

BRITISH DAIRYIN



September 2026 Vol 32, No.11

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Sarah Tomlinson receiving the Dairy Woman of the Year award accompanied by two of her children

Celebrating the best

What a wonderful night we had at the Cream Awards, celebrating the very best that this special industry has to offer. Many congratulations to all the winners, and those who were shortlisted; it's an incredible achievement. It was so nice to be able to celebrate with everyone, to catch up with friends old and new, and to let our hair down and have a lot of fun. I hope you all enjoyed it as much as I did.

We had not one, but two MPs in attendance – Daniel Zeichner and Robbie Moore. The latter said: "It was brilliant to meet so many dedicated individuals and businesses who are clearly committed and passionate to not only their own organisations, brands, services, and products, but enhancing the whole of British dairying. It was also great to see the team at First Milk win the overall Cream Award. The hugely positive progress they have made over the past 10 years has been phenomenal, and it has been good to see them grow in strength."

Massive congratulations, too, to Sarah Tomlinson, for winning the Dairy Industry Woman of the Year. "Sarah embodies everything Women in Dairy is about," said Hayley Campbell-Gibbons at RABDF. "She shares her knowledge and views on a very political and emotive issue with care, passion and authority, but also manages to engage with people from every walk of industry with a sensitivity and authenticity that few others can. Through her influential work on TB, Sarah has provided hope, support and kindness to thousands of farmers facing some of the most difficult times of their lives. Because of this, and her industry profile, Sarah is an inspiration to women across the industry, and a very humble one at that." I think anyone who knows Sarah would agree.

Meanwhile, and perhaps most excitingly, we've finally had some rain! I even took a video to record the sound of it in the first proper downpour! Fields are slowly greening up around here, although whether it will be enough to get a late flush remains to be seen. Unfortunately feed costs are rising (see p13), so for those who are short of forage it could be an expensive winter.

Just before British Dairying went to press, Dairy UK announced 'a clear expectation' that all feed supplied into the sector from December 30, 2026 should be deforestation free. This brings the UK in line with the EU Deforestation Regulation, and gives processors and importers clarity over future requirements. This will likely switch imports from Brazil to US origin, and could potentially add further cost as a result. But there are lots of strategies to make the most of winter forage stocks, from planting cover crop mixtures to carefully balancing rations – you can read more in our forage focus, winter housing and feeding special, and feeding efficiencies section.

Finally, I'd like to invite you our Farm Partnerships and Matching Conference on October 27 at Harper Adams University. This is for anyone who is considering succession planning on the one hand, or looking for new opportunities on the other. See p11 for more details.

Olivia Cooper

Managing Editor

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Help needed to secure UK food production

Farming organisations are calling on government for more urgent action and investment to secure UK food production as farmers reach a financial crisis point. “Defra’s recent strategic commitments were a welcome and important step towards building greater water resilience and long-term resilience on farms,” said NFU President Tom Bradshaw.

“But farmers face an immediate crisis in cash flow and confidence. Rain has come too late for lost harvests and slashed yields, while livestock farmers are dealing with the worst bluetongue outbreak to reach our shores. Many are worried they will not have money in the bank to plant next year’s crops or replace livestock lost to bluetongue.

“When we met the Prime Minister on farm in Cornwall, he acknowledged the scale of the challenge and said the commitments were a ‘first start’, but there was ‘more to come’. This was a welcome shift from government.”

Mr Bradshaw said the key investments needed now are a ‘Keep



NFU President Tom Bradshaw

Britain Growing Loan’ together with a ‘Fallen Stock Scheme’. The former would be a government-backed, interest free loan, linked to the losses caused by drought, with the latter helping livestock farmers affected by bluetongue to meet the rising costs of fallen stock collection and disposal.

The Central Association of Agricultural Valuers backed the call, but said the Government should then go further. The organisation’s

Secretary and Adviser Jeremy Moody said a much larger package of reforms is required to answer the long-term problems that farmers are facing.

“The challenges we face are moving faster than policy is responding,” said Mr Moody. “The challenge is finding a financial margin worth having and the resilience for the business confronted with hard times. Is there a model that can produce profits with different varieties and crops, on less costly inputs and operations; perhaps finding more routes to market, but doing so at sufficient scale to service the business and make a return in a high-cost country?”

There may be much the UK can learn from Australia, in providing for free-market farming but with policies that assist with investment, innovation and resilience to manage the wild swings of risk, he added.

George Dunn, Chief Executive at the Tenant Farmers Association, said: “This is not just about absorbing the issues of a difficult year. For many tenant farmers the risk is that we see



CAAV Secretary Jeremy Moody

otherwise fundamentally sound farm businesses being lost due to their inability to secure the cash and working capital needed to keep operating for 2027 and beyond.

“This is not about propping up businesses that were already unviable. It is about preventing temporary but extreme cash flow shocks from destroying productive farm businesses, livelihoods and food-producing capacity.”

GB milking herd numbers at an all time low, but deliveries increase

The size of the milking herd in GB has fallen to its lowest level on record, totalling 1.57m head on July 1, according to the latest data from AHDB.

That is a fall of 34,500 head or 2.2% on last year. However, as most producers are well aware, GB milk deliveries increased by 3% to 12,931m litres in the 12 months to July.

Youngstock numbers under two years old have dropped 2.2% which creates some concern over availability of replacements going forward, said Livestock Analyst Molly Corbett.

There has been a consistent reduction in female dairy births since early 2023. The four- to six-year-old group of cattle was the only band to grow, by 0.5%.

Older cows, from six years upwards, have also declined in number, although this could reflect farmers keeping potential culls back while milk prices and beef calf values were higher. As milk prices declined and having got an extra calf, those older cows have now been coming onto the cull market.



The GB milking herd fell 2.2% in the past year, but production was up 3%

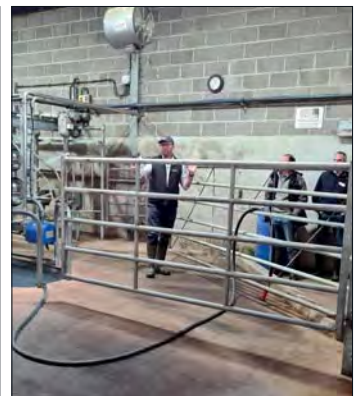
New dairy management academy open

Applications have opened for a new 12-month Dairy Management Academy aimed at helping dairy businesses develop and retain skilled herd managers.

Designed to fit alongside participants’ day-to-day roles, the academy will help aspiring herd managers build practical skills, confidence and industry connections through networking and peer-to-peer learning.

The programme includes eight classroom and on-farm training days, eight online sessions and a four-day European study tour. It gives participants the opportunity to see different dairy systems and bring new ideas back to their own businesses.

Training will be delivered by industry specialists including Ian Lindsay of LKL Services, farm vet



On-farm training will be included

and Kingshay training consultant Micheal Head, and Kingshay knowledge exchange manager Sarah Bolt. Applications are open for up to 12 participants, with the first course starting in January 2027.

Dairy farm energy investment free webinar

A second energy webinar for dairy farmers is being organised by NFU Energy on September 30. It will explore whether attendees’ farms could produce more of their own energy, make better use of existing resources and become less exposed to changing energy costs. The webinar is free and runs from 11am-12pm. It

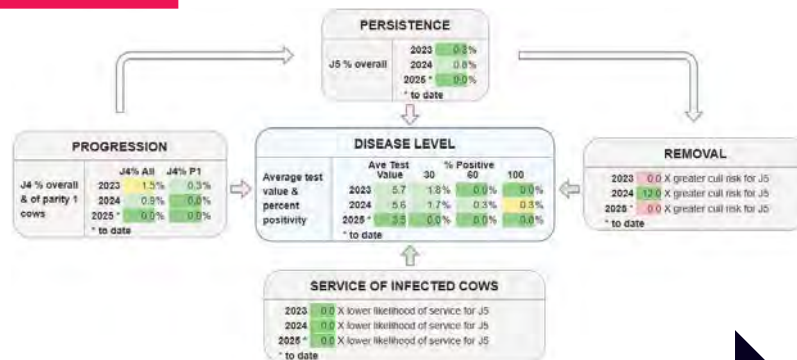
will look at the practical opportunities available to dairy businesses for investment in on-farm energy and will cover anaerobic digestion, solar generation and green gas, with a particular emphasis on how slurry, land and farm infrastructure can support future energy projects. Visit <https://bit.ly/4qQ8VVU>

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Your Herd's ATV

Illustrates your herd's average test value against the National Johne's Management Plan target of 5.5:



Results Summary

At a glance information on dam Johne's status and priority culling list:

Line No	Lactation	Days In Milk	Fertility	Predicted Calving Date	16/11/23	16/01/24	26/04/24	26/07/24	20/10/24	30/01/25	Johne's Code	Comments	Dist Johne's Code
1802	4	171	Barnen		4.24	25.45	40.93	88.03		79.71	35	Priority Cull	25
2367	1	181	Served	08/01/25						0.06	31		11
2313	1	266	Pregnant	07/11/25					5.8	3.25	30		30
2203	1	250	Pregnant	29/07/25					4.98	1.65	30		30
2253	1	270	Pregnant	06/06/25					2.32	0.4	30		30
2202	1	277	Pregnant	30/06/25					0.83	0.95	30		30
2203	1	306	Pregnant	13/06/25				3.29	6.39	0.95	30		30
2254	1	350	Pregnant	23/05/25				8.57	3.72	2.73	30		30

The farmer's view



Screening before breeding is vital in making sure we don't breed replacements from any infected cows. We use the HerdWise Progress Tracker in our annual Johne's review so we can home in on an area to make best progress.

Julian Evans, Shropshire

... and vet's view

A major advantage of Progress Tracker is that it provides the farmer with a measurable starting point and an incentive to continue, and confirmation for the vet that the plan is working when looking back over previous results. Progress Tracker can demonstrate early on that things are actually starting to head in the right direction.

Nichol Fisher, Daleside Farm Vets



HerdWise Results & Reports 2025
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Roadmap's further targets for dairy processors

The Dairy Roadmap has set further targets across three areas in a bid to drive more environmental and sustainability progress across the UK's processing sector.

This next phase focuses on plastics and packaging, climate change and energy, and water. With the former, the ambition is to eliminate unnecessary single-use plastic, maximise recycled content and improve recyclability of products while minimising carbon impact. In essence, all packaging should be recyclable where possible and economically viable. All paper and card is to be Forest Stewardship Council certified, or equivalent, and dyed plastic bottle caps are to be removed from consumer packaging by 2030.



Continuous improvement is key



The Dairy Roadmap has made significant progress since its establishment

On climate change and energy targets, the Roadmap's long-term climate ambition is to limit global warming to 1.5°C and achieve zero contribution from the dairy sector towards global warming by 2050. With that in mind, new processor targets will increase measurement, transparency and action on emissions. Processors must estimate and report their Scope One and Two emissions and set science-based targets by the end

of 2027 (including Scope Three for large organisations),

Meanwhile the end goal for water is for no serious pollution incidents, compliance with legislation, sustainable water use and the best possible treatment and use of wastewater, including reuse where possible. This will involve processors measuring water usage, undertaking risk assessments, and developing certain action plans by the end of 2026 and 2027.

The announcement also highlights the significant progress already achieved by the industry since the Roadmap was established 18 years ago. This includes:

- >30% less energy is required to process each tonne of milk,
- ~65% of UK milk is within Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi) aligned supply chains (5% in 2008),
- >50% less water is required to process each tonne of milk,
- >60% reduction in packaging per tonne of milk,
- Plastic milk bottles contain >30% recycled materials (was 0% in 2008),
- >90% of processor waste is recovered or recycled (was 62% in 2008),
- Less than 2% of waste ends up in landfill (was 24% in 2008),
- Consistently low food waste, with an average 1.3% of inputs lost as waste.

Dr Emma Gregson, Secretariat and Environment Manager at Dairy UK, said: "The UK dairy sector is in a strong position thanks to pre-competitive collaboration and an emphasis on continuous improvement."

Lely and Holstein Young Breeders supporting Louise Hartley Award

Lely Atlantic has partnered up with Holstein Young Breeders (HYB) to support the annual Louise Hartley Award.

It is funding a place for the winner on the Lely Journeys Programme, highlighting the development of cutting-edge technology and solutions. The programme follows products from factory to farm in Holland.

Louise, who lost her battle to cancer in 2016, had a deep passion for the dairy industry through her involvement in HYB, the Young Farmers' Club and as a livestock reporter for Farmers Guardian.

The award is presented at the All Breeds All Britain Calf Show in Staffordshire on October 30-November 1. Each HYB club nominates a young breeder aged 18-22, recognising one member's dedication and enthusiasm for their club, the breed, and the industry.

"The opportunity for the winner to take part in the Lely Journeys Programme is an incredible experience that will broaden their knowledge of the dairy industry and innovative technology," said National HYB Co-ordinator, Lizzie Yates. "It is a fitting way to recognise the enthusiasm and dedication that this award celebrates."

Scottish BSE case investigated after surveillance

Investigations into the source of the single BSE case confirmed in a cow on a farm in Dumfries and Galloway on August 19 are ongoing.

The case was identified through routine BSE surveillance, and precautionary movement restrictions were put in place on the offspring of the animal and its cohort.

"The fact we identified this isolated case so quickly is clear proof that our surveillance system is working effectively," said Agriculture Minister Jim Fairlie. "I want to thank the animal's owner for their diligence. Their swift action allowed us to identify and isolate the case immediately, minimising its impact on the wider industry."

Rabobank reports world's largest and top 20 global dairy companies



The world's largest dairy company, Lactalis, is taking over Cathedral City

Lactalis retained its position as the world's largest dairy company in 2025, with dairy turnover exceeding \$40bn (£29.6bn), according to the latest Rabobank report.

A series of acquisitions helped widen its lead over second-placed Nestlé to more than \$16bn (£11.8bn). These included Fonterra's Mainland Group consumer business in Australia and Asia and General Mills' US yogurt business.

The top three companies in the ranking remained unchanged, and third-ranked Dairy Farmers of America expanded

through targeted investments in value-added processing, particularly in specialty cheese.

Fourth on the list is Arla, with the merger of Arla Foods and DMK Group, to create Europe's largest dairy co-operative, being one of the biggest changes this year.

"We have seen a broader trend toward consolidation among dairy co-operatives seeking scale to remain competitive in an increasingly globalised dairy market," said Lucas Fuess, Senior Dairy Analyst at RaboResearch.

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Tenants have a case for rent reductions

Tenants should press for rent reductions this autumn amid the perfect storm of high costs, weak returns and devastating livestock disease.

The Tenant Farmers Association said those served with rent review notices last year should use this autumn's opportunity to put forward a properly evidenced case for a lower rent. Meanwhile, those without a live rent review should consider whether to serve notice for a review in the coming year.

"If tenant farmers cannot make the case for a rent reduction in circumstances like these, I would ask when they ever will," said Association Chief Executive, George Dunn. "Landlords and their agents cannot be blind to the financial realities now confronting agriculture, and should respond positively to any approach they receive to relieve pressure on rents. Landlords and their agents are keen to press the case for rent increases in better times; they should also be willing to offer rent reductions in the tough times."

Mr Dunn is also calling for those bidding on land under new tenancies to take a prudent approach. "Despite the current difficulties, we continue to see individuals; typically large



Seeking a rent reduction is prudent business management, says TFA chief

owner occupiers with low rent and finance charges on their existing units and with an inflated sense of their ability to spread fixed costs, bidding over the odds.

"That is not just a private arrangement between themselves and the landowner, it builds an evidence base of comparables that can be used against other tenant farmers, particularly within rent reviews under Farm Business Tenancies," he added. "Individuals taking land at rent levels far beyond its realistic

earning capacity do the whole sector a disservice."

Where agreement cannot be reached, advice should be taken about whether the dispute should be referred to an arbitrator for dispute resolution, said Mr Dunn. "Seeking a sensible rent reduction is not an act of hostility towards a landlord. It is prudent business management. Good landlord-tenant relationships depend upon rents that the holding can sustain and that allow both parties to plan for the future."

Free ATV training

The Farm Safety Foundation, in partnership with Lantra and Logic, has launched the 2026 ATV Bursary Scheme. This offers fully funded and industry-accredited training to help all-terrain vehicle users to operate them safely, confidently and responsibly.

