have helped reduce seasonal dips in conception rates and milk yield, while also improving hygiene by keeping passage-ways drier.

Next, the team will focus on improving their score in the Checklist by addressing the points raised in the 2025 review.

A key priority is increasing the amount of colostrum fed to calves within the first 24 hours. Currently, calves receive 4 litres within the first 12 hours, with an additional 2 litres offered if they will take it. Moving forward, the aim is to ensure calves receive at least 6 litres as a standard.

Duncan Sinclair, Associate Director Market Access at MSD says “Greenrigg Farm is a great example of how incremental improvements — guided by tools like the Calf Health Checklist — can deliver meaningful results, from reduced calf losses to more consistent heifer performance.

“The value of the Checklist lies in its simplicity and structure. It gives the farmer, those responsible for calf rearing and vets a framework to assess calf management and identify practical steps that drive progress over time.

“We’re seeing real benefits when farms use the Checklist as a working document — returning to it regularly, reviewing progress, and setting new goals, just as Johnny and his team have done.

“By being open to change, embracing new technology, and working closely with their vet, the team at Greenrigg Farm are setting an example that others can learn from — and that’s exactly what the Demonstration Farm Network is all about,” says Mr Sinclair.



FOCUS ON YOUNGSTOCK MANAGEMENT WITH THE CHECKLIST

If you are thinking about calf health and management on your farm, you can now ask your vet for the MSD Animal Health calf health checklist tool which provides a detailed, score-based appraisal of your youngstock rearing system.

Find out more here www.msd-animal-health-hub.co.uk/dairy-calf-health

FARM FACTS – GREENRIGG FARM, WIGTON, CUMBRIA

- 460 Holstein Friesian milking cows and 400 heifers
- 11,500 litres per cow per lactation
- Housed year-round, with low yielders grazing for 6–7 months
- Milked twice daily in a 20/40 herringbone parlour
- Calving all year round with a calving index of 380 days

YOUNGSTOCK MANAGEMENT:

- Calves are initially housed in groups of three in clean, disinfected pens, bedded with straw, and fed transition milk from their dams twice daily for the first 5–7 days
- Heifer calves are moved into groups of 15 in straw-bedded loose housing and fed via an automatic milk feeder
- Beef calves are housed in groups of six in outdoor hutches.
- All calves are bedded every other day
- A strict all-in-all-out (AIAO) system operates between calf pens

About the MSD Demonstration Farm Network

The MSD Animal Health Demonstration Farm Network comprises five dairy farms across England, Scotland, and Wales. This unique initiative showcases how modern herd monitoring, proactive health management, and the use of identification systems can improve cattle health, welfare, and productivity.

In the first phase of this two-to-three-year initiative, launched in 2025, MSD Animal Health will work closely with the demonstration farmers and their vets to assess wellbeing, reproduction, and productivity outcomes on each farm, alongside each herd’s disease and pathogen burden. The Network aims to provide actionable insights and demonstrate the value of proactive herd management to the wider farming community.

SenseHub is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease in animals.

For the diagnosis, treatment, cure, or prevention of disease in animals, you should consult your veterinarian. The accuracy of the data collected and presented through this product is not intended to match that of medical devices or scientific measurement devices.

Easy-access data adds value on farm

Access to accurate health data, packaged in an easy format with clear messages set out 'on a plate' adds value to the vet's involvement on farm, according to NMR lead veterinary officer **Karen Bond**.



Dr Karen Bond
NMR vet and
Johne's Action
Technical Group

Dr Karen Bond believes that having easy testing options through milk recording samples and simple to use, informative reports, has contributed to the progress made in Johne's disease control.

Routine screening for Johne's has been an option since 2010, and it is now a requirement of many milk buyers and farm assurance schemes.

"As we've learned more about the disease and its behaviour, or at least that of the Johne's-causing bacterium *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* - MAP as it is commonly known - we've improved the reporting tools for vets and farmers and the way these are presented."

One of the most recent that is proving highly successful with farmers and their vets is the Progress Tracker dashboard and related reports, introduced in 2023. "It tells a story in a straight-forward way," says Dr Bond. "It was developed with farmers and vets in mind, to give a snapshot of progress in key areas in the herd, and to generate discussion and actions."

