

BRITISH DAIRYING

August 2026 Vol 32, No.10

FARM MATCHING

■ A new young farmer paving her way in the industry

HOUSING AND HYGIENE

■ How tweaking flooring can pay off for comfort and welfare

UK DAIRY DAY PREVIEW

■ What to expect at this year's UK Dairy Day

BREEDING MATTERS

■ Investigating inbreeding: Is it a problem?

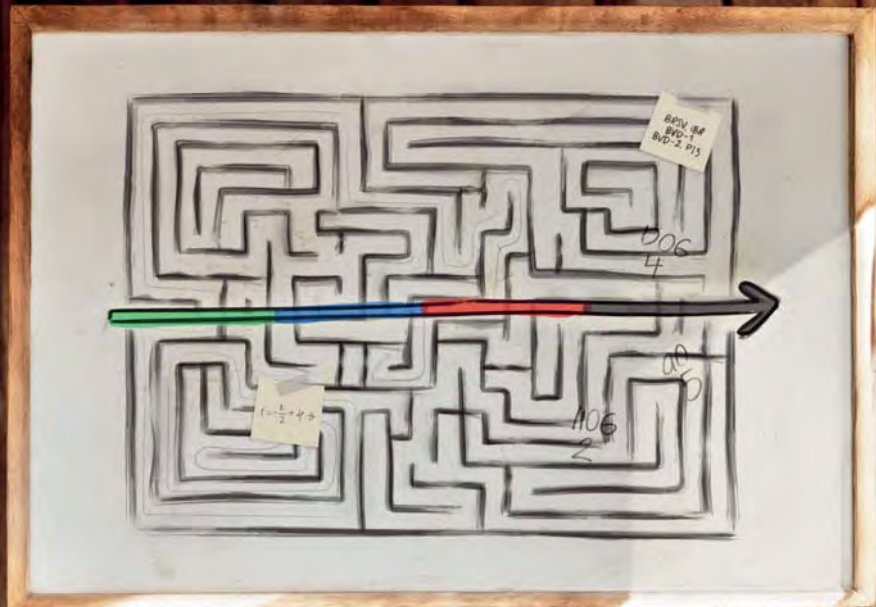
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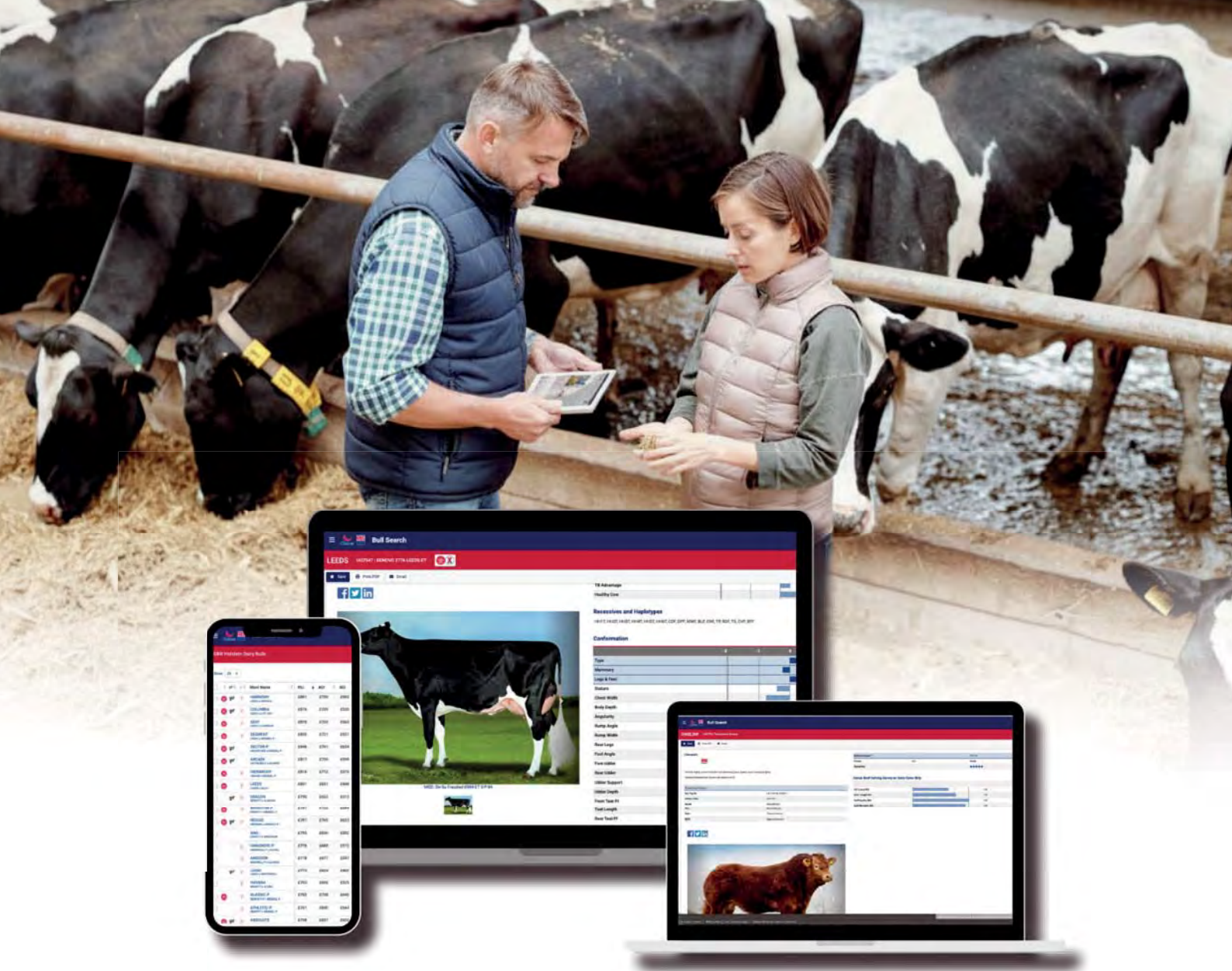
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Nearly 1,000 visitors attended the Gold Cup open day - a day to remember for the Treveale Farm team

Adapting to change

It's hard to believe that we experienced showers at the NMR RABDF Gold Cup Open Day on June 30; it was that the last real rain we had? It was a brilliant day, and I'm so pleased we were able to welcome the Gold Cup to our little county. You can read more about the day from the hosts' perspective on p14.

Fast forward to August; we're entering our fifth heatwave, and at home we're feeding silage in fields that look like a desert, aside from some small herbs in the few fields of herbal ley. We have slowed the grazing rotation down, to protect what grass is left, and we're feeding more concentrates in the parlour.

Water availability is an increasing concern, as we anticipate this shift in weather patterns might be here to stay. Along with the hot weather, flies have been ever present, but there are some practical tips on how to deal with them, particularly in calving areas, on p34.

And it's not just flies we're battling; it's midges too. Particularly in our corner of the South West, bluetongue has been a very real concern, with every conversation at the pub turning to vaccination programmes and symptoms - we vaccinated in the spring, thankfully. But at £10/head for two doses, you can see how quickly the costs stack up, by the time you vaccinate for bovine viral diarrhoea too. It was great to read about how a fellow Cornish farmer, Amy Osborne, has adopted a belt-and-braces strategy on her youngstock to ensure the herd is not hindered by disease or infections (p48). Farmers are brilliant at adapting to whatever comes their way, and there certainly seems like a lot to adapt to at the moment.

All these issues seem to have pushed food security into the spotlight, with a renewed debate over where our food comes from, and the future of that food supply. Indeed, a special episode of the very popular The Rest is Politics podcast was dedicated to the challenges of ensuring long-term resilience of our food system. Speaking of podcasts, don't forget that British Dairying has its own audio version, so pop us on in the parlour, or when you're driving, and catch up on a selection of our favourite articles from the month (see www.britishdairying.co.uk/audible).

Despite the negative backdrop, there are some reasons for optimism. It seems the wheel is turning on milk prices, as they edge up slightly - you can read more about what's happening in the markets on pp15-19. And there are opportunities for new entrants, as demonstrated by one Shropshire farm, where a gap year turned into an opportunity which changed the course of young farmer Hannah Edwards' life (pp26-27). And that's exactly the opportunity that British Dairying hopes to help facilitate even more, through the Farm Matching initiative (see www.britishdairying.co.uk/farm-matching).

I can't quite believe that UK Dairy Day is just around the corner; a day where the industry comes together to hear from experts, see the latest technology, and importantly network with others. At times like these, it's important to hear from others in the same boat. So whether you're looking for ideas, the best of the breeds in the show ring, advice, a new product or simply a chat with someone who understands - we'll see you there.

Ruth Wills

Deputy Editor

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

Contributors this issue: Jeremy Moody, Charlotte Ward, Mark Campbell, Sarah Bolt, Rhian Price, Kevin Lane, Howard Walsh, Ruth Wills, Paul Broad, Jamie Day, Chris Walkland

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

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

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

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

Production/Pre-press - Jamil Dhansey, Ruth Wills, Natalie Noble, Danusia Osioy, Angus Day, Jenni Green

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Publisher
Alan Whibley



Managing Editor
Olivia Cooper



E-News/Marketing
Caroline Calder



Agritrader/Feed
Jamie Day



Deputy Editor
Ruth Wills



Comment/Markets
Chris Walkland

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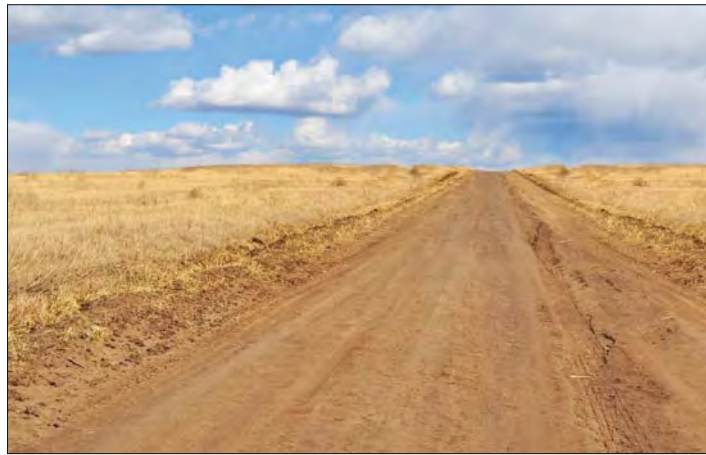
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Drought: More reservoirs urgently needed

With much of the UK officially in drought, pressure is mounting for the Government to begin planning for similar events in the future.

"This is the third drought in five years," said CLA President Gavin Lane. "We know that proper government investment in resilient farming systems; from reservoirs to wildfire prevention, could help farmers cope with these new extremes. And a well-funded sustainable farming incentive, open to all farms, would give farmers a reliable source of income should the weather wipe out their harvest."

In Wales, wildfires are causing immediate and long-lasting damage, with vast areas of grazing land having been scorched, killing livestock and threatening their welfare, said Victoria Bond, Director at CLA Cymru. "We urge the Welsh Government and relevant agencies to provide swift, targeted support for recovery, including resources for habitat restoration, compensation where appropriate and long-term strategies to build resilience against heat-related risks."



The prolonged hot weather has left vast areas of grazing dry and scorched

They should also examine how land is used and managed to better prevent and mitigate the risk of future wildfires, she added.

Head of Agriculture and Estates at HCR Law, Rory Hutchings, said the focus must now be on more planned storage of water, with reservoirs balancing farm production and environmental protection.

"Many farmers know the sensible answer - capture water when it is

available, store it safely, and use it efficiently when crops, livestock and soils need it most," he said. "What is not realistic is assuming that farmers pump more water from rivers, streams or boreholes once drought has already arrived."

But reservoirs require long-term investment. "Farmers cannot commit to major capital projects if the consenting route is unclear or if the timetable is open-ended,"

he warned. "The industry and government need to come together to work out solutions. On-farm water storage must be treated as strategic infrastructure and there should be a clear path to allow that to happen without undue delay and additional cost."

In East Sussex, the Wealden Green Party has welcomed the District Council's decision to press the UK government for urgent action over the district's worsening water supply crisis, warning that the issue poses a growing threat to local farming and the UK's food security.

Councillor Christina Coleman said: "Communities are rightly asking how thousands of new homes can be expected when the infrastructure to supply water has not kept pace."

"At the same time, many of our farmers cannot access the water they need to not only grow their businesses, but in some cases to safeguard their existing livelihoods, because they are not afforded the same obligations from water companies as new housing developments."

Block calving on the increase

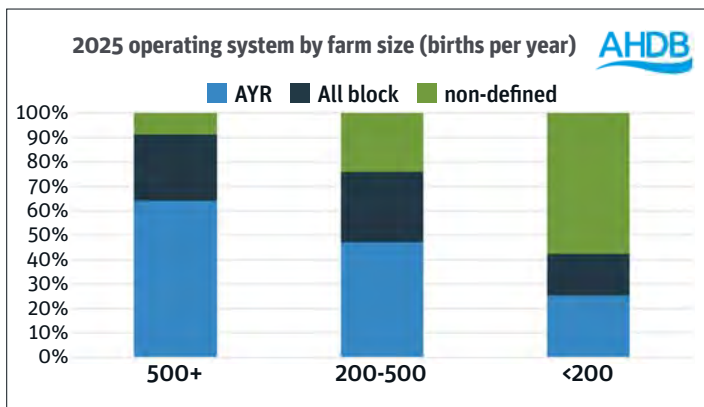
The proportion of GB farms operating a block-calving system has risen to 21.4% while those calving year-round has remained relatively steady at 35%.

AHDB's analysis of British Cattle Movement Service data shows that, in 2021, 48.4% of farms had a non-defined calving pattern, which fell to 43.6% last year. Block-calving systems increased by 4.8 percentage points over that time, exaggerating the peaks and troughs in seasonal milk production.

Autumn and spring block-calving accounted for 7.0% and 6.7% of all

systems, respectively, with spring calving up by 1.3 percentage points, adding to processing capacity challenges in the spring flush. Autumn calvings declined by 0.1%, year-on-year.

Larger dairy farms tend to have the most defined systems. In 2025, just 8.7% of the largest farms - calving over 500 a year - ran a 'non-defined, calving system'. They favoured an all-year-round pattern which, at 64.1%, was unchanged from 2024. By comparison, 57.7% of the smallest farms - calving less than 200 a year - had a 'non-defined' calving system.



Large farms are likely to calve year-round; small farms are less defined

Creating fuel from cheese waste

Dairy waste - notably the salty whey from cheese production - is a potentially valuable resource for bioethanol fuel.

Take Root Bio - which helped design the technology for astronauts to grow and recycle food in space - is working with Heriot-Watt University to see how the sugars in salty whey could be transformed through a bio-based process.

The UK generates around 95,000t of whey each year and its combination of milk sugars and high salt content makes management expensive and difficult. "Food and drink manufacturing produces a huge range of by-products, many of which contain valuable components but can be challenging to manage," said Dr Jane White at Heriot-Watt University. "That makes them



Scientists are investigating whey

interesting candidates for bio-based processes that can recover value from materials that might otherwise be treated as waste."

Take Root Bio is now looking at whether mobile production units could be deployed close to whey processing plants, helping to reduce transport requirements and making the concept easier to scale.

Cheshire calf housing open day is free to attend

On September 3, Tom and Dan Mitchell are holding an open day at Fields Farm, Nantwich, Cheshire to showcase their new calf shed for 120 calves.

In partnership with Bonanza Calf Nutrition, the day will feature the unit's four-station automatic

feeding system and a guided walk. There will also be talks on calf health and nutrition, key performance indicators, and breeding decisions to improve cow longevity, efficiency and productivity.

The day is free to attend - visit www.bit.ly/4hKei6i

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Farming uncertainty's impact on lettings

By Howard Walsh

Increased uncertainty in the agricultural sector had a noticeable impact on land letting agreements in 2025, with a net loss in let land.

That's according to the latest annual Agricultural Land Occupation Survey carried out by the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV). Covering England and Wales, the survey involved 35,783ha of land transactions in the year to October 31, 2025.

It found a net loss in let land of 1,826ha, with the proportion of Agricultural Holdings Act (AHA) tenancies being re-let declining sharply. Historically, 75-80% of



Smaller tenancies have been squeezed - but re-lets to new entrants rise

AHA tenancies have been re-let, but this dropped to under 53%, while the proportion sold increased from 8-10% to nearly 23%.

Jeremy Moody, Secretary and Adviser to the CAAV said: "Activity in the let sector remains overwhelmingly in terms of bare land. Only a small minority of lettings - 6.8% in 2025 - are of what would be called 'farms' with a house, buildings and land."

The average length of Farm Business Tenancies declined to its lowest level since 2021, dropping from 3.97 years last year to 3.38.

"Over the years, these surveys have shown that periods of policy uncertainty see the average length of letting shorten," said Mr Moody. "Wider issues; from farming economics to housing legislation, underpin this reality. It is typically the shorter lettings that shorten at such times, with little or no effect on longer lettings which have greater consideration and often investment involved in them."

Larger holdings were more likely to be let on longer terms than smaller ones, with new entrants also offered longer terms. Some 79% of new

entrants obtained tenancies of more than two years compared to 62.5% of other tenants.

Promisingly, 30% of new lettings, where there was a change of tenant, were to new entrants, which is the top end of the usual range, said Mr Moody.

Flexibility was the most common reason landlords gave for choosing the length of tenancy, cited by 37% of respondents, against 27% last year, while five percent referred directly to uncertainty against two percent last year.

In Scotland, tenancy changes were made to 8,423ha, with a net loss to the tenanted sector of 4,234ha. The proportion re-let fell to 60% of holdings, down from 75% last year, while the average length of new tenancies declined from 4.31 year to 3.35 years - the lowest since this survey began in Scotland in 2011.

Swiss trade deal

Dairy products are among those for which the Government has secured improved market access in a trade deal with Switzerland.

While the Swiss market is small and highly protected, it is also high value, with food prices 73% above the EU average, and a consumer base which is willing to pay more for high-quality products.

"This is a great example of a balanced deal," said NFU President Tom Bradshaw. "We appreciate the Government's efforts to secure competitive access to the Swiss market for UK farmers. It will provide exciting opportunities for our farmers."

Livestock conference

A 20% discount is currently available for the Precision Livestock Farming Conference on November 4 at Harper Adams University.

The conference will explore the use of precision technologies in dairy and beef farming, and how they are helping producers improve productivity, animal health and welfare, and environmental impact.

Topics will include precision monitoring, artificial intelligence, data-driven decision-making, sensor technologies, sustainability, and practical innovations. There will also be a guided tour of the award-winning farm. For tickets visit www.bit.ly/4yMk79s



CAAV Secretary Jeremy Moody

Recognise tenants' importance, says TFA

The Tenant Farmers Association has called on Andy Burnham to make tenant farmers a central part of the Government's programme for farming, food security, rural opportunity and environmental renewal.

Association Chief Executive, George Dunn, said: "Mr Burnham must ensure his new Government gives tenant farmers fair rules, secure foundations and the ability to share in the public and private opportunities now reshaping land use."



New Prime Minister Andy Burnham

Tenant farmers are not a marginal interest group, he added. "They are responsible for farming 30% of the country's agricultural land, producing food, caring for the countryside and sustaining rural communities. If the Government is serious about standing with those who too often lack power, security and voice, in addressing farming it must start with agriculture's tenanted sector."

The Association has suggested four immediate priorities: Encouraging longer-term agricultural tenancies; ensuring all future farming, environment, productivity and nature-market schemes are tenant-proofed; introducing fair compensation for tenant farmers displaced by solar, infrastructure or other development; and setting a practical timetable for tenancy reform during this Parliament.

"A farmer cannot sensibly plan a long-term rotation, build fertility, invest in infrastructure or change a business model if the tenancy horizon is one, two or three years,"



TFA Chief Executive George Dunn

said Mr Dunn. "Warm words about security are not enough. Tenant farmers need a market in which longer-term agreements are normal, rewarded and expected."

"Tenant farmers cannot wait the best part of a decade for change while short tenancies continue, land is removed from agriculture and compensation gaps remain unfilled. In rebuilding trust with the farming community, Mr Burnham could start in no better place."

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NFUS calls for higher Scottish milk prices

NFU Scotland has called on milk processors to deliver meaningful milk price increases through August and September. Falling production and soaring spot market prices underline the need to restore confidence in the sector.

GB milk production has fallen sharply following the recent heatwave and is now at, or below, the five-year average. As a result, spot milk prices have climbed to around 50ppl.

But while the average milk price in Scotland is in the mid-30ppl range, NFUS was contacted by two producers in July receiving just 22p and 24p respectively, after transport costs, for June milk.

"The market is sending a clear signal," said Bruce Mackie, NFU Scotland's Milk Committee Chair. "Milk supplies are tightening, spot prices have risen sharply and processors need to reflect those conditions in the prices they pay."

"It is simply not sustainable for dairy farmers to be receiving little



Bruce Mackie, NFU Scotland

more than 20ppl while input costs are high and still increasing. Without fair returns, producers cannot continue investing in their businesses or have confidence in the future."

During the first six months of 2026, Scotland lost a net total of 10 dairy herds, leaving 740 dairy herds nationwide. While producer numbers declined, the national dairy herd increased slightly to 181,581 cows, with the average herd size rising from 236 to 245 cows, reflecting continued investment by those remaining in the sector.

Milking marathon for charity



Marie Stephenson is milking 10,000 cows in 10 days as an RABI fundraiser

At the beginning of this month, Lancashire based Marie Stephenson embarked on a fundraising challenge to milk 10,000 cows in 10 days.

An agricultural professional working at AB Agri, she planned to travel from Scotland to Devon to support RABI. "After a series of losses close to my family and local

farming community, I saw the impact left behind on families, schools and whole communities," she said. "I want to do something to raise awareness, bring some light to the farms I milk at, and help open conversations about mental health in farming."

Donate at: www.justgiving.com/page/marie-stephenson-4

Farming grants open for applications

Applications have opened for two farming grants; the Farmer Welfare Grant and the Farming Futures Automation and Robotics Competition.

The former offers £1.5m over three years to support farmer mental health and wellbeing across England. The aim is to help rural charities and organisations

deliver support to strengthen personal and business resilience across the sector.

The latter - a £20m competition - is part of the Farming Innovation Programme. It supports collaborative projects developing practical automation and robotic technologies which help farmers improve productivity and efficiencies.

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One million farm visits by 2031

A new campaign has been launched to increase young people's understanding of food production, farming and the environment.

AHDB and LEAF have joined forces to deliver one million on-farm experiences for young people by 2031. Open Your Gate wants to inspire and help farmers overcome any obstacles to delivering farm visits, with 80 farmers able to take part in its free 'School Farm Visits Support' programme.

This will help participants to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver safe and meaningful on-farm experiences. It will provide fully funded Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme training, tailored one-to-one support, practical resources and access to a network of new and experienced host farmers.

A LEAF study involving 2,500 young people found that 95% want to understand where their

food comes from and 91% believe their food choices can help tackle climate change. More than half also want to know how to enter the agri-food sector.

Roz Reynolds, AHDB Head of Education, urged organisations to help the campaign reach its ambitious target. "Every farm has a story to tell, and we are providing the tools, training and support to help farmers host visits with confidence."

For more information, visit www.ahdb.org.uk/schoolfarmvisits

New CEO appointed at Ehrmann Dairy

Ehrmann Cornish Dairy has appointed its hitherto Chief Commercial Officer, Ed Watts, as Chief Executive Officer.

With more than 20 years' experience behind him, Mr Watts has worked in several globally recognised fast-moving consumer goods businesses.

He is credited with having played a key role in supporting the integration of the Cornish Dairy Company (formerly Trewithen) into the wider Ehrmann business.

Bluetongue advice for Wales during current active transmission period

Cases of BTV-3 in both cattle and sheep are emerging across England and Wales this summer.

The Welsh Government is therefore urging farmers to check for signs of the disease, report any suspected cases, and consider vaccination.

Livestock are now allowed to move between England and Wales without restrictions, but this makes it more important

to check the Bluetongue status of animals before buying or moving them.

Chief Veterinary Officer, Richard Irvine, said: "We are now in the active transmission period for Bluetongue. It remains important for livestock keepers to speak with their vet and consider vaccination, as it's the best way to protect herds from the impacts of disease."



Farmers are urged to stay vigilant for the signs and status of Bluetongue

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Light at the end of the tunnel for dairy farmers?

Dairy farmers are struggling with low milk prices, drought and higher feed costs, but there is some light at the end of the tunnel. That's according to the annual Milk Cost of Production report by Old Mill and the Farm Consultancy Group.

Although the financial year ended March 31, 2026, was stronger for many UK dairy farmers, the situation now is very different. Costs of production averaged 42.38ppl against a total income of 54.81ppl last year, boosting profits to 12.43ppl - more than double the five-year average. But there is considerable variability between systems, and the figure does not reflect the current reality of sharply lower milk prices and weather challenges.

"Spring-calving systems may have been best suited to the market conditions of 2025/26 given the higher milk price in the first half of 2025," said Bradley Causey, Rural Accountant at Old Mill. "We may see a reversal of this in 2026/27, with spring calvers possibly being least suited to the financial environment."



Bradley Causey, Rural Accountant

During the year in question, milk income rose to 46.38ppl, while income from calf and cow sales rose to 8.43ppl. However, all input costs increased against the five-year average; driven particularly by purchased feed, as the strong milk-to-feed-price ratio encouraged producers to feed for yield at a time of forage shortages.

Interestingly, there was little correlation between milk yield and profit, because extra litres can be

expensive to produce. "It may be that controlling cost and hitting a profitable level of production is the better option," said Mr Causey.

A comparison between the top and bottom 10%, in terms of profit, shows that technical performance and cost controls are key, with the top 10% achieving the same milk production at a lower cost.

Allaster Dallas, a consultant at the Farm Consultancy Group, said the top 10% also commanded over 10ppl more for their milk, bringing total income to 60.87ppl against 50.19ppl in the bottom 10%. Total costs came to 36.56ppl versus 52.75ppl, making for profits of 24.31ppl against a loss of 2.56ppl in the bottom 10%.

The report's outlook for 2026/27 is a likely massive drop in profits, to average 3.96ppl, driven by sharply lower milk prices and higher production costs. At the same time, producers could face a large income tax bill in January 2027, from the 2025/26 milk year.