ATVs remain an essential part of day-to-day life on many farms, but as machines become more powerful and working days remain under pressure, expectations around ATV use are changing. Training, helmet use and safer decision-making are no longer 'nice to have', they are vital best practice.

The scheme will fund 50 training places and each delegate will also receive a Logic ATV helmet. Successful applicants will be matched with an approved Lantra training provider, helping them access accredited, practical training at a suitable location.

Applications are open to people currently working in agriculture or studying at a land-based college or university in the UK. They close on September 25.

Visit <https://bit.ly/4xACuNM>



Fifty funded places will be available

Applications now invited for ADOPT funding

The latest round of the Accelerating Development of Practices and Technologies (ADOPT) Fund is now open to eligible applicants. The fund supports innovative, on-farm trials to test ideas and demonstrate that they will address major on-farm or immediate post-farmgate challenges or opportunities. The maximum project size has been increased from

£100,000 to £200,000 and a project's total costs must be between £50,000 and £200,000.

The Facilitator Support Grant provides £2,500 for an applicant to engage an external project facilitator to support submissions into the full ADOPT grant competition. Project facilitators can help applicants develop ideas, shape proposals,

build partnerships and identify the expertise needed for further support.

There is also an ADOPT Support Hub, delivered by ADAS, UK Agri-Tech Centre and the Soil Association, which can help with applications. The deadline for the full ADOPT grant is October 7, and September 30 for the Facilitator Support Grant.





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First Milk named Dairy Company of the Year

First Milk has been named Dairy Company of the Year and presented with the John Beckett Memorial Cup at the 2026 Cream Awards on the 3rd of September, recognising a decade of transformation for the British farmer-owned dairy co-operative.

The award celebrates a business that has strengthened its own position while making an exemplary contribution to the wider dairy industry. Through sustained investment, close partnerships, award-winning products and a pioneering approach to regenerative farming, First Milk has demonstrated confidence in British dairying and a determination to help shape a resilient future for the sector.

Today, First Milk brings together around 700 dairy farming families across Great Britain. Owned by its members, the co-operative processes their milk into high-quality cheese, whey and specialist chilled dairy products, creating long-term value for the farmers at the heart of the business.

Its success is all the more significant given the position from which it has emerged. When Shelagh Hancock became chief executive in 2017, First Milk was recovering from a serious financial crisis. Confidence had been damaged, members were leaving and questions remained over whether the co-operative could survive independently.

Since then, First Milk has rebuilt its financial foundations, restored relationships with members and customers and developed a clear strategy. It is now financially stable, investing significantly and growing its farmer membership, with a strong identity as The Regenerative Co-op.

Capital investment has been fundamental to that turnaround. First Milk has modernised its manufacturing operations, including its Lake District and Haverfordwest creameries, to improve efficiency, product quality and future growth. In May 2026, it announced the largest capital investment in the history of its Lake District Creamery, underlining its confidence in the long-term prospects of British dairy farming.

The 2024 acquisition of BV Dairy marked another important step. The Dorset-based business added expertise and capacity in specialist chilled dairy products for food service and manufacturing, diversifying First Milk beyond its established cheese operations.

Its reputation is also increasingly built on product quality. First Milk cheddar has earned recognition at major national and international competitions, including



gold medals and championship trophies. Golden Hooves, the co-operative's regenerative dairy brand, has helped connect those products more visibly with the farming practices and people behind them.

Perhaps the company's most distinctive contribution has been putting regenerative farming into practice at scale. Launched in 2021, its regenerative agriculture programme now covers approximately 90,000 hectares and is one of the UK's largest farmer-led programmes of its kind.

Members develop field-level Regenerative Farm Plans covering soil, carbon, water, biodiversity, animal welfare and people. The focus is on practical improvements that strengthen farm resilience and productivity while delivering positive environmental outcomes. First Milk is also gathering credible evidence of the impact of these practices.

This work includes soil-carbon measurement, satellite risk mapping and a freshwater strategy across member farms. The programme helps farmers identify targeted changes that can protect rivers and waterways while maintaining productive dairy businesses.

First Milk's achievements have received significant external recognition. It is a certified B Corporation and has received the King's Award for Enterprise for Sustainable

Development for its work in regenerative agriculture.

Collaboration has been another defining feature of its progress. First Milk's longstanding Milk Plan partnership with Nestlé supports environmental and social improvements on member farms and includes initiatives such as the Young Dairy Leaders programme. Its long-term commercial partnership with Ornuo UK has created stability and long-term mutual benefit. More recently, First Milk has formed the Naturally Better Dairy Group with Yeo Valley Production, to establish a growing regenerative milk pool in the South West, based on shared ambitions for animal welfare, nature, climate and farming communities. In addition, a partnership with Arla Foods Ingredients has allowed the co-operative to access higher value markets for whey.

Behind these milestones are First Milk's members and colleagues. Renewed member confidence, stronger engagement and a shared sense of purpose have been essential to the co-operative's recovery. The acquisition of BV Dairy almost doubled its workforce, bringing additional skills and perspectives to a business operating across a broader range of dairy markets.

The award also recognises Shelagh Hancock, who will retire in early 2027 after ten years as Chief Executive. Her leadership, resilience and ability to bring people together have been instrumental in First Milk's transformation. She has developed a strong management team, restored trust among members and built productive relationships across the food industry.

The strongest testament to her leadership is that First Milk's success now extends beyond any one individual. It has the strategy, people, partnerships, assets and member commitment needed to progress through its next chapter.

From a business once fighting for survival, First Milk has become a financially secure, forward-looking and highly regarded British dairy co-operative. Its transformation shows what farmer ownership, purposeful leadership and long-term investment can achieve, making First Milk a worthy winner of the 2026 Cream Award.

These accolades reflect an approach that embeds responsible business principles throughout the co-operative, from farm and factory to customer and community.

For all the category winners see www.creamawards.UK

Arla addressing industry skills shortage

Eight in 10 British farmers say it remains a struggle to find people with the skills they need, as workforce pressures continue across the UK food sector.

Arla has released new data from its farmer owners into the ongoing workforce and skills shortage in the sector. This data highlights that the issue is not improving. With the Government having committed to getting more young people into work, inspiring and educating more young people about the role that the food and farming industry plays is crucial.

The survey highlights that almost 65% of farmers say better education and training is the most effective measure to attract more people into the industry. Some 82% of farmers who have had a vacancy said very few or no applicants for the role had the right skills; a figure that has not dropped below 80% in the past seven years. Across the wider supply chain, Arla said its own data shows it takes



The Arla programme will showcase career opportunities in agriculture

around 105 days to recruit engineers compared to an average of 58 days for other roles.

Managing Director of Arla Foods UK, Bas Padberg, said: "Securing the future of British food starts with securing people. Behind every litre

of milk and every meal on the table is a skilled workforce producing, processing and transporting food."

Arla is launching a new outreach programme across the country to help address some of the key barriers in the workforce and skills

crisis. Reaching over 100 schools and more than 100,000 young people, the education initiative will showcase the breadth of progressive and modern roles available in food production.

"Government proposals like the Farming Roadmap and its efforts to help young people into work through courses in schools are helpful," said Paul Dover, Arla's UK Agriculture Director. "They will go some way to supporting farmers, but the reality is we need intervention much earlier. We need to change perceptions of the sector and ensure attractiveness to expand our talent pool and bring many more young people into our industry."

Alex Hardie, Development Manager at the School of Sustainable Food and Farming at Harper Adams University, said earlier investment in education, skills and training to help young people realise the vast range of opportunities available to them was needed.

New calf trial to evaluate sodium salicylate

A large-scale trial is getting under way at Buitelaar's development farm in Somerset to investigate whether sodium salicylate can improve calf health and lifetime performance in dairy-beef systems.

The trial is being supported through Defra's farmer-led innovation programme ADOPT

fund (Accelerating Development of Practices and Technologies). The progress of 725 dairy-beef calves, from arrival through to finishing and processing, will be analysed.

The aim is to generate evidence to help farmers and vets decide when and how sodium salicylate - a non-steroidal

anti-inflammatory drug - should be used. Specifically, it is testing how the timing of sodium salicylate supplementation can impact pneumonia and lifetime growth performance.

Led by James Watson, Group Sustainability Lead at Buitelaar, the project also involves Synergy Farm Health, the Royal Veterinary College and independent consultant Marc Jones. "Everything we trial at Long Lane Development Farm has to be commercially viable," said Mr Watson. "It's all very well saying something works for 10 calves or with expensive technology, but it has to be practical and scalable."

"People have been trying sodium salicylate in different ways for years. You speak to one person, and they'll tell you to give it on arrival. Someone else says day 10, someone else does something completely different. There hasn't been much evidence so far to say what's right, and we want to find out what actually works under commercial conditions."



The trial will take place at Long Lane Development Farm in Somerset

Milking 10,000 cows in 10 days challenge raises £5,706

AB Agri's Marie Stephenson successfully milked 10,000 cows in 10 days to raise £5,706 for RABI. Her journey began in Cornwall and covered 920 miles, milking 10,411 cows and following strict

biosecurity measures throughout. "The commitment that farmers put in is beyond anything I have ever experienced," she said. "They have fed, watered and housed me, and I will be eternally grateful."

Danielle Burwood at RABI, said: "Marie's journey has created conversations about wellbeing in agriculture and helped more farming people understand that support is available."

Cattle genotyping scheme now open

Northern Ireland dairy and suckler beef farmers are being urged to opt in to the new Bovine Genetics Genotyping Scheme. The scheme initially provides financial support to livestock farmers to genotype their current breeding animals, including future replacements.

From next January, all calves born and registered on the NI Food Animal Information System can be genotyped. The laboratory process analyses an animal's DNA via an ear tissue sample, collected using an ear tag in a similar way to the bovine viral diarrhoea eradication programme. It will enable herd owners to improve the accuracy of breeding decisions by identifying traits, at an earlier stage.

Farm businesses will receive £13 per eligible genotype submitted through the scheme. Eligible businesses must opt in to the scheme at www.srgni.com.



The scheme being launched

Dairy Farm Partnerships and Matching Conference

Helping to connect dairy farm owners and the next generation

Date: Tuesday 27 October 2026. Venue: Harper Adams University

Meet with Industry experts on:

- Finance
- Banking
- Pensions / IHT
- Legal and law
- Land management
- Management skills
- Like minded people

Time: 10.30 start, lunch, followed by farm tour 2.30-5pm.



To register your place, scan the QR code below or email info@britishdairying.co.uk for more information

FARM OWNERS / LANDOWNERS

Are you considering:

- Succession planning
- Stepping back from day-to-day farming
- Bringing in a new partner or manager
- Keeping the farm in production while reducing workload
- Creating a long-term partnership

ASPIRING FARMERS

Are you looking for:

- A tenancy
- Share farming opportunity
- Equity partnership
- Contract farming role
- A pathway into the dairy sector

SUCCESSION CHALLENGES

Many dairy farms face succession challenges as older generations consider retirement while younger farmers struggle to access land or capital.

NEW MODELS OF FARMING

Partnerships, share farming, contract farming and equity agreements can provide flexible ways to keep farms operating and profitable.

INDEPENDENT FACILITATION

A trusted industry platform can help bring both sides together and start the conversation.

Venue: Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB

Supported by



Date: Tuesday 27 October 2026 Venue: Harper Adams University
USE THE QR CODE OR CALL OR EMAIL FOR MORE INFORMATION TODAY

Email: alan@whibleys.net Tel: 07786 993797

www.britishdairying.co.uk/farm-matching



Scan to register

Bullish half year report from Arla

Arla has recorded one its strongest half-year performances to date, with Chief Executive Peter Tuborg saying it had entered 2026 in formidable shape.

Healthy global demand and a marked recovery across its strategic brands drove branded revenue growth of 6.7% - a sharp turnaround from the same period last year.

Group revenue reached €7.6bn (£6.5bn), while net profit rose to €213m (£182m), up from €158m (£135m) in the first half of 2025. The period also saw Arla complete its merger with DMK, hailed as the start of a new chapter.

However, the first half report acknowledges the pressure on milk prices with the abundance of milk across Europe, including a strong increase in Arla's own milk intake. At the same time, cost inflation, driven in part by the crisis in the Middle East, ran higher than anticipated, further lowering the value of milk across the sector. As a result, Arla's performance price decreased to 43.6c/kg (37.4p/kg), from 57.5c/kg (49.3p/kg) in the first half of 2025, and the pre-paid milk price fell to 40.7c/kg (34.9p/kg).

"Despite the lower price level, Arla remained highly competitive and

delivered a robust result, supported by strong brand volumes, growing protein demand, and €63m (£54m) in net efficiencies under its Fund our Future programme," said Mr Tuborg. "The strong result has enabled the Board to approve a half-year supplementary payment of 1c/kg (0.86p/kg) of milk delivered to Arla farmer owners. This is the market doing what it should. High milk availability has brought prices down across the sector, but a lower milk price does not mean a weaker co-operative. Our brands are growing, our business is efficient, and we remain highly competitive."

British Dairying farm matching conference

British Dairying is hosting a farm matching conference on October 27 at Harper Adams University.

As part of our farm matching service, the conference will bring together aspiring producers with those looking to step back, with expert advice on finance, tax, legal issues, management skills and more.

Partnerships, share farming, contract farming and equity agreements can provide flexible ways to keep farms operating and profitable. Supported by Lely, the event runs from 10.30 to 5pm and includes a farm tour. For more details see the advert on p11.

RABI launches a drought fund

RABI has launched a £2m emergency drought fund offering grants towards personal and household living costs for eligible farm owners and tenants



Alicia Chivers, RABI Chief Executive

whose household finances are under pressure.

Applications are opening in five regional phases, with up to 200 grants of £2,000 available to farmers in each of the five regions. The grants cannot be used for farm or business running costs.

"The prolonged dry conditions are having a significant impact on farming people and households across England and Wales," said Alicia Chivers, Chief Executive at RABI.

"I am proud of RABI's ability to respond at pace when farming people face challenges on this scale.

"We know the impact of the drought varies across the country, which is why the applications open in regional phases. I would encourage eligible farming people to apply when the fund opens in their area and remember that RABI's wider support services are available to our farming community whenever needed."

Visit www.rabi.org.uk.

Competition champions British produce



The Love British Food competition will recognise those making a difference

Farmers and other businesses are invited to enter Love British Food's 2026 Community Competition which celebrates practical actions that build a deeper connection with British produce.

British Food is the organiser, and the competition, in partnership with Morrisons, is entitled 'Champion of Change', and is part of British Food Fortnight, which runs from September 26 to October 11.

Practical actions it is looking for include growing, sourcing, cooking, serving, educating or widening access to British produce.

"In our 25th anniversary year, we want to find and celebrate people who are making a profound difference at a grassroots level," said Love British Food founder, Alexia Robinson.

Entries close on October 11. Visit: www.lovebritishfood.co.uk.



Visit UK Dairy Day 2026, the UK's leading dairy industry trade event.

Wednesday 16th September
at Telford International Centre

- Trade Stands
- Cattle Show
- Seminars & Industry Panels

- Practical Demonstrations

FREE ENTRY



Feed material markets tighten



Jamie Day

Feed market specialist

Shipping constraints due to the Russia:Ukraine conflict have seen the cost of cereal feed ingredients rise rapidly over the past month, while weather factors are also inflating maize and soya values. With autumn here, markets for all feed commodities are tight as the winter feeding period approaches.

The break in the hot weather across much of the UK from mid-August has helped grass growth, although advisers warn it will take some weeks to return to normal. The ADAS Forage for Knowledge report shows a rapid rise in average growth rates in the third week of August, followed by an equivalent fall in the subsequent week. While growth rates remain above those at the same stage of 2025, they are below the five-year average. ADAS warns that the latest figures are based on a very low number of regional reports.

“Traditional Russian customers in Asia and North Africa are seeking alternative supplies.”

Much depends on the weather and rainfall, as to whether there will be a late flush of grass for grazing and conservation, and the right conditions to establish winter forage crops. With no official figures, it seems the shortfall is very regional, with some farmers already feeding winter fodder supplies, while others are relatively unaffected. The maize silage crop will also be down in volume - many growers started chopping crops from mid-August before dry matter scores got too high.

Cereal values have hardened since the recent escalation of hostilities in the Black Sea region, which has seen Russia target Ukraine's grain export terminals and associated transport, handling and storage infrastructure, with Ukraine responding in kind. The combined assaults are reducing early season Black Sea grain exports significantly - while both countries had reasonable harvests, it is availability that is the issue.