'Clever' bacterium

She describes MAP as very clever. "We have a grudging respect for this bacterium. It likes an easy life, and it will sit quietly in a fit healthy cow that has a strong immune system.

"But if the cow is under stress, which might be at calving or early lactation, or if she's unwell, and she's vulnerable, MAP will take its opportunity to multiply and be shed.

MAP can lie dormant in an animal for years and not create a problem until later in life. "For example, I've known 'Johne's free' cows hit their sixth lactation and suddenly return a positive test result because, for some reason, they've a weakened immune system. This is why we can't be complacent when it comes to routine screening. Neither can we say Johne's is eradicated from a herd."

It's also why control protocols must be in place to prevent new infections and mitigate the risk of the introduction of infection into the herd.



Progress Tracker provides accurate evidence on Johne's for Nathan Loewenstein (vet, on left) and farmer discussion

"It was developed with farmers and vets in mind, to give a snapshot of progress in key areas in the herd"

A good measure of control plan success is seeing a decline in new detections, especially in young cows, and a steady fall in the annual average test value - ATV - which is the herd's infection rate. These two key measures are the first results that the farmer and vet should look at on NMR's Progress Tracker.

Vets can sit down with the farm team and see immediately if the level of infection is going up or down in first lactation animals. As most animals are infected as calves, these first heifers act as the 'sentinel' group.

New detections are classified as J4 and ideally, if good controls are in place, the number of J4s should be very low. If the number of cows in this J4 category, especially J4s in parity 1, is high or increasing, transmission of Johne's is still occurring and control plans should be reviewed.

The proportions of J4 cows and J4 parity 1 cows are shown in Figure 1 in the 'Progression' box.

The 'Removal' box indicates the likelihood of Red J5 cows being culled compared to their Johne's 'negative' herd mates.

Stop the flow

"While culling is an important part of Johne's management, it won't solve the herd's Johne's problem single-handed," adds Dr Bond. "We like to use the analogy of a sink full of Johne's. Trying to get rid of it by culling - or just making the plughole bigger - while still leaving the tap running and letting it fill with more Johne's, just won't work."

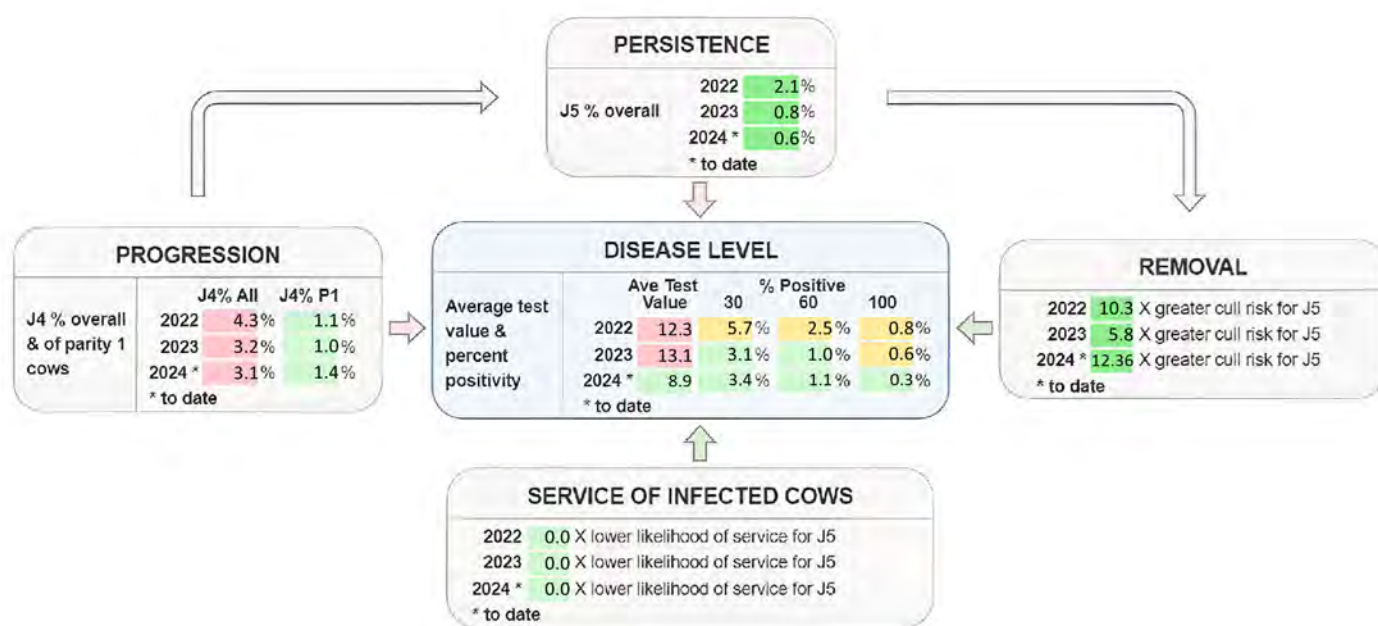
"It's a losing battle unless you block transmission too and try to stop new infections." She adds that the same is true when controlling somatic cell counts. "You can't rely on just culling high cell count cows; while this reduces the average cell count immediately, it doesn't solve the problem or prevent new infections."