Some in the industry may be concerned for the future, with



Allaster Dallas, Farm Consultant

increasing compliance requirements, political uncertainty and wider economic fragility on top of fluctuating milk prices. "However, producers who have invested in technology; particularly to reduce energy costs and improve genetics, are starting to yield rewards in both efficiency and cash," said Mr Dallas. "Hopefully, this report will inspire producers to review their costings and implement practical changes to maintain profitability."

Concerns over Huskvac loss

Experts from the Control of Worms Sustainably group (COWS) have concerns for UK cattle farmers following MSD Animal Health's announcement that it will cease production of Bovilis Huskvac.

The UK's only licensed lungworm vaccine will not be made after the end of the 2027 season, as part of MSD's decision to close its UK manufacturing plants.

Lungworm remains one of the most difficult cattle parasites to manage and can appear rapidly and unpredictably. Clinical signs, like coughing, often emerge after the disease has progressed.

"For years cattle farmers have been encouraged to use fewer medicines, target treatments more carefully and build healthier, more resilient grazing systems," said cattle vet and COWS member, Rob Howe. "The withdrawal of Huskvac risks taking away one of the key tools that have helped many farmers do exactly that."

Without the safety net of vaccination, farmers may return to more frequent use of other wormers, at a time when resistance to these products is being reported, he added. COWS is urging the industry to work collaboratively and explore pathways to preserve future access to lungworm vaccination.

International success for First Milk



First Milk recognised across classes

First Milk claimed 26 awards, including eight gold, 11 silver and one bronze medal, at this year's International Cheese and Dairy Awards.

This year, the world's largest cheese show attracted the most entries for several years. Many of the creamery cheddar classes received 30-40 entries and First Milk was recognised across a range of cheddar and regional cheese classes.

Action demanded on solar clusters



Cabinet member Andrew Mynors: Stop the Solar Land Grab advocate

Staffordshire County Council has said solar land grab exceptions need stopping, with a local contradiction showing why national guidelines need examining.

The Government's Energy Minister Michael Shanks told the council that only 0.4% of UK land will be given up to solar farms. Yet the Staffordshire hamlet of Drointon faces having 80% of its surrounding area covered for the next 40 years.

Andrew Mynors, the Council's Cabinet member for Connectivity, said: "There is an obvious inequality

in the system, which is why we launched the Stop the Solar Land Grab campaign here in Staffordshire.

"The Government says these huge solar farms and accompanying infrastructure will be spread thinly around the country. But the reality shows that companies are trying to cluster solar farms in small areas because of easier grid connections, which makes a mockery of the Government's guidelines. If infrastructure is not developed, we will continue to see clusters forming in rural areas."

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Tackling crypto in calves

Persistently high levels of cryptosporidiosis in calves, and increasing antibiotic sales, are reinforcing calls for greater focus on prevention-led disease control.

Cryptosporidiosis remains the second most common bovine diagnosis and the leading enteric pathogen in neonatal and pre-weaned calves, according to the Government's Veterinary Investigation Diagnosis Analysis report. And sales of paromomycin - the antibiotic licensed for the reduction in diarrhoea due to *C. parvum* - has risen by 143% over five years.

Dr Kat Baxter-Smith, Veterinary Adviser at MSD Animal Health, said routine or widespread antibiotic use may increase selection pressure and contribute to resistance development. "Management of cryptosporidiosis requires a multi-pronged approach, as there is no silver bullet for its control," she explained.

MSD's five-point plan for crypto control focuses on stopping the parasite's spread through diagnosis, colostrum management,



MSD's Dr Kat Baxter-Smith

environmental management, prevention, and treatment. It can help farmers and vets identify the areas that need attention and address each area together.

The Bovilis Cryptium vaccine can be administered to the dam during the third trimester to help protect calves against the disease, she added. "This can help reduce reliance on antibiotics during the highest-risk period."

Award honours antibiotic reduction

The 2026 Arwain DGC Awards have recognised farmers' and vets' achievements in reducing antibiotic use and improving animal health.

Arwain DGC is a Welsh Government-funded programme, led by independent business development organisation iMentera, dedicated to preventing antibiotic resistance in animals.

Roger Lewis at Poyerston Farm, Pembroke Dock, scooped the farmer title by reducing antibiotic use through increased biosecurity measures and pasteurising colostrum during autumn calving to reduce harmful pathogens.

Hannah Jarman of Prostock Vets, Carmarthen, claimed the veterinary award, having led the practice's antimicrobial stewardship. Rather

than simply treating disease, she focuses on prevention through vaccination programmes, biosecurity, nutrition, and herd health planning.

Pembrokeshire Farm Vets won the livestock veterinary practice category, while Aled Bradbourn of Prostock Vets took the young vet or farmer award for sharing his experiences as a mentor and supervisor to veterinary placement students.



2026 Arwain DGC Awards winners

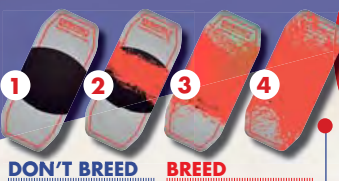
2026 Capital Grant Scheme sees rapid uptake

Within days of the 2026 Capital Grants Scheme being opened for applications, three-quarters of the £225m budget had been allocated.

The sum available is 50% greater than last year and aims to help farmers invest in projects that benefit nature, water quality, biodiversity and

sustainable land management. The Government's Farming Blog stated in early August that interest in the 2026 scheme had remained consistently strong since the offer opened. Farmers should note Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier grants are funded from a separate budget.

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Plan for a fodder shortfall



Jamie Day

Feed market specialist

July was another volatile month on world feed ingredient markets, with prices driven both by geopolitical events - particularly in the Middle East and Black Sea regions - and weather factors.

The continued dry conditions across much of the UK are a concern for both grazing and winter fodder supplies. This season's drought comes on top of 2025's hot, dry weather, with experts projecting a near 20% average forage production shortfall across England this year.

The AHDB's Forage for Knowledge grass growth rate was above both the 2025 season and the five-year average until the beginning of July, when they fell below both measures. By the end of July, average growth was just 27.96kg/ha dry matter (DM)/day, compared to 48.19kg/ha at the same point in 2025 and the five-year mean of 51.91kg/ha.

The Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU), a non-profit body advising policymakers on energy use and climate mitigation, reports that grass growth was 43% below average for the time of year in the last three weeks of July. Soil moisture deficits are running at record levels for the time of year across much of north east, central, south east and south west England.

"Even under the most optimistic scenario modelled, in which growth returns to normal by the end of the season, 2026 finishes at 86% of average," predicts the Unit. "That is no better than 2025, itself a drought year, at 87%. This leaves livestock farmers heading into a second consecutive winter of tight forage, starting from stocks already drawn down."

Maize silage impact

The heat has also affected the forage maize crop, especially on lighter soils where crops are senescing early with a clear yield penalty. The dry conditions at the flowering and grain fill stages will negatively affect both yield and starch content, and a good deal is expected to be cut in late August, rather than the usual mid-September. Where plants have dried out ahead of the cob, silages will be drier than usual, and quality more variable.

Turning to feed ingredients, feed wheat futures strengthened by £20/t over the first three weeks of July, only to fall back in the last week. The November 2026 London contract opened July at £178/t and reached £198.50/t by the 20th of the month, only to close it at £196.50/t. The May 2027 position moved from £188.50/t to £206/t over the same period, ending the month at £203.25/t.

The on/off hostilities between the US and Iran continue to move markets, but it was the military actions in the Sea of Azov within the Russia/Ukraine war - and associated retaliations on portside facilities - that threatened energy and grain exports across the Black Sea region, which caused prices to rise.

Russia appears to have a good wheat crop, assuming it can get it to world markets. But the hot dry, weather has led to a downgrading of the European cereal harvest. There is no official estimate of the UK wheat and cereal harvest yet, but the fact that most of the English crop was harvested in July indicates yield records are unlikely to be broken.

The AHDB says it is the earliest harvest since it started records in 2006. "Cereal yields have generally been below the 10-year average so far, with some farms experiencing significant reductions," it writes. It appears many milling wheat crops are meeting flour specification, which has led to the milling premium falling sharply - which may swell the amount available for feed use.

Last year's small UK harvest had little effect on domestic crop values throughout the marketing year, as markets were driven by well-supplied global markets. Traders believe that good crops in the Americas, Eastern Europe and Australia for the 2026/27 marketing year will see sufficient global grain supplies to limit upward price movements, depending on geopolitical and weather factors. Average spot UK wheat prices opened July at £177/t and closed the month at £188/t ex-farm.

Small crops mean reduced straw yields, which, together with pressure on forage stocks, will see hardening wheat and barley straw prices.

Government support

The Ensus UK wheat-to-bioethanol plant on Teesside has secured government support to operate until at least the end of October, although the subsidy is to guarantee supplies of carbon dioxide by-product for essential users, rather than the bioethanol or the distillers' dried grains with solubles co-product resulting from the process.

UK barley production is also likely to be down in harvest 2026, especially for spring varieties, with drought-hit yields on top of the smallest planted area for 14 years. Malting demand remains subdued and UK feed barley is not competitive on export markets, but there is some support from feed compounders. Feed barley values followed the wheat market upwards in July, but with a discount of £15-17/t. Average spot barley was £168/t ex-farm at the end of July.

The grain maize crop in Europe is likely to be affected by the hot weather - although markets will be partially offset by favourable development conditions in the US. Ex-store maize values have hardened from £210/t to £225/t over the month.

US soyabean futures gained almost 20% over July, on the back of rising energy costs - which in turn lift biofuel markets - in addition to Chinese import demand. But good crop prospects in the US and Brazil saw half this gain lost in the last week of the month. Hi-pro soyameal rose from £328/t to £336/t ex-store during July, with soya hulls rising to £193/t ex-store. Winter rape crops in the UK and EU appear to have escaped most of the heat damage. UK production - although estimated to be up on recent years - is still only half the national requirement. Rapemeal values fell £10/t over July to £225/t ex-store at its end.



Protecting milk production as grass quality declines

By Dr Richard Kirkland,
Global Technical Manager
for Volac Wilmar
Feed Ingredients

As grass quality changes through late summer and autumn, maintaining energy supply without disrupting rumen function becomes one of the biggest nutritional challenges facing grazing dairy herds. While mature pasture generally contains more structural fibre to support butterfat production, declining grass quality, lower dry matter intakes and reduced energy density can steadily erode milk yield if rations are not adjusted.

Seasonal changes in grass composition can also influence rumen function. As grass comes out of the reproductive heading phase, the oil concentration in leafy regrowth begins to increase, creating rumen responses similar to those associated with butterfat depression. Recognising these changes early allows producers to adapt feeding strategies before milk quality and production are affected.

As pasture digestibility declines, many herds require buffer feeding to maintain energy intake. However, simply increasing cereal inclusion is not always the best solution. Rapidly fermentable starch increases acid production in the rumen, lowering rumen pH and reducing fibre digestion. If left unchecked, this can increase the risk of acidosis while compromising milk yield, milk fat production and overall feed efficiency.

Increasing dietary energy density with rumen-protected fat supplements offers a practical alternative. Because rumen-protected fats bypass fermentation in the rumen and are digested in the small intestine, they provide concentrated energy without increasing the rumen acid load. Supplying around 2.5-times the energy density of cereals, they allow more energy to be delivered while maintaining rumen stability and supporting fibre digestion.

The benefits of this approach have also been demonstrated under grazing conditions. Research at the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture's Dairy Research Centre found that cows supplemented with 250g/day of Megalac rumen-protected fat produced up to 2.1kg more milk at peak lactation and maintained up to a 1.5kg/day production response at 200 days in milk, while maintaining high fertility.

As grazing conditions become more variable towards housing, buffer feeding strategies should focus on maintaining rumen health alongside energy supply. Combining good grazing management with rumen-protected fat supplementation can help sustain milk production, protect milk quality and maintain herd performance throughout the remainder of the grazing season.

Dr Richard Kirkland can be contacted
at Volac on 01223 206226
or richard.kirkland@volac.com

Behind the scenes on a successful Open Day

In this month's RABDF/NMR Gold Cup Comment, Paul Broad reflects on a successful Open Day at Treveale Farm in Cornwall and how, sometimes, everything falls into place.

What a month it's been; a bit busy here to say the least. Preparations for the Open Day were not without a few incidents along the way. Sometimes in farming you have a little bit of luck; after winning the Gold Cup, we were given a cow recovery bucket to try for six months.

'Will it work?' and 'do we really need it?' were two of the questions that came to mind, but you give a farmer something free of charge, and they'll always give it a go. So, when our bulling heifers busted the gate open and got into the feed passageway, three fell over and couldn't get up again - as the resin they eat off is very slippery.

"To have all those people visit our farm is mind blowing."

With the recovery bucket on the handler, the heifers were quietly and effortlessly winched into the bucket and taken to the loose house where they all stood up and have made a full recovery. It was a good thing we had the right piece of equipment for the job. Since then, a deal has been done to make its stay permanent, with all the scepticism gone, but my pocket now several thousand pounds lighter.

Then, a few days before the Open Day, we had a cow with a twisted uterus; the vet was called and untwisted it, but the calf was too big to come out. We haven't had a caesarean for the past five years, but this was carried out, with a live



It was a team effort to pull off this year's RABDF/NMR Gold Cup Open Day

Belgian Blue bull calf delivered. Cow and calf are both doing well - there's never a dull moment in farming. Other than that, everything else went to plan, with the time and effort not wasted, as we have a farm assurance inspection next month.

Laura and her team at RABDF arrived on Sunday afternoon and marked out the sites for the trade stands ready for Tuesday - it's a good thing we have a big yard as there were over 40 stands. All day Monday the stands were being erected, and the farmyard was a hive of activity. By mid-morning the ox roast was cooking, and everything was ready for tomorrow.

Then the day was finally here. The morning milking went smoothly, and we had cleaned out and fed all the animals by 9am, when the first visitors started arriving. Over the next two hours, the procession of cars down a usually quiet country road seemed endless. With between 900 and 1,000 people here, it was a tremendous turnout; we had visitors from all over

the country, and especially farmers from Cornwall making the most of having Gold Cup Open Day in the county for the first time.

We had typical Cornish weather for the day with a few light showers, but the wind soon blew them away; what we wouldn't give for some rain now. I think the visitors were surprised at how many trade stands were present, and it created a show type atmosphere, with farmers having a good look around our unit and socialising at the same time.

Visitors' questions

Tractors and trailers took people to see the calf igloos and heifer unit. The six speaker stations were well attended, with lots of people listening to how we do what we do on this farm. All of us at Treveale were answering questions on how, why and what we do on the farm all day, and by four o'clock it was all over. In the next hour all the trade stands - which took one and a half days to set up - had packed up and gone home, and we had our farmyard back to normal again.

For us as a family, it was a day we will never forget. During the preparations, you wonder how many people will come, but to have all those people visit our farm is mind blowing. The interest in what we have done and are doing was staggering, and I'd like to thank everybody for coming. I'd particularly like to thank Laura and her team at RABDF for organising the event and making it run so smoothly. We were even lucky enough to have the Gold Cup in our house - for one night only.

I would also like to thank all our sponsors for their generosity, with the ox roast and cream teas going down a treat. For all the trade stands for attending and creating a great atmosphere - a lot of Cornish people compared it to the Royal Cornwall Show. But the stars of the show really were the cows and youngstock; with all the people and machinery moving around, they never batted an eyelid. For them it all just seemed like another day at the office.

Open Day highlights

The highlights for me were all the people asking questions about what we do, and having our family photographed with the Gold Cup. We also had an Irish farmer here who was on holiday in Cornwall, he arrived at 10am and was still here at 5pm when we started milking. And hearing other farmers say they want to win the Gold Cup within five years, bringing more energy and enthusiasm to this prestigious competition.

Now it's back to the day job; a light fourth cut has been taken, with it being cut, raked and picked up within 24 hours. All the fields have been spread with the separated liquid, but we haven't applied any fertiliser as it's too dry. The lack of rain is starting to show now - fields only cut a week ago are already burning off. The maize is showing signs of stress and was tasselling out by July 10; it's going to be another early harvest this year. On July 18, we started combining our winter wheat, which is a good three weeks earlier than normal. I think that the yields of corn and straw will only be average, but we'll know more when it's all in the shed.



The stars of the show were the cows and youngstock at Treveale Farm



Paul says it's a day he won't forget

And so the wheel turns...



Chris Walkland

COMMENT

Milk prices are now edging up for nearly all producers, with some getting in the 37–39p zone on a manufacturing litre. But not many. And even these prices are still short of the cost of production, and it shouldn't be forgotten that the increases are coming from a very low base.

Alas for some, the going is still very tough – not least for the Muller Skelmersdale farmers supplying into Yew Tree. It really has been one tiny foot forward, and one large step back with this group.

Almost exactly a year ago Muller commendably tried to ease the pain of the ingredients-only price by moving to a 40% liquid: 60% ingredients contract. This improved the fortunes of the farmers for a few months until the market crashed.

Then Muller lost the Brake's liquid milk contract to Freshways and Wells, which had been serviced out of Yew Tree under the Woodcocks for years. This was worth about 50m litres of milk.

Muller then lost around 60m litres of the Morrisons business to the Pembrokeshire Creamery (for Wales), the Cornish Dairy Company (formerly Trewithen, for the South West) and to Arla. This then resulted in some termination notices to several dozen farmers, plus a further deduction of 1–1.5ppl off the ingredients element of the milk price for the rest of the suppliers. This was agreed by MMG, with the pain also being shared across the whole Muller pool.

“There might be a glimmer of light for Skelmersdale farmers.”

Then, this spring, the skimmed milk powder (SMP) price started to improve, boosting milk cheques (a bit)... before the price started to drop again, at the same time as the cream / butter price was still low.

The returns these farmers have been getting has been painfully low, at well below 30p, for about a year now I think, and there has inevitably been much discontent from suppliers. There is a pretty widespread view among the Skelmersdale farmers that Muller simply doesn't care about them.

I don't believe that, actually. I think it does. (Or at least most of them!) I've pressed Richard Collins at Muller about the awful situation his farmers find themselves in, and he does have a lot of sympathy. But he is in an impossible situation.

The commodity prices have been rubbish for a long time now (but are getting a bit better) and Muller is effectively paying its farmers a milk price where 40% of it is determined from the liquid

market... and Skelmersdale isn't sending a single litre of milk into that market. So effectively there's a subsidy of 40% at 34.5ppl (the liquid price). On the same logic, he might as well pay on a cheese price formula... and Muller doesn't make cheese (here).

If Muller didn't care about the farmers it could simply abandon its 40% liquid percentage and revert to a 100% ingredients one, and that could be a logical business move from an 'uncaring' Muller perspective. But that would result in an even lower price for the Skelmersdale farmers.

“The volume boot is switching to the other foot.”

I don't think Muller will do that - Richard (and Rob) are decent guys; they want to try and do the best they can for their farmers, and have been at the mercy of (on the one hand) the terrible world market for ingredients.

Their position (and the discontent) is also not helped by the retailer cost-of-production (COP) contracts that return up to 47ppl (before an ingredients deduction) to aligned farmers. In between are the non-aligned Muller farmers on around 33ppl.

Now, though, there might be a glimmer of light for Skelmersdale farmers - if the cream price continues to increase, butter follows suit and SMP pulls up its trousers again like it did in April / May, when it was in touching distance of €3,000/t (£2,569).

But there is a long way to go. If I take Parkham's price of 36.5p on a standard litre then to get somewhere close to that, butter would have to be at around £4,400/t and SMP at £2,500/t or, alternatively, £3,800/t and £2,800/t, respectively (to give just two price points). The first set of prices equate to €5,100/t and €2,950/t, and the second set equate to €4,475/t and €3,300/t. Currently, the butter futures aren't over €5,000/t for a year ahead.

Despite the dreadful price the Skelmersdale farmers have been on over the past few months (years?) I don't hear that many of them have quit. Only a very few have left the industry, apparently. But they are bleeding a slow death.

Now, though, and with milk volumes dropping quite dramatically, there is more talk of processors recruiting new farmers into their fold. This is happening on a targeted sporadic basis, rather than anything widespread I think, so I hope there might be new opportunities for some of them. Muller surely can't carry on as it is with the Skelmersdale price for the long term, else it will have no suppliers left. It has to do something. The question is what.

Now, to milk contracts. Several A, B and C pricing models have been introduced by processors in recent months (or will be). Over the past year or more there have been many stories of contracts being withdrawn and then reissued due to the

huge milk volumes produced last year, with various different ructions during the process. I can understand why the processors did it, too – dairy farming won't be the only industry where a buyer guarantees to take everything a supplier produces, but there probably won't be many others. Farmers often (always?) take this for granted.

The perfect milk production conditions and economics in late 2024 and through (most of) 2025 meant that some processors got swamped with milk, and, following the price crash, some of this had to be sold for way less than they paid for it. Some even had to be dumped.

Something had to happen to control it and A, B, C litres / prices and even zero pricing (for milk over a certain specified volume) became the tools introduced to (try to) control the volumes. There is a plethora of different schemes, with the B price usually relating to the actual milk price equivalent (AMPE) or the spot price, or a mix of both. Now, though, the volume boot is switching to the other foot. There's more talk of B litres being converted into A litres, and B / C litres being ditched altogether.

However, this isn't how it should be if these schemes are going to get a positive reputation – if the B or C litres were paid at a discounted price when milk was in surplus, they should receive a higher price when it's short, to reward or incentivise production.

“The spot price is irrelevant if none is bought or sold.”

The spot price, for example, is currently way higher than the A price (as high as 47p recently versus, say, 33p for a standard litre). When spot / AMPE values are high the processors should pay their farmers a premium for B / C litres, not merge them into the A price. But will they?

Well, we'll see. There's also a volume issue in the equation – the spot price is irrelevant if none is bought or sold. So will producers be told the volumes that are bought or sold on spot, for example? I'm told Davidstow Creamery Direct – a dairy producer organisation – will see the numbers, but I doubt others will.

Thus, what has happened in the past is that when volumes tighten, B and C litres / prices get diluted or parked until the cycle turns again, and farmers feel as if they have been done on the downturn, and done on the upturn.

I hope I'm wrong, because I like the principle of A, B and C, but the danger is that the dissatisfaction we saw with the introduction of A, B and C when milk was plentiful will now continue with even more dissatisfaction with the schemes now milk is tightening. And that would do nothing to foster the better relationships between farmer and processor from which many processors could benefit.

AHDB MILK PRICE LEAGUE TABLE

Milk price league - June 2026

	June price	Annual average
Müller M&I M&S	48.62	48.68
Müller M&I Waitrose	47.38	47.44
Müller M&I Sainsbury	45.74	45.80
Müller M&I Tesco	43.60	43.64
Müller M&I Co-op	41.63	41.69
Saputo Dairy UK - Profile	35.28	35.30
Saputo Dairy UK - Variable	33.28	35.26
Müller M&I Direct	35.13	35.19
Arla Manufacturing	35.17	35.18
Dale Farm NI	34.99	34.98
Dale Farm GB	34.83	34.76
Lactalis - Profile	34.02	33.98
Barber's Cheesemakers	33.92	33.92
Crediton Dairy	33.76	33.76
Lactalis	33.27	33.27
Wensleydale	32.25	32.25
Lactalis - Seasonal	27.27	32.12
Wyke Farms	31.90	31.84
Pattemores	31.09	31.09
First Milk Manufacture	30.72	30.72
Leprino Foods	30.39	30.64
South Caernarfon	30.00	30.47
Belton Farm	30.26	30.26

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 we have updated our standard litre for the 2026/27 milk year to better reflect recent trends in production. This includes increasing the average farm size to 1.7m litres per annum and increasing the butterfat and protein percentages. Please be aware when making comparisons with March 2026 prices.

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 1.32ppl.
2. First Milk manuf. member premium +0.50ppl and F/M manuf. Tesco cheese group +1.56ppl. Members may qualify for both premia.
3. Müller M&I Sainsbury's pays a sustainability supplement of +0.57p 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			2026						
	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
UK Arla Farmers Manufacturing	-2.63	-3.50	-3.48	-1.75	-	0.09	1.76	-	1.41	0.91
Barber's Cheesemakers	-2.50	-3.75	-2.50	-2.00	-1.90	-	-	1.50	-	2.50
Belton Farm	-1.50	-3.50	-2.00	-2.50	-3.00	-	-	-	1.50	0.50
Crediton Dairy Ltd	-2.00	-2.00	-2.00	-3.00	-2.00	-	-	-	-	1.40
Dale Farm GB	-3.54	-3.32	-2.22	-1.91	-0.25	0.12	0.13	0.38	0.48	NPA
Dale Farm NI	-3.00	-2.00	2.00	-3.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	-0.50	NPA	NPA
First Milk Manufacture	-2.00	-6.00	-3.60	-2.00	-	0.50	-	-	0.60	1.50
Lactalis/Caledonian Cheese	-5.19	-3.11	-3.04	-1.76	-	0.52	-	1.55	NPA	NPA
Leprino Foods	-4.00	-5.00	-3.00	-2.00	0.40	-	1.60	-	-	1.00
Müller M & I - Co operative	0.84	-	-	-1.75	-	-	-0.36	-	-	0.12
Müller M & I - M&S	-	-	1.02	-	-	0.81	-	1.12	1.35	NPA
Müller M & I - Direct	-1.25	-1.50	-1.50	-3.00	-1.00	-	-	-	-	-
Müller M & I - Sainsbury's	0.16	0.04	0.18	0.04	-0.05	-0.41	0.25	0.15	-0.13	-0.01
Müller M & I - Tesco	-0.11	-	-	0.41	-	-	0.12	-	-	0.34
Müller M & I - Waitrose	NPA	NPA	NPA	-	-	-	0.25	-	1.00	NPA
Pattemores Dairy Ingredients	-3.79	-3.00	-3.00	-4.00	-	-	-	1.00	1.00	3.00
Payne's Dairies	-4.00	-2.00	-3.00	-	-1.00	-	-	-	-	-
Saputo Dairy UK	-	-1.00	-4.00	-2.50	-1.50	-1.00	-	1.50	1.75	0.75
South Caernarfon Creameries	-3.50	-3.50	-3.00	-2.00	-	-	-	-	-	1.00
Wensleydale	-2.55	-3.00	-2.93	-2.23	-1.29	-0.20	-	0.92	0.65	1.49
Wyke Farms	-5.20	-3.11	-3.11	-2.08	-	-	-	1.57	-	3.63

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 4.24ppl, subject to contractual adjustments.

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

Prices: What next?

British dairy farmers have had a tough year as a result of global milk oversupply. Average farmgate prices have fallen to 34ppl; with many well below that, and values for most are well below the cost of production. But what can we expect in the months ahead?