Consequently, traditional Russian customers in Asia and North Africa are seeking alternative supplies, particularly from Europe and Australia. This pressure is lifting global prices - not helped by investment funds seeking to profit from a rising market. Some Black Sea grain is being moved by road and river to other ports, but the low water levels in many of Europe's major waterways after the hot summer is also constraining the movement of feed materials.

Market values rise and fall in the short term on news of various peace initiatives - notably Turkey's unsuccessful attempt to reopen the 2022 land corridor for grain exports and the more recent US ceasefire proposals - but the trend has been steadily upwards.

The November 2026 London feed wheat futures gained £20/t during July, closing at £198.75/t, only to gain a further £17.75/t during August to reach £216.50/t by September 1. The May 2027 contract moved from £188.50/t to £223.25/t over the same two-month period.

Good quality

The UK wheat crop is down in volume terms - the AHDB estimates by 12%. The smaller wheat crop is of good quality, as evidenced by the fall in milling premiums over feed values. But the quality means there is a higher flour extraction rate, which in turn leads to reduced supplies - and rising prices - for the wheatfeed animal feed co-product. Average spot UK feed wheat prices rose from £187/t to £206/t ex-farm over August.

Merchants also report firm feed barley prices. Growers are reluctant sellers, since the forage shortfall is likely to increase both on-farm feeding and demand from feed compounders. The Black Sea disruption means the large barley crops in Russia and Ukraine are not reaching international markets at the usual early season volume, with the pace of exports significantly below that of last year. However, UK barley remains uncompetitive on export markets for the time being, which is keeping a ceiling on domestic values.

The downturn in the hospitality trade, affecting beer and spirit sales, is having a knock-on effect on the brewery and distillery co-products used as feed materials. Lower production volumes mean less draff and brewers' grains, with their values rising to reflect the shortfall. On the other hand, less demand for malting barleys adds to the feed pile. UK feed barley values rose from £165/t to £188/t ex-farm over August.

Maize values are tightening as the US crop condition is downgraded ahead of harvest, while Europe's grain maize volumes will have been affected by the hot weather. Protein feed ingredient markets have also moved higher over recent weeks in line with strengthening oilseed markets.

Firm prices

All these factors have seen firm soyabean and soyameal prices, with oilseed rape and meal following markets upwards. Soya hull values are tight too. Average soyameal prices gained £19/t over August to close at £355/t ex-store, with soya hulls up from £193/t to £218/t ex-store.

UK rapeseed crushers are reported to be working flat out. Despite a larger 2026 UK rapeseed crop, production is still only half the domestic demand. However, imports from Ukraine and Europe are under pressure from the Black Sea hostilities and the European transport constraints - so meal values are strong.



Balancing maize silage rations for milk production

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

Maize silage is an excellent foundation for dairy rations, providing valuable starch and energy. But if we want cows to make the most of homegrown maize, we need to consider how the rest of the ration is balanced around it.

Maize starch ferments more slowly than cereals such as wheat and barley. While cereals can help fill an energy gap, pushing rapidly fermentable starch too hard increases acid production in the rumen, potentially reducing rumen pH, fibre digestion and milk fat production.

Digestible fibre sources such as soya hulls, citrus pulp and sugar beet pulp can help provide balance. The limitation is bulk. There is only so much we can include before rumen fill starts restricting intake and our ability to deliver enough energy.

This is where rumen-protected fat supplements complement maize particularly well. Fat is the most energy-dense nutrient available to dairy cows, and 500 grams of Megalac can increase ration energy density by around 0.5 megajoules per kilogram of dry matter. Importantly, rumen-protected fats provide this energy without adding to the acid load in the rumen.

We can also use the fatty acid profile of a supplement to target different areas of cow performance.

During the first 120 days after calving, maintaining energy supply while protecting body condition and fertility should be a priority. Oleic acid (C18:1) improves total diet fat digestibility, supports body condition and promotes egg and embryo development, making calcium salt rumen-protected fat supplements particularly valuable during early lactation.

Once cows are beyond peak lactation or back in calf, we can consider supplements higher in palmitic acid (C16:0), which directs more nutrients toward milk and milk fat production.

Getting more from maize isn't simply about adding more starch. We need to balance energy sources so cows can make the most of homegrown forage while maintaining rumen function. Rumen-protected fat supplements provide a unique way to increase energy density while targeting milk production, milk solids, body condition and fertility, without disrupting rumen function.

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

Dry weather and unexpected surprises

In this month's RABDF/NMR Gold Cup Comment, Paul Broad discusses how he's managing a difficult season of drought and ensuring there's enough forage in stock.

There is only one topic to start this month's article with and that's the good ol' British weather. When speaking to non-farming people, they never seem to look at the weather forecast; when they want sun, they jet off overseas to top up their tan. But I, along with thousands of other farmers, have been looking at forecasts for the past two months wondering if it will ever rain again.

“The whole industry has many new challenges ahead.”

Writing this on August 19, it's our third wet morning in a row, and the weather has turned, with more showers forecast over the next 10 days and temperatures back to normal. Last year after the dry spell we had over 250mm of rain in September to kick start everything back into life again, but with it being both drier and hotter this year we are going to need more than a few showers to make the grass green again.

We have some round bales of hay in the shed for the heifers, enabling us to keep the good silage for the milking cows. Our silage fields will be topped off and fertilised as there is more rain to come - hopefully the grass will then regrow from the bottom of the sward, giving us one or possibly two more cuts. I hope we will have enough grass silage to take us through winter but there will be less to carry over for next summer. When the ground softens up, we have grass



Paul Broad reflects on how this summer's weather has influenced the farm

seed to sow along with more acres of cover crops to give us a larger first cut next year.

Even some of our maize crops on the top of the hills are struggling this year, but the majority is still green and will produce a good tonnage. We have built up a good buffer of maize silage in the clamp, with enough of last year's crop to take us through to February 2027. This is a great position to be in, but we will need to grow more maize next year.

Easy harvest

How does the old saying go? Pity dry weather does any harm. Our winter wheat was cut in July at 8.75t/ha and we had 6t/ha of straw; it was a very easy harvest as we could leave the straw on the ground for five days and not worry about it getting rained on. The quality of the grain was average, but with some small, shrivelled grains

due to lack of moisture. The only thing we're saving money on at the moment is the amount of diesel we're using in the straw bedder tractor, as the straw is that good this year.

The heat and humidity this summer have taken their toll on the cows, with feed intakes varying from day to day. This has impacted milk yield and quality, and fertility has decreased, with more cows bulling when they should have been 60-100 days in calf. The financial consequences of this will be felt for the next 12 months. I am glad I am not a block calver and wanting to calve everything in 12 weeks; we can live with some cows losing time in our all-year-round calving system.

Battling bluetongue

And now bluetongue has reared its ugly head. We haven't vaccinated our herd, but we have had a couple of cows look ill - we blood tested them, but they came back negative so we gave them anti-inflammatories and they are fine again. I think cattle cope with the disease, but it is proving to be devastating for sheep farmers. One sheep farmer I know said sheep don't need a reason to die and now they've got bluetongue too. If we are going to have hotter and drier summers the whole industry has many new challenges ahead.

One challenge we have completed is our farmhouse renovation. Last August, Tom, our builder, had finished my son David's new house

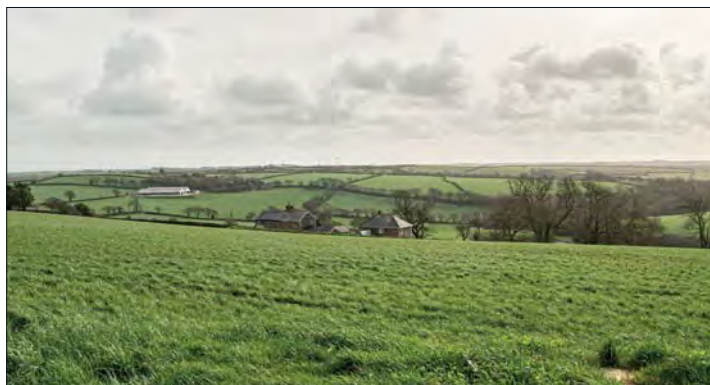
and said he had time to renovate our farmhouse. You know how it goes on the farm - all the important things like sheds, slurry pits, and new tractors take priority when you've got some money to spend. Our house hadn't had any money spent on it for the past 20 years, so when Tom said he had the time and the milk price was looking pretty good we decided to go ahead, much to my wife Wendy's delight.

Like every project we have had a few ups and downs and extra costs along the way. We started upstairs by insulating the outside walls, adding a new wet room and ensuite bathroom for my son Philip, and installing new central heating and electrics. By Christmas Wendy and I had to move up to my mother-in-law's house as it was no fun living in a house with no heating or hot water.

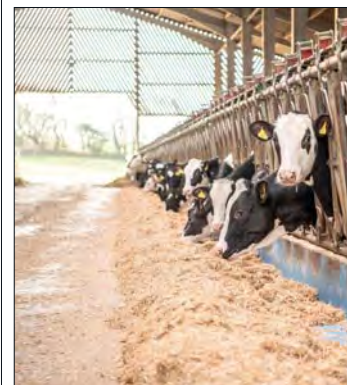
Structural issues

That's when all the fun and games started; the builders took down the dining room ceiling and wondered how the bedroom above had stayed there, as all the timbers had rotted. We also found an unused chimney that went up to the eaves of the house - we had to get a structural engineer in to make sure it was safe to remove it.

After sweeping the chimneys and having a new liner put in one, they condemned our two wood burners, so we had to get new ones. On the ground floor we installed underfloor heating and sold our Rayburn. A new kitchen, carpets and decorating followed, and we finally moved back in at the beginning of August. Wendy is absolutely delighted with everything and I'm in her good books - for the time being.



Rain on the forecast brings hope for one or two further cuts of silage



Feed intakes have varied day to day

Who's taking the profits?



Chris Walkland

COMMENT

Last September seems a very long time ago now. But at the beginning of that month I started warning on the Kite podcast that prices were going into reverse at pace, and the pressure was on. No one believed me, of course... until Peter Willes at Parkham Farms wiped 8ppl off the milk price in a single month for November. The price cut floodgates duly opened, and price cut carnage ensued - of the 26 processors I track, which I estimate account for 95% of the nation's milk, 24 of them dropped last November, December, January, and 23 of them in February.

At the Semex conference in January, I stated that I couldn't see milk prices increasing until August, as there was nothing pinging on my six-month outlook radar to suggest that there was. I predicted that prices would be between 30 and 33p from February to July. And I wasn't too far out, I don't think - February's average was 31.3p by my reckoning and July's was 32p.

Happily, prices started to turn up in May for a few as a result of the (temporary) Gulf War commodity price boost. And in June, nine of the 26 processors increased, with the highest being 2p from previous pantomime villain Parkham Farms.

“Farmers have endured one of the worst years in living memory.”

However, the serious heavy lifting didn't start coming until the first week of July for August prices, when Wyke increased 3.64p, Parkham went another 3p (on a manufacturing litre basis), and Freshways went the same amount, but for September. Wyke then increased again for September and October, to join Parkham at 40p on a manufacturing litre. I think a lot of credit has to go Parkham and Wyke's way for their efforts to drive the price on - the moves set the bar for others, and changed the narrative for the cheese sector.

For example, in my Provision Trade Federation bulletin (which many of the UK manufacturers and traders get) I could move on from saying (in effect) “cheese prices have to rise” to (basically) “if cheese prices don't rise significantly, NOW, then there will be far less milk in the coming months: Why else would two processors have increased their prices to 40p so far ahead of the market...” Since then, a lot of other companies have posted hefty increases - far higher than predicted even a month ago. Now we have to wait and see if the market does move as it needs to. (See my markets page for more on this.)

You will know better than me the amount of money you've lost over the past year, and the size of your cash flow black holes. From an industry point of view, if the average milk price for 2026 ends up being 36–37ppl or a bit over (it might, yet - the year to date to July has the Defra price around 35p) and we produce 15.5bn litres (slightly down on last year) then the industry's total income (volumes x price) will be £5.6–£5.8bn. In 2025, total income was £6.9bn, in 2024 it was £6.2bn. So we're down £1.3 billion-ish on last year and £600m on 2024. Simple enough maths so far.

Consumer spending

However, here's some more simple maths for you: On July 31 AHDB published Nielson data on consumer spending on dairy for the last 52 weeks to July 11. The data clearly states that the year-on-year change in consumer spending is up by nearly... (are you ready for this?)... £650m. £650m! Well, £645,866,160 to be precise, to a total dairy spend of £12.5bn, of which cow dairy accounted for £11.5bn. Volumes were down slightly, so the additional £650m cannot be accounted for by an increase in volumes. Breaking this down into 12-week chunks shows this, comparing with the same periods the previous year:

- 12 weeks to July 12, 2025 - retail prices were up 5.3%;
- 12 weeks to November 29, 2025 - retail prices were up 8%;
- 12 weeks to January 24, 2026 - retail prices were up 6.7%;
- 12 weeks to April 18, 2026 - retail prices were up 4.4%;
- 12 weeks to July 11, 2026 - retail prices were up 2.7%.

Now I know some of this increase in price will be to cover inflation on fuel, labour, packaging and other materials from processors and retailers, but dairy inflation has been about half of those figures. And I know we're not comparing one timescale with another (I will over time!), but you get the gist. The take-out message is pretty clear: Farmers have endured one of the worst years in living memory, while someone else at the other end has enjoyed a pretty good one.

Retailer profiteering

How much of the extra lolly the retailers have had, and how much the processors, I have no idea - we won't know until the accounts come out and then it's very hard to determine. But I know who my money is on for making a nice pile out of the additional £650m! Meanwhile the politics is ramping up on possible retailer profiteering, and in Scotland there's a consultation on capping some food prices. #JustSaying...

Now to Saputo and Lactalis. The latter's near £1bn purchase of Saputo certainly came as a surprise to most people in the industry, and has significant implications, not only for Davidstow but for Lactalis' Stranraer factory as well. That, I see from the Milk Suppliers Association, has 97 farmers sending just 210m litres of milk into the

site. I thought there were more suppliers than that. The site also takes in significant quantities of milk from Arla and First Milk too, I think, so the factory there is vital to the success of the Scottish milk field.

My initial concern centred on whether Lactalis might one day rationalise cheddar production from Stranraer into Davidstow, and then either close or sell Stranraer, into which it has not invested much over the years, other than to keep the plant ticking over. It is well known that the plant is pretty tired and would benefit from substantial investment. Frankly, I think farmers there can be forgiven for feeling more than a tad irked about Lactalis spending £1bn at Davidstow, and so little on them.

Rationalisation might be a logical move from a fixed cost perspective, but I'm not sure Lactalis would, or even could do it. For starters, the Davidstow milk field is the most expensive in the UK, and Lactalis isn't used to paying top dollar for milk, although it will have to down there! I also don't think that Davidstow could either source or process another 200–300m litres of milk, which is what Stranraer's intake will probably be.

“Scottish farmers and Scottish Government dairy representatives should not be complacent.”

I think Davidstow is taking in about 550m litres of milk a year now, but supposedly maxed out at one time at 650m litres. Thus there is no way it can absorb Stranraer's capacity. Nor could Lactalis recruit or buy the sort of volume required in the South West, least of all with Arla building a new mozzarella plant 40 miles away. Parkham Farms and Crediton suppliers would also be nuts to move.

Nevertheless, I think Scottish farmers and Scottish Government dairy representatives should not be complacent. That is probably the biggest risk. My best rating on the Stranraer site now would be 'safe-ish', but a lot of issues potentially still arise from the 'ish' bit. Lactalis' brand Seriously does not have a protected designation of origin, so doesn't have to be made in Scotland and could be produced under contract by anyone, as First Milk effectively does for Ornuu.

Perhaps now is therefore the time for the Milk Supply Association / Scottish Government to seek even closer ties to Lactalis than it has had before, if that's possible and not too fanciful an idea. There is a precedent for very close ties in Orkney, of course, but that's a completely different ball game to Stranraer.

But there is a dairy producer organisation at both plants, and the one at Stranraer is run by an experienced diplomat in Rory Christie. That's a good start, and one that could come in very handy indeed going forward as Lactalis' strategy for both Davidstow and Stranraer unfolds.