Shropshire Farm Vets' Nathan Loewenstein agrees.

"For many years the focus of Johne's control has been to reduce the number of J5 - or red - cows, which are the most infected animals in the herd, particularly by milk buyers," he says.

"While this is important, as they're the major reservoir of MAP bacteria in the herd and are a threat to any youngstock coming into contact with their muck, simply culling these cows won't stem the flow of all new infections."

Figure 1 HerdWise Progress Tracker dashboard - a snapshot of a herd's Johne's status



He encourages farmers to work closely with their vets and discuss the analyses of Johne's test results, so controls that are specific to the herd can be developed. "The data analysis tools and presentation have improved so much, allowing us to make more informed management decisions for both individual and groups of animals," he says.

Mr Loewenstein typically starts his discussions on farm with a review of the Progress Tracker dashboard derived from the herd's routine Johne's test data. "This gives us a snapshot of the Johne's situation on-farm. All the key information is in one place, and it provides an instant appraisal of which way the farms control programme is heading. We can see areas requiring attention very quickly."

Going green

He looks for mainly 'green' areas on the dashboard. "This is a good sign and we look to maintain the progress, but I'll direct discussions more to the yellow and red shading where attention is needed and controls need tightening.

Controlling new infections in young calves, especially in their first month of life, is also highlighted in his discussions. "This is how we can reduce the herd's new infection rate, and it is highlighted on the Progress Tracker dashboard as J4% and J4% (parity 1).

"Progress here shows how effective the controls are at protecting replacements from infection - if they're turning off the tap, or if we need to look at actions that can reduce the risk of infecting newborn and young dairy replacements.

"More green areas are a good sign on the Progress Tracker."

"This might be improving the hygiene of calving areas, removing calves from the maternity areas, or making sure no known or suspected Johne's-infected animals are present in the calving area and colostrum preparation is scrupulously clean," he says.

Strict biosecurity

Karen Bond adds that access to the Progress Tracker dashboard can be

invaluable when buying in animals.

"Bringing stock on to the farm is high risk and biosecurity measures are paramount as an infected cow - or bull - can ruin years of hard work. Asking the seller to provide a herd average test value for Johne's is useful - even more useful would be a review of the Johne's summary on the Progress Tracker, and chance to review new infections verses culling infected cows."

Johne's control is a team effort and needs farmer and vet involvement for management decisions. "As vets we can never say Johne's is eradicated from a herd, but we can keep working with farmers and using the tools available to us to chip away and keep reducing infection levels.

"As an industry, we've set a target average test value of 5.5 but herds that are already there will set a lower target in order to maintain progress - just as we do with somatic cell counts."

PROGRESS TRACKER

The Johne's Progress Tracker was developed by the Johne's Action Group and PAN Livestock and is now used in Johne's screening services including NMR's HerdWise. It compares the farm's data with benchmarks. These targets are derived from analysing a large database of cow data - that are recognised as having a significant impact on Johne's infection rates. The median value and quartile ranges for each parameter are shown and can be compared with individual herd performance to identify the herd's strengths and weaknesses in their Johne's control progress. It provides vets and producers with a more powerful tool for interpreting Johne's test results than has been available in the past.

Teamwork in action

Veterinary Surgeon & Director, **Kirsty Howson** discusses how Yan Farm Health partners with farmers for herd success

Our whole approach at Yan Farm Health emphasises proactive care - planning ahead to prevent issues rather than simply reacting to emergencies.