GB has had an exceptionally hot summer, with a series of heatwaves from May to August for many parts of the country. This has caused milk supplies to falter; June was behind last year by 3.1% and July (to 25 July) was behind by 2.6%, with signs of an acceleration in the last data period.

Stock numbers

The dry weather has meant that many farmers have already had to begin feeding silage put away for winter. This could cause difficulties through the winter, and farmers may need to manage stock numbers accordingly. The war in the Middle East has also caused prices for fuel, fertiliser and energy to rise, with ongoing cost increases in labour and taxation still posing an issue.

Bluetongue virus has become a growing threat, with reports of many cases in the West Country and estimates of vaccination uptake remaining at minimal levels. While less severe in dairy cows than sheep, bluetongue can cause a drop in milk production, impact fertility and cause foetal malformations.

“Many farmers will be in search of clues as to how the rest of the milking season will pan out.”

Fears of compromised milk supplies are encouraging some response in the markets. Spot milk has risen into the 40-50ppl range, cream up as high as £1.65/kg and cheddar gaining 6% in July's wholesale price reporting. While more milk is being diverted to fresh and liquid, a high amount of butter stocks still weigh heavily on markets. European (and British) produce is still being heavily undercut by cheap US exports, which is limiting export demand to some extent - although UK exports have actually performed very well this year.

Amidst this backdrop, processors have been forced to make a call – safeguard milk production by raising milk prices, but risk commodity markets not moving accordingly. With autumn calving about to kick off, many farmers will be in search of clues as to how the rest of the milking season will pan out. Should they dig in, cut costs and prepare for another difficult year or gamble that markets may improve as milk supplies fall?

The current situation is unpredictable and highly dependent on weather and disease progression. Fortune may favour the bold, but prudence could live to see some fight another day.

Milk price changes - August

Aligned liquid contracts continued their firm tone, with the exception of Sainsbury's, which made a price reduction for the second consecutive month, of 0.01ppl. Muller Co-op Dairy group and Tesco increased by 0.12ppl and 0.34ppl, respectively, after remaining steady in July.

Looking to non-aligned contracts, all buyers held steady to firm. CREDITON Dairy increased by 1.40ppl after remaining steady for three months. Pembrokeshire Creamery increased by 0.92ppl, while Muller and Payne's Dairies remained unchanged.

Cheese contracts on the AHDB League table saw growth this month. Wyke Farms made the biggest positive move, of 3.63ppl, followed by Parkham Farms at 3.00ppl. Barbers Cheese and First Milk Manufacturing increased by 2.50ppl and 1.50ppl, respectively. South Caernarfon Creameries and Leprino both rose by 1.00ppl, with Belton Cheese and Saputo up by 0.50ppl and 0.75ppl, respectively. Wensleydale Creamery also moved up, by 1.49ppl.

Manufacturing contracts moved in line with cheese contracts. Meadow increased by 1.00ppl, UK Arla Farmers Manufacturing by 0.91ppl and Pattermores Dairy by 3.00ppl; its third month of positive movement.



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Volume drop turns UK market

By Chris Walkland

It's all about milk volumes now. And the market is reacting accordingly. The latest figures show GB volumes in June were 3.1% lower than last year, while UK volumes were down 2.2%.

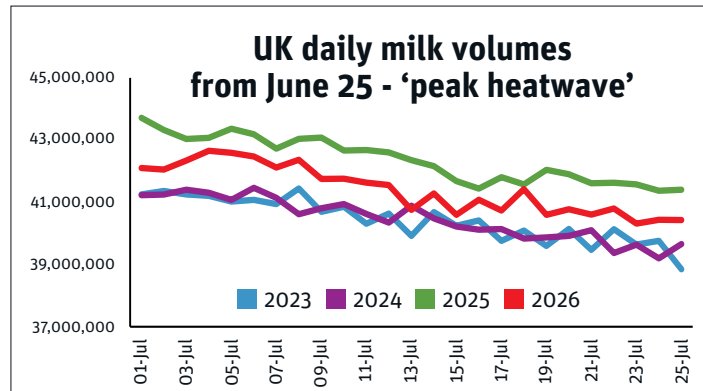
If we assume 'peak heatwave' started on June 25, when volumes began falling sharply below the five-year average, then between that date and July 25 (the latest available data set before the deadline for this article) UK volumes were down 39m litres (nearly 3%). For the previous month, between May 25 and June 25, they were down 26.7m (1.8%). For GB, volumes were down 3.7% for the latter period and 2.4% for the former one.

If we tally up the volume differential between April 19, when volumes consistently started to drop below last year, and July 25, we have lost a total of 72.5m litres for the UK (down 1.6%), and 82m litres for GB (down 2.25%). They equate to 2,500 and 2,900 reload tanker loads of milk, respectively.

Taken for granted

It's a sobering amount of milk for processors who have, for the past umpteen months, been able to take volumes for granted. Currently, there is no sign of volumes recovering either – they are still tracking well below last year, but above 2023 and 2024 levels.

While the heatwaves are currently front of mind, a wider drought issue is also now in play. Grazing paddocks have dried up in many parts of the country, and farmers report that even maize is under stress. Grazing herds have been housed, and cows are already chomping through first cut silage stocks as there is nothing else to eat. South West Scotland is better placed than much of the rest of GB, and has some semblance of grass in parts. But many parts of Europe are



also suffering, with the rainfall easily assessable from the reports of record low river flows in the Rhine.

In Germany, for example, milk volumes were down by around 3.6-4% during peak heatwave, pulling them back to 2024 levels, while France was even more severely affected, with volumes in the last week of June down 10%. They have recovered since, as they have done here, but not to the same level.

But falling volumes are one issue; solids are another, as they drop when cows are under stress. This is adding further pressure to the lower milk intakes processors are seeing. Again, though, there is not yet any data available to determine the extent to which they were affected.

Markets continue to respond accordingly, particularly cheese, with the UK reacting ahead of Europe. So too have the UK's processors, with many increasing their prices for either August or September.

Liquids, as ever, were the quickest to react, and the UK spot milk price was at one time a few pence short of 50ppl according to some traders. But then the kybosh was put on those levels when the schools broke up for the summer holidays. Now, though, prices are either side of the 40p level, depending on volumes and degree of urgency to buy or sell. UK cream is trading in the £1.60/kg zone, and this has resulted in some liquid processors

increasing their prices. However, butter might keep the lid on cream prices because there are high stocks in Europe. Cheaper imports, or greater difficulties in exporting due to cheaper competitors than Europe, might also add to that situation.

Traders are currently putting the butter spot price between €3,800 and €4,000/t, while the UK price is around £3,400/t. But for high milk prices butter ideally needs to be above €5,000/t (£4,286/t). This time last year, when the farmgate milk prices averaged 42p, butter was at €7,000 (£6,000)! It is just over half that now.

Powders are also important to the milk price equation. On the positive side, Dutch food-grade whey is at a very high €1,700/t (£1,457/t), and this is helping cheesemaker returns enormously. Much of the recent increases in farmgate milk for cheese prices will be whey driven.

It's not such a positive outlook for skimmed milk powder (SMP). At the end of July Dutch SMP recorded its strongest weekly gains since May, rising by €130 (£111) to €2,820/t (£2,417); its highest price since early June. But even so, the actual milk price equivalent (AMPE) that converts to is still well below 30ppl, so there is an awfully long way to go for both butter and powder before they return decent break-even milk prices.

Because of those butter stocks I can't see this happening for a long while yet, and this is reinforced by the futures prices. In the week of going to press the highest butter price was €4,500/t (£3,857) for the December and January contracts. There are eight contracts (months) at or above that over the next 12 months, but there were none over the key €5,000/t threshold. On SMP, the highest price is currently €2,930/t (£2,512) for the January contract, but there are no contracts at or over the €3,000/t

(£2,572) threshold for the next six months. There is just one over the next 12 months, and that's for July next year. Cheese prices are where the action is right now, though, which is why we are seeing cheesemakers leading the way on milk price rises, with some now in the 37-38p range on a manufacturing litre basis. I will look at these price moves in more depth next month, when others who declare later have announced theirs.

Given falling milk volumes and the high spot milk price, sellers' expectations are at least £3,000/t for mild, and rising all the time, with several cheesemakers having chosen to sell spot milk in recent months instead of making cheese.

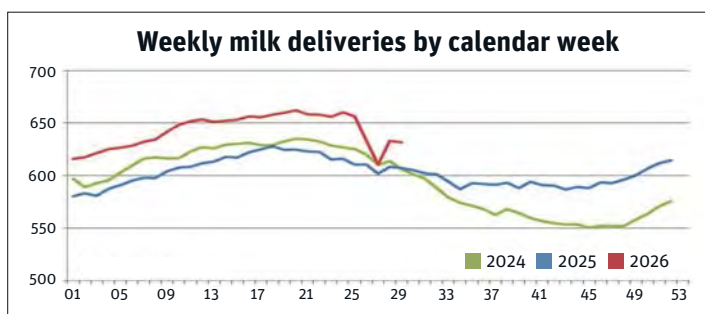
Manufacturers are comfortable with mild cheddar stocks, it seems, as high curd sales over the past few months have meant that less has been made. Stocks of mature and extra mature are particularly tight.

Tightening stocks

However, buyers seem to be dismissing warnings of already tight stocks and further tightening to come, or are able to source much cheaper cheese from Europe still. Stocks of cheese there will, like butter, also be high because the high whey price will have encouraged production, especially with lower butter and powder returns. Nevertheless, the upward trend is obvious - Q1 forward prices are currently around £3,200/t for mild, and mozzarella is around £3,150/t, according to manufacturers.

And finally, what of the GlobalDairyTrade (GDT) auction – quite often the master and commander of sentiment in the global dairy market? July's auctions were mixed, with the first down by nearly 5%; its biggest amount in two years, and the second up by 1.5%. Most of the price declines at the first auction were southern hemisphere prices, though, with minimal impact on EU commodities offered for sale on the platform.

The first August auction saw the index barely move, with an increase of just 0.1%. There were some positives for EU SMP prices, but they were negated by some losses on butter. The commodities will return around 31ppl on a UK basis, which means the tables are turning again – for several months the GDT prices have been out-paying UK ones, but that is no longer the case.



Heatwaves put short-term pressure on GB milk supplies



By Susie Stannard, Lead Dairy Analyst, AHDB

Recent heatwaves across GB and mainland Europe have added a new layer of pressure to an already shifting dairy market. After a strong 2025/26 milk year, which saw GB production rise by 5%, supplies have moved sharply from growth into short-term constraint as high temperatures and lower milk prices take effect.

The UK has seen a series of intense heatwaves, with temperatures exceeding 35°C in May, June and July for the first time. These conditions are particularly challenging for dairy cows, which are vulnerable to heat stress, because high milk production generates substantial metabolic heat. When temperatures remain high overnight, cows have less opportunity to recover, increasing the risk of reduced feed intake, lower rumination and declining yields.

The impact is now visible in the production data. Before the first heatwave in late May, GB milk production was running 1.6-2% above the five-year average. During the heatwave, this fell to just 0.4% above average, with AHDB estimating a loss of around 5.8m litres before production recovered in mid-June.

The second heatwave at the end of June had an even more pronounced effect. After briefly returning to around 2% above the five-year average, production fell to 2.9% below average on a seven-day rolling basis. AHDB estimates a further 12.7m litres have been lost so far, taking the combined impact of the first two heatwaves to around 18.5m litres.

This has temporarily shifted the market from over-supply to under-supply. Spot milk prices have reportedly strengthened by 10-15ppl, while bulk cream and some European commodity prices have also firmed as processors respond to tighter availability. However, this may prove a short-term reaction, with global milk production outside of Europe still strong and wider market fundamentals remaining cautious.

The longer-term issue is that extreme heat is likely to become a more regular feature of British summers. Farmers may need to place greater emphasis on shade, ventilation, water access, minimising yard time and longer-term resilience planning. For processors, summer supply disruption may also become a more important part of risk management.

With a third heatwave already under way and grass growth challenged by drought, further pressure on supplies remains likely.



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NMR/RADBF Gold Cup Open Day Insights

The Gold Cup Open Day in Cornwall brought together experts from across the industry. So what were the key insights from the wide range of discussions? Ruth Wills reports.

Nearly 1,000 people from the dairy industry flocked to Treveale Farm, near Ladock in Cornwall, for the first Open Day in Cornwall in the Gold Cup's long history. Keen to see what made the farm stand out, and listen to key speakers, there was a range of advice to be taken home.

Controlling John's disease is something that the team at Treveale Farm have excelled at, despite successfully expanding the herd, making them stand out as winners. "One of the big reasons John's disease control is important for everyone is welfare," explained Dr Karen Bond, Head of Knowledge Exchange at NMR. "We don't see that many clinically diseased animals any more, because we tend to have them out of the system before they get that far."

"We have put together a John's progress tracker."

But there are hidden costs. "We know cows with John's are much more likely to have high somatic cell counts, more likely to be lame and poor yielding." And recent research has shown an extended calving interval - which could be a simple knock-on effect to not culling problem cows. "We're not entirely sure that is down to the clinical effects of John's, but it's a cycle - when you have a John's problem, you hold onto cows which maybe aren't as fertile as others, which extends the calving period."



John's and milk recording data can be used to track disease management

If there is a John's problem, there is often an issue around calf health too, as John's and other diseases are spread by muck getting into calves' mouths, noted Karen. "So there are a lot of hidden things going on."

Getting on top of John's disease is a long-term project. "If you were to put a John's programme in place today, you're only protecting the calves born after today, so there are all the youngstock and heifers coming through the system before you start seeing an impact."

It's therefore likely that producers will observe an improvement in calf health first, as a result of the improved calving area, hygiene and colostrum management. "All have a big impact."

Another hidden cost is on the farm's carbon footprint. "John's cows are still being fed, milked and housed - all the input costs are the same," said Karen. "Yet chronic John's cows produce around 800 litres less in a lactation. If you can reduce the

number of those cows, it improves the herd's carbon footprint."

Testing is a good way to start to understand the prevalence of John's in the herd, and influence management going forward. The team at Treveale have been John's testing for a long time. "They went through quite a big herd expansion, and saw John's start to go up," explained Karen. "But what's really impressive is that they have managed to control John's against the backdrop of that increasing herd size. "Often when people increase herd

size, they'll be less conscious about the animals they keep to breed, because they need more heifers. But the team have been really conscious to not set themselves up with a future problem."

Action after testing

In the latest test results from March 2026, only one animal from nearly 470 tested was a repeat positive, while three had a first positive test. "The team have really good colostrum management and are getting calves away from the adults and potential transmission quickly and cleanly."

They have also been utilising their data. "We have put together a John's progress tracker which takes all the milk recording data and John's test data and tracks how the farm is managing John's," said Karen. "Sometimes it's quite difficult at the start if you see an increase in the number of positives, but the John's tracker will reassure you that the right thing is being done."

"It's really about blocking those new infections; particularly in first lactation animals. If you can see the level going down there, you know you're doing the right thing."

Continued on page 22.



Calf health is often the first response to improved John's management

Partnership versus limited company (see page 22)

Benefits of a partnership:

- Farmers' averaging significantly smooths high and low years
- VAT recovery on farmhouses and cars
- Maximum flexibility to move assets between family members in the partnership
- Ideal for when profits per person are modest - not regularly over £50,000-£60,000 each.

Benefits of a limited company:

- Retaining profits in the business for reinvestment
- Can make use of:
 - Salary and rent planning
 - Director's loan account
 - Dividend flexibility and alphabet shares
- Inheritance tax planning options with freezer / growth shares

- Ideal for large-scale farms with high taxable profits
- Any claims made against a limited company are limited to the company, rather than against you personally as it is with a partnership or as a sole trader.

Overall, although it's easy to focus on tax, business structure should be part of the bigger picture, not driven by tax. "Tax mustn't wag the tail; it's making sure the structure forms part of the plan - protecting wealth and assets. Make sure that flexibility remains built in; don't close down avenues for future planning," said Simon. It's also important to consider succession planning. "Looking at the inheritance tax now, if you're on a trajectory for growth and scale, make sure you have the right business structure in place."

EAR BASED MONITORING FROM CALF TO COW

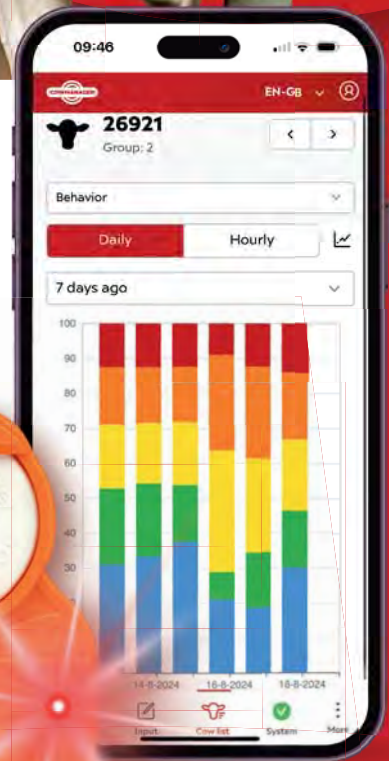


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Continued from page 20.

Some herds try to cull their way out of the disease, but she used the analogy of a sink full of Johnes. "How do you empty that sink? Either you turn the tap off - which is the right way to do it, getting rid of new infections - or you make the plug hole bigger. You can make the plug hole bigger, but if the tap is still running it's not going to end."

Slurry management

At Treveale Farm, slurry is separated to allow for easier handling, and to make the most of the nutrients available. "A 470-cow herd would typically produce 54t of nitrogen in manure every year," explained David Ball, Environment and Buildings Senior Manager at AHDB.

"That's equivalent to 156t of ammonium nitrate, which at £514/t is currently £80,000 worth of nitrogen produced every year. The difficulty is that we cannot capture all of that."

The availability of nutrients varies tremendously. "Nitrogen availability is between five percent and 45% - you won't get any more than 50% because that's how nitrogen behaves. What you do with it, how you store it, how you put it on, and what crops you put it on can all influence it," said David. "The phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) availability is fairly standard - between 50% and 90% - it's not affected much by how it's managed."

The farm situation will dictate the best slurry storage option, for example, Treveale has an above ground tank. "There are two types of storage - an earth bank lagoon or an above ground tank - and which you choose depends on the rainfall," explained David. (See table) Lagoons are generally broad and shallow, so capture more rainfall than a narrow and tall tank - they therefore need to be bigger. They also require 750mm of freeboard;



AHDB's David Ball discussed slurry value and the cost of nutrient losses

an above ground tank only requires 300mm. So you can't use nearly a quarter of the lagoon."

The rainfall captured over a year is 63% of the working capacity for the lagoon versus 35% of the tank. And the cost of spreading that rainfall at £3/m³ is nearly £10,000 for the lagoon.

"A 470-cow herd typically produces 54t of nitrogen in manure every year."

The different surface areas have another implication. "The surface of a tank will lose around 2kg of ammonia/m² per year - so the tank loses 1,722kg/year of ammonia versus 4,200kg for the lagoon," said David. The value of that ammonia, based on ammonium nitrate at £514/t, is £5,125 for a lagoon versus £2,100 for a tank.

Often people think digging a lagoon is the cheaper option, but looking at the ammonia losses and

the cost of spreading rainwater, it's worth considering a tank.

"If you were to cover the lagoon to stop the ammonia losses and the rainfall, then it could be built smaller, so you're saving on construction costs," noted David. "Don't automatically go for an earth bank because you think it's going to be cheaper."

Tax saving strategies

Tax is something that all farmers, not just the team at Treveale Farm, have to consider. And tax savings can be made on a couple of levels, depending on the business structure. Partnerships offer flexibility, with farmers' averaging to smooth taxable profits over five years, with fixed year ends, said Simon Tapp, Associate Director at Moore Scarrott Rural.

Partnerships allow for VAT recovery on farmhouses and cars. "And running cars through a partnership is much easier and less of a tax strain than through a company."

Partnership income tax is payable in January and July. "The first £12,500 taxable profit is generally tax free, the next £38,000 is 20% tax up to £50,000. Over £50,000, you're talking 40% tax. Then over £125,000 it starts to get nasty - 45% tax."

National insurance must also be factored in. "It's 6% on £38,000 of profits and then over £50,000 you get an additional 2%," he added.

On the other hand, limited companies offer flexible year

ends and are a standalone legal entity owned by shareholders and managed by directors - often the same people. "Companies pay corporation tax in one lump sum," explained Simon. "If they're making profits over £250,000 it's a flat 25% across the board. Below £250,000, the first £50,000 is caught for 19% tax, and then there's a tapering system; a marginal rate that ultimately takes you up to 25%."

There are ways to make the most efficient use of a company. "As a director, take a salary of £12,500/year to utilise your personal allowance. Also, if you have land or property, ensure the company is paying an appropriate rent to you as landlord. If you can engineer it so that, as a landlord, your total income is below £50,000, you get taxed 20%, so potentially a 5% advantage."

Director's loan account

When incorporating, it's possible to sell livestock and machinery from the partnership or sole trader's ownership into the company at market value, with no immediate income tax charge. "That creates a director's loan account, which represents a sum of money on paper that you can draw down tax-free - or you could charge interest on - a bit like the rent. It's taxable on you at 20% and tax-deductible on the company at 25%," said Simon. "Alternatively, you could sell the land and everything to the company, refrain from taking the director's loan but instead take the shares. No tax again, but the value is wrapped up in the share capital."

Alphabet shares allow for different classes for different family members. "This enables different levels of dividend to be paid out to each member, depending on the work they do or their marginal tax rate on income elsewhere."

Freeze and growth shares can also be issued. "They're a clever trick of retaining some value with the senior members but handing down wealth to the next generation," explained Simon. "They earn and generate themselves through future growth."

Example farm: 200 cows, 8,000 litres, 60 followers, 1,400mm annual rainfall (uncovered).

	Earth bank lagoon 24% freeboard	Above ground tank 15% freeboard
Total capacity (m ³)	6,750	4,563
Working capacity (m ³)	5,200	3,878
Surface area (m ²)	2,100	861
Ammonia losses/yr (kg)	4,200	1,722
Nitrogen value (AN at £514/t)	£5,125	£2,100
Rainfall captured on surface	3,283m ³ 63% of working capacity	1,346m ³ 35% of working capacity
Annual cost of spreading rainfall at £3/m ³	£9,850	£4,038

Source: AHDB



Slurry is separated to allow for easier handling and nutrient utilisation

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Proof it works is regenerative dairy's next big challenge

Regenerative farming has moved beyond being a collection of good ideas. The next challenge is proving it delivers measurable benefits for farmers, customers and the environment. British Dairying reports from Groundswell.

Evidence is becoming the new currency of sustainable dairy production. While much of the debate at Groundswell in recent years has centred on encouraging farmers to adopt regenerative practices, the focus must now shift towards measuring what those practices achieve.

And for dairy farmers, that matters. Retailers and food manufacturers increasingly want robust evidence to support sustainability claims. Consumers are asking more searching questions about how food is produced. At the same time, farmers need confidence that investing time and money in changing management will strengthen their businesses as well as improve the environment.

This changing landscape provided the backdrop to First Milk's series of In-Tents Talks, which brought together customers, scientists, environmental organisations and farmer members to discuss what resilient dairy farming looks like in practice. Coinciding with the event was the launch of the co-operative's new white paper, 'From principles to proof: Why measurable outcomes matter in regenerative dairy'. The publication argues that regenerative farming must move beyond simply recording actions and instead demonstrate measurable



Measuring what regen achieves builds confidence in the whole concept

improvements in areas like soil health, biodiversity, water quality and farm resilience. Five years after launching its regenerative farming programme, First Milk now works with independent specialists to monitor everything from soil carbon and nutrient footprinting to biodiversity and animal welfare. This is creating what it believes is one of the most comprehensive evidence bases for regenerative dairy farming in the UK.

Opening the discussions, First Milk Chief Executive Shelagh Hancock explored how resilience depends on collaboration across the supply chain. She was joined

by Emma Keller, Sustainability Director at Nestlé, and Fay Cooke, Chief Impact and Financial Officer at Yeo Valley. Nestlé's relationship with First Milk stretches back 22 years. And Emma reflected on how what started as a procurement arrangement has evolved into something far more collaborative. "We've learnt that resilience is vital for longevity," she explained. First Milk's close understanding of its members allows both organisations to share not only opportunities but also the risks involved in making change.

For Yeo Valley, regenerative farming has to stand up commercially as well as environmentally. Farmers need robust research and practical evidence demonstrating changes deliver genuine benefits on farm, said Fay. Only then can brands communicate those benefits confidently to customers and consumers. It was a point Shelagh returned to repeatedly throughout the discussions. "The next phase for regenerative farming is measurement," she said. "We need to demonstrate what these practices are actually delivering."

Looking ahead, the speakers envisaged a future where regenerative farming becomes standard practice throughout dairy supply chains. The question will no longer be why the industry is making the transition,

but how quickly it can happen. One of the biggest environmental challenges facing livestock farming has become water quality – and the co-op believes better data can help farmers target improvements where they matter most.

Its new water strategy combines nutrient footprinting across all 700 member farms, with satellite-led mapping of around 90,000ha to identify where nutrient pressures coincide with the greatest risk of nutrients reaching watercourses.

Ric Cooper from the Cleddau River Action Group explained why collaboration is essential if rivers are to recover. Using Pembrokeshire's River Cleddau as an example, he pointed out around 80% of phosphate and nitrogen entering the catchment originates from agriculture. However, meaningful improvements will only come through working alongside farmers rather than blaming them.

"By building trust with farmers, we are more likely to succeed," he said. His vision of success was refreshingly straightforward. "I want to be able to paddleboard on the Cleddau knowing it's safe to fall in."

More importantly, he thinks farmers who improve nutrient management are often improving business performance too. And this mirrors First Milk's own findings. Early analysis suggests farms with lower nutrient footprints are achieving similar levels of milk production to those with higher nutrient losses, reinforcing the message that better environmental performance does not have to come at the expense of productivity.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for regenerative farming has always been biodiversity. Farmers may know wildlife is returning, but proving it has been much harder.

This is changing through First Milk's partnership with the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH), which is monitoring biodiversity across six commercial dairy farms using ecological surveys,

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satellite habitat mapping and new technologies. Rather than simply recording habitats, the project measures important indicator species including birds, pollinators, dung beetles and bats, creating repeatable datasets that can be compared year after year. Among the discoveries so far are a rare, yellow-faced bee and evidence of beavers, while eco-acoustic monitoring equipment is recording bird and insect activity across the sites. The objective is not simply to celebrate interesting wildlife sightings. Instead, the project aims to identify which regenerative interventions deliver the greatest ecological benefit, giving farmers practical information about what works while providing customers with credible evidence dairy farming can contribute to nature recovery.