AHDB MILK PRICE LEAGUE TABLE

Milk price league - July 2026

	July price	Annual average
Müller M&I M&S	50.19	50.03
Müller M&I Waitrose	48.60	48.44
Müller M&I Sainsbury	45.83	45.67
Müller M&I Tesco	43.82	43.64
Müller M&I Co-op	41.85	41.69
Saputo Dairy UK - Profile	37.06	37.08
Saputo Dairy UK - Variable	35.06	37.03
Arla Manufacturing	36.60	36.61
Dale Farm NI	35.42	35.42
Dale Farm GB	35.28	35.24
Müller M&I Direct	35.35	35.19
Lactalis - Profile	34.14	34.35
Barber's Cheesemakers	33.92	33.92
Crediton Dairy	33.76	33.76
Lactalis	33.64	33.64
Wensleydale	32.90	32.90
Lactalis - Seasonal	33.64	32.49
Pattemores	32.09	32.09
Wyke Farms	31.90	31.84
Belton Farm	31.76	31.76
First Milk Manufacture	31.32	31.33
Leprino Foods	30.39	30.64
South Caernarfon	30.35	30.47

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 supplementary payment of 1.83ppl.
2. First Milk manuf. member premium +0.50ppl and F/M manuf. Tesco cheese group +1.91ppl. 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								
	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP
UK Arla Farmers Manufacturing	-3.50	-3.48	-1.75	-	0.09	1.76	-	1.41	0.91	0.89
Barber's Cheesemakers	-3.75	-2.50	-2.00	-1.90	-	-	1.50	-	2.50	1.50
Belton Farm	-3.50	-2.00	-2.50	-3.00	-	-	-	1.50	0.50	2.00
Crediton Dairy Ltd	-2.00	-2.00	-3.00	-2.00	-	-	-	-	1.40	1.50
Dale Farm GB	-3.32	-2.22	-1.91	-0.25	0.12	0.13	0.38	0.48	1.03	NPA
Dale Farm NI	-2.00	2.00	-3.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	-0.50	0.50	NPA	NPA
First Milk Manufacture	-6.00	-3.60	-2.00	-	0.50	-	-	0.60	1.50	2.00
Lactalis/Caledonian Cheese	-3.11	-3.04	-1.76	-	0.52	-	1.55	0.37	1.71	2.07
Leprino Foods	-5.00	-3.00	-2.00	0.40	-	1.60	-	-	1.00	2.00
Müller M & I - Co operative	-	-	-1.75	-	-	-0.36	-	-	0.12	-
Müller M & I - M&S	-	1.02	-	-	0.81	-	1.12	1.35	-	-
Müller M & I - Direct	-1.50	-1.50	-3.00	-1.00	-	-	-	-	-	0.50
Müller M & I - Sainsbury's	0.04	0.18	0.04	-0.05	-0.41	0.25	0.15	-0.13	-0.01	-0.06
Müller M & I - Tesco	-	-	0.41	-	-	0.12	-	-	0.34	-
Müller M & I - Waitrose	NPA	NPA	-	-	-	0.25	-	1.00	-	1.00
Pattemores Dairy Ingredients	-3.00	-3.00	-4.00	-	-	-	1.00	1.00	3.00	2.00
Payne's Dairies	-2.00	-3.00	-	-1.00	-	-	-	-	-	3.00
Saputo Dairy UK	-1.00	-4.00	-2.50	-1.50	-1.00	-	1.50	1.75	0.75	1.00
South Caernarfon Creameries	-3.50	-3.00	-2.00	-	-	-	-	-	1.00	2.25
Wensleydale	-3.00	-2.93	-2.23	-1.29	-0.20	-	0.92	0.65	1.49	1.83
Wyke Farms	-3.11	-3.11	-2.08	-	-	-	1.57	-	3.63	NPA

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.

Milk volumes decline as the heat continues

Daily milk deliveries in July averaged 33.28m litres and totalled an estimated 1,032m litres, a reduction of 34m litres (-3.2%) on last year. This brings milk year-to-date (April-July) supplies for GB to 2% below 2025 levels.

July daily deliveries opened 1.8m litres below last year's high level and remained consistently under year-ago volumes, averaging a 1.1m-litre shortfall. The most recent week of data (week ending August 29) showed a 3.9% decline on last year and -4.5% for the month of August. Drought has cut forage production through much of the country, tightening margins further.

Grass growth is non-existent in places, and many farmers are having to feed winter stocks. Reports of widespread bluetongue through the South West and increasingly the North West of England and Wales is also adding to milk production fears. These concerns contributed to wholesale prices rising a modest amount in August.

Bulk cream increased by £77/t (5%), butter by £130/t (4%), skimmed milk powder (SMP) by £110/t (5%) and mild cheddar by £10/t during the period. With more milk diverted to cover fresh dairy production, cheese stocks have tightened a little. Bulk cream has continued to pick up and has been bolstered by fast-rising prices on the continent. At these prices it is still not worth churning to butter and reports of some processors turning old butter to anhydrous milk fat are holding back export prospects. SMP prices rose on reports of some buying to store for Q4.

The rise in commodity prices is not currently enough to support the size of the rise in milk prices, but processors have had to act quickly to safeguard supplies. This will produce some tension until commodity prices follow suit. Much will depend on milk production on the continent and elsewhere.

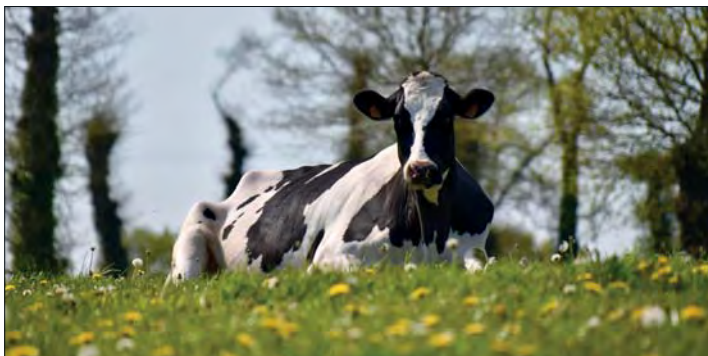
Milk price changes - September 2026

Aligned liquid contracts held mostly steady. Muller Co-op Dairy group and Tesco made no change to their prices after an increase last month. Muller M&S held on to its price while Waitrose increased by 1ppl. Sainsbury's was the only exception, making a price reduction for another month, dropping by a scant 0.06ppl.

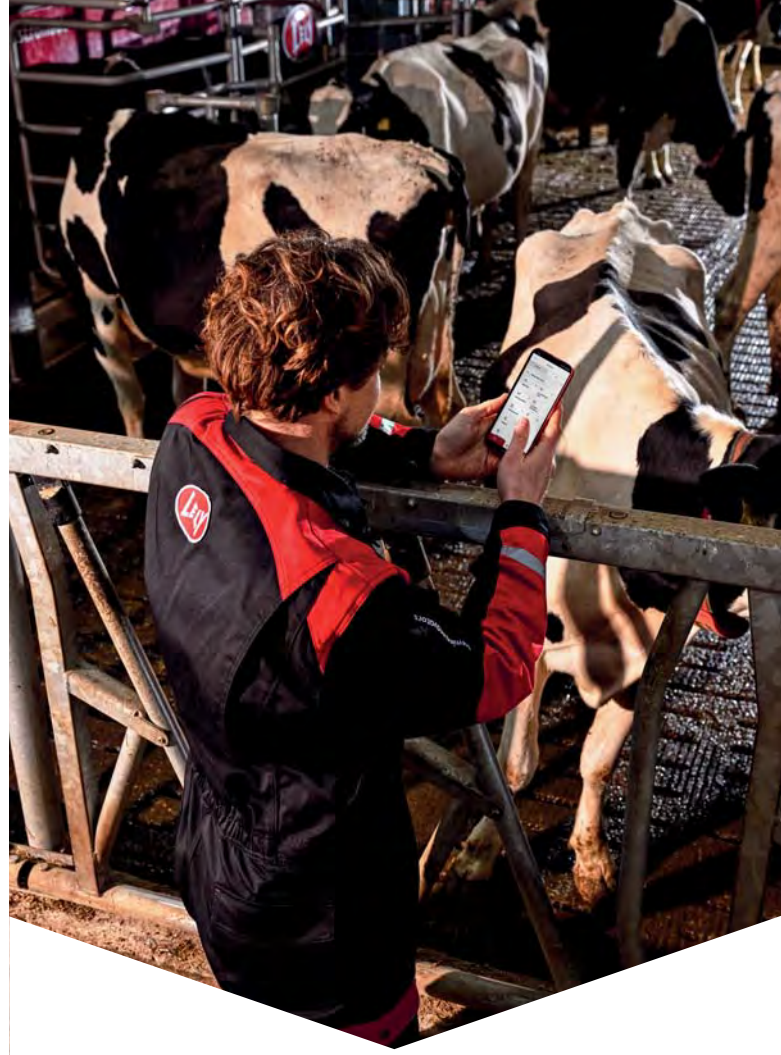
Non-aligned liquid contracts were all positive. Crediton Dairy increasing its price by 1.50ppl, with Muller and Payne's Dairies up by 0.5ppl and 3ppl, respectively. Pembrokeshire Creamery increased by 0.69ppl.

Cheese contracts on the AHDB league table continued their growth this month, up by between 1ppl and 2.25ppl. South Caernarfon Creameries announced the largest increase of 2.25ppl. Belton Cheese, First Milk Manufacturing and Leprino Food increased by 2ppl each. Lactalis made a positive announcement of 2.07ppl while Barbers added 1.50ppl. Saputo and Wensleydale Creamery raised values for the fourth consecutive month, by 1ppl and 1.83ppl, respectively.

Movements in manufacturing contracts were in line with cheese contracts. UK Arla Farmers Manufacturing increased for the sixth consecutive month, by 0.89ppl. Pattermores Dairy Ingredients and Meadow rose by 2.00ppl.

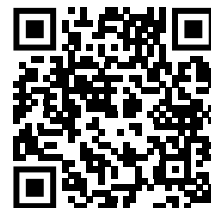


Drought conditions have hampered grass growth in many places



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UK market increases, as Europe lags behind

By Chris Walkland

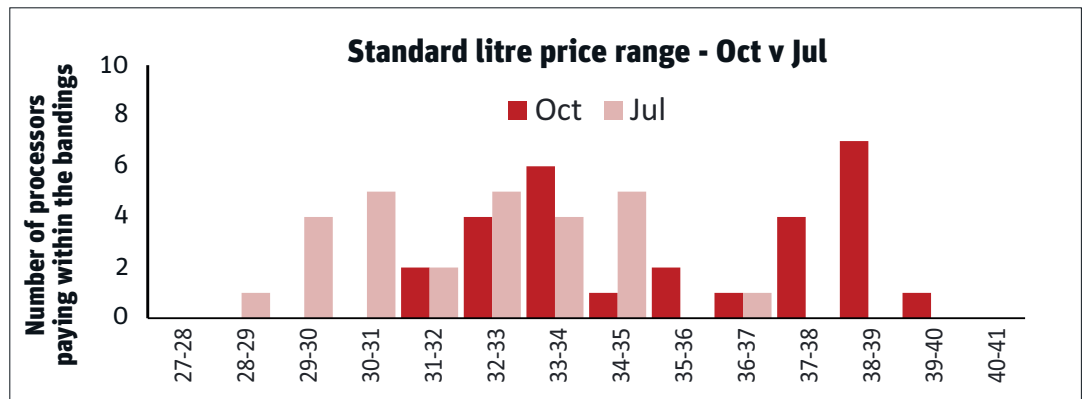
I really don't understand what's happening at the moment in Europe. On the one hand the French Government is coughing up hundreds of millions of euros in drought compensation for its farmers. Some 65% of French land has faced drought conditions with crop losses of 50% or more, and up to 70-80% in some regions. Farmers there are already looking to buy forage from Ireland... but it is short there too. In The Netherlands and Germany river levels in the Rhine fell to their lowest ever, so they must have been hit hard too.

On the other hand, the volume statistics aren't bad at all. French milk volumes are tracking last year's levels, and Germany's are still higher than last year. Those in the Netherlands are up on 2025 too, and there doesn't seem to be much concern there either. Perhaps this is why I am seeing trader reports which say they aren't worried about milk flows at all. Yet. Certainly EU prices, particularly cheese, are not following the UK's up, and EU traders are currently saying the EU dairy market is 'balanced'.

"It's too late to save the pasture on many farms."

Here in the UK it is impossible to say our market is balanced, given the latest milk production volumes. Volumes are falling sharply, and the outlook is poor given the grass and maize situation, the fact that a lot of first cut forage has been chewed away, there's bluetongue, and major cash flow pressures. Last year farmers had cash to supplement forage with bought-in feed to keep the milk flowing. This year they don't.

If EU processors aren't worried about milk then there is no doubt that UK processors are. The numbers say it all - over the past 14 days GB volumes are down around 4.5%. Some firms are down by a much larger extent, too. The total milk produced in the UK over the 50 days from July 4 to August 22 was 1,963m litres, which is down 64.6m litres and 3.2% on last year. In GB, over the same period volumes were 1,597m litres, which is down 4% on last year. And if we take the



The prices have moved up the bandings compared to July, with six processors paying between 38p and 39p

comparison further... GB volumes were down 1.2% on the three-year average, including 2025's record high levels, and within 0.5% of the three-year average excluding 2025.

The prospects aren't great, either. The rains may have come to most parts of the country, but it's too late to save the pasture on many farms, and even if a very late silage crop can be taken the quality of that forage will not match early cuts. Winter feed prices are already £25-£30/t higher than last year, and rising, so it looks as if farmers are faced with a pretty expensive winter - hence the growing concerns about next year's production. Surely many EU countries are faced with the same set of circumstances? Ireland certainly is, and some processors have already introduced special measures and prices to aid their producers.

Our processors are clearly aware of, and responding, to the situation. Two processors have increased their milk prices by around 9ppl in just two to three months. There was a raft of decent milk price increases at the end of August - much higher than some (including me) expected. As it stands there is now one company (Crediton) on 40p for October on a standard litre, six between 38p and 39p, and four between 37p and 38p. The graph illustrates how prices have moved up the price bandings compared to July.

Others are expected to follow, as the message is now becoming crystal clear: If milk prices do not rise to break-even level and more soon then the milk volume situation for Q4 this year and next year will be desperate.

The current shortage here, and lack of a shortage in Europe, is being particularly reflected in the cheese market. UK mild cheddar prices were being negotiated at around £3,200/t two weeks ago, with some processors

now setting minimum spot trading prices at £3,400/t or more. But prices are going to have to approach or exceed £3,800/t soon to hit a 40p milk price (with high whey prices adding to the revenues). Frankly, if prices don't get there then the farmgate prices we are seeing announced now won't be sustainable.

In contrast, EU trader prices and futures prices are lagging significantly, and there is a striking disconnect between those markets and the UK physical market. For example, EU cheddar is around £3,150/t. The gap is the widest for several years. In fact, Stone X's cheese futures don't reach the minimum level that some UK processors have set until Q1 next year, and this, plus the EEX semi-official EU index, also at a similar level, could be a major anchor to market progress. The GlobalDairyTrade (GDT) cheddar price is also terrible, and one of the lowest in six years at \$3,500/t, or £2,600/t. However, there is no UK or EU cheddar bought or sold on the auction.

Red Tractor cheddar

I know a lot of people despise Red Tractor, but believe me, British retailers want Red Tractor cheddar and they will pay a premium for it. Right now, if you didn't have Red Tractor, you wouldn't have a chance of getting the milk prices promised for October.

Our market also needs Ireland's prices to step up. Its prices were lagging the UK's, but I am assured its prices have lifted. Farmers there have similar drought problems to us, and it is pretty clear that they are unlikely to tolerate a large farmgate price premium between their market and GB for long, especially from those companies picking up milk on both sides of the border. Butter is a different story, though, with

the price supposedly held back by high stock levels in Europe. I have no idea about Red Tractor butter stocks, though. I wouldn't think there are much of those at all. UK butter is around £3,600-£3,700/t for fresh, while EU butter is around £150 less. It is the highest price since mid-April.

The latest GDT auction put Solarec's EU butter at €4,280/t (£3,678/t) for the next three months, which is more than the Dutch price has been trading at in recent weeks, so there is reason to be optimistic.

Nevertheless, the high stocks mean that traders are bearish for the short and medium term on butter. Cream, though, is rising sharply. UK cream has been relatively stable at £1.65-£1.70/kg over the past few weeks, but it's over that threshold now.