We work closely with clients to understand their business goals and herd ambitions. While formal health planning meetings may occur once or twice a year, these sessions are far from a tick-box exercise. They form part of an ongoing, two-way dialogue that changes according to the current pressures and concerns on farm. From fertility to mastitis control, lameness management, and youngstock care, we provide practical, evidence-based solutions tailored to each farm.

Collaboration is key

We actively engage with industry professionals—consultants, nutritionists, and foot trimmers—because effective communication and teamwork lead to better outcomes for both herd health and business performance.

Preventing infectious disease is a priority

Many conditions are avoidable or manageable through vaccination, and we believe these should never compromise herd health or productivity. To support this, we conduct regular bulk milk sampling across all dairy herds, enabling us to detect changes promptly.

Vaccination protocols are then customised for each farm based on pathogen presence and herd risk factors. Our administration team plays a vital role in coordinating testing and health planning.

Youngstock health exemplifies teamwork at every level

Administrative staff manage data and scheduling, vet technicians handle on-farm tasks such as calf weighing and colostrum assessment, and veterinarians provide guidance on disease prevention, nutrition, and housing design to name just a few. Data from colostrum transfer monitoring, growth rates, and disease incidence is compiled and shared with farm teams. If issues arise—such as poor colostrum transfer—we investigate transition yard management and nutrition, often involving additional farm staff and nutritionists.



Disease management

Sometimes we have to deal with complex diseases on farm—those that we cannot provide a simple solution too such as TB. These cases are hugely challenging from a farmer perspective both emotionally and financially, they are exceedingly stressful for all involved. Although the decision making for TB control on farm falls to APHA vets here at Yan we are fully committed to supporting our clients through these disease outbreaks. There is often no simple solution to the problem but understanding the business, its pressure points combined with strong working relationships allow us to provide meaningful advice and support during these difficult times.

Exemplary service

As our business grows, we maintain a low client-to-vet ratio to ensure personalised, high-quality service. We invest lots of time in understanding new clients and their operations, recognising that the initial phase can feel overwhelming particularly with the volume of information we can be providing.

To support this, we prioritise face-to-face discussions and supplement them with clear, accessible communication via email and WhatsApp. Our farm

WhatsApp groups are particularly effective for keeping all stakeholders - farm staff, vets, and the wider Yan team - up to speed and informed.

At Yan we promote a continual learning culture within our team ensuring they have plenty of opportunities to stay up to date with new developments and research. With a large range of additional qualifications/certificates between our team we are ready to support our clients whatever the conundrum from mastitis to housing, lameness to nutrition to name just a few.

In addition, we have vets with LANTRA qualifications helping them effectively teach others, we put these to good use teaching many hands-on farmer courses including calf rearing, foot trimming and DIY AI courses – running these in house allows us to tailor the course to the specific farms and audiences. We are passionate about upskilling our clients, enabling them to provide further care to their stock when needed.

We believe that success starts with healthy livestock and informed decision-making. Our role goes beyond treating animals—we are partners in building resilient, profitable businesses for the long term.

By combining proactive veterinary care, collaborative working relationships, and a commitment to continuous learning, we aim to give farmers confidence in every aspect of herd management. Whether it's preventing disease, improving productivity, or navigating challenging situations, our team is here to provide practical solutions and unwavering support.

At Yan Farm Health, our commitment is simple: we're here to help our clients achieve long-term success through collaboration, innovation, and care.

YAN FARM HEALTH FACTS

Yan Farm Health was established in 2021 by Kirsty Howson and Andrew Crutchley. The primary objective for the veterinary practice is to 'deliver exceptional, comprehensive veterinary services that support clients in advancing livestock health and productivity.' To achieve this, Yan Farm Health have built a passionate and skilled team committed to delivering the best farm animal veterinary services in our region. By January 2026 the practice will have 6.5 full time equivalent vets providing a 24/7 service to commercial farms across Cumbria, North Lancashire and North Yorkshire. At Yan Farm Health, we partner with farmers to maintain healthy herds and thriving businesses. Each farm benefits from a dedicated, lead vet and a supporting vet to ensure continuity and tailored, consistent advice.

www.yanfarmhealth.co.uk

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