Over the years, carbon sequestration has generated plenty of debate, but the discussion at Groundswell focused firmly on measurement rather than modelling. Agricarbon's Chief Executive Annie Leeson explained how advances in direct soil sampling are allowing companies to make claims capable of standing up to scientific scrutiny. Between 2021 and 2022, First Milk



Impactful improvements to water quality come from working with farmers

established a soil carbon baseline across 100 farms, analysing around 118,000 soil samples to create one of the largest soil carbon datasets in the global dairy sector.

Early remeasurement of three farms has shown increases in soil carbon on each holding, with the biggest gains occurring where regenerative farming scores had improved the most. While it's important not to draw wider conclusions until more farms have been resampled, the early results provide encouraging evidence that regenerative management can deliver measurable improvements. The wider remeasurement programme, due to expand later

this year, should provide the robust dataset needed to understand which management changes have the greatest impact.

Ultimately, though, regenerative farming must deliver in the farm office as well as the laboratory.

For farmer Lucy Noad, the changes have been gradual rather than revolutionary, despite admitting she doesn't 'really do half measures'. Rotational grazing has lengthened the grazing season, cow longevity has improved and the business is recovering more quickly from challenges. Lucy is also working to increase bat and bird numbers alongside reducing carbon emissions

and improving animal welfare. Fellow farmer Scott Calderwood highlighted steady improvements in soil organic matter, carbon capture and bird populations, including swallows. Perhaps most importantly, regular measurement gives confidence the years of incremental change are moving the business in the right direction, he said.

It was clear that one theme linked every discussion at Groundswell. Whether the subject was carbon, biodiversity, water quality, resilient supply chains or practical farm management, the emphasis was no longer simply on adopting regenerative practices. Instead, the industry is entering a new phase where those practices must be measured, verified and continually improved. For First Milk, this means combining farmer experience with independent science to create evidence that strengthens businesses, builds trust throughout the supply chain and demonstrates the value dairy farming can deliver for food production, nature and climate alike. If the first chapter of regenerative farming was built around principles, the next looks set to be defined by proof.

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- Farming **40ha** of grass plus **4ha** of woodland, with an additional **5ha** rented for summer grazing, **12ha** rented for silage and **12ha** of maize purchased.



Milk price volatility required Hannah to rethink cows and cashflow; having Philip's support was a big help

October, and receive a buffer of 13kg of grass silage and 2kg of Trafford Gold per head per day. Hannah believes grazing cows at 500ft on hilly terrain keeps feet and mobility in check.

During the winter, cows are housed in straw yards, although Hannah hopes to install cubicles before this winter. The winter ration comprises grass silage, maize, fodder beet, rapemeal and wheat. Cows are fed to yield inside the parlour, averaging 5kg/head daily of an 18% protein nut.

“When I started, the milk price was 48ppl and I thought it was easy.”

While Philip previously ran pedigree Holstein stock bulls, Hannah has introduced artificial insemination (AI) on milkers to accelerate genetic gain. Current sires include Pinetree Pursuit, Stanton's Chief, and Koepan Oh Robin Red. Bitten by the pedigree bug; a passion she shares with Philip, Hannah has invested in foundation females from world-renowned cow families to establish her Whirlwind prefix.

These include the Zip and Rhapsody families from Sterndale Holsteins; Amy, Star, and Savoie Faire from Whinchat; Molly and Lianne from Hawksmoor; Nugget and Dusk from Aintree; Roxy and Missy from Wilsbro; and Melody and Zandra from Woodmarsh. The best cows receive three services to sexed semen before being mated to beef. Anything not up to grade is served straight to beef.

Heifers are run with a pedigree stock bull for ease of management. Hannah says the greatest challenge is milk price volatility. “When I started, the milk price was 48ppl and I thought it was easy,” she says. “Within six months, the milk cheque crashed to £12,000/month and reality hit. It didn't even cover my rent and feed.”

Cash flow

Currently receiving 28ppl, she has reduced costs by culling more aggressively, and closely monitoring cash flow. “The most important thing is to talk to people you owe money to and have a plan,” she explains. “I've found people are willing to work with you because they want to see you succeed, but you must keep to your word.”

While at times the reversal of roles can be difficult, having Philip's support is a big help. “I sit down every month, and we work out my debt versus assets, and if my assets are higher than my debt, I know it's okay,” she says. “If I sell up, I must be left with something because I've put in too much work not to.”

Farm matching service

British Dairying is working with a range of industry partners to facilitate a farm matching service, helping to introduce prospective new entrants to those who are looking to step back and retire. Each month we are running part of a series of articles profiling different ways in which such agreements can work. If you are seeking a new opportunity in the dairy sector or are interested in offering land, facilities and mentoring to the next generation **please register at www.britishtdairying.co.uk/farm-matching**.

For Philip, seeing the farm continue under Hannah's stewardship has helped rekindle his enthusiasm for dairying. And he encourages more farmers reaching retirement to consider giving a new entrant an opportunity.

“It gives me great pleasure, and I'm very proud of what Hannah has achieved, because farming isn't easy,” he adds. For young farmers

starting out, Hannah says self-belief is essential. “That self-belief keeps you going through the darkest times. Talk to people who inspire you and learn from them. I do sometimes wonder if my life would have been easier if I had gone to university, but I don't regret my choice. I love the lifestyle, and I've met and been supported by so many people – the farming community is incredible.”

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A day in the life of...

A ruminant technical manager

As the Ruminant Technical Manager working across the Asterra Group – the dairy division of AB Agri – there really is no such thing as a typical day for Charlotte Ward.

I grew up in rural Buckinghamshire, and while from a non-farming family, having joined the Young Farmers' Club at the age of 14, my interest was piqued. After graduating with a first-class degree in agriculture and animal science from Harper Adams University, I began a career in ruminant nutrition, and have recently marked my tenth anniversary at AB Agri.

While my role has obviously evolved, and varies massively day-to-day, I have primary responsibility for on-farm support across the South of the UK. This involves technical support for the on-farm feed advisers; especially those starting out in their careers, in terms of ration advice.

"We never take an issue in isolation."

This is all underpinned by training; a large part of my role, across different teams across the business. I run training sessions at least once a week; within KW Feeds, across other Asterra businesses and even externally. I provide technical training across all the teams; from customer services and product sales to product managers and our field-based advisers, as well as providing marketing support.

The training is always focused on what is relevant for the audience. I am currently preparing a session for the on-farm feed advisers around forage analysis for this year, exploring opportunities for their farm customers. This involves looking at forage analysis from our own samples and the wider industry, considering general trends, and identifying what that means for rations on farm.

On another day, it can be identifying signs of heat stress; it's all about what's relevant for our team and their customers. It provides the support they need to lead with



Charlotte's day varies from farm visits to formulation and team training

discussions on farm, and, where relevant, where to position products to support performance and margins.

Communication is key. We have a Monday morning call with the on-farm advisers every week, where both sides can provide any updates or raise any questions. I also attend regular sales meetings, to maintain that technical and commercial connection.

Further training

As well as the field-based teams, I also develop training for the product sales desk and product managers. Recently I have been presenting some training with NMR; new to the Asterra business, around the basics of nutrition, alongside some product awareness to support what's happening in the market.

For example, if we get a flag from AIC of a potential heightened risk, we might introduce mycotoxin training, ensuring all our teams have that knowledge, and can help on farm with any issues that they might come across.

It's also about working closely with customers, and understanding their farm and contract requirements. For

example, when Arla brought in its sustainability incentives, we were working with relevant customers to make sure they could achieve as many points as possible, which has a tangible impact on the price paid per litre.

It is really rewarding from a personal perspective to get these wins, as well as updating and balancing rations so that they are cost-effective, while also fitting in with contracts and the goals of that particular unit.

Goals and focus

It could be about focusing on their homegrown feed, and making the most of that to help with feed costs and margins. Individual goals might be milk from forage, constituent-based, or focused on fertility. Whatever that unit's goals are, we never take an issue in isolation; it is about linking everything together to balance the ration as best we can.

It is obviously important for me to keep up to speed, and as such I attend regular industry conferences, webinars and presentations. For example, Arla now hosts regular

meetings/webinars aimed at feed advisers and consultants.

The technical team meets every other week, with each member of the team also focusing on a specific area of expertise and specialism, such as sustainability, innovation or processor relations.

I also sit on the Nutrition Network, across the Asterra Group, where members share updates and information via email and WhatsApp groups. We meet every six weeks, with a set agenda into which we all contribute. Other members of the technical team will sit in other Asterra networks, like the Sustainability and Forage Networks, feeding back into our regular technical team meetings.

I also sit on the Animal Health and Welfare Steering Committee, which is an AB Agri-wide networking group. It also covers the monogastric, pet and equine sectors, helping us understand the different pressures and sharing experiences, knowledge and best practice across these wider teams.

Variety in the day

I still like to get out and about as much as possible, and have just undertaken a farm walk and talk in conjunction with NMR, focused on heat stress advice. No two days are the same. In the past week, I've been involved in everything from advice and training for various teams, judging entries for the Cream Awards, providing marketing and product support, as well as presenting at the NMR farm walk.

We have to be proactive and pre-empt any potential issues, and I will always keep abreast of industry news and the trade press. But being part of those networks and working in such close collaboration across our various teams really does help.

And it is that variety that really drives me, knowing that all the activities come together to help better position our teams to support their farmers. That, in turn, supports a successful UK dairy industry. Being part of that delivers fantastic job satisfaction.

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Understanding dairy cow heat stress, one building at a time

Following three successive heatwaves, it might be time for producers to consider future-proofing buildings and making management adjustments to mitigate heat stress.

A two-year project has investigated farmer attitudes towards heat stress as well as its impacts across 23 housed dairy herds in Scotland and Cumbria. The project, which was undertaken by Galebreaker, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and Smartbell, was funded by the Digital Dairy Chain.

The study aims to shift dairy farmers' perception surrounding the risk of heat stress. It uses local data to visibly demonstrate the knock-on effects that badly ventilated housed environments can have on herds in the north of the UK.

“If you do not monitor it, you cannot manage it.”

“There is so much power in showing farmers real-time data of what is actually going on in their local area,” says Chloe Rodriguez, Animal Welfare Specialist at Galebreaker. “Much previous heat-stress research has come from America, the Middle East or southern England, so there's a real gap in the relevant information currently available to UK farmers.

“The Analysis of Scottish Housed Environments for Dairy (A-SHED) project aims to understand more about the risks of heat stress throughout Scotland and northern England by expanding on Galebreaker's existing live network of temperature-humidity index (THI) monitoring.”

The THI combines temperature and relative humidity into a single value to represent the level of heat stress experienced by an animal. Humidity is important when quantifying heat stress, because at higher humidities, the effectiveness of evaporative cooling (through sweating or panting) reduces, making it more difficult to regulate body temperature.

And humidity is often the missing link in the assessments being made



Galebreaker's animal welfare specialist Chloe Rodriguez with a THI sensor

on farm. “Many people don't know when their cows are affected by heat stress,” says Dr Laura Shewbridge Carter, Researcher at SRUC.

“At one of our project meetings, 14 farmers arrived adamant heat stress was not a local issue. By the end, several wanted THI sensors installed in their sheds, as we were able to show that cows can struggle even at lower temperatures when the humidity is high,” she says.

When humidity and restricted airflow limit heat loss, cows may breathe faster, lie less, bunch around water or fresher-air areas, and lose yield. A-SHED data indicates that a THI above 67 is associated with reduced milk yield. “It's important to remember that lactating dairy cows produce a lot of metabolic heat and high THI levels within the building restrict the cow's ability to dissipate excess heat,” says Laura.

The problem does not disappear at sunset. A-SHED found some buildings were hotter at night than during the day. And facilitating cooler night-time conditions helped cows recover some lost yield, highlighting the importance of managing them beyond perceived daytime peaks.

External conditions are only part of the equation. Livestock housing in the North of the country is often designed to protect cattle from wind,

rain and winter draughts, but it can be difficult to release heat and moisture from enclosed structures in warm, humid weather.

The project identified one farm building where the THI was consistently around four units higher than the regional average, leaving cows particularly vulnerable to heat stress. “This particular shed had an open ridge which provided an outlet, but a multi-pitch roof, Yorkshire boarding and lack of mechanical ventilation were leading to restricted fresh air intake,” Chloe says.

“The roof also had clear panels covering around 30% of the roof, which increased temperature through solar gain. In addition, the stocking density of 5.2m² compared to the AHDB guideline of 10.5m² contributed to further temperature and humidity pressure inside the building.”

When the research team carried out a smoke test in the shed, it took four minutes and 35 seconds to clear, an indication of slow airflow and heat removal. A well-ventilated shed should clear in around a minute. “Every shed tells a different heat-stress story based on its design and positioning,” says Chloe. “Orientation, inlet area, ridge design, roof pitch, solar gain, stocking density and internal obstructions all

affect how fresh air enters and warm, humid air escapes. This helps explain why two sheds in the same region can present different risks.”

Understandably, cost remains a major obstacle when optimising buildings, with 78% of farmers citing capital cost as a barrier to implementing mitigation solutions, while 59% mentioned limitations in existing shed infrastructure. Return on investment, labour and limited information were also concerns.

The data strengthens the case against a one-size-fits-all solution. Before investing, farmers must identify whether the constraint is inlet area, ridge capacity, solar gain, stocking density, overnight management or cow-level air movement. “If you do not monitor it, you cannot manage it,” says Laura.

SRUC's milk analysis separates first-lactation and older cows, then divides each into early, mid and late lactation, helping identify groups under different metabolic and pregnancy-related pressures. “We're seeing considerable variation between buildings, and by simultaneously monitoring milk yield we can show how heat stress correlates with reduced productivity,” adds Laura.

Climate-resilience planning

The project partners are turning this evidence into farm-specific feedback and data to support longer-term climate-resilience planning. For farmers, the practical starting point is to measure the conditions cows are experiencing, assess how the shed handles heat and humidity, and target improvements where they will make the greatest difference.

Galebreaker can support farmers with THI monitoring, building assessment, ventilation advice and practical mitigation planning. The aim is to help farmers invest where it will make a difference to cow comfort and performance.

A weather forecast can tell you what is happening outside. A-SHED is showing why farmers also need to know what is happening inside.



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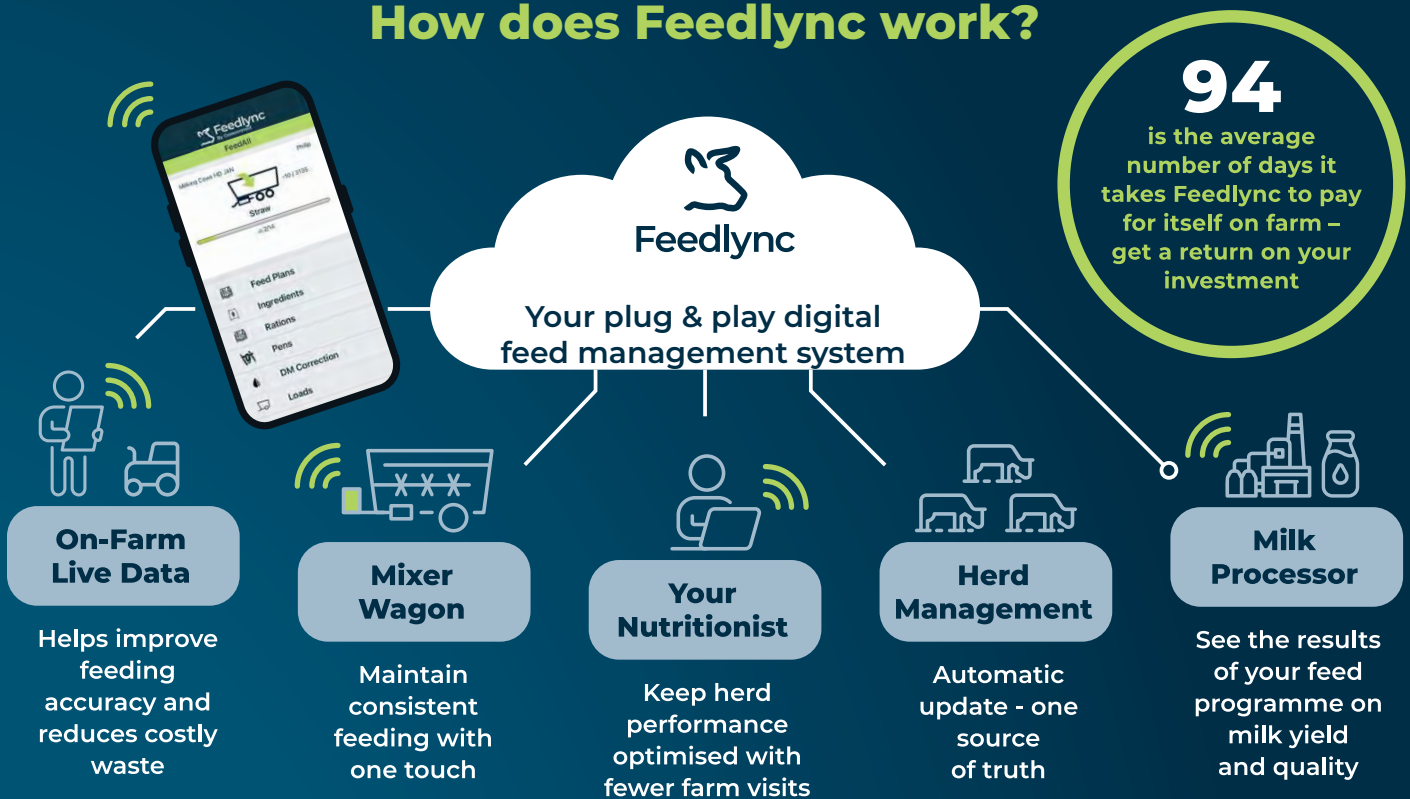


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Dairy cows vote with their feet

Maintaining happy and productive cows starts with the feet - that's the message from one cow housing expert who says underfoot comfort plays a massive part in influencing livestock behaviour. British Dairying finds out more.

Hitting the target of 12 to 14 hours of lying time is understood to be crucial for cow health, wellbeing and productivity. So many farmers choose rubber mattresses for their combination of comfort and easy maintenance.

But alongside getting lying comfort right, walking comfort also has a massive role to play in supporting cow health and encouraging the daily routines of dairy farm life. And this is where rubber flooring can create a healthy underfoot environment for cows.

"The cows tell you where they would rather be."

"In a natural environment, we would expect cows to favour soft ground, and it makes so much sense to mimic that in farm settings," says Roger Craig, Director at Shield Agriculture. "As well as providing comfort and sure-footedness, rubber flooring can help to keep floors dry, reducing the risk of infections that are unpleasant for cows and costly to farmers."

"Comfort plays an important role in nudging cows towards important daily activities like social behaviour, heat detection, eating and milking," he adds. "It's interesting to see how cows vote with their feet when they



Roger Craig says cow comfort pays off in cow activity and production

have the option to walk on rubber flooring. I can think of one farm where the feed area with rubber flooring is routinely busy, while a neighbouring concrete section is much quieter. The cows tell you where they would rather be."

Cows' preference for soft flooring is driven by biomechanics. "Because a cow's outer hoof is slightly longer than the inner hoof, hard floors create an imbalance in the pressure loaded onto different parts of the hoof," explains Roger.

In a natural environment the load on the hoof is balanced by the outer claw sinking into the soil, so ideally dairy farm flooring will provide a similar level of flexibility to make walking more comfortable and natural. Rubber flooring encourages

a more natural gait, with cows taking longer strides than they would on a hard concrete surface.

Using flooring differently

"Once that comfort is established, cows are more likely to show the behaviours that we want on the farm."

"They'll go and feed more often, so increasing feed intakes, and they'll be happier to walk into the milking parlour, therefore increasing the speed of cow flow at milking time. Walking comfort helps to unlock behaviour found in a natural environment."

Different dairy farm set-ups lend themselves to use of rubber flooring in different ways.

- Feed passages: Rubber flooring improves standing comfort and

encourages cows to feed more frequently and for longer.

- Milking parlours: Rubber matting in the milking parlour or on rotary decks increases standing comfort for cows and helps encourage them to go for milking. Rubber flooring on parlour entry and exit points also reduces stresses on the hooves caused by twisting forces in turning areas - potentially reducing white line cases and sole ulcers and promoting overall hoof health.

- Robotic milking machines: Matting in and around robotic machines - where cows twist and turn in tight spaces - provides similar benefits to those seen in and around traditional or rotary milking set-ups.

- Sloping areas: Steep slopes present issues for cows, with a heightened risk of slips or additional pressure causing hoof damage, as well as joint and limb injuries. Matting these areas provides grip and cushioning, which in turn leads to increased confidence and better hoof health.

- All walking areas: Use of specialist ammonia reduction flooring, which separates the urine from the dung, provides a dry, sure-footed surface and reduces ammonia emissions.

Walking comfort complements lying comfort as a key driver of dairy cow wellbeing, says Roger. "Rubber is a big answer to lameness. And once you've cured lameness, all of a sudden you increase feed intake, increase milk production, and increase reproduction - all of these things stem from the cows' feet."



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Fly control starts in the calf pen

Fly pressure is a familiar challenge on dairy units, but treating adult flies alone is unlikely to solve the problem if breeding sites are not targeted. British Dairying reports.

A swarmspell speeds up breeding cycles, fly populations can build quickly. With larvae hatching in as little as eight to nine days a small problem can become a larger one in little more than a week, particularly when temperatures remain high overnight.

“For many farms, the parlour is where flies are first noticed, because that’s where they cause the most obvious disruption,” says Dave Reece, Pest Control Technical Adviser at Lodi UK. “But treating the parlour alone does not address the root cause of the problem.”

“Once they are flying, you’re already on the back foot.”

Effective fly control starts with finding breeding sites, rather than simply treating the areas where adult flies are most visible. Calf housing can provide ideal conditions, particularly where bedding is damp or soiled, milk has been spilt, or muck has built up around pen edges, walls and corners.

“Calf pens often provide the ideal mix of straw, muck, moisture and warmth,” he says. “If you pull back the straw in these pens, you’ll often find small white maggots and larvae sitting underneath.”



Warm, moist calf pens provide the ideal environment for fly breeding sites

The impact of fly activity may be less obvious around calf housing, but it should not be underestimated. “Irritated calves are less likely to rest properly, which can affect welfare, growth and performance,” says Dave.

“Flies can also move between animals and areas, increasing the risk of disease spread, particularly around sick or scouring calves. Even where biosecurity is good, with clean pens, boot washing and careful routines, flies still move between areas. That’s why control needs to start where flies are breeding, rather than where adult flies are being seen.”

Good hygiene remains the foundation of fly management. Removing dirty bedding, keeping pens dry, fixing leaking drinkers and clearing up spilt milk all help reduce the conditions larvae need to develop.

Close attention

And particular attention should be paid to pen edges, walls, and areas around hutches, as these can be missed during routine cleaning and may allow larvae to continue developing.

“All dirty bedding should be removed, and any leaking drinkers should be fixed quickly,” he says.

“Move muck well away from calf housing and wash the area down with disinfectant between batches where possible. If larvae are left behind, you’re introducing the next group of calves to an existing problem.”

During periods of high fly pressure, cleaning out calf pens more frequently can help break the breeding cycle. Where pressure is severe, this may mean cleaning almost weekly to prevent larvae developing into adult flies.

In warm weather, hygiene alone may not be enough, particularly where larvae are already present. This is where larval control can play an important role as part of an integrated programme. Larvicides are designed

to target flies before they hatch and become biting adults, but they should support good management rather than replace it. “Larval control is about breaking the lifecycle before adult fly numbers build,” he says. “Larvicide use should always be based on the level of pressure on the unit, the housing system and label instructions.”

Where appropriate, apply two larvicide treatments during the period calves are on milk. The first should be applied around 10 days after calves enter the pen, with a second treatment around a month later, before maggots develop into adult flies.

Prevent adult flies developing

While the priority should be to prevent flies developing, adult fly control still has a place where flies are already present and causing disruption.

In calf housing, Ultra Dairy Fly Spray can be applied to calf hutch roofs, in line with label instructions, to provide knockdown and residual control.

If flies are active in the parlour, targeted treatment can help reduce immediate pressure. In these areas, spray should be applied to walls, roofs and resting areas before cows enter, and high enough to avoid being affected by washdown.

Stable flies are one of the main concerns in housed dairy systems and can cause significant irritation. They are attracted to warmth and carbon dioxide, which is why they often move towards collecting yards and parlours.

“When cows are bunched together in a collecting yard or parlour, heat builds up and flies quickly move in,” says Dave. “This can make it look as though the parlour is the source of the issue, when in reality, the breeding site could be on the other part of the yard.”

Adult fly control can help where flies are already causing a nuisance, but the best results come from combining hygiene, larval control at breeding sites and targeted adult control where it is needed.

“Start early, keep bedding clean and dry, and treat larvae before flies hatch,” he adds. “Once they are flying, you’re already on the back foot.”



Adult fly control can help where flies are already causing a nuisance

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UK Dairy Day 2026: What's in store?

UK Dairy Day returns to Telford on September 16, and brings with it competition in the show ring, trade stands and a dedicated calf corner. British Dairying finds out more.

UK Dairy Day is entering its twelfth year, and visitors can expect the usual strong turnout - from trade exhibitors to cattle showing and the latest updates from industry professionals.

Building on the success of last year's practical demonstrations, the Calf Corner will be found in hall three, where three leading veterinary groups will be sharing insights throughout the day. Rumen development in dairy calves is one topic into which Nantwich Farm Vets and AHDB will provide insight, with demonstrations taking place at 11:15am, 12:15pm and 2:30pm.

"There will be something to appeal to every visitor."

A lung scanning demonstration by Shropshire Farm Vets will return this year, showing how it can help assess lung damage caused by pneumonia, and the impact it has on calves transitioning into the milking herd. The demonstrations by Veterinary Surgeon Duarte Monteiro will take place at 10:45am, 11:45am and 2:00pm. The popular 'Beneath the Black and White' calf painting demonstration also returns. Carolyn Baguley and the team from Scarsdale Vets will present their innovative and engaging demonstration using paint to assist in understanding calf health,



UK Dairy Day promises a packed agenda of speakers and practical demos

welfare and rumen function from 8:30am to 4:00pm.