Market indication

Spot milk, meanwhile, is providing another indication of how tight the UK market has become. Prices are now 47-48ppl in general, but with some trades over 50p. Cheesemakers are selling whatever spare milk they have because the financial incentive is considerable, but doing so only tightens cheddar and mozzarella availability further, as the market moves forward.

As the UK market moves, therefore, we have to wait and see whether the EU market responds, or stays indifferent in the face of an expensive winter for farmers, and surely numerous drought induced issues. Currently traders don't seem concerned. But I can't help thinking they may get caught out and are misreading the impacts. I sincerely hope I'm right, but those EU milk volume figures don't lie... and that's what they are going by.

Will there be enough cows in future?

For much of the past decade, the UK dairy sector has focused on producing more milk from fewer cows. Improved genetics, better nutrition and greater management efficiency have delivered impressive gains in productivity. However, recent breeding trends raise an important question: Could the industry be creating a shortage of future milking cows?

Latest data shows that while births to dairy dams increased slightly in 2025, the growth was driven by dairy-beef calves, accounting for 60% compared to only 32% dairy heifer calves for replacements.

Long-term decline

Dairy heifers have been falling since 2021, reaching a record low of 463,000 head in 2025. Once losses are accounted for, questions inevitably arise about the future supply of replacements. At the same time, the GB dairy herd continues its long-term decline, with production growth coming from higher yields rather



Dairy heifer numbers reached a record low of 463,000 in 2025

than cow numbers. The national dairy herd fell by 2% last year.

This reflects decisions made several years ago. During the early 2020s, concerns about the reliability of sexed semen led many producers to over-produce replacements. Those cows are now entering their fourth lactation. As these animals leave production, fewer replacements appear to be coming through behind them.

Beef market economics are playing a major role in these decisions. Strong beef prices over recent years, combined with greater demand for

well-bred dairy-beef calves, have encouraged producers to maximise the value of calves. Better genetics, integrated supply chains and growing consumer acceptance of dairy-beef products have reinforced this trend.

However, advances in genomic testing and improvements in sexed semen technology allow producers to identify their best females and breed replacements more accurately than ever before. As a result, fewer replacement heifers are required, helping reduce costs while continuing to drive genetic progress.

Greater longevity also has a role to play. Retaining cows for additional lactations can improve environmental performance and reduce the cost of rearing replacements. Yet this approach carries risks if disease, fertility issues or other challenges unexpectedly reduce herd numbers.

Looking ahead, there are growing signs that replacement heifers could become scarce. Global dairy demand remains positive, while milk price forecasts suggest improved returns over the medium term. If producers need more cows to respond to stronger milk markets, rebuilding numbers will take time. While this can be compensated for by longevity gains to an extent, disease risks could compromise this.

After years of successfully producing more milk from fewer cows, future growth could depend not only on how productive those cows are, but on whether there are enough of them available in the first place.



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Cleanliness yields results at Ley Farm

A rigorous hygiene routine has helped a Devon dairy unit to lower bactoscan results, reduce somatic cell counts (SCCs) and minimise mastitis issues. British Dairying reports.

Third generation Wayne Pomeroy farms in partnership with his parents at Ley Farm on the Devon/Cornwall border near Holsworthy. With 170 cows in milk and 90 followers, the farm prides itself on cleanliness, and through a number of measures has seen bactoscans reduce to around 15 and SCCs to 80,000.

“We’ve farmed here since 1982 and started with beef but soon managed to get a milk contract,” says Wayne. “The herd has grown from 80 to the 170 in milk today, but along the way we have learned that good hygiene is the key to controlling common concerns like mastitis.”

“It’s about doing the little things well, every time.”

A relative pioneer, he has been pre-foaming in the farm’s 20/20 DeLaval herringbone parlour for more than 10 years. Using Dual Defence, chlorhexidine and a lactic acid-based pre and post dip with peppermint oil, he has been able to improve teat condition and reduce cases of mastitis.

“We have always been keen to minimise antibiotic use and believe that prevention is better than cure. We pre-foam and dry wipe before milking, and post dip to provide a thorough routine that has helped the cows milk more easily and maintained teat condition throughout their cycle,” he says.



Wayne Pomeroy pays close attention to herd hygiene and cleanliness

A new calf shed was constructed in 2020 following issues with pneumonia and coccidiosis in calves. Providing a cleaner, better ventilated calf shed demonstrated how important the environment was to calf health.

“We have made good use of disinfectants like Coxicur to keep the sheds continually clean,” notes Wayne. “The key is not just using disinfectant products but having a layout with water troughs at the front of the pens to keep the rear as dry as possible, and having materials that are easy to keep clean with a pressure washer.”

The herd is grazed for as long as the season will allow. Walking and

standing time means foot health is another area that the farm has adopted as an important hygiene protocol. The floors are scraped with automatic scrapers every two hours and all the milking cows go through a footbath five times a week.

“We put the heifers through at least once a week too. Keeping hooves clean and free from infections like digital dermatitis is a best practice measure that pays dividends for milk yields and cow longevity,” explains Wayne. “I manage the lactation foot trimming myself and have support from a local trimmer for post dry-off cows.”

Closed herd

The Norwegian cross Holstein herd is milked twice a day and yields an average of 9,000 litres/cow per year. The decision was made eight years ago to keep a closed herd, which further guards against common infections being brought on to the farm from replacements.

“We milk record with QMMS so I am able to see any fluctuations in butterfats, protein and SCCs quickly and easily. This helps with spotting issues and acting before anything compromises cow health or productivity,” he says.

Wayne monitors bactoscans and SCCs every other day and has a

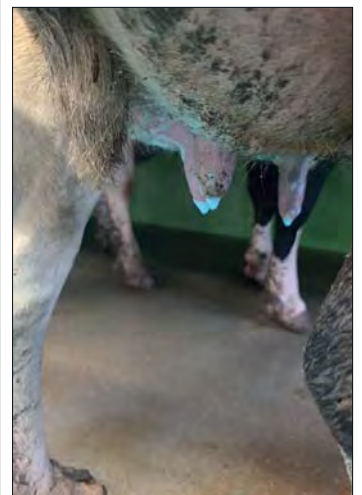
thorough parlour cleaning routine that helps minimise the chance of bacteria building up in equipment. “Our parlour has an auto wash function but we also wash everything after each milking and check the bulk tank and receiving vessel for any signs of bactoscans rising. Drinking troughs are cleaned regularly and we always have a bucket of water on hand to clean anything during milking.”

If any cows suffer repeated or prolonged mastitis issues, he chooses to cull and replace. In the past he ascertained that the cause of mastitis on the farm was from *Streptococcus uberis*, and this is why he chose to use a chlorhexidine and lactic acid combination teat treatment.

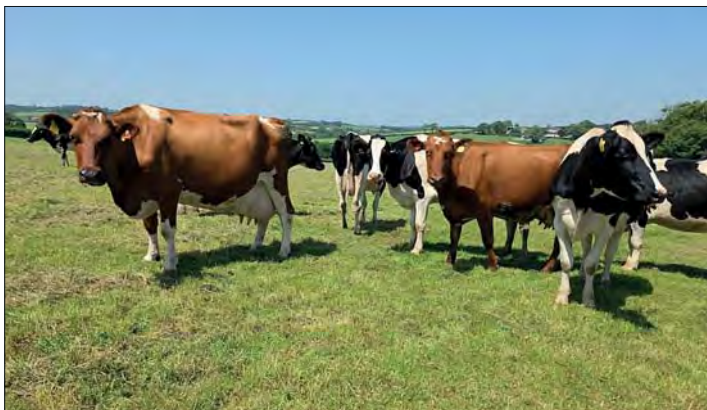
One product

“Dual Defence is easy to use, and it does exactly what it suggests; it offers both pre and post disinfection and protection, and we only need one product. It is also quite handy that it’s bright blue because you can see when you have got a good covering on the teats,” he says.

The farm’s mastitis cases are at an all-time low, as are common health concerns. “It’s about doing the little things well, every time,” says Wayne. “Having a routine, the right products and a clean environment has helped us to improve health throughout the herd, from calves to milkers. All I can say is that it’s worth spending the extra couple of minutes to check, clean or prepare. In the long run, it saves time and unexpected costs while also keeping milk yields consistent.”



The teat disinfectant is bright blue



The 170-head Norwegian cross Holstein herd grazes for as long as possible



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Understanding and tackling the aftermath of heatwaves

Heat stress is no longer a short-term blip in the summer, it's affecting cows from spring to autumn, knocking both yields and fertility. So how can producers limit its impact?

It's not over yet! This summer's heatwaves and persistently high temperatures wiped 18m litres off national production by the end of July. And more consequences of this record-breaking summer are likely to become obvious in the next few months with reduced pregnancy rates and extended calving intervals.

"Cows stop eating, they spend longer standing in cooler areas and show fewer signs of oestrus when they get heat stressed," says Cargill UK's Ruminant Adviser Donald Macleod. "Spikes in temperatures affect behaviour and eating patterns, and persistently hot weather with little difference between night and day temperatures affects fertility. We've had plenty of both this summer."



Heat stress can have a toll on cow fertility, explains Donald Macleod

the diet and tweaking the feeding pattern alongside some building modifications - sprinklers or fans - are just some ways of keeping production on track."

Producers should implement a summer management package from April at the latest, to October. "Temperatures above 14°C and high humidity are fairly typical in late April and sometimes earlier. The combination of the two create heat stress related problems, and these warm and humid conditions can last well into October, even if we don't see the mid-summer spikes in temperature," she adds.

"It's a combination of actions that gets the best results."

Dugdale modifies its diets from April by including the specialised rumen buffer Equaliser CoolCow in a farm pack and in compound feeds. This buffer combines a coolant product to restore a cow's electrolyte balance and regulate her core body temperature.

It is particularly valuable for today's high-production cows which produce a lot of metabolic heat. Cows yielding 46kg/day of milk produce 26% more metabolic heat than those yielding 32kg/day. "It's all about keeping conditions for the cow as consistent as possible so intakes don't take a hit," says Debby.

Producers who included the coolant buffer in their summer rations from April saw little dip in milk yields over summer. "But it's a combination of actions that gets the best results. Those tweaking feeding times and putting out fresh feed in the evening got a good response, and fans and sprinklers also help."

But while some were well prepared, others panicked when it got much warmer and realised intakes were dropping. "They then made some changes and introduced CoolCow,

Cows are more tolerant to cold weather, but they start to feel heat stress around 15°C; depending on the relative humidity. This means that spring and early autumn can still present heat stress conditions for cows; particularly housed herds.

"Once temperatures get above 14°C at a typical UK humidity of 60%, oestrus is affected, and conception rates will typically start to fall when temperatures are 20°C or more," says Donald. "As it gets warmer, production will start to dip."

Summer management

Most of the UK has been affected by high temperatures this summer. Debby Brown, Veterinary Technical Manager at Dugdale Nutrition witnessed this first hand on farms in the North of England.

"When temperatures spiked, we saw yields and butterfat drop, and it's been a challenge to get them back on track," she says. Some producers were happy to reconcile themselves with the fact that yields had only dropped two litres/cow per day compared to the four-litre drops in the South of the country.

"But if they prepare and have a summer management package in place, they shouldn't need to accept these falls in production or fertility," notes Debby. "Amending




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and had a positive response in getting production back on track, but not until they'd lost sizeable amounts of milk production."

Costs are easy to justify. If the buffer can prevent a drop of two litres/day for three months, at 28ppl it would put an extra 180 litres of milk/cow in the tank, worth over £50. "If we take off the cost of using the buffer the approximate net gain would be over £30/cow, and that's before we consider the likely costs of a dip in fertility."

Keeping cows cool

Conservative estimates put the financial losses caused by heat stress, through lost milk, reduced fertility and less efficient feed use, at between £40 and £85/cow in a typical year.

"We seem to be re-defining our 'typical' year, so these losses could now be much higher," says Donald.

"We're still in the 2026 heat stress zone, and scientists are predicting that the El Niño event is going to affect next year's temperatures more than this year's. So managing heat stress will be the norm for those UK dairy farmers who want to keep cows comfortable and on track." Andrew Bullock runs a 110-cow



Plane Tree Farm installed heat reflective roof panels and ceiling fans

Holstein herd in partnership with his brother Stuart at Plane Tree Farm, near Clitheroe. They have kept production and fertility on track throughout the past few summers by introducing a diet with a coolant buffer, installing reflective roof sheets on buildings and adding two fans in the milking cow shed.

This high production flying herd averages 11,115kg/cow per year at 4.1% butterfat and 3.4% protein and supplies Lancashire Dairies. Cows are milked through two robots and calve all year round. Bulk tank results

for July averaged 3.98% butterfat and 3.43% protein. "There's no doubt that the rumen buffer has encouraged intakes and helped rumen health," Andrew says.

"It's included in my coarse blend and fed daily, in troughs, as part of the partial mixed ration comprising grass silage, blend, Alkafibre and molasses."

Heatguard roof sheets with an aluminium sheet to reflect heat while not excluding light have also been very effective. "It's transformed a 50-year-old shed which now gets plenty of natural light, but

it doesn't get too hot," he adds. In April 2026, the brothers added two fans to the milking cow yard.

"These have paid for themselves already and there's still a month or two to go when it could be warm and humidity is likely to be higher," says Andrew.

Good results

This combination has contributed to consistent milk production and very good fertility results; their best ever during summer. "We've seen very little dip in production – just half a litre in July – and fertility has been excellent," he explains. "We pregnancy tested cows served in mid-July at 35 days, and they were all in-calf."

Average conception rate is 60% with a pregnancy rate of 31%. The calving interval is 373 days and 64% of cows are pregnant 100 days after calving. InterHerd+ data shows the three-month rolling conception rates above the 12-month average, and well above the key performance indicator average.

Measures to prevent heat stress will continue into October at Plane Tree Farm to mitigate any associated losses and to ensure cow comfort.

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Precision production: The future?

The Precision Livestock Farming Conference returns to Harper Adams University on November 4, with a theme of 'Balancing one health: Technology for animal, human and environment'. So what can visitors expect from the day? British Dairying reports.

Precision technology is advancing all the time, but for it to be of most use to producers, it has to be practical, affordable, and genuinely useful. We speak to three dairy industry leaders to find out what it means to them and what the future might look like.

What do we mean by Precision Livestock Farming (PLF)?

David Craven: Our experience at Grosvenor Farms is that the key to this is using technology and data to support better day-to-day decisions. But, importantly, it's not about replacing good stockmanship. Within our dairy operation, PLF includes areas like robotic arms to automate positions on the parlour during milking, automated data capture, activity monitoring, feeding systems, calf feeding technology and herd management software.

Jonathan Statham: PLF is part of a wider 'precision agriculture' approach which aims to sustainably



David Craven from Grosvenor Farms



Precision livestock farming methods can deliver several benefits at once

increase animal productivity, improve animal welfare and health, while reducing environmental impact. Improvements are achieved using real-time monitoring and management systems, alerting farmers/advisers when problems arise to allow targeted delivery of interventions.

Gemma Charlton: To me, it's the use of technology to help us monitor individual animals, groups of animals and their environment. The important part of PLF is what we do with this collected data and how the information helps in making informed decisions.

How would you describe the current level of precision technology adoption in UK dairy and beef farming, and is there much variation between the two sectors?

Jonathan Statham: PLF adoption is much higher in dairy, but the green shoots are becoming evident in the beef sector. Milking parlours are an

obvious opportunity for dairy, as cows are in close proximity typically two or more times per day for milking and are tolerant of handling, contact and 'wearables'. Technology grants have become available through programmes like the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway in England and adoption is growing all the time.

Gemma Charlton: We probably see a wider range of precision technologies being used routinely in dairy systems. It is worth acknowledging that the challenges are different in the beef sector, particularly where cattle are managed extensively. Technologies need to work reliably in those environments and connectivity can be an issue.

David Craven: At Grosvenor Farms, precision technology has become an important part of how we manage our dairy enterprise and make informed decisions. Having a wealth of data helps us manage exception reporting, identify potential issues and improve consistency across a large-scale system. Whatever the sector, the adoption of PLF is most effective where the technology fits the system, provides reliable information and supports clear management actions.

What motivates farmers to invest in precision technologies and what roles do labour shortage and rising production costs play?