Keen foot trimmers will want to head to the external trade stand area, where Tim Carter will be running practical demonstrations on trimming and blocking, as well as advice on knife sharpening. Streamed to a large TV screen with commentary, visitors will be able to see first-hand the intricate details of successful trimming.

As usual, within the wide range of trade stands, there will be something to appeal to every visitor. Principal sponsors Lely Centre Midlands, NWF Agriculture, the Cattle Information Service, and Holstein UK will be found ringside, and the creativity of trade exhibitors will be rewarded in the Trade Stand Awards. This will be judged and sponsored by AssuredPartners, the specialist insurance and risk management company.

Speakers and industry panels

In the sharing knowledge zone, leading industry professionals will be airing their thoughts on key topics.

10:00am to 10:30am - AHDB seminar: Breeding and feeding for a lower emission dairy cow

- John Newbold and Marco Winters

10:45am to 11:45am - Industry panel one: Building the future

- Edward Lott, Dairy Business Consultant, EJI Business Consulting
- Mel Shipley, Senior Agricultural Relationship Manager, Oxbury Bank
- Ian Harvey, National Dairy Board Chair, NFU
- Richard Corbett, Planning Consultant, Roger Parry & Partners
- Fraser Jones, Dairy Farmer, Calcourt Farms

12:00pm to 12:45pm - UK Dairy Roadmap

- Paul Flanagan, Dairy Strategy Director, AHDB

1:00pm to 2:00pm - Industry panel two: Technology adoption

- Emily Craven, Vet
- Mike King, Dairy Farmer, PE King, Gloucestershire
- Robert Hyde, Associate Professor, Nottingham University
- John Smout, Lely Atlantic, Proposition Manager Milking and Digital
- Patrick Armitage, Farm Management Support, GEA Farm Technologies
- Brian Richardson, Head of Agriculture, Virgin Bank

2:15pm to 2:45pm - Seminar one: AI in agriculture, Lely Centre Midlands

- Sergio Ooijens, Director of the Business Team Next.

Get ready

For everything visitors need to know at the event, a UK Dairy Day app is available to download. It will include exhibitor and sponsor listings, the event map, a timetable for the day and a link to view a digital version of the event and cattle guide.

Entry to the event is free, with no pre-registration required. UK Dairy Day is registered for two CPD professional development points for BASIS, BASIS Dairy Pro and BASIS Environmental.

www.ukdairyday.co.uk

In the cattle ring

Also taking place will be the cattle showing, with six breeds battling it out for the top spot. The day will host national shows for Ayrshire, Brown Swiss, Dairy Shorthorn and Holstein breeds, with classes for the Guernsey and Jersey breeds.

Sponsored by Mole Valley Farmers, the showing will be live streamed with commentary throughout the day.

FerAppase returns as the cattle infrastructure sponsor, in addition to LLM Farm Vets as official show vets, Oakwood Farm Supplies sponsoring the milking parlour and VetSet sponsoring the best presented and tidy lines.

Gary Jones of the Jones prefix from County Wexford, Ireland will be judging the National Holstein Show. Joining him to judge the other breeds are:

- National Ayrshire Show: Matthew Service from Stranraer
- National Brown Swiss Show and Guernsey Classes: Richard Thomas from Carmarthenshire
- National Dairy Shorthorn Show: Blaise Tomlinson from Leicestershire
- Jersey Classes: Phil Arrell from Shropshire

The presentation of the Holstein UK Premier Herd Award will be a highlight of the afternoon, as the 2026 winner will be judged by last year's winner W A & A Booth of Feizor Herd in Settle.

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When mixing robots with parlours...

How easy is it to incorporate robots alongside a conventional milking system? Gareth Jones from Robotic Milking Systems visited a farm in Northern Ireland to find out.

Matthew Irvine's family have been farming at Quarry House near Moira in Northern Ireland since 1979. Back then, his grandfather began milking 25 cows through a jar parlour, installed by local Fullwood dealer Sam McKee.

Cow numbers naturally increased and Matthew and his father Jackie updated the parlour in 2010 by, to a high level 22-point herringbone. Today, the parlour is still running, but it is working alongside two Merlin robots which were installed in 2025, as cow numbers had risen to 200 head.

"We felt our herd of pedigree Holsteins were being restricted with twice-a-day milking in the parlour," says Matthew. "But committing to three milkings a day, with the additional labour required, was something we knew would be very hard to achieve."



On average, milk yields have increased by five litres/cow across the herd

Robotics was the obvious next step, but they felt there could be an interim solution; milking cows at the beginning and end of their

lactation through the parlour, and using robots to milk cows at their peak more regularly.

After some deliberation, the pair decided to install two Fullwood Merlin robots because they could be controlled by the same management system as the parlour. This meant they would get all the data for each cow's lactation on one system. In addition, they had a long history with their dealer, so knew they would get excellent support with their new project.

Accommodating the robots

Construction began last summer and the two robots started up in December. The existing buildings were able to accommodate the two robots with limited cost, with one additional bay added to the cubicle shed. It was designed as a free access system for 120 in-milk cows running as one group, on two robots.

The Irvines milk cows in their first 10 days of lactation through the parlour, twice a day, before introducing them to the robots. Here they are averaging 2.7 milkings/day with an average yield of 45 litres/cow. "We have gained around 1,000 litres/day, which averages out at five litres/cow across the whole herd," says Matthew. "It goes to show the impact additional milkings can have on yield."

Once the cows are past their peak yield they are returned to the parlour to complete their lactation. Balancing

the numbers milked through the robots is key, so this takes priority over days in-milk. "We have found that 120 cows in-milk on the robots is optimum; if we go above that we end up fetching more and we have too little free time," he explains.

The robot group are fed a mixed ration of 50:50 maize to grass silage, with 4.5kg of a high protein blend on the feed fence, before being fed to yield with one concentrate in the robots. In addition, liquid feed is dosed in the machines for any cows that are producing more than 40 litres/day.

"Time spent in the parlour has dramatically reduced."

Since incorporating the robots into their system, labour on the farm has reduced. "We have two part-time staff, who undertake all the evening milkings in the parlour," says Matthew. "Then dad and I manage everything else ourselves. Time spent in the parlour has dramatically reduced, so we have probably saved half a labour unit since making the change."

So what's next? "We are really pleased how things have gone in our first six months, so I guess the natural progression would be to replace the parlour at some stage with another robot," he adds. "I have three boys so I think it will depend on their level of interest in dairy farming, if we decide to expand beyond that."



Robots are used during peak yield

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Realising the full potential of maize

'King of the forage crops', maize represents a cost-effective route to improving dairy ration efficiencies. British Dairying reports.



Iwan Vaughan discussed the sustainability of more maize in the ration

There's room to increase maize inclusion rates in the diet and boost milk from forage, if attention is paid at every stage, from variety selection to ensiling and feed out. That's according to speakers at the recent Volac Maize Symposium at Harper Adams University, Shropshire.

"Maize is more efficient to grow than grass."

Iwan Vaughan, Ruminant Nutritionist at Dairy Diagnosis, said reassessing maize inclusion levels in the diet could help meet growing processor requirements to lower dairying's environmental impact by improving nitrogen (protein) utilisation.

Typically, only 20-30% of dietary protein is utilised and converted into a saleable protein product like milk or meat. The rest is excreted as urea which has the potential to be converted to nitrous oxide - a greenhouse gas.

"Maize is very low in protein; we're talking 8% protein in the diet as a percentage dry matter (DM), and it's full of carbohydrates so it's full of starch," he said. "Effectively with maize, you put in less nitrogen and more carbohydrate."

"As we feed more maize, we get a better balance, with a lower requirement of crude protein and a higher output of microbial protein. This means a higher total milk volume, and higher protein in the milk, too, so that's what helps your protein efficiency."

This translates into less nitrogen excretion into the environment. In an ideal world, maize silage would make up 60-70% of the forage component of the diet - although on some farms, over 40% would get the effect needed, said Iwan.

"Off the back of that you'll hopefully be more cost effective and have a higher margin per litre. Maize is more efficient to grow (than grass) and you can reduce your total concentrate input."

However, to get the most from maize, it's important to get the balance of fibre in the diet correct, to optimise

Continued on page 40.



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Continued from page 39.

throughput and utilisation. Maize complements high-quality, multi-cut grass well. Both have a relatively low total neutral detergent fibre (NDF) which helps increase total forage DM in the diet, but maize has a higher percentage of undigestible NDF (uNDF) which balances the passage through the rumen and optimises forage utilisation.

The volume of maize fed depends on an individual farm's location and ability to grow maize well. And choosing varieties with the right maturity to suit the farm location should be a key priority when looking to grow maize successfully, said Thomas Turner, KWS Technical Adviser.

Growth speed

Maturity class indicates how many days a variety needs to reach harvest, so choosing an early maturing variety will avoid having to cut crops too late in the season, when rainfall could create harvesting and environmental challenges. Other factors affecting the speed of growth include altitude and aspect, latitude, soil type and drilling date.

A variety's FAO number gives an indication of maturity, with a higher FAO (200 plus) being later maturing. So farms with heavy clay soils - which



Thomas Turner discussed variety choice and rethinking fertiliser strategy

may delay drilling date and available growing days - should opt for a lower FAO. A higher FAO could be used on south facing, light ground, said Thomas. But FAO numbers are not the same between breeders, so the best way to compare varieties is to use the Descriptive List to benchmark.

It's also important to prioritise crop nutrition for optimal quality, which then translates into better milk from forage. A common mistake is growers applying nitrogen (N) too early, or not enough of it - particularly this

year when many have tried to save costs by dropping back fertiliser rates.

"This is where you start to see a huge reduction in the quality of your product," noted Thomas. "You're spending an awful lot trying to get this into the clamp and get more milk from forage. If you're not spending money on the nutrition that the crop needs, you are going to lose out on a huge amount of quality."

Fertiliser timings

He advised treating maize like a cereal and applying fertiliser incrementally through the growing season, using SAP testing to identify key nutrients that are missing and replacing them accordingly. As N and sulphur (S) are highly mobile and readily lost in the soil profile, front loading fertiliser at the start of the season could mean the nutrients have been lost by the time the crop needs them.

With the cost and effort associated with growing a high-quality maize crop, it is essential to safeguard as much quality as possible in the clamp, explained Dr Mark Leggett, Head of R&D at Volac. Excluding oxygen and ensuring a rapid drop in pH as part of the fermentation process plays a significant role in doing so, as 'bad' microbes - which cause a reduction in nutrients and dry matter - favour high pH and oxygen.

This is helped by thorough consolidation, rapid sealing, the use of an oxygen barrier sheet, side sheets and appropriate weighting, he said. Using a proven silage additive with *Lactobacillus plantarum* MTD/1 could also tip the balance in the farmer's favour. This helps lower the forage pH rapidly through the production of lactic acid, and prevents 'bad' microbes from proliferating.

Preventing aerobic spoilage once the clamp is opened and exposed to air is also a must, as this is when yeasts could proliferate causing heating/spoilage and DM and energy losses.

"It is essential to safeguard as much quality as possible in the clamp."

A study looked at maize silage treated with Ecocool, which contains *L.buchneri* PJB/1 to create acetic acid - a powerful inhibitor of spoilage yeasts and moulds. The crop ensiled had a naturally high microbial count at ensiling, including over 10,000,000 yeasts per gram of forage. The study found the treated silage remained cool for 4.7 days more than the untreated silage and had no visible spoilage - unlike the untreated silage.

Additional research showed this spoilage would have a negative impact on DM intakes and would reduce NDF digestibility (see table). "What you wind up with is less of a lower quality forage - and the cows can't eat as much. It's a double whammy," he said.

This would translate into less milk in the tank. For example, a one percentage point increase in NDF digestibility is associated with a 0.17kg increase in DM intake and a 0.25kg increase in fat corrected milk. So a four-point change, as seen in the treated silage, would be worth a kilo of milk.



Mark Leggett discussed safeguarding high-quality maize in the clamp

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'Don't let "Cowslip" down'

	Spoiled silage (% of DM) (Ref: Whitlock et al 2000)			
	0	5.4	10.7	16
DM intake (kg/day)	8	7.4	7	6.7
NDF digestibility (%)	63.2	56	52.5	52.8

Spoilage can have a negative impact on DM intakes and NDF digestibility

Winter forage prospects looking good

Second and third cut silages are now in the clamp on many farms, so attention is beginning to turn towards winter feeding strategies. And based on exceptional first cut results, the prospects are extremely promising, as British Dairying reports.

Analysis of more than 300 first-cut silage samples by NWF Agriculture suggests that 2026 could be remembered as one of the strongest forage years seen for some time. Quality is generally showing a marked improvement on recent seasons, reversing the five-year trend of declining silage quality.

"This improvement has been driven by favourable winter and spring growing conditions, although some regions experienced a drier spring than in 2025," says Paul Mardell, Technical Development Manager at NWF.

"Carry out regular forage analysis throughout the feeding period."

"The main driver is that we have seen silage cut slightly earlier this year, which has meant the grass has been leafier, less mature, lower in fibre and higher in digestibility. The weather conditions have allowed farmers to cut and wilt at the optimum growth stage of the grass, giving an increase in sugar, rapidly fermentable carbohydrates (RFC) and metabolisable energy (ME), with lower fibre and neutral detergent fibre (NDF) values."

This will enable farmers to increase silage inclusion in rations, driving dry matter intakes and milk from



Silage quality is generally showing a marked improvement on recent years

forage up. "This could also give the potential to reduce purchased feed and improve feed conversion efficiency," notes Paul. "There will, however, be a greater requirement for effective fibre and NDF sources; like straw and fibrous straight feeds, to help balance rations."

Rumen health

Focusing on rumen health will be critical. Lower fibre and NDF levels, combined with higher fermentability, will increase the risk of ruminal acid loading. "Without sufficient effective fibre in the diet, the risk of digestive upsets and reduced performance will increase," he warns.

"To help combat this, farmers will need to ensure there is enough effective fibre to give the ration some structure." Higher RFC and increased protein in silage should help maintain

rumen balance; starch levels will need to be reviewed carefully, along with an increased requirement for bypass protein.

Clamp management

The higher dry matter silage, combined with higher sugar, will boost intake potential, but can also increase the risk of heating and aerobic spoilage, says Paul.

"Careful clamp management, including maintaining a clean face and progressing quickly across the clamp, can help minimise spoilage. At the feed fence, avoiding overfeeding and regularly removing refusals will further reduce heating losses and support feed intakes."

At the start of the feeding period and whenever there is a diet change, careful monitoring will be required, he adds. "Check cows regularly for

cud chewing rates, rumen fill, dung consistency, and milk butterfat; these are all indicators of rumen health. Monitor intakes and adjust as required.

"Farmers will need to ensure there is enough effective fibre."

"Most importantly, carry out regular forage analysis throughout the feeding period and use the results to review ration performance. By closely monitoring forage quality and cow response, farmers can maximise the value of what appears to be one of the highest-quality first-cut silage crops seen in recent years."



Paul Mardell at NWF is optimistic

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Choosing the right brassica crop

Dairy producers should assess forage stocks now ahead of the winter and consider planting a brassica crop to make up any shortfalls. British Dairying finds out more.

As part of its natural growth cycle, perennial ryegrass growth typically peaks in May and slows as temperatures cool, creating potential forage shortages. Brassicas can help fill this gap, providing high-quality forage from August through to February, depending on the variety choice and sowing date.

According to Germinal Area Sales Manager Claire Bailey Archibald, dairy farmers should opt for forage varieties rather than game cover types, which are taller and have a lower feed value. Speaking at a recent webinar, she stressed that bigger is not always better when it comes to variety selection. “The highest-yielding crops are not always the best. Quality and utilisation are key,” she said. “Varieties with higher leaf-to-stem ratio will improve animal performance.”

“The later you drill it, the less it will potentially grow.”

Brassicas are hungry crops that require good nutrient management. Before establishment, soil testing should be carried out and any lime deficiencies corrected. Soils should have a pH of 6-6.5, while phosphorus and potassium should be maintained at an index of 2 and -2, respectively. Site selection is also critical - heavy or poorly drained soils and sloping fields should be avoided, as they increase the risk of compaction and nutrient runoff, said Claire.

It is now largely too late to plant crops for summer/early autumn grazing. However, several brassicas can still be established to provide valuable autumn and winter grazing. In the former camp, swedes and kale take the longest time from sowing to grazing (around 25 and 22 weeks, respectively) and should have been planted by May/June.

While they are still options for next year, a better choice for this year might be the hybrid brassica Redstart; a cross between kale and rape, which has an extended sowing window from April to August.



Brassica crops offer livestock operations a valuable filler for the forage gap that sits between autumn and spring

Redstart typically reaches maturity in around 90 days and produces 6-8t/ha dry matter (DM).

“It can be drilled early to allow multiple grazings in the late summer and autumn due to its regrowth potential, giving farmers two opportunities to control weeds and break pest cycles for things like leather jackets before going back into grass,” said Claire. Alternatively, crops drilled now can be winter grazed ahead of a spring reseed.

Forage rape is another option. It can also be sown until August, establishes quickly and yields around 4-6t DM/ha. “It is very popular in arable systems following winter wheat or barley,” Claire explained.



Germinal's Claire Bailey Archibald

Lastly, leafy turnip is another suitable option following arable crops and can be sown until early September for grazing through to January. Although it is lower yielding than hybrid brassicas, it still produces around 4-6t DM/ha.

Establishment timing is critical, and Claire advised against drilling into dry soils. “We need rain, otherwise the plant won't germinate. The worst case is we get rain and then another heatwave, because it could die off due to lack of moisture.”

Timing and conditions

When establishing brassicas, the aim is to produce sufficient biomass to feed dairy animals during the late summer and winter, so getting the crop in the ground as early as possible is key. “It's always best to establish it in good time and under the best conditions possible. The later you drill it, the less it will potentially grow,” she warned.

Successful utilisation of the crop relies on good planning and adhering to some basic principles. Farmers should look for a good leaf-to-stem ratio and quality as these varieties will have a higher feed value for livestock.

Dairy animals require a seven to 10-day adaptation period when they are introduced to brassicas. This can be achieved by allowing animals to graze for one or two hours per day initially before gradually increasing access until they are grazing full-time by day 10.

“Brassicas are completely different to grass and are low in fibre,” explained Claire. Because brassicas are highly digestible and low in structural fibre, it is crucial that cattle receive hay, straw or silage to slow rumen passage. The fibre source should account for around 30% of the total diet. Ideally, bales should be positioned during the summer, at the time of drilling, to avoid the need for heavy machinery on wet ground during the winter.

Brassicas are low in the essential minerals iodine, selenium, copper and cobalt, so these must be administered. A slow-release bolus is an option, but speak to your vet for advice. Animals should also have access to fresh, clean water.

Dietary percentage

When grazing lactating cows, brassicas should make up no more than 25-30% of the diet to minimise the risk of milk taint. And to achieve good utilisation, Claire recommended using a long, narrow fence face with a double break wire to make it easier to move animals.

Finally, brassica crops should be grazed off by the end of February, before flowering, as flowering plants produce glucosinolates, which are toxic to livestock. “Start planning winter feed stocks now,” she noted. “Assess how much feed you have so far and whether you are likely to face a shortfall, then choose the right brassica for the job.”



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Manage what you can control...

Farmgate milk prices are increasingly volatile, so what can producers do to manage those elements that they can control: Input costs and income? British Dairying reports.

Dairy farmers are used to volatility. But the extremes seen between 2023 and 2026 have been unprecedented. That's according to dairy commentator Chris Walkland, who was speaking at a recent Mole Valley Feed Solutions event. "There's a clear price cycle - we've gone down through the depths over the winter and now we're coming back up the other side," he said. "But it's getting increasingly volatile - it's brutal."

Lower prices have started to curtail domestic production, bringing supply and demand slightly back into balance - although fat and protein contents are high, and global production remains extremely strong. So what's the current forecast?

"From 2008 to 2025, milk yields increased by 27%."

The UK's free trade agreements have played purely into the hands of those importing to the country, while the US Dairy Export Council has huge ambitions, which will likely displace the UK's own exports in future, explained Chris.

At the same time, Brexit has made trade with the EU increasingly difficult. "Since Brexit, 16,400 British businesses have stopped trading with the EU - it's risky, costly, and more complicated; UK products



Milk price volatility is getting increasingly extreme, said Chris Walkland

now equate to 'non-EU products.' That said, British dairy exports are performing strongly, adding value to branded domestic production, and the demand for whey protein among the health conscious seems unstoppable. "Arla has pulled some genius moves; buying the Volac factory in Wales alongside the redundant factory next door," said Chris. "They have 50-60 scientists working on whey, and they're brilliant at what they do. The Arla price is 3ppl above the rest because of whey, and I can see that getting bigger"

However, the cure for high prices is high prices, and markets will be seeking lower cost alternatives to

whey, he warned. Global volatility - whether related to consumption trends, trade tariffs, wars, or supply and demand - will therefore continue to be a feature of the market.

Retailers offering aligned, cost-of-production contracts will continue to offer more level prices, given that liquid milk does not face import competition. But contracts based on commodity markets remain open to all global, external impacts.

In future, commodity processors will increasingly levy production caps to manage supply, including ABC and even zero pricing, predicted Chris. And there are plenty of processors making

long-term investments - although farmers' options clearly depend on their local milk field. Some will find it uneconomic to continue producing milk, and may focus on other enterprises.

This will see the continued consolidation towards fewer farms producing the same amount of - or more - milk. "I also think we'll see greater payments for protein and sustainability measures," added Chris. "And if we could get the people who matter [politicians] to listen to us, there'd be no stopping us. Left to our own devices, we'd be flying."

Main considerations

So in the meantime, for farmers who aren't in control of their milk prices, what are the options? There are two main considerations - improving feed efficiencies and maximising fat and protein content to boost milk prices, said Chris Bartram, Head of Nutrition at Mole Valley Farmers. And farmers have already made great strides in this, partly through genetic progress and partly through better feeding and management.

"From 2008 to 2025, milk yields increased by 27%, according to Kingshay costings," he said. Over the same time, fat and protein yields increased by 27%, and the margin over purchased feed (MOPF) (based on a milk price of 30ppl and feed cost of £275/t) rose by 15%, to £1,804/head. But by feeding more precisely, it's possible to get more. For example, first cut silage

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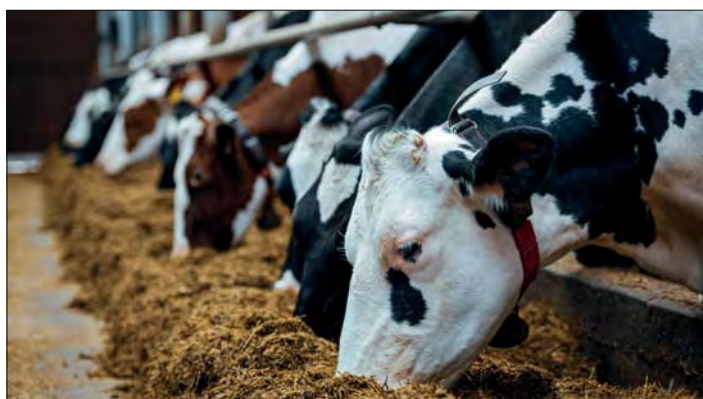


Some producers will find it uneconomic to continue producing milk

in the South West this year averaged 11.2MJ/kg dry matter (DM) of metabolisable energy (ME), versus 10.9MJ/kg last year. "That will enable cows to produce one more litre per day from forage." Lactic acid content is higher, too - at 93g/kg versus 87g - so cows will eat more of it. However, individual forages will need to be carefully balanced to maximise feed efficiencies and fat or protein production.

"You can influence input costs and what you get out of them."

"It's not worth pushing for production if your contract doesn't pay for the extra," said Chris. "But where your contract allows, the economics are still there to feed for the marginal litres." For example, based on a milk price of 35ppl and concentrate cost of £300/t, a farm producing 10,000 litres/cow and feeding 4t/cow (0.4kg/litre) will generate a MOPF of £2,300/cow. A



Forages need to be carefully balanced to maximise feed efficiencies

farm producing 7,000 litres using 2.1t/cow of feed (0.3kg/litre) will generate £1,820.

"But the concentrates you feed can have a massive impact on yield and quality," he added. Concentrates with a high acidogenicity value (AV) (ie, more acidic) will reduce feed intakes and upset rumen activity. Comparing a high and low AV concentrate, trials show forage intake falls from 11.7kg DM to 11.1kg/head, causing yields to drop from 31.7 litres/cow to 27.8 litres, and butterfat to decline from 4.18% to 3.75%. "Not all feeds are the same."

Feeding fresh cows TPI90 - which includes prairie meal, protected methionine and lysine, before and after calving - boosted fat and protein by 0.2 percentage points. In addition, cows gained weight rather than losing it, helping to set them up for subsequent insemination.

Exciting development

"If you invest £30/cow the return is £60. This is a really exciting development - trials found feeding TPI90 just for four days post-calving had a beneficial effect," said Chris. "A short, sharp slug has continuing benefits."

Meanwhile, feeding calves and heifers higher protein milk powder and concentrates also has a very good return on investment, maximising growth rates at the most efficient time in a cow's life, and enabling them to calve down earlier.

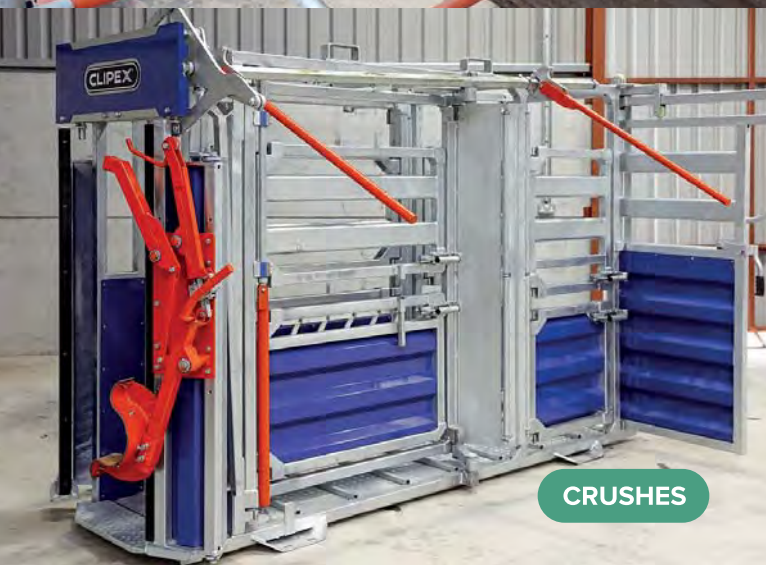
Dietary protein

"A Reading University trial showed that increasing dietary protein at a cost of under £4/calf gave a positive return on investment with only 15 litres more milk required to break even in the first lactation," he explained. "And yields in a summary of recent studies increased from 10,242 litres to 11,511 litres, simply by feeding more protein in the rearing period. So if you're still feeding 18% concentrates, have a look at 22% protein instead."

Other areas to consider include using silage additives to reduce clamp losses, and re-evaluating minerals and specialist inputs in the light of forage analyses. "Bringing that all together, alongside payments for carbon efficiency, can help you to claw back up to 5ppl," said Chris. "We may not be able to influence the milk price, but you can influence input costs and what you get out of them."



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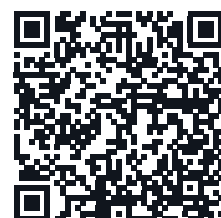
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Soil health key to sustainable maize

The UK's maize acreage is at an all-time high, with the crop becoming a major component in the rotation of more and more farms. And in today's climate, there has never been a greater focus on growing it sustainably. British Dairying finds out how it's done.

To be sustainable, any crop must first be profitable. So producers have to pay close attention to areas like pest and disease pressure - something that is only likely to increase with larger cropping areas. But equally important - particularly with maize - is its impact on the wider environment, most notably soil health, says Megan Whatty, Environmental Services Specialist at Hutchinsons.

Perceptions and regulations

Maize does have negative associations with issues like soil erosion, nutrient leaching and compaction. So there is a responsibility on growers to apply a best practice approach in order to reverse these perceptions and comply with pollution regulations.

"Avoiding high risk sites; like steep slopes, and ensuring fields that are close to water courses have buffer strips, is a good first step," she says. "Next is adopting cultivation methods that reduce run-off risks and minimise soil compaction."

"With a crop that is harvested relatively late in the season, soil damage and bare stubbles over winter have historically been at the root of a lot of the problems with maize. But companion cropping or use of winter



Megan Whatty says that larger maize crops require careful management

cover crops are increasingly offering a good solution," she adds.

"Despite the loss of the SOH4 maize cover crop option in the 2026 sustainable farming incentive (SFI), there is still support for these

practices through SFI - and in some areas there is funding offered by water companies, for example.

"Ultimately, looking after the soil is going to impact positively on the long-term prospects for the whole

farm, not just the sustainability of growing maize. So, incentivised or not, minimising soil damage and avoiding bare soils should be a priority."

In the latest SFI, the two actions most relevant to sustainable maize growing are CSAM2, for a multi-species winter cover crop, paying £129/ha; and the CIPM3, for companion cropping, paying £55/ha.

While the companion cropping option only requires a single plant type, the inclusion of a second would allow these two actions to be stacked, according to Hutchinsons' Arable and Forage Agronomist Adam North.

"A little cover can develop into something significant."

"By including something like crimson clover alongside a grass like Italian ryegrass as your maize companion crop, this could also qualify as a multi-species overwinter cover crop," he explains. "It is then possible to stack these two actions, to give a total payment of £184/ha, making that single establishment action far more cost effective."

For many growers, how to establish the companion crop is a key question, and one that Adam has had cause to address on many farms. "Most farmers would prefer to avoid driving into a standing maize crop; for obvious reasons, so using a very specialised combination drill that puts the maize and the companion crop seed in the ground simultaneously has its attractions," he explains.

"But it is fraught with danger. Maize has an inherent characteristic where it can shut down in the face



Best practice involves avoiding high risk sites and ensuring fields close to water courses have buffer strips



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of too much competition, so if the companion crop gets away too well, it can significantly impede the primary crop. There is then the question of weed control, which becomes more challenging when you have a companion crop in its early stages."

Inter-row drills are now reasonably well established, with the companion crop being drilled into standing maize at the six-to-eight-leaf stage. Results can be variable, however, with timing around weed control still a potential issue, so the quest for greater reliability goes on.

"Broadcasting a companion crop using a drone is one of the latest methods I've seen," says Adam. "There needs to be some moisture in the ground around application for this to be really effective, and there is the question of herbicide residues to consider, but we have seen it successfully applied in some areas of the UK."

Alternative method

"Another method is to incorporate the seed into slurry or digestate and drill it between the rows using a trailing shoe applicator. I was concerned about scorch of the seedlings, but - carried out after weed control - I have seen this work surprisingly well," adds Adam.

The seed was included at 20kg/ha, and applied at around the six-to-seven-leaf stage, with the maize at 75cm rows, he explains. "Establishment was certainly helped by the presence of moisture in the digestate, and the organic matter may well have bound up any herbicide residues.

"You do of course need the right equipment, including highly specialised dual narrow wheels, but this method does seem to offer optimum establishment conditions



Companion crop seed, in digestate, can be drilled between rows

for the companion crop with minimal disruption for the maize."

Success in establishing a companion crop may well address the issue of avoiding bare soils over the winter following maize. Where it's not possible, getting some kind of overwinter cover crop in after maize harvest should be a priority, notes Adam.

Establishment timings

"A poorly established cover crop can in some cases be more damaging than doing nothing, and hence why many are looking at companion cropping to have something established before harvest.

"Nevertheless, the window of opportunity for after-harvest establishment is increasing, due to steady progress in the development of earlier maturing maize varieties," he

explains. "And - as with companion cropping - anything is better than nothing. A little cover can develop into something significant that will do a lot for soil health.

"Also, having overwinter cover ahead of maize makes a huge

difference, so keep that in mind when planning rotations. Driving on some kind of green cover, as opposed to bare soil, when applying muck and preparing the ground for maize, is so much better for overall soil health."

Adam and Megan are in agreement when it comes to the merits of growing maize in rotation, as opposed to continuous cropping, though both recognise that farms can often face limitations.

Exploring options

"Whatever your individual farm circumstances, it is well worth exploring all options in order to grow maize in a way that prioritises soil and water quality," says Megan. "Companion cropping and/or overwinter cover crops are certainly going to be beneficial for most farms. But there are other options, supported within SFI or other environmental schemes, like buffer strips or in-field grass strips, which are a great tool for reducing soil erosion and nutrient run-off risk.

"Ultimately, the goal when growing maize should be to look after soil health; whether it is funded or not, because that's the key to long-term resilience and sustainability."



Adam North stresses that correct timing for undersown crops is crucial

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BVD testing is proving its worth

One farm in Cornwall adopts a belt-and-braces approach to disease prevention – but still found persistently infected stock at routine bovine viral diarrhoea testing. Thankfully, this enabled them to act quickly and turn things around, as British Dairying reports.

Producer Amy Osborne from Tobarn Farm, Jacobstow in Cornwall runs a 175-cow milking herd, with around 120 calves and youngstock at any given time. Working alongside three other family members and two relief milkers, she sells milk to Saputo.

The herd is predominantly Holstein Friesian with about 25% of it Dairy Shorthorn, and is run as one herd. Amy wanted to be more selective around replacement breeding, so now uses genomic testing to select only the best heifers for sexed semen. The intention is that, unless something unexpected happens, their offspring will go on to join the milking herd. Milking cows are artificially inseminated (AI) to Angus and the non-AI heifers run with a Hereford bull. Overall, fertility on the farm is strong, with a 41% pregnancy rate.

Vaccination practice

Everything is vaccinated against bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD), leptospirosis and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) and has been for some time. Calves also have an intranasal pneumonia vaccine, as Amy is keen to ensure bovine respiratory disease (BRD) isn't an issue when they're young or as they grow – any lung damage can impair future performance.

Every calf on the farm has been tag and tested for BVD for the past five years. Prior to that, calves were only tagged; something which coincided with picking up some persistently infected (PI) bulling



Every calf has been tag and tested for BVD for the past five years

heifers; they were all immediately removed from the herd.

"We thought that the issue had been dealt with, but BVD is known for not only being endemic in the UK cattle population; it is able to lurk unseen, shedding the virus and leading to problems with many aspects of performance," Amy says. "We had a heifer calf born dead – a really pretty little Shorthorn – from a healthy-looking dam, which was hugely disappointing. We tested the calf and it came back as a PI, but mum tested negative and got back in-calf without issue to the Hereford bull."

Unfortunately, that calf, upon tag and testing, also came back as a PI. "We had no choice – dam and calf had to go," notes Amy. "The risk of virus being spread was too great and the negative impact on herd performance couldn't be ignored."

Making the best of the Cornish climate's good grass growing conditions, the cows graze in the day from March until September/October – rainfall dependent – and are housed at night to ensure they are getting sufficient nutrition.

"It's great being able to reassure them that BVD is not an issue."

"We knew the cows had the potential to do more," says Amy. "But what 'more' looked like, we weren't sure – so after speaking to our advisers, we changed the nutrition to incorporate maize silage."

The farm averages four grass silage cuts and 2026 is the second year of growing maize, something that has given an almost immediate nine-litre improvement in yield. Cows now average 31 litres/day and 8,800–9,000 litres/cow.

Despite the farm's proactive approach to disease control, nothing can be 100% reliable against BVD, warns vet Tom Lush from Giles and Parsons Vets. "Having good biosecurity, vaccinating, and tag and testing meant that Amy already had strong measures in place to try and prevent BVD causing issues," he says. "But it is important to remember that, even with all these in place, BVD

can still be lurking as no approach is 100% effective. If Amy had not been vaccinating and actively monitoring, there was potential for BVD to have caused devastating consequences.

"Without tag and testing, a PI calf could have carried on into the milking herd, infecting many others along the way, creating a significant impact on fertility and production. This heifer could have then been served with sexed semen, perpetuating the cycle."

The year-round calving herd has fortnightly vet visits from Giles and Parsons and has made use of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway-funded vet visit. For BVD, they use the Bovela vaccine due to its one dose primary course and annual booster regime making it easier from a management perspective.

Sales reassurance

"The herd has been free of TB since June 2025, which has opened up calf sales as an additional income stream," remarks Amy. "We tend to sell calves to just a couple of buyers at 42 days, and it's great being able to reassure them that BVD is not an issue in the herd, and everything has been tag and tested."

Looking ahead, the 100-ha owned farm is supplemented with 49ha of rented ground and, should more become available – at the right price – the Osbornes may look to increase farm size. But for now, the intention is to stick to current cow numbers and improve efficiency by carefully selecting heifer replacements and ensuring all stock are as disease-free as possible.



Vet Tom Lush says vaccination is only one part of a whole BVD strategy



Amy focuses on a healthy herd



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CALF CARE

How justified are high calf feeding rates?

New research questions if a trend towards feeding excessive milk volumes can be justified from both a performance and cost perspective. British Dairying reports.



Dr Jessica Cooke challenges feeding higher volumes of calf milk replacer

Investing in calf rearing to produce healthy and productive replacements is critical. But farmers should carry out a cost benefit analysis on feeding volumes, according to Dr Jessica Cooke, R&D Manager at Volac.

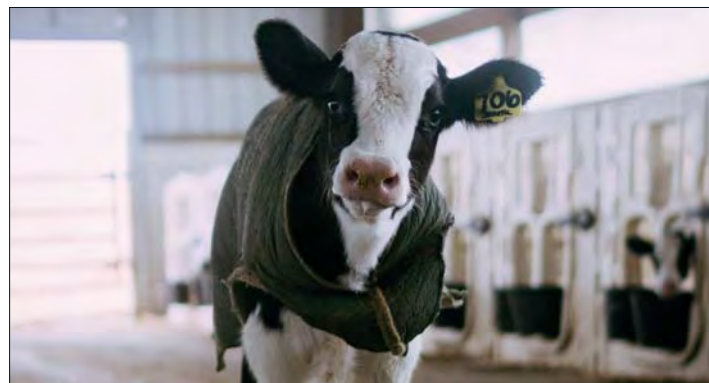
"Our research shows that higher milk volumes - of over 1,050g of milk solids per calf per day - do not deliver significant improvements in growth or health, could be compromising performance at weaning and costing farmers more," she says.

The two studies showed that higher feed volumes - either from high-quality whey protein concentrate or skim-based calf milk

replacer (CMR) - tended to deliver better pre-weaning growth due to increased energy supply. However, growth suffered at weaning as calf starter intakes were reduced. There were also high CMR refusals on calves fed high volumes.

Study one

The first study, at AFBI Hillsborough fed 96 Holstein heifers Radiant Calf CMR, a 23% crude protein, 18% fat, 30% skim-based product, enhanced with milk oligosaccharides. Half of the heifers received six litres (900g of milk solids) of CMR per day across two feeds, with milk reduced from day 43 to 63. The other half



Jessica recommends feeding 900-1,050g of milk solids per calf/ day

received eight litres (1,350g of milk solids), reducing from day 50 to 77.

"There were higher refusals of CMR up to 28 days in the group fed eight litres," says Jessica. "In fact, in the afternoon feed, the full volume of milk was not consumed 38 times." Most notably, total starter feed intakes were higher (108kg/calf to day 90) in the group receiving six litres a day. This compared to 79kg in the group fed eight litres.

"What's important is farmers provide a CMR with good levels of protein."

"This meant the six-litre group were better equipped to cope with the weaning transition and were eating around 2kg of starter by day 63," she explains. "The eight-litre group ate less starter. Consequently, although pre-weaning growth was higher in calves fed more, growth suffered at weaning."

Average daily live weight gains (DLWG) were 0.93kg/day to 90 days



Calves fed 6 litres had higher starter feed intakes than those fed 8 litres

in the higher group and 0.89kg/day in the six-litre group. That translated into 3kg difference in weight at 13 weeks - and health was good in both groups. "A growth rate of 0.89kg/day is excellent, and calves were more equipped to deal with weaning, so it's worth questioning if the 26kg of extra CMR fed was worth the investment, particularly as a lot was wasted."

Study two

Another study at Duchy College in Cornwall compared performance of calves born in a September-October block and fed via computerised

feeders. The 25 Holstein heifers were fed Imunogard, a 23% crude protein, 21% fat, all dairy protein, whey protein concentrate-based CMR, including Celmanax yeast. One group received seven litres (1,050g of milk solids) a day over 66 days, reducing over days 46-66, and the second received nine litres (1,350g of milk solids) per day over 80 days, reducing from days 58-80. Average DLWG to day 84 was identical at 0.78kg/calf per day.

"The calves fed the higher rate had stronger pre-weaning growth - but

checks at weaning due to reduced starter intakes meant average growth rates were the same for both groups, and there was no difference in weight by 12 weeks," says Jessica.

"Both studies show excessively high CMR volumes are not always necessary to achieve good growth, and feeding more can make weaning more challenging. What's important is farmers provide a CMR with good levels of protein; either from whey or skim, at a level which will promote starter intakes - which are just as important for rearing success as CMR."

Recommended practice

To encourage starter consumption, Jessica recommends:

- Offering around 900-1,050g of milk solids per calf per day and weaning over at least three weeks.
- Feeding a CMR based on all dairy protein or a combination of dairy protein plus vegetable protein (hydrolysed wheat gluten), where the dairy protein is either good quality whey protein or skim (>30% skim inclusion).
- Feeding a CMR with 16-21% fat, as higher fat can lower starter intakes.

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AHDB and LEAF launch drive to inspire the next generation through on-farm experiences

by
Roz Reynolds,
AHDB Head of Education

AHDB has joined forces with LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) to launch Open Your Gate – a new campaign that supports farmers to deliver one million on-farm experiences for children and young people by 2031.

To inspire and help them overcome obstacles to delivering farm visits as part of the one million ambition, 80 farmers are being given the chance to take part in AHDB and LEAF's **free School Farm Visits Support (SFVS) programme**, developing their knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver safe, high-quality and meaningful on-farm experiences.

Those taking part will receive:

- Fully funded Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS) training, providing the knowledge and practical guidance needed to plan and deliver safe, high-quality and engaging farm visits
- Tailored one-to-one support with a LEAF Education Specialist, helping each farmer apply the training to their own farm, from visitor routes and activities to planning their first visit and connecting with local schools
- Practical resources and ongoing support, including access to a network of new and experienced host farmers

Farmers who have already taken part in the CEVAS course have found it transformative.

Celia Smith, who has a dairy and beef farm in Gloucestershire, said: "It was great to meet other farmers and hear about what they are doing as well as getting all the important information needed to open the farm up to visitors. The course leaders were really inspiring."

The **Open Your Gate campaign** comes amid growing evidence that young people want to know more about where their food comes from but often lack opportunities to engage directly with farming.

AHDB and LEAF believe that giving children first-hand experiences of sustainable farming can help address misconceptions, build trust in food production and inspire future careers in the sector.

Roz Reynolds, AHDB Head of Education said:

"Every farm has a story to tell, and working with LEAF we are providing the tools, training and support to help farmers host visits with confidence. By opening their gates, farmers can help children understand where their food comes from, share the pride they take in producing food and inspire the next generation through real experiences on farm."

"Open Your Gate is about creating a movement across the industry. Together, we can help deliver one million impactful farm experiences by 2031."

Applications are now open for 80 fully funded places on the SFVS programme.

For more information about the campaign, visit: <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/ahdb-and-leaf-launch-drive-to-inspire-the-next-generation-through-on-farm-experiences>



How to keep cows and calves properly hydrated

Anything that causes a cow or calf to become dehydrated will impact on its performance and welfare. So how can producers mitigate the effect? British Dairying finds out.



Bill Holland uses targeted rehydration to support fresh calvers and address dehydration in calves

For the past 15 years, Bill and Jenny Holland, who farm near Sudbury in Derbyshire, have made rehydration a core element of managing their calving cows. And they now also use supplements when problems are seen in pre-weaned calves.

With herd manager John Wheat, the Hollands run a herd of 489 all-year-round calving cows – although they don't serve cows in March to ensure they have some time off around Christmas. Milked twice a day though a rapid exit parlour and housed all year round, the cows are averaging 11,000 litres.

"We started using post-calving drinks because it seemed the right thing to do; we want cows back on their feet and settling into lactation as quickly and smoothly as possible in what is a risky period for the animal," Bill says. "We think it is important to give calving cows more attention, as if you get that right it saves labour and stress on the farm."

The farm operates a just-in-time calving system, with close-up cows in cubicles and moving into one of four rubberised pens just before calving. Immediately post-calving, cows get access to fresh water, and are given a calcium bolus and pain relief. They also get Reviva, a post-calving drink which helps prevent post-calving dehydration.

"A central tool when managing dehydration is the use of rehydration supplements to reduce the physiological effects," advises Alicia Wilson at Trouw Nutrition GB. "They can be especially important in times of hot weather, when cows and calves can also be affected by heat stress."

Post-calving dehydration affects all cows and is due to a combination of two factors. Firstly, they lose around 50 litres of fluids and salts when they calve, made up of blood and intra-uterine fluids.

At the same time, food and water intakes reduce in the hours leading up to calving.

"When a cow loses fluids and salts she needs to replace them, and the immediate physiological response is to move fluids out of cells to balance concentrations in the blood," Alicia explains. "The sooner she is able to drink after calving, the sooner the balance is restored and the less has to be extracted from cells."

"It is normally not difficult to get cows to drink a lot in the two hours immediately post-calving, provided the drink is palatable, but it is important to make sure what they are drinking is the best replacement for lost fluids – and this means supplying electrolytes," she adds.

"We see very few transition issues or metabolic problems, which is pleasing."

"Water has no electrolytes in it, so doesn't rehydrate cows as well as a product that supplies the necessary salts. The cost of a rehydration supplement is very low compared to the benefits that will result."

Reviva is a highly palatable post-calving drink providing a balance of glucose, electrolytes, vitamins and trace elements to support the immune function and rehydrate cows effectively. Bill mixes it in warm water and has no problem

with cows taking it. Immediately after they have finished the drink, they get access to the milking cow ration.

"It has become a standard part of our protocols, and cows seem to settle into lactation well with good dry matter intakes," he says. "We see very few transition issues or metabolic problems, which is pleasing."

Jennifer Holland is in charge of calf rearing at the farm, and believes that with calves, it is all about prevention and catching things early. She rears around 250 calves per year, with beef calves sold at three weeks old.

Growth rates

She feeds calves colostrum within two hours of birth, followed by a second colostrum feed to achieve 10% of birth weight fed within six hours of birth. The calves then get transition milk for 30 days before moving onto pasteurised whole milk fed through automatic feeders until 90 days old. Nothing is weaned before 12 weeks old and growth rates average over 0.8kg/day.

Dehydration can be a significant issue in calves, so for the past four years the Hollands have included Osmofit in their calf management protocols. This is an oral rehydration



Oral rehydration is always given with water and between milk feeds

solution that is mixed in water and is designed for use alongside continued feeding of milk or milk replacer. A hypotonic solution containing carefully formulated levels of sodium and glucose, it helps stabilise the water and electrolyte balance. It can be used during periods of, and recovery from, diarrhoea, or as a preventative measure to reduce the risk of dehydration.

Calves dehydrate faster than mature cattle, particularly when

scouring, which, combined with a faster metabolism and smaller body size, means dehydration can rapidly lead to death, says Alicia. "Look out for the signs that calves are suffering from dehydration, because the sooner you can intervene, the less severe the impact will be. Reduced milk intake, including reduced speed of drinking, refusing milk feeds or generally being 'fussy' are all tell-tale signs of dehydration."

Changes in behaviour, like less time socialising, droopy ears, or hiding away from the group, should all be taken as indications that a calf is off colour, she adds. "To help mitigate the risk and consequences of dehydration in calves, plan for it happening. The goal must be to rehydrate calves before scouring signs are seen, so ensure there are always stocks of a rehydration formula on farm."

Feeding electrolytes

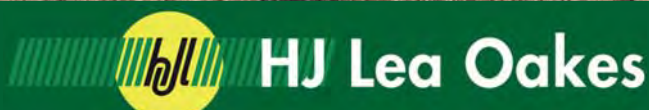
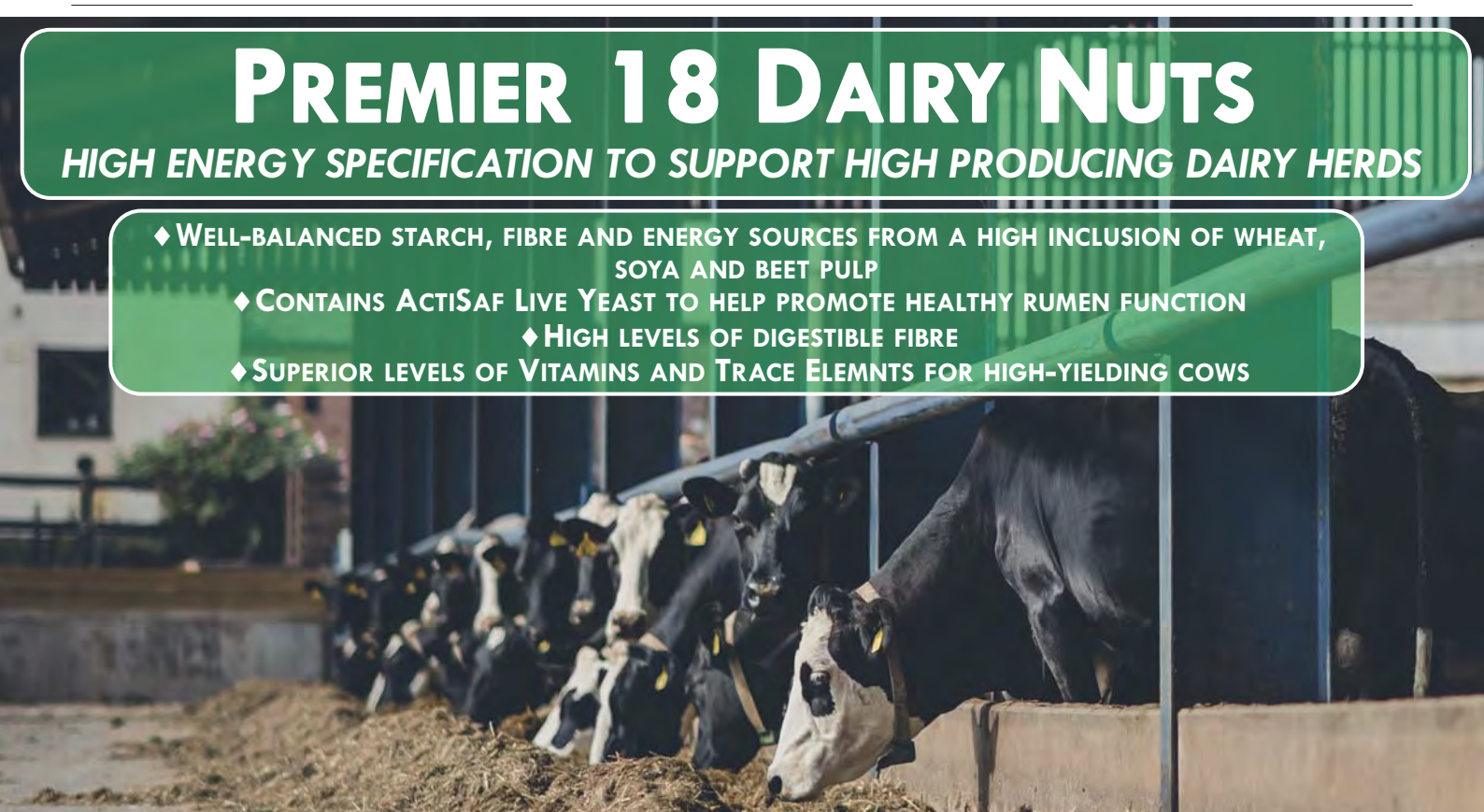
As soon as a calf is off feed or looking a bit lethargic, Jennifer will give it electrolytes. "The standard protocol is two feeds of milk and two Osmofit feeds fed in between the milk feeds," she explains. "Calves won't realise they need to drink water when they are getting dehydrated, so we give them the electrolytes and find they drink it straight down and still have enough appetite for a milk feed later."

"Although taking the pre-emptive approach might cost you a little bit of extra work, getting calves straight back on track quickly saves you time you would otherwise spend managing a sick calf for the next few days," she adds. "We see very low incidence of scours but ensure the consequences are minimised."

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Transition milk brings calf health benefits

In this month's Farm Vet Opinion, Sarah Bolt from Kingshay; part of the VetPartners group, explains why the attention of producers is shifting beyond the first colostrum feed towards transition milk, water intake, and farm-specific calf-rearing protocols.