David Craven: Our main motivation has been to improve the overall performance and resilience of the business. Labour efficiency is an important factor, particularly in a large-scale dairy operation where repetitive tasks, consistency and availability of skilled labour all need

About the conference

The PLF Conference takes place on November 4 at Harper Adams University.

For more information visit <https://bit.ly/4yjhtak>

careful management. Technology helps us monitor cows more closely and identify early signs of health, fertility or performance issues.

It also supports staff by giving them better information, improving consistency and helping them execute agreed protocols more reliably. This is particularly important in larger teams, where consistency helps reduce variation in how tasks are carried out. When assessing return on investment, the strongest case for PLF is when it delivers benefits across several areas at the same time.

"PLF can support UK farming work towards achieving low emissions."

Gemma Charlton: From our recent work with dairy farmers, it is clear that technology adoption is usually driven by a need. So far, heat detection and labour and/or cost savings have been key drivers of technology adoption. Interestingly, once farmers have invested in a technology and can see the benefits it brings, this can encourage them to invest in other technologies.

Return on investment can be difficult to assess; labour and time savings, improvements in health and fertility and reduced losses all come into it. Ultimately, a technology needs to address a genuine need on-farm and, while PLF tools can collect huge amounts of data, if that data isn't easily interpreted and doesn't help the farmer to do things differently, its value is limited.

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Continued on page 26.

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LALLEMAND ANIMAL NUTRITION

LALLEMAND

Continued from page 24.

Jonathan Statham: PLF offers several solutions, from skilled labour shortages to sharing data with external advisers to seek another interpretation. Rising production costs mean that efficiency is paramount and blanket treatment and feeding approaches are often less cost-effective than a targeted approach. Often evaluating a return on investment for technology requires a multifactorial view combined with an awareness of external factors that may be beyond individual farm control.

How can precision technologies help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve feed efficiency and reduce waste?

Jonathan Statham: UK agriculture contributes 7% of UK greenhouse



Dr Gemma Charlton, Senior Lecturer

emissions, and 40% of methane. Precision technologies can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions or emissions intensity in several key areas: Feeding, breeding and disease control. Incorporating machine learning with novel sensors

to measure and manage the rumen microbiome for sustainable beef and dairy phenotyping, combining health, feeding and breeding strategies is a big opportunity.

PLF can support UK farming work towards achieving low emissions through management of animal health, feeding strategy and breeding, and it can also support water sustainability, nutrient balance and biodiversity by managing balance and targeting interventions as above.

David Craven: The link between environmental sustainability and business efficiency is close and PLF technology has a role to play. If cows are healthier, feeding is more accurate, fertility is better and waste is reduced. At Grosvenor, we also use precision technology in the planting, growing and harvesting of crops grown on the farm. Measurement remains a challenge, but we use the data available to track metrics like milk yield, milk from forage, feed use, crop performance, fertility, health events, medicine use, replacement rates and overall herd efficiency.

“There are very exciting opportunities on the horizon.”

Which technologies are likely to become mainstream within the next five to 10 years and what emerging innovations are you most excited about?

Gemma Charlton: For me, one of the most exciting developments will be to develop the PLF technologies already available further and get more value from the data they already collect. I'm also interested in how different technologies can work synergistically to give us a more complete picture of the individual animal.

Jonathan Statham: I think that wearables like accelerometers/activity meters are already well on the way to becoming mainstream in the dairy industry. There are very exciting opportunities on the horizon including sensors that combine optical sensing systems with the electrochemical and integrate multiple signals from wearable and implant-based systems into combined information. Individual animal decision support alongside herd-level data can be used by vets and farm teams to guide management at group and animal levels.

David Craven: From a Grosvenor perspective, the technologies most likely to become mainstream are those that make information easier to use and help teams make better decisions. We already generate a large amount of data, so the next step is improving how systems communicate with each other and how that information is presented to those managing livestock. I think we will see greater use of integrated dashboards, automated alerts, camera-based monitoring, improved fertility and health detection, automated feeding systems and more accurate measurement of feed efficiency and environmental performance.

Why should someone attend the 2026 PLF Conference?

David Craven: The PLF Conference is valuable because it brings together farmers, researchers and technology providers to discuss how technology can be used practically. PLF is becoming increasingly relevant, but its value depends on understanding which technologies genuinely work in commercial farm systems.

Gemma Charlton: PLF is moving incredibly quickly, and the conference is a great opportunity to bring the industry together to talk about where the technology is going, but also what is actually useful on-farm. I'm particularly looking forward to discussions around how we move from collecting more data to giving farmers information that helps them make better decisions.

Jonathan Statham: This is a time of great opportunity and also some risk for precision farming. Not all technologies will be successful; however, failing to exploit technology at this time of rapid change might be a significant threat to future competitiveness. The 2026 PLF conference will provide practical insight into this balance, and future opportunities, and I am looking forward to the discussions on all these topics.



Veterinary expert Jonathan Statham

Who's who

Dr Gemma Charlton is a Senior Lecturer in Animal Behaviour and Welfare at Harper Adams University, where she leads the Animal Behaviour and Welfare Research Group. Her research focuses primarily on dairy cattle behaviour and welfare, and she has worked with a range of technologies; including wearable sensors and automated monitoring systems, and collaborates with both academic and industry partners. Gemma is particularly interested in how precision technologies can provide reliable and useful information to support farmers and improve the health and welfare of their animals.

David Craven is Dairy and Infrastructure Manager at Grosvenor Farms, based on the Eaton Estate near Chester. He has spent more than three decades working in progressive, large-scale dairy farming, with a particular focus on technology, infrastructure, animal welfare and sustainable milk production. David has played a central role in the development of Grosvenor Farms' modern dairy operation, including the adoption of automated and data-led systems to support herd management, staff efficiency and environmental performance. He is committed to sharing practical experience that helps improve efficiency, welfare and resilience within commercial farm businesses.

Jonathan Statham combines 30 years of ongoing experience in clinical veterinary practice with a range of wider industry and academic roles. He is chair of Bishopton Veterinary Group in Yorkshire, a Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Recognised Specialist in Cattle Health and Production and a Fellow of RCVS. He is Professor of Sustainable Livestock Health and Welfare at Harper and Keele Veterinary School, CEO at RAFT Solutions, Chair of the Animal Health and Welfare Board England at Defra, and was previously President of the British Cattle Veterinary Association.

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Invaluable bluetongue vaccination

In this month's Vet Comment, David Taylor from FarmVets SouthWest – part of the VetPartners group – shares his experience dealing with bluetongue cases and risks.

Having recently spoken on a Battle Bluetongue webinar for farmers and vets, the clear message from all the experts was vaccination is the best way to protect your animals. Every day you can get in front of the virus is going to be beneficial to your herd.

Though it takes three weeks to get full immunity after the second injection, there will be some degree of protection before the end of the third week is reached.

Speaking from firsthand experience in our practice, we are primarily seeing severe drops in milk yield, with only a handful of cattle showing obvious clinical signs. You could be expecting a drop of somewhere between three and six litres/cow across infected herds.

I want to highlight this because it is important to investigate a milk drop and not assume it is down to drought affecting nutrition or the heat stress.

These might be contributing factors, but as an example, one of my farmers lost three to four litres/cow and had put this down to the heat, when it was in fact bluetongue.

Welfare is impacted too, with slow recovery from lameness, and we are seeing individual cows' milk yields take weeks to recover.

Value for money

For anyone on the fence about vaccination – maybe farmers in previously unaffected areas – the calculation is simple. The value of the milk lost over just three days may be enough to pay for the vaccine. That is without taking into consideration a milk drop persisting for much longer, or the fertility impacts that may follow, like empty cows and foetal losses. You can calculate the cost benefit using the 'Vaccine Finance Calculator' for dairy cattle on the AHDB website.



David Taylor has seen drops in yield

Our dairy farmers who vaccinated last year and have since given boosters this year are reporting their cattle have been clinically unaffected by the virus.

I want to remind farmers of the importance in considering the wider farming industry and the need to control the spread of this virus. Everyone has a legal duty to report

suspicion of the disease; this will help the industry prepare and build a clearer picture of disease spread. It is also important to test and investigate suspicious clinical signs in case it turns out not to be bluetongue and is something else.

In practical terms, ideally everyone should be using a new needle for each animal. Failing that, use a new needle for every five animals because the needle can act as a vector and transmit bluetongue from one animal to the next. I also recommend leaving any animals that appear a little quiet or not quite 100% in themselves until the very end.

Veterinary teams are working flat out to ensure that vaccine supplies are distributed as soon as practicable. Get in touch with your vet and order your vaccine early to help avoid supply issues, protect your herd and safeguard your business in 2027 and beyond.



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Dairy Show industry showcase

Sustainability, future-proofing and celebrating the best of British dairy will be centre stage at this year's Dairy Show at the Royal Bath and West Showground in Shepton Mallet. British Dairying takes a look at what visitors can expect to see on the day.

Showcasing the best in UK agriculture, visitors can expect to see displays from leading manufacturers, suppliers and breeders alike at this year's Dairy Show.

"UK dairy is estimated to be worth over £8bn to the UK economy, and the show is both a flagship for this important sector and a valuable opportunity for farmers to connect with others in the industry," explains Royal Bath & West of England Society Chief Executive, Carol Paris.

"The Dairy Show will offer plenty of food for thought to plan next steps."

With over 6,000 visitors expected and more than 200 trade stands, this year's event will see the return of key sponsors Mole Valley Farmers and Barber's Cheesemakers, who will both have prominent stands to welcome customers new and old.

Alongside the exhibitors, the cattle classes will be showcasing the best of the UK dairy herd. Breeders will be taking part in a wide range of cattle classes including the Jersey and Guernsey Society National Shows, Ayrshire, Dairy Shorthorn, Holstein, and Any Other Dairy Breed.

The overall winner of the coveted Supreme Champion award will take home the Colonel Joseph Weld Perpetual Challenge Cup and



More than 6,000 visitors are expected to attend this year's Dairy Show

£750, while the reserve champion will win £500.

"Sourcing cattle from top-quality bloodlines is important to the continuation and resilience of our dairy breeds," Carol says. "We are anticipating a high calibre of entries once again. Exhibitors know that by entering classes at such a prestigious show provides them with a great opportunity to showcase their stock to a wider audience."

Demonstration area

For those looking to update their kit on farm, Somerset machinery dealership, Reco Redlynch, will have a demonstration area in the main ring, which is bookable in advance for anyone interested in testing new tech.

Amongst the other trade stands, visitors can expect to find a range of industry experts covering animal health and welfare, machinery, breeding, feed, housing and more. Meanwhile, the AgriForum panel

discussions, sponsored by Clarke Willmott, will cover topics including the impact of inheritance tax changes on the future of farming and the potential of anaerobic digestion as a new income stream for farms.

Industry experts

"As longstanding advisers to farming and rural businesses across the South West, we are proud to sponsor the Forum at this year's Dairy Show," says Esther Woolford, Partner at Clarke Willmott.

"The Forum offers a valuable opportunity for farmers to hear from industry experts, ask questions and gain insight into topics that are likely to have a significant impact on their businesses in the years ahead.

"The Forum topics are particularly timely," she adds. "With increasing interest in diversification and renewable energy projects, alongside continuing uncertainty around

agricultural policy and taxation, both sessions will give farmers practical insights to help inform future business decisions."

In addition, LandAlive makes a welcome return to the show. Offering a full programme of practical discussion, farmer-led insight and industry debate, LandAlive offers a focus on regenerative agriculture. With a list of high-profile speakers on the agenda, LandAlive will give farmers the opportunity to learn from those driving innovation across UK dairy farming.

"After what's been a challenging year for dairy producers, the Dairy Show is a great opportunity to get off farm and see issues from a different perspective," says Carol. "For dairy farmers looking to expand or evolve their farm enterprise in the next year, the Dairy Show will offer plenty of food for thought to plan the next steps."

To book tickets, visit the website at www.bathandwest.com/the-dairy-show



The 2025 Supreme Champion



A range of cattle classes will be held

LandAlive returns

Building on the success of last year's event, LandAlive returns to the Dairy Show to explore one key question - how do we build viable, resilient and profitable dairy farming businesses in the face of an increasingly challenging climate and volatile global markets?

Whether you have already adopted regenerative practices or are looking for practical ideas to strengthen your business, LandAlive offers the opportunity to learn from those driving innovation across UK dairy farming.

Featuring a full day of practical discussion, farmer-led insight and industry debate, the impressive speaker line up includes Baroness Minette Batters, dairy farmers Sophie Gregory and James Robinson, Lee Truelove at First Milk and Ffinlo Costain, Chief Editor at 8point9.

"The impacts of climate change are already being felt through flooding, drought and wildfires," says Event Director Tom Pycraft. "Alongside this, rising costs, changing policy and volatile markets are adding to the pressures farmers are facing. LandAlive is about moving the conversation beyond the challenges and towards practical solutions that work both environmentally and economically, while also building the resilience in the sector."

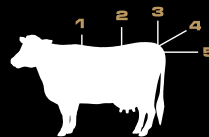
Tickets for LandAlive can be purchased via the Dairy Show ticketing page. Farmers wishing to attend, but for whom ticket price is a barrier, are encouraged to contact the LandAlive team to access a small number of bursary tickets.



The risk of hypocalcaemia increases when dairy cows:^{1,2}

2+

Are on their second or greater lactation



Have high body condition scores



Produced a high milk yield in the previous lactation



Have a history of milk fever



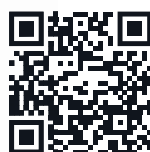
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References: 1. Houe H, Østergaard S, Thilising-Hansen T, et al. Milk fever and subclinical hypocalcaemia – an evaluation of parameters on incidence risk, diagnosis, risk factors and biological effects as input for a decision support system for disease control. *Acta Vet Scand.* 2001;42(1):1–29. 2. DeGaris PJ, Lean IJ. Milk fever in dairy cows: a review of pathophysiology and control principles. *Vet J.* 2008;176(1):58–69.

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Date of preparation: Jan 2026. RUM-0081-2025.

Robotic milking success in Tasmania

Two first-generation farmers in Tasmania installed robotic milkers for their extensively grazed cows a couple of years ago, and are finding it's not only saved time, but allowed a route for expansion. Gareth Jones at Robotic Milking Systems reports.

Nick and Jess Midson farm in North West Tasmania, Australia's southernmost state, and have recently installed four GEA robots to milk their herd of 220 cows on an extensive grazing system. "We are first generation farmers," explains Nick. "I was a diesel mechanic by trade, but always saw it as a means to an end. I even spent some years working in the mines in South Africa to save up enough money to buy my first farm."

"Since installing the robots, we increased our solids by 20%."

In 2013 the opportunity arose and Nick managed to buy 40ha at Spring Vale in Tasmania before meeting Jess in 2016, when they started dairy farming together. "There was a parlour on the farm so I leased 100 cows initially, purchased calves to rear and just went from there," explains Nick. The numbers gradually increased as additional land came up, and by 2024 the couple were milking 220 cows on 100ha, which they now owned, whilst renting a further 24ha.

"The milking was taking seven hours a day at this stage and although we had the assistance of an excellent casual milker, we were still completing many of the milkings ourselves," continues Nick. The couple had also started a family by this point and were aware that if they were not



Nick and Jess Midson have built a system around their young family

careful, they were going to miss out on their growing-up years. There were not many robots in their area of Tasmania, but Nick and Jess felt that they could provide the most flexible solution for their farm. Having looked at several manufacturers they decided to install four GEA R9500's.

"We really liked the robot, especially the option of manual attachment, the in-line teat preparation system and the per quarter milk separation," says Nick. "We also have a very good local dealership, Irrigation Dairy Solutions which is only about an hour away."

The robots were installed in winter 2024 and started up the following spring, operating on an extensive ABC grazing system. "We don't have any housing for the herd, so the cows graze for their whole lactation, with some silage fed in mid-summer when there is a lack of grass or when it is too wet during the winter," says Jess. "This only equates to around 1.5-2t

of silage per head and then we feed all of the concentrates in the robots, which amounts to 1.6t/cow, for her full lactation. When the finances allow, we would also like to build a compost barn, to provide shelter at key times of the year, during extreme heat or wet weather."

The grazing platform is split into three areas which the cows can access at set times of the day with the use of a grazing gate, walking up to 1.5km to the furthest paddocks. "Typically, we alternate a long-distance paddock with a nearby one, to cut down on the walking in a 24-hour period," says Jess. "We normally average around 2.5 milkings, but this does vary depending on stage of lactation."