Two themes stood out at this year's Youngstock Conference - the growing importance of transition milk and the value of water. Neither is a new concept, but the discussion marked a noticeable change, with greater emphasis on turning traditional 'best practice' approaches to feeding pre-weaning calves into more farm-specific protocols for the whole farm team to use.

Developing your calf feeding protocol collaboratively with the whole farm team, youngstock adviser and vet will help make it more practical and therefore consistently followed.

Relevant farm data and observations should shape the plan, allowing everyone to monitor progress and, if needed, adjust the protocol to achieve daily liveweight gain (DLWG) targets.

Transition milk

Industry conversations around youngstock have long focused on the fundamentals of good colostrum management, which remains essential, but interest in the role of transition milk is really growing.

Produced during the second to sixth milkings after calving, transition milk contains more milk solids, immunoglobulins, bioactive compounds, growth factors and hormones than mature milk. And calves fed transition milk have been shown to have better gut development and improved DLWG compared with those not fed it. The 'right approach' to transition milk will be farm



Sarah Bolt explains why transition milk deserves greater attention

specific as it will depend on resources available on each farm, like labour and hygiene, as well as the risk of disease transfer, especially if transition milk is not pasteurised.

There are several ways to use transition milk, including feeding it directly, pooling milk from the second milking until it is suitable for the bulk tank, freezing supplies, adding a measured quantity of colostrum to milk, or incorporating stored transition milk into a milk-replacer programme. Whichever approach is chosen, a clear protocol should set out feeding volumes, handling procedures and individual responsibilities. This helps the whole team work consistently while managing the practical implications for hygiene, milk quality and workload.

Setting this protocol to fit in with the farm strategy can also provide an answer to the fine balance between

enough milk replacer and calf starter, so the question is not just 'how much should we feed?', but 'what are we trying to achieve, and what is practical on this farm?'

For example, a business targeting an average DLWG of 0.8kg across the pre-weaning period may choose to build its protocol around milk intakes of over eight litres/calf per day. Concentrate provision, step-down feeding and weaning then need to be planned around that target.

Intentional strategy

Feeding higher volumes of milk can support growth, but it will also mean a change to standard weaning, extending the step-down period, so calves have enough time to increase concentrate intake before they are weaned.

This is not a problem if it is intentional, recorded and understood

by everyone involved. Difficulties arise when the strategy exists only in one person's head.

Concentrate should still be offered from the first days of life, but intake must be considered in the context of the calf's stage of development. Young calves are obviously meant to consume milk, and their ability to derive nutrients from concentrate develops over time. So, monitoring milk intake through teat buckets, feeders or automated systems helps show whether your plan is being delivered and that the protocol is fit for purpose.

Wider strategy

Speakers at the conference repeatedly emphasised that water intake must come from water itself, not as part of milk. Clean and fresh water must be available from day zero, as this is essential for successful rumen development and concentrate intake.

Finally, farms need data to show whether the protocol is working. Average DLWG, milk intake, concentrate intake, age and weight at weaning all help build that picture. These measures should be reviewed alongside practical observations.

Transition milk can offer real value, but only when it forms part of a wider, workable strategy. Set youngstock goals, share them with your vet and adviser, and build a protocol that fits the farm. The biology matters, but consistency across the whole team is what turns potential into performance.

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Tackling methane one step at a time

In the Netherlands, two dairy producers are being paid to reduce their milk's carbon footprint, which could provide a template for the UK. British Dairying reports.

The dyke separating the Amstel lake from North Holland farmland is over eight metres high. If you're on the water, you can't see behind. But just a stone's throw from this impressive flood defence, the Appelman and de Wit farm is busy making low-methane dairy a reality.

Producing for Friesland Campina, one of the world's largest dairy co-operatives, Jos Appelman has lowered his footprint to 649g CO₂ equivalent per kilogram of milk - more than 30% below the Dutch national average of 950g.

Many factors contribute to this reduction, including high-quality, locally grown grass, energy-efficient milking systems, and various measures to increase herd longevity. Another tool in the box is Bovaer, Dsm-firmenich's methane-reducing feed additive.

Although the product suffered a huge public backlash in the UK



Dutch dairyman Jos Appelman has lowered his CO₂ footprint to 649g

and Denmark after the Danish government mandated its use in dairy cows, Jos Appelman has never found any negative effects. "The feed mills add it to the vitamin mineral mix, at the EU-approved dose of

60ppm," he explains. "Then we mix it in the feed that is put in front of the cows."

These quantities are automatically inputted by the feed mills to the KringloopWijzer, a sustainability

measurement tool that minimises effort and administration on the farmer's side.

In line with its commitment to incentivising low-impact dairy production, Friesland Campina then rewards Jos for quantifiable performance improvements. The implementation of Bovaer alone results in a net profit of €15-20/cow (£13-17) each year, with additional payments delivered through the Focus Planet programme based on CO₂ reduction figures.

"We started using the additive three years ago, as part of a development group receiving input-based payments for specific measures," says Jos. With clear incentive structures in place, it has proved to be an easy and effective way of advancing his farm's

Continued on page 56.

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WOOLDRIDGE
milking technologies

Continued from page 55.

sustainability ambitions. The product takes effect within 30 minutes of feeding and reduces methane emissions by around 30%. “The impact of methane on warming up the atmosphere is 27 times greater than CO₂,” says Andre Bannink, Senior Scientist and Ruminant Expert at Wageningen University and Research’s dairy campus.

“So if you reduce methane levels now, it has a really quick effect on reducing global warming.”

“We were really surprised by the disinformation campaign.”

Compared to the 100 years that CO₂ stays in the atmosphere, the positive impact of methane reduction is felt in just 10 years. This is why some call it the ‘handbrake on climate change’, because it enables rapid deceleration.

The question of how to reduce methane levels in livestock - which together account for a third of global emissions - puzzled scientists for decades. Prior research efforts in the 1960s were abandoned after the problem proved too complex. But the breakthrough came in 2008 - and it works by targeting methanogenesis in the cow’s stomach.

“When feed is fermented that generates hydrogen, which is then converted into methane,” explains Andre. But if you replace the cow’s regular methanogenesis with a different process called homo-acetogenesis,



The global dairy industry continues to ask what improvements can be made on farm to reduce methane levels

the hydrogen converts into acetic acid instead.

This is the key activity of 3-NOP; the molecule sold commercially as Bovaer. “It binds really well to a key enzyme in the methanogens, thereby inhibiting methane production,” says Andre. “As soon as it binds, it degrades back into alcohol and nitrate/nitrite groups, which are normal, natural compounds in a bovine stomach. The hydrogen which isn’t used for methane production is then redirected into valuable ingredients for the cow. This is a completely normal process and occurs after every big meal.”

The 3-NOP mechanism is notably superior to that of other methane-inhibiting additives, like

bromoform and sulfonic acids, which can be toxic and negatively affect bovine tissue, he notes. And it may even be connected with higher performance. Multiple studies show slight improvements in energy-corrected milk production, reductions in calving intervals, and minimal impact on feed intake, which he attributes to the nutrients found in extra levels of acetic acid.

Mode of action

The additive’s inventor, Maik Kindermann, says the breakdown of 3-NOP into natural fragments is essential to its commercial viability. “We don’t see 3-NOP in milk and meat because it’s erased by its mode of action,” he says.

“What’s more, the electron it ‘steals’ to block the methanogen enzymes is replaced naturally in the cow. There’s a built-in repair mechanism. It works like a switch - so the enzyme has no need to adapt.” This explains why, if a cow stops eating the additive, her methane emissions go back to normal within hours. The switch is turned off.

“In 2024, we were really surprised by the disinformation campaign against Bovaer circulating on social networks in the UK,” says Maik. “When some innovations come to market, they can face distrust. The 5G rollout is a good example of that.

“I understand that, for some people, their confidence in the product could have been affected by disinformation. Looking back, we could have explained better how it

works and underscored that it is by design safe for cows, with no impact on their milk or meat.”

Over the past 15 years, trials in over 20 countries and 150 farms, together with more than 120 peer-reviewed publications, have demonstrated its safety and efficacy. A comprehensive study by Aarhus University in Denmark, published in May 2026, found no evidence that the additive increased cow mortality or caused permanent decreases in milk yield.

Why, then, was there so much noise in Denmark last year about the Bovaer rollout? The answer appears to lie in public policy, not ruminant biology, says Maik. Of the 70 countries that have approved the use of the product since 2021, Denmark was the only one to issue a mandate, requiring farmers to use the additive



Researchers at Wageningen University have been involved in trials



Hilco Eikelenboom milks 105 cows

for 80 days to help the nation realise its climate targets.

The move backfired. Farmers, already feeling the pressure of mounting regulation, took against the mandate and shared emotive stories on social media about the impact of the product on their cattle.

"If people are told what to do, they don't want to listen any more," says Dennis Rijnders, VP of Global Sales and Business Development at Bovaer.

"We hope the new government changes to a voluntary system.



André Bannink, Senior Scientist

From our point of view, we're very confident, based on all our evidence, data, and practical experience in different markets, that we will continue, and find Danish farmers that want to be on the journey with us."

Back in the Netherlands, a short drive from Schiphol Airport, Hilco Eikelenboom runs a highly efficient operation for Vreugdenhil Dairy Foods. He produces 1.3m kg of milk annually from 105 milking cows.

"If you share the costs, it's almost nothing."

The herd had just one or two cases of mastitis per year, and its annual carbon footprint has declined from 1050g CO₂e per kg of milk to just 665g. Hilco is hoping to reduce this further, to 600g this year.

Bovaer's contribution to Hilco's carbon footprint reduction is 80-100g CO₂e per kilogram of milk, and he considers it by far the easiest sustainability measure to implement.



Bovaer inventor Maik Kindermann admits their communications fell short

"We put it in the silo, and overnight we get better numbers."

Vreugdenhil pays Hilco €30,000-€35,000 (£25,715-£30,000) each year for working within its sustainability programme - split into monthly payments, unlike the Danish policy, which takes up to 18 months to arrive. After Bovaer costs, it equates to €2.30 (£1.97) per 100kg of milk. These results are possible because

the value chain has come together to build a solid incentive scheme. "If you share the costs across five different players, it's almost nothing," says Pierre-line Bouvet-Guéguen, Business Development Senior Manager at Bovaer.

"The farmer is the least financially strong in the chain, so it makes no sense for them to be the one to pay for this."



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Building resilience one decision at a time

There is an obvious temptation, when you hear about a dairy business milking 6,500 cows, to assume the lessons will be out of reach for the average family farm. But that's not the case, as Mark Campbell, Knowledge Exchange Manager at AHDB, reports.

Rodney and Dorothy Elliott's journey is remarkable by any measure. After selling their 140-cow farm in County Fermanagh almost 20 years ago, where they produced 1m litres/year, they moved to the US to build one of the largest dairy businesses in South Dakota.

Drumgoon Dairy now produces around 181,000 litres of milk every day. Alongside Countyline Dairy and other partnerships, the wider enterprise now includes more than 11,500 cows.

"If people know they are valued, performance follows."

Visiting the UK for the Drumgoon roadshow, hosted by AHDB Dairy, the conversation between them and other dairy farmers quickly shifted away from cow numbers and towards something much more familiar.

Instead, Rodney and Dorothy repeatedly returned to the routines and disciplines that have underpinned every stage of their growth. These include weekly management meetings, clear responsibilities, regular financial reviews, open conversations between family members and decisions backed by data rather than instinct.

It was a message that resonated with farmers in the room because,



Rodney and Dorothy say people are at the heart of their dairy success

stripped back, it was not about running a huge dairy. It was about building a business capable of coping with whatever comes next.

For Rodney, resilience begins with understanding your farm figures. Their business tracks financial performance throughout the year rather than waiting for annual accounts, while major investment decisions are tested against different market scenarios before they are made.

Whether it is milk price volatility, rising feed costs or interest rate changes, the principle remains the

same. If you know how the business performs under pressure before that pressure arrives, decisions become easier when markets change. For many British producers, that could be as straightforward as reviewing cash flow every month or modelling what happens if the milk price falls by 5ppl.

As Drumgoon Dairy has expanded, consistency became just as valuable as efficiency. Standard operating procedures, regular management meetings and clear communication help ensure that the business performs in the same way regardless of who is working on any given day.

Removing uncertainty

The Elliotts argued that good systems are not about creating paperwork, they are about removing uncertainty and giving people the confidence to make decisions; and the same principles apply whether a farm employs one person or 50.

While technology featured throughout the discussions, it was people who remained at the centre of almost every conversation. Rodney and Dorothy described using lean management principles, artificial intelligence tools like iYOTA and personality profiling to better

understand how individuals think and communicate.

Responsibility across the business is clearly divided between finance, herd management, maintenance, nutrition and risk management, allowing people to take ownership of their roles. Rodney believes businesses only perform at their best when people understand both what is expected of them and why their contribution matters. "Our people are our biggest asset," he said. "If people understand what good looks like and know they are valued, performance follows."

The theme extended beyond employees. Succession planning, family communication and the use of trusts to create clarity for future generations were all discussed openly, reflecting the family's belief that difficult conversations are easier when they happen early.

"Their message is simple: Do the simple things well."

Risk management featured prominently throughout the event. Rather than attempting to predict every challenge, the Elliott family focus on preparing for those they can influence. Milk price protection, crop strategies, external advisers and long-term financial planning all contribute to what Rodney described as building layers of protection around the business.

He referred to this as creating a 'moat', with each decision adding another line of defence against future uncertainty. It was an image that stayed with many in the audience because it shifted resilience from being a reaction to becoming part of everyday management.

The Elliott family also made it clear that their planning horizon stretches far beyond the next season. Tree planting, nutrient management, cover crops, renewable energy and strategic business partnerships all form part of a wider vision that looks decades ahead rather than months.



Rodney (L) joined Mark Campbell (R) in the UK for the Drumgoon roadshow

For Rodney and Dorothy, growth has never been an end in itself. Every investment is measured against whether it strengthens the business for the next generation. As farmers headed home, there was a sense that the biggest takeaway had little to do with the size of Drumgoon Dairy.

Instead, it was a reminder that resilient businesses are rarely built through one transformational decision. More often, they emerge from countless small decisions made well, repeated consistently and reviewed honestly.

Lessons to take away

James Yeatman, a dairy farmer from Somerset, summed up the mood at the end of the day: "Today was exceptional. Even having visited Drumgoon before and met Rodney and Dorothy, I came back to hear their story again because there are so many lessons to take away.

"Their message is simple: Do the simple things well. They are a wonderful example of grabbing life by the horns and making the very most of every opportunity," he added.

Matt Ford, of The Ford Partnership, was equally struck by the way the couple have developed



Attendees at the roadshow took away valuable lessons from the Elliotts' extraordinary dairying story

the business together. "It was great to see the double-act dynamic between Rodney and Dorothy and how they have used their complementary skills and shared vision to continually remove bottlenecks as the business has grown," he said.

For Lauren Hammond, of Burnt House Farm, the day offered practical

ideas to take home. "It's a really motivating story from the Elliotts," she noted. "I'm looking forward to implementing some ideas that Rodney and Dorothy covered."

The first Drumgoon Dairy Roadshow may have centred on one family's extraordinary journey, but its lasting message was refreshingly

ordinary. Know your business, back your people, build good systems and plan ahead. Whether a farmer milks 150 cows or 6,500, those fundamentals remain the strongest foundation for whatever lies ahead.

More information about Drumgoon Dairy can be found at ahdb.org.uk/drumgoon-dairy.

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Challenges facing the dairy sector

Tackling multiple hurdles embedded in local and national government and dairy supply chains could unleash huge productivity in dairy production, as British Dairying reports.

British politics is once again in the grip of change as another Prime Minister enters Number 10 Downing Street. However, while the revolving door of Whitehall ushers in more uncertainty, there remains a raft of structural issues within national and local government that are holding farmers back, regardless of who is in power.

These challenges were explored in the recent HCR Law report, 'Food for thought: Shaping sustainable farming futures'. It examines how planning delays, labour shortages, policy uncertainty and supply chain imbalances are preventing many farming businesses from achieving their full potential.

"A single contract issue can have catastrophic consequences."

For many dairy businesses, efficiency and technology are key, so investment is critical to success. Whether installing robotic milking systems, constructing slurry storage, expanding cow housing or developing on-farm processing facilities, modern dairy farming relies on infrastructure.

However, planning permission is one of the greatest frustrations facing farm businesses. "The planning system's complexity and inconsistency creates barriers for farmers," says Gareth Davies, Legal Director in Planning, Highways and Environment at HCR Law.

The report describes planning in England and Wales as a 'postcode lottery', where a project approved by one authority may be rejected by another only a few miles away. This uncertainty can make it difficult for dairy farmers to justify major investments, particularly when environmental compliance requirements continue to evolve.

The firm argues that a more streamlined and predictable planning system would support investment, productivity and food production alongside environmental safeguards.



Food security should be a matter of national resilience says Rory Hutchings

"Streamlining regulations, improving guidance and ensuring greater consistency between local authorities would go a long way toward encouraging innovation and enabling rural enterprise," notes Gareth. "But, as ever, that golden goose remains elusive."

Alongside planning, labour remains one of the most pressing concerns facing the dairy sector, yet recruiting and retaining staff has become increasingly difficult. The report highlights how the end of free movement reduced access to migrant labour, while existing immigration routes remain poorly suited to agriculture's needs.

Skills required

Stephen Jacob, Chief Executive at the Institute for Agriculture and Horticulture (TIAH), believes the challenge goes beyond simple labour availability. "We simply do not have enough people coming into the industry and, at the same time, the skills required to run productive, technologically advanced farm businesses are changing rapidly."

Indeed, research commissioned by TIAH found 37% of farmers lacked confidence in their ability to recruit and retain staff with the necessary skills. However, Lynne Adams, HCR Law's Legal Director of Employment and Immigration, says options are open to farmers to make staffing more seamless and bring about positive results.

"Despite the challenges, there are opportunities. Farms that invest in

proper human resources support and embrace compliant recruitment practices can position themselves as employers of choice," she explains.

"Apprenticeship schemes and partnerships with agricultural colleges offer routes to develop homegrown talent. Additionally, investing in automation and technology may help reduce reliance on seasonal labour in the longer term."

Moving on to dairy markets, supply chain relationships remain a major concern for many producers, the report suggests. And while it welcomes the introduction of the Fair Dealing Obligations (Milk) Regulations 2024, which were designed to improve transparency and fairness in milk contracts, progress is required.

Producers exposed

Dairy businesses often make significant investments based on long-term supply agreements, notes Steve Thomas, Partner in Commercial Law at HCR Law. "Supply contracts in the dairy sector often underpin substantial investment, where a single contract issue can have catastrophic consequences," he says. Many contracts still contain lengthy notice periods, restrictive supply obligations and limited flexibility, leaving producers exposed when market conditions change.

The issue is highlighted further by Rory Christie, Chair of the Milk Suppliers Association. "Contracts act as a basic framework, aiming

to stop the worst of the worst of power abuse in the supply chain, but they are extremely vague and flexible in favour of the processor," he says. "Unfortunately for the farmer, their flexibility is much more limited."

For dairy businesses investing millions in livestock, buildings and equipment, contractual certainty and expert guidance is fundamental to long-term planning and resilience, the report stresses.

While the report identifies these uncertainties, it also calls for robust government action to enable farming to prosper at a time of heightened global political tension. According to Rory Hutchings, Head of Agriculture and Estates at HCR Law, UK farming's ability to produce food should be viewed as a matter of national resilience, rather than convenience.

"We can secure a prosperous, resilient future for UK agriculture."

"Food security is not just a matter of producing enough food, but of ensuring the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the farming sector," he says. "The future of UK farming depends on government recognising farming's vital role in both food security and economic growth. By removing the barriers that currently hold the sector back, we can unlock its full potential and secure a prosperous, resilient future for UK agriculture."

For the dairy sector, many of the challenges outlined in the report will feel familiar. But the report's conclusion is clear: If the UK is serious about strengthening food security in an increasingly uncertain world, it must create conditions that allow farm businesses to invest, innovate and grow.

That means a planning system that supports development, fairer supply chain relationships, realistic labour solutions and a policy framework that gives farmers the confidence to plan for the future.

Farmer-led innovation sees new dairy technologies put to the test

Five commercial dairy farms are helping to evaluate emerging technologies that could improve transition cow management and mastitis treatment, by partaking in two projects funded by the Innovate UK ADOPT programme. British Dairying reports.

“Innovation shouldn’t stop at developing new technology,” says Phil Cullinan, Business Development Manager at Nantwich Farm Vets. “We also need to understand how it performs on commercial farms, whether it improves decision-making, and ultimately whether it delivers enough value for farmers to adopt under non-grant funded conditions.”

Working alongside technology partners and fellow veterinary practices, the firm is supporting the projects to help dairy farmers assess emerging technologies under real commercial conditions.

De-risking adoption

New technologies can only become part of everyday farming if they improve herd performance and make economic sense, notes Phil. The ADOPT programme de-risks things for farmers, providing an opportunity to evaluate both.

The first project is being delivered in partnership with RAFT Solutions, evaluating a novel transition cow management approach using the Bovilab on-farm blood analysis system and a new transition cow bolus.



New technology could benefit cows

Transition cows present one of the biggest opportunities to improve herd performance, says Phil. Decisions made during the weeks around calving influence milk production, fertility and disease risk throughout the lactation, making effective monitoring essential.

Some farms already blood test to assess transition cows, but a limited range of routinely measured parameters can restrict how the results are used. The Bovilab system provides a broader panel of parameters directly on farm, allowing metabolic status to be assessed while management decisions are still being made.

Targeted interventions

Within the project, blood results will also be used to identify cows that may benefit from targeted supplementation with a new bolus. Rather than treating every animal in the same way, the aim is to investigate whether more targeted interventions can improve transition cow health and make better use of nutritional supplementation in a cost-effective manner.

“We’ve been blood sampling transition cows for some time, so this project isn’t about starting from scratch,” says producer James Ailsby. “It’s about getting a broader range of information to help us understand what’s happening during transition and make better-informed decisions. It’ll also be interesting to see whether

having that extra information ultimately delivers enough benefit to justify using the technology routinely after the project.”

The second project focuses on clinical mastitis, one of the most significant health and economic challenges facing dairy farms. Working with three of its dairy clients, the vet practice is evaluating the Biotangents on-farm diagnostic platform, which rapidly identifies the bacterial pathogens responsible for individual mastitis cases.

Treatment decisions often need to be made before laboratory culture results are available, explains Phil. Identifying the bacteria causing infection within one to two hours

could support treatment decisions and refine existing protocols. The project will therefore assess whether earlier pathogen identification can improve clinical outcomes while supporting responsible antibiotic use through more evidence-based treatment decisions.

While both projects involve innovative technology, their real value lies in being carried out on commercial dairy farms in conjunction with veterinary providers, he adds. The aim isn’t just to prove that a particular technology works; it’s to understand where it adds value, where it may not, and whether the benefits justify the investment required for routine use.

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Inbreeding: Is it a problem?

One of the big genetic topics being discussed among dairy farmers is the rise in inbreeding percentages in the Holstein population. Independent Breeding Consultant Kevin Lane seeks out the opinions of leading industry figures.

Discussions around inbreeding have always been part of genetic planning, and that is still the case today. However, a shorter generation interval, due to genomics, has brought this matter to the fore; particularly given the inexorable rise of inbreeding percentages in the US, where much of our genetic material is sourced.

The best bloodlines available have always been heavily used (not just in dairy cattle but in other species where targeted breeding is available). I can recall decades ago when ABC Reflection Sovereign and Triple-Threat were the stand-out sires, and concern raised as to the next good 'outcross'.

This was alongside a lot of Arlinda Chief and Elevation bloodlines, and then SWD Valiant (a son of Chief) and Carlin-M Ivanhoe Bell. It is said that over 95% of all pedigree Holsteins can trace back to Chief and Elevation (and in many cases, both) in their distant pedigrees.

Nothing new

Thirty years ago, we had a lot of Blackstar sons, as well as Starbuck, Prelude and Chief Mark - and these were followed by Mascot and Bellwood. Then it was Shottle, Planet and Oman, and the last big names before the explosion of genomics: Mogul and Supersire. So there has always been the danger of close breeding.

But with genomics negating the need for progeny testing and the four-to-five year lay-off while bull data was collated (the time for semen distribution to calves on the ground to milking daughters), there was always an age gap between sire and maternal grandsire.

Using Shottle as an example; he was born in 1999, his sire Mtoto in 1993 and his maternal grand-sire Aerostar in 1985. Compare this to the number-one genomic bull in the April proof run; Denovo Lorenzo, who was born in 2024. His sire Denovo Leeds was born in 2021 alongside his maternal grandsire Denovo Benefit.

That's a 14-year gap for Shottle to his maternal grandsire but just three years for Lorenzo. Hence



The grandam of Denovo Leeds, a product of quicker genomic breeding

more milking daughters of related bloodlines are still in the herd when these new genomic bulls are used.

I asked Professor Mike Coffey of SRUC about the science of inbreeding. "Inbreeding is not a new problem or even a new subject matter," he says. "There are many instances of pedigree breeders intentionally mating close relatives and calling it line breeding. In commercial herds most inbreeding has arisen from mistakes or simple bad breeding management; it is usually not intentional."

Inbreeding arises when animals with common ancestors are mated, which brings together parts of the DNA from those common ancestors, creating more homozygosity and thereby less heterozygosity (variation). Historically it has been estimated through pedigree records, but more recently using genotypes. This is important, because it is a more precise calculation utilising the actual DNA and the variance contained within.

"An example is that we assume 50% of DNA comes from each of sire and dam, whereas in practice that can vary around 45-55% from each," notes Mike. "Also, inbreeding occurs at the chromosome level and varies across chromosomes for the same pedigree estimate. Some

chromosomes can be more inbred than others, and we don't yet know if the highest inbreeding is important, or whether inbreeding on a specific chromosome is important."

A rule of thumb has been to avoid matings that result in inbreeding values above 6.25%. Inbreeding in the UK population of Holstein dairy cows is now approaching 10%. So, what does that mean?

"Essentially, bulls are being made available to farmers that are related to previous bulls that have been used. This is not unexpected - just like better cows come out of the best mothers," he explains.

Genomics and sexed semen have allowed more rapid genetic improvement, and the average age of a bull used for artificial insemination (AI) is now around one year old - and that bull remains popular until the next hot young bull comes along (which is usually very soon, and is often a son of a previous 'hot' bull).