Split calving

Although there is a big focus on spring calving in Tasmania, the Midsons have opted for split calving, with two thirds of the herd calving in the spring, and remaining third in the autumn. This helps to even out the peaks and troughs of block calving, which means they can milk more cows through the robots and get a milk cheque every month of the year.

Tasmania has a population of just over half a million, so liquid contracts are few and far between. All of the milk that Nick and Jess produce is sold to Saputo, to be processed into milk powder and cheese.

"We are paid on milk solids," explains Jess. "So the weight of fat and protein is what pays the bills,

not litres in the tank. Since installing the robots, we increased our solids by 20%, to around 515kg/cow, and we put this down to more efficient feeding through the robots, the higher milking frequency, and the utilisation of data from the robots to make informed decisions on herd improvement."

The couple are in the process of changing the breeding from crossbreeds to Holsteins, but with a maximum liveweight of around 600kg. "This will give us a higher yield of milk solids with this type of cow, but still with the ability to be an efficient grazer, to cope with the long walks and steep terrain of the farm," notes Jess.

Labour reduction

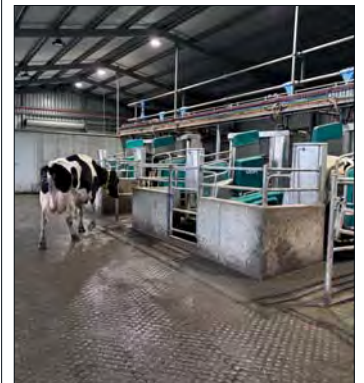
The Midsons have seen a big reduction in their labour requirements. They were employing a relief milker to give themselves some flexibility from the parlour, but now they run the whole operation themselves, and can also enjoy time away from the farm with their young family.

"Right now, we are focusing on improving our herd's production and consolidating our investment," explains Nick. "The data we receive from the robots means we can make informed decisions, and the flexibility they have given us has been life-changing, meaning we can now enjoy quality family time."

"However, we have recently purchased an 85-ha tree block which we are converting to pasture, so our long-term aim is to milk around 400 cows with six robots."



The couple operate on an extensive ABC grazing system



Four robots were installed in 2024

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Analysis is key to optimising forage

Producers wishing to make the most of forage stocks this winter will need to ensure they are planning, monitoring and paying attention to detail, as British Dairying discovers.

As plans for winter feeding begin to be formulated against a backdrop of continued milk price and feed price pressures, the opportunity to produce more from forage will be welcomed.

Stocks could be an issue in many parts of the country. The extensive and extreme drought means that farmers are already making inroads into initial cuts while late grazing and subsequent cuts are likely to be reduced. Maize crops in much of the country are on track to be harvested early, with many expecting poor yields.

“Regular analysis of individual clamps will be vital.”

However, and encouragingly, initial analysis of second cut grass silages by Trouw Nutrition GB confirms that dairy farmers should be more optimistic about increasing potential production from forage this coming winter.

With over 2,200 first and second cut samples now processed through the company's laboratory in Ashbourne, farmers can have confidence in the robustness of the data. “To exploit the full potential of forages it will be vital to have a full and accurate picture of the forages on farm when formulating rations,” says Isabelle England, Ruminant Nutritionist at Trouw. “For example, this might allow protein supplementation to be reduced, saving on one of the most expensive ingredient categories in dairy diets.



Isabelle England from Trouw



Regular analysis of grass silage will be crucial to formulating winter diets

“While average results can be a guide and give a general picture, the initial averages indicate that silages could feed well this winter,” she adds. “Weather conditions this summer mean that we are seeing regional variances, and of course some maize and subsequent grass cuts still have to be made, with both yield and quality influenced by the hot, dry weather in many parts of the country. But initial indicators are encouraging.”

First cuts are generally showing encouraging nutrition characteristics with higher dry matter, metabolisable energy (ME) and crude protein levels. Rapidly fermentable carbohydrates (RFCs) are higher, indicating a greater supply of readily available rumen energy, which may support microbial protein production and milk from forage potential.

Fibre reduction

Neutral detergent fibre (NDF) levels have decreased slightly, likely driven by earlier cutting dates. The reduction in fibre should help support higher intakes and higher forage inclusion rates, provided stocks are sufficient and overall ration structure is considered.

“Overall, this year's first cuts, on average, appear nutritionally better than in recent years, which will be encouraging for diet formulation,” says Isabelle. “However, as there is tremendous variation in samples, regular analysis of individual clamps will be vital.”

The results for second cuts reflect the challenging season, with growing and harvesting conditions varying considerably across the UK. In some parts of the country the dry conditions restricted growth and

encouraged producers to delay harvest to build yield. In other areas, wet conditions at harvest affected wilting times.

“We are seeing a wide range in dry matters in second cuts, which will have practical consequences,” notes Isabelle. “At the wetter end of the range there may be a greater risk of effluent, more extensive fermentation and reduced dry matter intake, with some samples as low as 16% dry matter. At the drier end, where crops have been as high as 60% dry matter, the issue will be the effectiveness of consolidation. Poor clamp filling and consolidation can lead to an increased risk of heating and aerobic spoilage, so care at feed-out will be essential.”

Energy reduction

Second cut dry matters are averaging 33.2%, below the first cut average of 35.7%. Despite a small increase in NDF, digestibility remains relatively good and ME is averaging 10.9MJ/kg dry matter (DM). As both digestibility and ME content are lower than average first cuts, moving from first to second cut may reduce overall energy density in the ration unless other ingredients are adjusted to compensate.

“Looking at how second cuts will ferment in the rumen, RFCs are slightly lower. However, total fermentable carbohydrates remain reasonably strong, meaning overall second cuts will provide a good base within the ration, which will be welcomed,” explains Isabelle. “Increased fibre index and a reduced acid load indicate a slightly slower and potentially more stable rumen fermentation profile.”

Second cuts on average will provide a slightly greater supply of fermentable protein relative to fermentable carbohydrate. This means the amount and degradability of protein in compounds and blends needs careful review, she adds.

Adding more rumen-degradable protein sources like rapeseed meal or distillers' grain may be unnecessary in some rations, as this will increase feed costs without improving performance. It may be necessary to include sources supplying a greater proportion of bypass protein like heat-treated/protected soya. The key step will be to closely monitor the whole ration protein supply and balance accordingly.

“The message here is to be proactive.”

“Overall, attention to the fine detail will be essential to ensure silages deliver on their potential this winter,” continues Isabelle. “Nutritionists will need to review the balance of starch, sugars, fibre and protein in the whole ration rather than assuming that first and second cuts are interchangeable, if production from forage is to be optimised. In particular, starch supply and fibre balance will need to be carefully assessed.”

Feeding a mix of first and second cuts could work well, combining the higher energy and RFC of the first cut with the slightly slower fermentation profile of second cuts. “However, it will be essential to review diets as the proportions of different cuts in the diet change and quality varies as you move through the clamps.”

Clamps should ideally be analysed every four to six weeks, or whenever there is a noticeable change in the clamp face or an unexpected change in cow performance. This will ensure the ration reflects the quality of silages actually being fed. As well as ensuring the diet is balanced, it will also help ensure stocks are closely managed.

This will be even more important when a wider choice of silages is available, including later grass cuts, wholecrop and maize. Dry

matters should be checked more frequently, and intakes should be monitored closely.

“Reducing waste must be a high priority on all farms this winter to allow forage stocks to contribute as much as possible,” says Isabelle. “Keep the clamp faces tight and only open as much of the face as required. Ensure block cutter knives are sharp and keep the area around the clamp face as clean as possible, removing any spoil material.

“Where high dry matter forages are being fed, clamp face management, feed-out rate and ration stability will be crucial to reduce the risk of spoilage affecting intakes and performance,” she adds. “Monitor the clamp face and look for signs of heating, and check the troughs for signs of feed refusals. Products like Selko TMR can help reduce heating in the trough to limit feed wastage.”

This is a blend of buffered organic acids and acid salts optimised to create a hostile environment for micro-organisms, effectively reducing their growth and activity in the ration. This results in less heating, improving palatability of the ration and reduced losses of dry matter and nutrient value, explains Isabelle.

“Mycotoxins may also be of increased potential risk, and the message here is to be proactive. Where there are signs of mould, heating, and unexplained reductions in intake and performance, the forage should be investigated and an appropriate, targeted mycotoxin risk management strategy should be considered, which may include a binder.

“The Toxo range of mycotoxin binders bind and work to eliminate mycotoxins while strengthening the intestinal barrier and moderating the immune response. Together these work towards mitigating the effects on animal performance caused by exposure to mycotoxins.”

Trouw’s national averages, based on a significant number of samples, indicate that on farms with sufficient stocks and well-preserved silages, there could well be the opportunity to increase the contribution from forage. This will help to reduce purchased feed costs this winter and help support margins, says Isabelle. “But the skill will be in understanding the forage available on the farm, monitoring performance and reacting as the season unfolds to maximise the opportunity.”

2026 First and second cut averages

Nutrient	Unit	2026 Second cut average	2026 First cut average
DM	%	33.2	35.7
Crude protein	% DM	14.7	14.5
D value	%	68.0	69.8
ME	MJ/kg DM	10.9	11.2
NDF	% DM	47.5	46.0
ADF	% DM	30.2	29.2
Lignin	g/kg DM	37.0	38.0
Sugars	% DM	1.5	1.9
pH	-	4.3	4.2
Lactic acid	g/kg DM	70.1	84.6
Volatile fatty acids	g/kg DM	32.8	27.8
Ammonia	%	3.2	3.3
Rapidly fermentable protein	g/kg DM	80.6	76.4
Total fermentable protein	g/kg DM	104.9	102.2
Rapidly fermentable carbohydrate	g/kg DM	188.9	200.0
Total fermentable carbohydrate	g/kg DM	457.9	461.5
Acid load	-	45.8	47.3
Fibre index	-	190.9	184.0
Source: TNGB			

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Boosting homegrown winter forage

The winter and early spring could be the perfect time for growing forage and bolstering stocks in the clamp with a cold-tolerant catch crop – turning the growing season upside down in the face of climate change and grass seed shortages. British Dairying reports.

Dairy producers growing consecutive maize crops may have an opportunity this autumn and winter to produce some much-needed extra forage. With widespread forage shortages across the UK and an exceptionally early maize harvest - already complete on many farms - a catch crop growing between September and April could be the perfect solution.

One mixture that's proven to work well at this time of year is forage rye mixed with hybrid ryegrass, says Sean Lovegreen at seed specialist, Nickerson.

This could be sown as soon as the ground is sufficiently moist, and offers the potential for some autumn grazing and vigorous growth over winter. It leads to the prospect of a silage cut as early as March next year.



Cut forage rye and ryegrass with care this autumn, says Michael Carpenter

The mixture offers benefits over either crop individually, as - dependent on autumn rain - the forage rye has almost guaranteed vigour and will grow at low temperatures. And a mix of Westerwold, Italian and perennial ryegrass offers a combination of quick establishment and a high metabolisable energy feed.

"The rye and ryegrass mix gives the best of both worlds, as a straight crop of rye would be difficult to manage, and ryegrass alone is unlikely to bulk up enough for an early spring cut," Sean says. "Depending on sowing date you should also be able to achieve at least two grazings before Christmas, or there's a slim chance

you could even get a light silage cut in late autumn."

Much of the UK's maize, particularly across the South and East, will be harvested four to five weeks earlier than usual. Rather than leaving the land bare until the next crop is drilled, a catch crop offers extra forage and environmental and soil benefits.

Cooler months

"After a summer like the one we've had we may increasingly find the cooler months are better for exploiting some cereals' growth," he adds. "We've also heard from meteorologists that summer 2027 may be even hotter, giving an added sense of urgency to growing before temperatures soar.

"Forage rye is particularly suited to growth over the cooler months as it's the most cold-tolerant and

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winter-hardy of the cereal crops. It will continue growing later in winter than other crops and will be the first to get going in the spring," he notes. "This is unlike brassicas, which are often grown to fill a winter gap but whose growth slows down after the autumn equinox."

Seed for short-term grasses like Italian ryegrass have been in short supply across Europe for the past couple of years, but a shot of forage rye - whose seed supply should be more plentiful - helps alleviate this problem.

However, conserving forage out of season - whether in autumn or early spring - is not without its challenges. Cutting forage rye and ryegrass in either autumn or early spring requires particular care as both dry matter (DM) and sugars are likely to be low, says Michael Carpenter at forage preservation specialist, Kelvin Cave.

"We have seen silage successfully preserved as late as November."

"With modern silage preservatives there is no reason why this crop can't be safely conserved, as long as every step is carried out correctly and precautions are taken against soil contamination, which is more likely in off-season conditions," he says. "The objective with low sugar, low DM crops is to achieve a rapid fermentation and stabilise the forage by developing a high concentration of lactic acid."

If spoilage bacteria are not wiped out, they can dominate the fermentation and deplete the crop's sugar, creating undesirable compounds like butyric acid and ammonia. This will make the silage unstable, unpalatable and cause dry matter loss.



Sean Lovegreen at Nickerson



Forage rye and ryegrass in Cheshire

"Unfortunately, there's a growing body of evidence that bacterial inoculants cannot achieve a desirable lactic fermentation in challenging conditions. For this reason, we recommend a preservative rather than an inoculant for such situations," says Michael.

MultiMax has been developed specifically to wipe out spoilage bacteria, especially those which develop when DM is low. "It's the only silage additive we know of which has been tested with heavy levels of soil and clostridial contamination. Even in this situation, it achieves high levels of lactic acid, a rapid drop in pH and a stable fermentation," he claims.

Absolute confidence

"With its use, we have seen silage made and successfully preserved as late as November. This has given us absolute confidence that low sugar, low DM autumn- or early spring-cut silage can be well-conserved, as long as the right preservative is used and good practice is followed."

Similar attention to detail needs to be paid to the crop's establishment and growth. This should include recalculating seed rates to 50% of the full rate for each crop, says Sean. Drill the rye, separately broadcast the ryegrass; and choose varieties carefully to maximise winter growth. He recommends Humbolt forage rye and 'Catch Crop Circle' for the ryegrass mix.

"Last year we put this mix into hundreds of acres - much across Cheshire and Shropshire - and it worked tremendously well," he says. "These farms went on to take heavy crops of silage, some as early as March."

"This year these farmers are asking for the same again, which tells me all I need to know," he adds. "And after the summer we've had and the widespread forage shortage, I believe this catch crop will be even more useful in 2026/27 than it was last year."



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A day in the life of... a cattle health training consultant

As a farm vet, Michael 'Spike' Head spends his life on the road helping farmers, vets and students develop skills and improve their confidence through hands-on learning.

My day usually starts early at home on the Devon/Cornwall border. How early depends on where I need to be, which varies hugely. One day I might be driving to a dairy farm in West Cornwall or East Sussex, catching a train to Bristol or, on occasion, taking a light aircraft to the Isle of Bute.

No two days have been the same since I joined Kingshay's farm training initiative in 2025. After 30 years working as a cattle vet, I now use that experience to deliver practical training for anyone involved in cattle health, including farmers, farm staff and vets.

"The model is now used by colleagues around the world."

A typical day might begin with loading the car with teaching equipment, course materials and practical models before setting off to deliver an artificial insemination (AI) course, or packing the kit needed to run cattle behaviour training on farm.

All my sessions include a practical element so those taking part can 'have a go'. I believe confidence grows best when people have the chance to handle equipment, ask questions and work through a range of real-life



Michael 'Spike' Head aims to give confidence to those attending his courses

scenarios. Many of the courses focus on hoof health or fertility, so I'm aiming to help farm teams identify problems earlier and respond more effectively.

I am also actively involved in the new graduate training scheme for VetPartners, where we deliver a two-day course in cattle reproductive ultrasound in collaboration with industry partners like IMV Imaging. The aim is to help these vets develop confidence and skill at the start of their careers.

By lunchtime, the focus often turns to discussion. Some of the most

valuable learning comes when people start talking about what happens in their own jobs, what challenges they face and where they want to improve.

Keeping people engaged is key to effective training. Classroom-style learning is not for everyone, and many people in farming are practical learners who want to understand how something works, see it demonstrated, practice it and then take it back to the farm.