"This has created huge benefits for dairy farmers that can now breed very high yielding cows that have good fertility and lower disease incidence - but have higher inbreeding." And whilst the inbreeding does have a negative impact on traits of economic value (see AHDB website for details), farmers have to balance gains in genetic merit and losses for the same

trait through inbreeding; although in many or most cases the inbreeding loss is less than the productivity gain.

That is in the short term, but what of longer-term gain? Accumulation of inbreeding over time will reduce future benefits, so farmers are considering how they can create a 'genetic pension' that will continue to look after them in the future, says Mike. That may require some sacrifice of current benefits. But how can they do that if the bulls being made available are related to previously available bulls?

"Their influence over what bulls are available in future is in their purchasing decisions of today. Perhaps we are approaching a period where some farmers (or farmer groups) may breed their own bull for use in their own herds using genomic selection and their top cows."

Marco Winters, Head of Animal Genetics at AHDB, offers a similar take to Mike, but his comments about historic against recent inbreeding are particularly relevant to this discussion. "Holstein inbreeding is clearly increasing, driven largely by the success of genomic selection, sexed semen and the rapid dissemination of elite genetics," he explains.

Breeding successes

"However, I think it is important to clearly separate concerns about rising inbreeding from the undoubted success of modern breeding programmes. Today's dairy cows are more productive, with significant improvements in fertility, longevity and health traits, suggesting that the benefits of selection have, so far, outweighed the losses associated with inbreeding depression.

"For me, the key question is not whether inbreeding is increasing; it clearly is, but at what point it begins to constrain future genetic progress," he adds. "We know that inbreeding can negatively affect economically important traits; particularly fertility, survival and fitness, so it is something that should be monitored and managed rather than ignored."

Genomics has, however, changed how we think about inbreeding.



Carabella, an ancestor of Shottle, which was a very popular Holstein bull

Measuring realised inbreeding directly from DNA provides a much more accurate assessment than pedigree alone, and recent research suggests that not all inbreeding has the same consequences, notes Marco.

"In particular, more recent inbreeding appears to have a greater impact than older, historic inbreeding, meaning that how inbreeding accumulates; including the rate of change, may be just as important as the overall level."

Management tools

The good news is that genomics gives us far better tools to manage the issue. Modern mating programmes can use genomic relationships and haplotype information to minimise unnecessary inbreeding while continuing to deliver genetic gain.

"Maintaining genetic diversity is not simply about reducing inbreeding today, it is also about preserving the variation needed to sustain future genetic improvement," he says.

"From my perspective, rising inbreeding is not something the industry can afford to ignore, but neither should it distract from the significant gains that modern breeding programmes have delivered.

"Reducing inbreeding should not become an objective in isolation. The challenge is to continue delivering more profitable, efficient and sustainable cows while maintaining sufficient genetic diversity to support long term progress."

Looking ahead, breeding programmes and national evaluations will continue to evolve. As more genomic information is incorporated into routine evaluations, we should have even better opportunities to optimise both genetic gain and genetic diversity at the same time,

notes Marco. "In short, therefore, the debate should perhaps be less about eliminating inbreeding and more about achieving the right balance between genetic gain and genetic diversity."

Andy Warne, Chairman of the AHDB Genetics Advisory Forum (GAF), says the key message is less about the technical aspects of inbreeding and more about the need for an informed, reasoned and co-ordinated response borne out of consensus. "AHDB is all about the farmer's perspective and ultimately the farmer has control, but it would be naïve to think the genetics companies don't have a massive stake in all this. For me, empowering the farmer with the right information is the key."

A cause for worry?

For Andy, a comment at the last GAF meeting, from a leading Sussex breeder, was the critical question: He said his herd (healthy, fertile and productive) had a pretty stable inbreeding figure of 12% and questioned, 'should I be worried?'

"We've done enough research to know the 6.25% threshold is a 'myth of time' figure backed by no more science than to say it is not a good idea to marry your first cousin," notes Andy. "But what is the figure - or is it herd specific?"

"A key next step for me is to take herds like his and model whether they can still make genetic progress using bulls lower down the profitable lifetime index (PLI) rankings and maintain or reduce inbreeding percentages (although



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Continued on page 64.

PLI and inbreeding % are not totally correlated)."

Darren Todd at Holstein UK says the organisation is helping at farm level by offering the Webmate programme to pedigree breeders, which includes a predicted inbreeding coefficient for matings. Users can identify sires that meet their selection criteria and then pick those that have the lowest predicted inbreeding from that group.

It is also publishing genetic defects of registered animals (including AI bulls) where available; as avoiding the use of sires with genetic defects is key in mitigating the effects of inbreeding. And it is monitoring and publishing performance trends in the pedigree dairy breed populations, including fertility, udder health and production.

Any signs of problems caused by inbreeding will likely show up in performance first (such as in the case of the Jersey Island breed where production started going down dramatically). And pedigree Holstein breeders have tools from HUK and AHDB to help manage this issue going forward.

"Inbreeding is an inevitable consequence of selection."

Well-known pedigree breeder and GAF member Andrew Rutter has wrestled with the subject for years, in both his previous position at Genus and now as a fully-fledged dairy farmer. "I keep coming back to 'what sort of cows do I want to produce for my business, both to make me profitable at home and also continue to sell well as milkers for other businesses,'" he says.

He milks 400 cows at home, but calves 200 heifers a year with a plan to sell 100-150 milkers per year.

"I'm lucky at the moment in that what I want to milk at home seems to be what the market wants," says Andrew. "They are robust, fertile cows that can work hard, but with the minimum of fuss; all I want to enter into Uniform is one service, one pregnancy diagnosis, one dry-off and two routine foot trims a year per cow."

"I don't want mastitis; we are averaging about one case per month, and I do want cows to get pregnant; the rolling 12-month results show a 35.2% pregnancy rate." The cows are



Genomic testing can not only tell the PLI value of each female, but the inbreeding coefficient for each cow and bull

partially grazed in the summer and produce just over 10,000kg/cow per year, all on twice-a-day milking.

"I absolutely trust and believe in the genetics I have used, in terms of improving my herd markedly in a very short time - eight years - and the difference in performance is absolutely staggering," he adds. "I am absolutely focused on genetic progress when I'm selecting bulls, with a huge emphasis on PLI, EnviroCow and Feed Advantage to maximise efficiency."

So, where does inbreeding concern Andrew? "Not in the genomic results that I am seeing at present, and certainly not in the cows coming through. When I sit and work through my potential mating lists, and calculate in the possible tariff for increased inbreeding, I am struggling to see it have enough impact to markedly make alterations to my current selection policy," he says.

"The mating programmes are used to minimise the impact of inbreeding, but I don't sacrifice bull selection for this. My logic is this. If a mating with increased inbreeding makes me a much more robust and profitable animal, to more than compensate for the inbreeding tariff, I'm happy to proceed," he adds.

"Why would I get excited about lower inbreeding if my cows are less fertile, efficient, robust or profitable? That said, if I can make the same progress with reduced inbreeding, I would of course take that route - I use a couple of mating programmes which use different methods of measurement on purpose." However, Andrew is concerned

with the seemingly inexorable rise of inbreeding within the breed - and that trend is not going to be easy to turn. "Just finding 'outcrosses' is near impossible without a huge sacrifice to profitability and fitness traits, and my inbreeding hit something of a ceiling 18 months ago," he notes. "One thing I absolutely do appreciate with genomic matings is the ability to protect against haplotypes and recessives, and I am proud of the cows we have bred here. I could not feel more confident I have future-proofed my business thanks to genetics."

Emotive subject

AI companies are often considered one of the reasons for higher inbreeding than in the past. Andrew Holliday at Cogent appreciates it is a highly emotive subject, with some very strong views on the matter. "But with good data and the tools to manage it, it is something that can be harnessed and used for good," he says.

"Firstly, we should be clear that inbreeding has the potential to be highly damaging, so we are not downplaying anyone's concerns on this. But we do feel that with proper management and a good strategy it is something that we don't need to worry about, and actually can bring some benefits," he adds.

"Pedigree inbreeding is tricky to manage, with dominant bloodlines appearing in a lot of pedigrees, but if we utilise genomic inbreeding, we move away from assumed inbreeding, and into the actual genes that are inherited. This brings a much clearer and data-driven approach. "In

addition, genomics brings awareness of harmful recessives and haplotypes, that without proper management have the potential to be highly damaging to a herd."

Genomic data on its own its not enough, explains Andrew. "We have been investing heavily in a genomics portal that allows that data to be managed, interpreted and analysed, to allow strategic decisions to be made that allow progress in the areas that are most important for that dairy farm."

The portal also integrates a mating programme that utilises the genotype of both the sire and dam to optimise matings for homozygosity in desirable traits that are known to have positive outcomes, while ensuring that no known haplotypes and recessives are passed on to other known carriers.

In addition to genomics, the UK part of the breeding programme is looking to identify new maternal lines and alternative sires to what is being used in the larger programmes, to provide alternative options for farmers who are concerned about genetic diversity, he adds.

"In summary, we need to breed for traits that are economically important, where benefits will outweigh any potential negatives."

Liam Healy at Genus ABS agrees that Holstein inbreeding should be monitored, but must be considered alongside genetic progress. "Some inbreeding is an inevitable

Continued on page 66.



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Continued from page 64.

consequence of selection, which drives improvement,” he notes.

“While historically associated with reduced fertility, health and longevity, modern genomics enables direct assessment of these traits, along with recessive conditions and genetic relationships. Importantly, animals with similar inbreeding percentages can carry very different levels of genetic risk, and the commonly cited 6.25% threshold is a historical guideline rather than a biological limit.

“Our view is that genetic gain has generally outpaced any measurable effects of inbreeding depression,” he adds. “The goal is therefore not to eliminate inbreeding; which would reduce selection intensity and slow progress, but to manage it responsibly.

“The Genus approach is to balance genetic gain with genetic diversity through maintaining a diverse sire portfolio, avoiding over-reliance on a small number of bloodlines and using genomic information to manage relationships and recessive risk.”

Safeguarding health

Genus views inbreeding as something to be actively managed rather than feared, surmises Liam. “Modern genetic tools allow the industry to continue making rapid genetic progress while safeguarding the long-term health, fertility and sustainability of the Holstein population.”

However, others do have concerns. The British Friesian Breeders Club was formed in 1990 with an aim to protect and develop the breed in the face of an onslaught of Holstein genetics. For the first few years, the committee selected a range of members’ bulls for progeny testing.

When Genus and then Cogent observed that the market for British Friesians (BF) remained strong, they began to widen their offer, although much BF semen had been ‘lost’ during the change from the MMB to Genus.

“Over time, and with a smaller population, we became concerned that their selection by ‘index’ would narrow the choice and lead to the increase in the inbreeding that we had seen in the Holstein breed,” says a spokesperson for the Club.

“Selection by index; while concentrating the best proven bloodlines, reduced options. This was observed by the smaller AI companies, who continued to offer a wider range of BF bulls, mostly bred by Club members or imported from Ireland or Holland.”



The British Friesian Breeders Club worked with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust to breed Oakalby Breakaway

Bill Foster of Genus was particularly helpful, as he purchased Dutch semen, proven in Ireland, where he had also inspected the daughters. “A few of the other large AI companies also offer the occasional BF.”

Firmly believing that breeding from strong, proven female lines will ensure the future of the breed, members have been able to use the facility offered by UK Sire Services (UKSS) and either have their bull jumped on farm, or, if qualifying on the health requirements, sent to stud for collection. Since this started, semen has been exported to Australia, where there is a very good market for British Friesians.

The UKSS facility is also open for Holstein breeders, should they wish to offer something different to get away from the dominating bloodlines. “Latterly the Club decided to take a more proactive part to open up the bloodlines and negate future inbreeding issues,” says the spokesperson. “With the help of AHDB; which sent across the file on current active pure (87.5%) females, and HUK; which applied the latest classifications, a great deal of work took place, selecting to a tight set of rules.”

These rules were: Three generations of VG/EX, a minimum of four lactations and none of the bloodlines usually found in most pedigrees. “The Rare Breeds Survival Trust sent its list of BF bull semen in store, paying for the genomic testing of the two chosen.” The committee agreed to purchase a certain number

of straws, register all the progeny, and in time to present them all for type classification, maybe keeping any male calves for future breeding. “We are pleased to see heifers from the sires; Oakalby Breakaway and Lismulligan Einstein.”

Meanwhile, the committee decided that Club funds should be used to establish a gene bank with UKSS. This has now been completed, with a good spread of genetics, and it can be added to from time to time. “It is surely good news that Defra has decided, at last, to fund a National Livestock Gene Bank for native breeds; both beef and dairy, that qualify at 87.5% pure. Should inbreeding cause unknown problems down the line we have a safety net of older but more diverse genetics,” they add.

“We also learn that Wageningen University has traced Dutch, German, pure Irish and BF active females (with help from HUK), possibly because of the anxiety surrounding the problem of rising inbreeding percentages.”

Jo Burton, at World Wide Sires, says that, historically, the avoidance of inbreeding was important to avoid doubling up on deleterious recessives which often only came to light when a bull was proven.

“Think back to the discovery of bovine leucocyte adhesion deficiency (BLAD, which was found in bloodlines traced back to Carlin Ivanhoe Bell in the 1990s) - and the rush to screen Bell sons who were already on test when he was found to be a carrier.

“Now that we have genomics, carriers of recessive genes and haplotypes are identified at a much earlier stage and either removed from the population or labelled as carriers so that buyers are aware - as we have seen recently with muscle weakness.”

Historic inbreeding is of little consequence in an individual, as long as she is healthy, fertile and productive - it is the consequence of the pursuit of genetic improvement within the breed, notes Jo. “As long as mating decisions are made within a suitable mating programme that ensures close matings are avoided, and that takes account of recessive genes and haplotypes, then herds should continue to make progress, and cows should become more productive and healthier.”

Genetic history

Genetics studies show that all bovine animals alive today have been bred from about 80 individual wild aurochs 10,500 years ago, so inbreeding is not new, says Andy. “Some of the very high index bulls currently being marketed have high percentage inbreeding figures, but due to their ranking they are not in any way mainstream when they are newly released.”

GAF exists to ensure producers have sufficient information at their fingertips - and more information would be useful. “I would like to reassure farmers that GAF is not ‘asleep at the wheel’ - but the forum discussions need to challenge GAF to act and not just talk.”

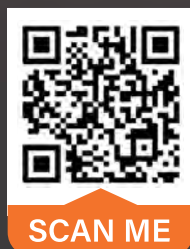


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FarmFlow app designed to ease daily tasks



A 16-year-old dairy farmer has launched a new app to unify everyday tasks, nutrition, animal health, and farm communication into a single, calm digital environment.

FarmFlow, created by Northern Ireland's Ben O'Connor, is a mobile-first operations platform designed for the day-to-day running of livestock farms. "Growing up on our family farm, I saw how much time gets eaten up by admin,

scattered notebooks, and missed messages between family members, staff, and relief milkers," he says. "When you are milking hundreds of cows, keeping the whole team on the same page shouldn't rely on memory or WhatsApp."

FarmFlow enables users to instantly assign and check off routine milking, scraping, and maintenance jobs, build diets and batch feed plans per herd group, and log compliance

and medicine records on the go. It also has a live, traffic-light system where anyone can snap a photo and flag a sick cow, broken gate, or hazard, instantly creating a tracked task.

It has offline functionality, enables teams to stay audit-ready, and saves three to five hours of desk admin per week, while automatically clocking workers in or out of the farm perimeter.

www.myfarmflow.co.uk

Improved self-propelled slurry applicator launched

Vervaet has launched the new third generation Hydro Trike self-propelled slurry and digestate applicator. It features more tank capacity, a stronger drivetrain, increased rear lift capacity, a new tyre configuration and improved cab comfort.

It is available as a three-wheeler (17m³ tank) and five-wheeler (21m³ tank), both of which are more than 1m³ larger than their predecessors.



The third generation Hydro Trike

The transmission delivers up to 45% more tractive power in the lower speed range of zero to 10km/h: From 100,000Nm to 145,000Nm - essential on hilly terrain. The rear linkage lift capacity has also increased, from 5,000 to 10,000kg, making the machine suitable for heavier implements.

It is equipped with a 530hp Mercedes MTU engine, and the cooling system is 50% larger for use in temperatures up to 50°C. The slurry system consists of a 9,000 or 13,500 litre/min Börger positive displacement pump combined with Vervaet's Cyclone macerator, and the suction pipe diameter is increased from eight to 10in for greater capacity.

The new cabin has more room, better all-round visibility, improved sound insulation and a new user interface.

www.vervaet.nl/en/

New metering roller meets diverse cover crop demand



Tim Farrow at Stocks Ag

As demand rises for applying a wider range of seed mixtures for cover crops, Stocks Ag has launched a new metering roller. Developed to overcome the challenges of applying diverse seed sizes at differing application rates, the new roller

ensures accurate and consistent application for stewardship and cover crop mixes.

"We are no longer being asked to apply a simple grass seed mixture," explains Tim Farrow at Stocks Ag. "We have had an increasing number of requests from customers for seed rollers that can cope with wildly varying shapes and sizes of seed in the same mix. Seeds like mustard, buckwheat, sunflower, and vetch in the same mix were quite a challenge."

The new 14-tooth medium roller has a flexible tipped vane for smooth distribution of diverse seed shapes, and the company can also configure bespoke seed rollers to suit the application required.

The new rollers fit in all existing feed blocks, so farmers can upgrade their current Fan Jet, Rotor Meter, Rotor Jet and Turbo Jet machines.

www.my.stocks-ag.co.uk

Staffordshire Jersey herd wins supreme championship

A Staffordshire dairy family's pasteurised Jersey whole milk was crowned supreme champion dairy product at the International Cheese and Dairy Awards.

The Wright Family Dairy, at Kennels Farm, Tixall, won champion milk for the third consecutive year before claiming the overall title. They established the 200-cow Fourcrosses pedigree Jersey herd over 50 years ago, and launched a milk vending business in 2022, while selling the remainder to Longley Farm, Holmfirth.

"Our aim has never been to bottle every litre of milk we produce," says Lowri Wright. "It's about creating the greatest value from the milk our Jersey herd produces." Their milk is gently batch pasteurised, without

homogenisation, preserving its natural characteristics and allowing the cream to rise to the top.

"Awards are fantastic, but every day starts in the same place - looking after the cows," she adds. "Producing

high-quality milk begins with good stockmanship, attention to detail and a genuine passion for what we do. Everything else follows from that."

internationalcheesedairyexpo.com



Third time champions 'The Wright Family Dairy' in Staffordshire

Animal sensor history from CowScout Cloud

GEA is launching a new data and analytics layer for its proven CowScout system, with CowScout Cloud. CowScout provides individual animal information on activity, eating and rumination behaviour, as well as fertility indicators and health monitoring. Its new Cloud development, which utilises data collected by the existing neck tag or newly developed ear tag, connects insights without time limitations, making them analysable across multiple lactations.

"With CowScout Cloud, we are creating an unlimited, cloud-based history of individual animal sensor data for the first time," says Holger Siegwirth at GEA.

www.gea.com

New Tersus flail choppers

Kverneland has introduced a new range of flail choppers for residue management. The new Tersus 4000 models will replace existing FRO versions. Improvements include a fixed driveline on the gearbox to replace a telescopic shaft with side-shift, manual adjustment of the multi-vee belt drive, and the option of a rubber stone guard that sits behind the rear roller. The range includes three models - Tersus 4023, 4028 and 4032 - offering working widths of 2.3m, 2.8m and 3.25m respectively. All models can be rear- or front-mounted, include 500mm of hydraulic side-shift and are



The new Tersus 4028 flail chopper

suitable to tractors from 80 to 170hp. www.kvernelandgroup.com

New forage wagons are much-requested size



The Magnon range has expanded

Strautmann is expanding its Magnon forage wagon range to include two more compact models with a lower loading capacity - the Magnon 8/9-330 and Magnon 10/11-390. "Many customers want the technology and performance of our profi rotor forage wagons in more compact sizes," explains Felix Rademacher at Strautmann. www.straumann.com

Best ice cream parlour named

Forest Farm in Aberdeen, Scotland's longest-established organic dairy farm, has been crowned Parlour of the Year 2026 by the Ice Cream Alliance. This year saw a record number of entries, says Catherine McNeil at the Ice Cream Alliance. "Forest Farm is a glowing standard for ice cream in Scotland, and its heritage of excellence shines through in its amazing organic ice cream."

Anthony and Anne Willis purchased the farm in 1989, establishing Scotland's first organic dairy farm in 1998. They introduced the country's first milk vending



machine in 2017 before turning their hand to gelato. In 2021, the family opened an on-farm gelateria and garden serving gelato, specialty coffee and homemade cakes. Today, Forest Farm welcomes over 250,000 visitors a year.

www.ice-cream.org

SlurryKat expands portfolio with lightweight tankers

SlurryKat has launched a new Farline tanker range, expanding its slurry tanker portfolio to meet growing demand for less intensive slurry handling. The tankers are built using high-tensile S355 steel and have a premium paint system with a seven-year guarantee. The result, says the company, is a lightweight yet robust tanker that delivers long-term durability, dependable performance and outstanding value.

The range is available in capacities from 1,350 to 2,500 gallons.

www.slurrykat.com



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The Government must wake up



Jeremy Moody

Secretary and adviser, CAAV

The repeating hammer blows of extreme weather, in the UK and abroad, can rather put politics in perspective - but a common theme is the importance of supporting business enterprise and management.

The past decade has seen increasing periods of hot drought; in 2018, 2020, 2022 (with temperatures above 40°C) and now the successive years of 2025 and 2026. In July, villages were evacuated for fire in Conwy and the Cairngorms.

The decade has been interspersed by flooding, the simply saturated conditions of 2023 and 2024, and wilder storms. The UK as a whole has had the driest July in at least 190 years - and 1976 is no longer in the top five hot summers.

Rainfall moves to the winter by 0.5 inches every decade: Of the 10 wettest October to March periods since 1767, six have been this century.

“We have a lot of coffee to smell.”

And we farm through this, with extensive outdoor businesses exposed to all the elements as they become more extreme. July's weather is assessed as reducing milk yield by 18m litres, many wheat crops have paid the price, and some are cutting maize now while it has use.

With the weather to become more extreme, we have as businesses to adapt and build resilience to handle what nature throws at us. Improving soils and investing in their management, is part of the answer.

More broadly, we need to strengthen resources, like management, finance, water, feed or energy. Just as some may be able to hold more than enough water for a year, so others may work to hold more than a year's worth of silage to buffer repeated drought periods. Land that is often wet may be the last grazing in such a year.

Those are decisions at farm level. Politics; domestic and global, can add anything from a sense of sport and human colour to cost and grief, sometimes just distracting the eye. We might not be short of plans, but we may be short of focused urgency to manage increasing change and risk with a practical understanding of business.

Internationally, the on/off Gulf War has, unlike Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, removed large fractions of key inputs without removing output at the same time. Trump is caught in his own trap without a satisfactory way out, damaging all - even if the previously open Strait of Hormuz is re-opened on terms. Russia's export ban may

mean diesel stays higher than oil for longer. Costs of fuel and fertiliser rise - and those that fall are still volatile. Relatively dearer inputs will change views on how we use them.

Might falling numbers of dairy cows, beef cattle and sheep mean some will rely on larger areas of grass keep rather than more intense management? Do all operations justify their fuel use? What is the efficient balance between sprays and husbandry? Different answers will be found and tested.

Greater instability is the common theme; whether war, failed and failing states, subversion, disrupted supply chains or renewed migration. On a more general view, the darkening world stage can seem in at least a pre-war phase.

Military and security sources see covert Russian, Iranian and other activity as on a war footing already. In turn, that instability puts pressure on our own politics, frustrated by an economy that has been stagnant for almost two decades. We get relatively poorer by the year, grumbling about the cost of living rather than the absence of income we are choosing not to have.

Here, we wait to see what a Burnham Government might mean, perhaps becoming more certain by the October 28 Budget, with more adjustment made from the Mayor's office to No 10's in-tray.

So far, the default seems to be to a larger state and nostalgia for lost glories of a half-remembered industrial past, assuming an orderly world with the leisure for local government reorganisation, not seizing the urgency of our problems and the new world we are in.

Even if 'Manchesterism', built around big cities and large investors, were to have meaning much beyond Manchester, there seems nothing in it that is rural or agricultural. For good or ill, what is sold as devolution looks like taking powers further away from the countryside, with its individual market towns, villages and small businesses.

It is still unclear whether mayors are to do the government's bidding or to have real autonomy, diverging from and competing with each other, finding different answers in the way of US states. True devolution means a 'postcode lottery' with different approaches in different places. Two central farming issues survive the change of Prime Minister and many ministers:

- What does the Roadmap mean?
- How much power over UK food production will be handed over to Brussels?

The Farming Roadmap seems to mean a string of signposts. The clear theme is what has been in plain sight since the October 2024 Budget. Production will not be subsidised. Taxpayer funding will move to being more concentrated on environmental change.

Other measures, like planning and training, may assist productivity but without an analysis of what would unlock its improvement. Much of the detail of where those signposts point seems still to be worked out. The moral is to see that the business of farming is farming as business. Then comes the puzzle, for all food production, whether or not for



EU oversight would be a failure, warns Jeremy

export to the EU. Why is the Government working energetically to outsource the regulation of UK food production and the food chain to the EU?

Why would a devolutionist Prime Minister want to pass power upwards and abroad where we have no vote? It would ease trade from GB to Northern Ireland. Otherwise, the trade gains seem small and reduced by more friction with the rest of the world.

The previous Government said it would lower food prices. Could we keep out food that does not meet our welfare and other standards? Could meat from cattle vaccinated against TB be sold legally? Will some farms be too far from abattoirs to send animals?

“More is being expected of the farm.”

The secrecy of the negotiations means we do not know what our rules might be and so cannot plan. Brussels knows its regulations hinder economic growth, that its red tape frustrates the innovation we need - but its politics produces ever more regulation.

More subtly, our maritime climate drives different agronomic answers to a continental one, resulting in different answers for equally good reasons - we could lose the freedom to do that.

Finally, there is the shadow of disease; not just the scourge of TB but the wider range of diseases touching Europe and prompting more concern for biosecurity on the farm as well as on the border.

The Greek island of Lesbos has some 146 cases of foot and mouth; probably spread from Turkey but a variant from Africa not known to European animals, now sporadic in Eurasia.

APHA and Defra are watchful but, 25 years after 2001, will they have the reactions and the capacity to move effectively when needed? As elsewhere, more is being expected of the farm - the proposal is that England's vet visits become mandatory without state funding. We have a lot of coffee to smell.



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