Models for learning

I strongly believe in using models and practical demonstrations to turn ideas into action. One example was in Uganda, where I tasked farmers and farm consultants with becoming 'chefs' and building a model rumen using a container, water, straw and concentrate to show how the rumen works and how quickly it contracts. The model is now used by colleagues around the world.

The variety continues into the afternoon as I regularly travel to Bristol to facilitate meetings between scientific researchers and funding organisations, helping to secure support for practical, farm-focused projects. The aim is to get realistic

research projects off the ground that can help develop solutions to endemic livestock diseases.

An evening might then be spent developing training materials for new courses, including programmes for agricultural college students that provide practical training outside their curriculum.

Other evenings are spent designing courses for vets or farmers. Alongside this, I regularly speak at industry events and conferences, and I also enjoy getting out to Young Farmers' events to share my experiences.

Enjoying the journey

With so much travelling, I try to make the most of being on the road. I often pack my bike, binoculars or telescope so I can enjoy the landscape and wildlife wherever I am. Looking back, some of my favourite moments have come from seeing the long-term impact training can have. I have delivered multi-generation training, working with people as young farmers and then later as adults running businesses or bringing the next generation through.

For me, training is about giving people confidence. Whether someone is learning how to scan a cow more effectively, improve their ability to identify lame cows or understand cattle behaviour, the goal is to give them a strong foundation they can use every day.



He uses practical demonstrations

My training background and why it matters to dairy farmers

My love of education and training started when I was about 12 years old. I attended speech therapy for years, and something clicked in my early years of secondary education. I found that I enjoyed learning, gaining knowledge and helping others understand what I had learned too.

Although I grew up in the city of Bath, my mother was Italian and grew up on a smallholding in Southern Italy. I was lucky to live next door to a vet, which led to work experience with a local farmer and sparked my interest in livestock.

I started my career in Cornwall, then spent time in the West Country where I was Director at a large practice in Somerset. I returned to Cornwall five years ago to join Calwetton Farm Vets, part of the VetPartners group, making the transition as a Training Consultant at Kingshay in April 2025.

MY CATTLE

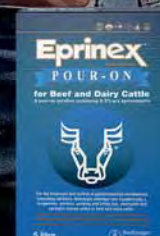
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Costings report reflects global volatility

Kingshay's annual Dairy Costings Focus Report reflects a year of extremes - record high milk production, a torrid wet winter, high milk prices and low milk prices. So what was the impact on gross margins, and which key trends stand out? British Dairying reports.

The 2025/26 milk year was one of two halves. High milk prices and record production led to plummeting milk prices in the latter half the year. Drought over the summer switched to constant rain and flooding over the winter. Input costs soared amid political tensions in the Middle East - and looking ahead there appears to be more of the same.

"Producers have faced forage shortages amid the summer drought this year, and with forecasters predicting the strongest El Nino effect since the 19th century, there will likely be more extreme weather ahead," says Richard Simpson, Development Director at Kingshay.

"There is still a large gap between the top 25% and the average."

"But farmers are nothing if not resilient, and many will have made the most of strong margins in 2025/26 to weather the downturn. The attractive milk price: feed price ratio meant producers fed a record amount of concentrates to boost yields and constituents. And despite a challenging growing season, they also increased milk from forage, generating record overall herd margins."

Yields and constituents have been gradually improving over the past two decades, but the 2025/26 milk year saw a significant jump in both. At the same time, milk from forage - which had been on a downward trend - increased quite sharply, too. Given



Aligned contracts helped to alleviate peaks and troughs of milk prices

the summer drought in many areas, that's quite an impressive feat, says Mr Simpson.

Overall, milk yields averaged a record 8,848 litres/cow among conventional Holstein/Friesian herds - up 6%, year-on-year, and an 18% rise on 2006. This can be attributed to the relatively strong milk price in the first half of the year, combined with lower concentrate costs, making for an attractive milk: feed price ratio of 1.40 - the highest since 2006.

More concentrates

As a result, farmers had fed 4% more concentrates (at a record 2,997kg/cow), while also successfully increasing milk from forage (up 9% on the year, to 2,652 litres/cow). Not only did this support overall yields, it bolstered butterfat and protein contents, up 0.02% points and 0.08% points to 4.37% and 3.46%, respectively. "This consolidates a solid upward trend in milk solids over the past seven years, most likely due to a combination of improved

genetics and farm management," says Emma Puddy, Farm Services Specialist at Kingshay.

As a result, the margin over purchased feed increased by 3% year-on-year, to £2,708/cow, while falling per litre. With cow numbers remaining steady at an average of 227/herd, the higher yields and milk solids combined to boost overall herd margins by over 4%, to a record £614,898. This increase in margin is much needed to cover ever-rising costs of other inputs, particularly labour and machinery.

Milk from forage

The past two years have been characterised by extreme weather contrasts: Following a soggy summer, the mild winter of 2024/25 paved the way for a good spring grazing season, but minimal rain across much of England led to a severe drought over the summer of 2025, followed by a record wet winter into 2026. However, while some areas fared badly, others (further west and north) had their best grass growing season ever.

It is perhaps surprising then, that all producers managed to increase their milk from forage, with the top 10% of farms up 7.3% to 4,460 litres/cow and the average up 9.3% to 2,652 litres. The top 10% produced 49% of their milk from forage, against the bottom quartile at just 12%.

The top herds managed the highest margin over purchased feed on both a per-cow and per-litre basis, at £3,067

and 33.66ppl, respectively, compared to £2,593 and 27.81ppl in the lowest quartile.

Organic herds

Organic herds were stronger from both a financial and productivity perspective last year, with yields, milk solids, milk price, and margins all improving.

Cow calving rates increased by 5.5% while heifer calvings were down by 7.9%, perhaps reflecting reduced breeding of replacements. Overall yields increased by 8.6%, to 6,843 litres/cow, and producers also managed to increase yields from forage, by 6%, to 2,939 litres/cow.

The 9.2% increase in milk price, to 57.66ppl, encouraged producers to feed for output, boosting concentrate use by over 11%, to 1,995kg/cow. As a result - and despite a marginal reduction in feed prices - the cost of all purchased feed jumped by 9.6%, to £933/head.

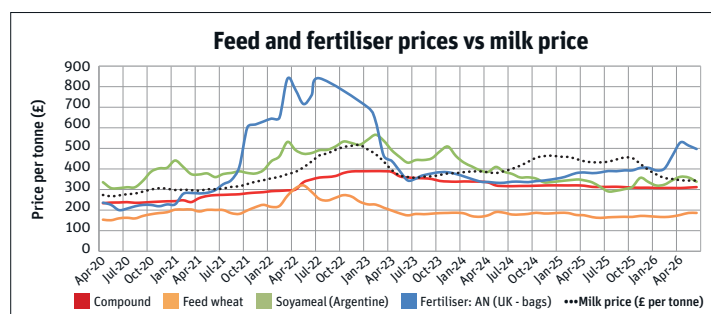
The combination of higher milk price and improved productivity meant margins over purchased feed soared by 21.7% on a per-cow basis, to £3,013, while on a per-litre basis they improved by 12%, to 44.03ppl.

Input prices

Input prices started ticking up at the turn of the calendar year, triggered by the war in the Middle East and subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz. At the same time, milk prices were in freefall, meaning milk price to input cost ratios increased sharply.

March 2026 brought a big spike in diesel values due to the Iran conflict, with red diesel rising from 75ppl to 118ppl in April, before easing to 91ppl in July. Fertiliser values also rocketed, from £402/t in February (UK bagged ammonium nitrate) to £529/t in April, before steadying to £439/t by July.

"Labour is another key cost, rising to 19.99/hour (including national insurance and pension) for a senior skilled worker and 12.71/hr for the minimum wage for 21-year-olds," says Emma. "That has risen steeply over the past three years in particular, bringing the increase to 44% over the past five years."



Health trends continue to move in the right direction overall, with marginal improvements in most calving-related issues. Over the past five years, the trends are impressive: Mastitis has dropped from 32 cases per 100 cows to 24, displaced abomasums from 2.8 to 1.8, difficult calvings from 3.8 to 2.9, abortions from 3.7 to 3.0 and metritis from 6.9 to 5.1.

Lameness

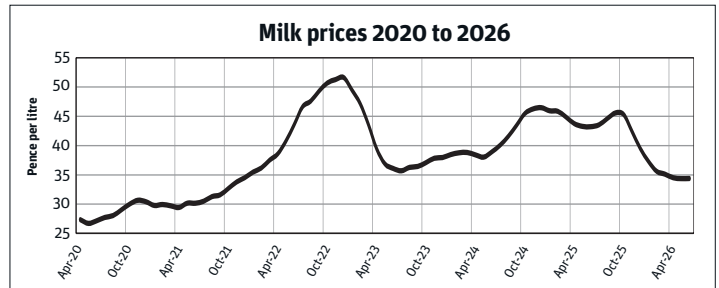
However, lameness remains difficult to tackle, hovering around the 35-case mark. And the proportion of cows scoring two to three on mobility has increased from 5.9% two years ago to 8%. “However, it is likely this is due to increased/better mobility scoring than a genuine increase in

mobility problems,” says Emma. “Unfortunately, the gap between the top 25% of herds and the average has not narrowed - and the higher cost of replacements means the cost of health issues has increased.”

Overall, across the herd, health issues cost an average of £30,307, whereas the top quartile has this down to £16,907. In 2024/25 the gap between the top quartile and average was £11,764 - last year that widened to £13,400.

“Lameness, mastitis and abortions offer the biggest wins, with gaps of £5,526, £3,773 and £1,203, respectively. The opportunities to reduce costs through improved health therefore remain significant.” Fertility has also been on an improving trajectory for years, but

Health trends		2026					
Cases per 100 cows	Group	Top 25%	Est. cost per case	Group cost	Top 25% cost	Difference	Diff on last year
Mastitis	24	14	£380	£9,138	£5,365	£3,773	£3,557
Lameness	35	20	£357	£12,510	£6,984	£5,526	£6,130
Milk fever	2.5	0.8	£302	£763	£242	£521	£485
Displaced abomasums	1.8	0.5	£365	£659	£183	£476	£310
Difficult calvings	2.9	1.6	£457	£1,321	£731	£590	£612
Retained cleansings	3.5	2.0	£522	£1,802	£1,028	£774	£517
Abortions	3.0	1.5	£803	£2,408	£1,205	£1,203	£1,216
Metritis	5.1	3.5	£334	£1,706	£1,169	£537	£253
TOTAL				£30,307	£16,907	£13,400	-£14,255



has stagnated over the past couple of years. Culling for infertility increased from 6.8% to 7.9%, year-on-year. “This may reflect poorer fertility, or, possibly more likely, that farmers are maintaining a tighter block-calving window or not carrying those not in-calf for so long,” notes Emma.

Cost of infertility

What is of particular note is the increase in the cost of infertility, which has jumped from 2.15ppl (£182/cow) to 2.8ppl (£238/cow), or £7.08/day of extended calving interval. “This is due to the significantly higher cost of replacements - a freshly-calved Holstein heifer is now often fetching £2,800+. As ever, focusing on fertility will pay dividends.”

The milk price analysis shows the impact of the global markets

in which the sector operates, with the top 10% reaching a high of 54.79ppl in September 2025, and the bottom 10% a low of 27.08ppl in April 2026.

“It also illustrates the benefits of being on aligned contracts, which even out the peaks and troughs, reducing producers’ exposure to risk,” says Richard.

Overall, there is still a large gap between the top 25% of herds and the average, in terms of production, health, input costs and milk price.

“There are plenty of opportunities for producers to make incremental improvements that add up to significant savings,” he adds. “We hope that by comparing your own figures to these benchmarks you can identify some of those areas on which to focus.”

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A focus on grassland and forage management reaps real rewards

The Henderson family have created a profitable livestock business with grassland management at its heart. Their efforts were recognised by the British Grassland Society, scooping the Grassland Farmer of the Year Award. British Dairying reports.

James Henderson farms at Kilkeel, between the Morne Mountains and the sea in Northern Ireland. Ten years ago, he had a farm which kept beef cattle and sheep. Now he runs a grassland farm where beef and sheep keep him and his family. The reason for this turn-around is a focus on growing and utilising more grass.

“Seafields Farm is 60ha on light, free-draining sand and gravel, with an annual rainfall of just 450-500mm,” says James. “We often dry out in summer and it can be a challenge to grow top quality grass all season.

“We saw an immediate impact to this method of pasture utilisation.”

“During World War Two, an American airfield was built across the fields - with 12ha of concrete runways and taxiways. My father's lifetime work was to return the airfield to farmland, by digging up and creating more than 11,000m of field boundaries with broken up concrete - creating smaller fields and shelter on this exposed coastal site.

“My task has been to improve the land between the walls, increasing the fertility and structure of the soil.”

The cattle enterprise utilises beef cross heifer calves from a local dairy herd. In October and November, 85 to 90 heifer calves, mostly British Blue and Aberdeen Angus crosses, are bought in at two to three weeks of age. They are vaccinated against pneumonia and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR).

In their first winter they are fed 700g/day of powdered milk until they are eating 1kg of concentrate consistently. Following weaning, 2kg of concentrate is fed with straw for roughage, then ad-lib red clover silage until turnout in April. The concentrate



James (right), his wife Brenda and son Scott, all work in the business

used is gradually changed over four weeks to a barley-based home mix, with substantially reduced protein content due to the inclusion of the red clover. James targets a growth rate of 0.8-0.9kg/day in the first winter.

The beef system is designed to minimise the use of concentrates, and since a move to rotational grazing, no feed has been given when the animals are at grass. “We started paddock grazing in 2016, when we were part of a CAFRE business development group,” James explains.

“We saw an immediate impact from this controlled method of pasture utilisation, including increases in stocking rate, cattle numbers and gross margin/ha. At the same time we saw a significant drop in concentrate fed, from a high of 1,300kg/head down to 460kg/head

now (table one).” Wormers are only given if faecal egg counts (FECs) indicate a need. All the calves have been vaccinated against bluetongue, and mortality rates are very low, with only one calf lost in the past two years.

The cattle spend their second winter indoors and are expected to grow between 0.5 and 0.7kg/day. In their second summer this growth rate rises to 1.1-1.3kg/day.

Optimising consumption

The finishing cattle are managed in one mob and are grazed in paddocks for two days before being moved on to the next. To optimise consumption and prevent waste, James splits larger paddocks with a temporary electric fence.

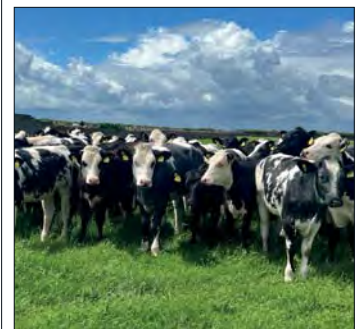
He turns out young calves in the first week of April, and older cattle in the middle of March. The usual

rotation length is 21 days - but in early summer 2026, this was down to 15 days to keep on top of grass growth.

From the third rotation on, James pre-mows the grass on every other rotation. This removes the need for topping, greatly improves pasture utilisation and maintains a high quality leafy sward throughout the grazing season.

Water is provided by a mobile water trailer. The trough, mounted on a hydraulic ram, can be positioned anywhere within a paddock, which allows for paddock splitting and prevents ground being poached by the cattle.

Native breeds finish off grass, while the continental types are housed for 30-40 days and fed silage with a barley-based home-mix. They are all sold at around 20-24 months of age to the local meat processor at ABP Newry. James receives a bonus/kg because his animals always make the buyer's specification (table two).



First year heifer beef calves

Table one: Physical and financial performance at Seafields Farm

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Stocking rate (livestock units/ha)	2.82	2.88	2.66	2.7
Concentrates fed/head (kg)	542	392	560	470
Carcass output kg/ha	1,355	1,444	1,311	1,470
Farm gross margin (£/ha)	1,465	1,944	1,732	2,504

Table two: Performance figures for the beef herd (dairy origin heifers)

Calves purchased per year	90
Age at purchase (weeks)	3
Growth rates: (kg/day)	
First winter	0.8-0.9
First summer at grass	0.9
Second winter (store period)	0.5-0.7
Second summer at grass	1.1-1.3
At slaughter:	
Age (months)	20-24
Liveweight (kg)	664.3
Carcass weight (kg)	348.6
Carcass classification	R - 78%
	O - 22%

The farm also runs a flock of 250 ewes and 60 ewe lambs, lambing in March and April, with progeny sold at an average of 168 days of age at 45.94kg liveweight. This is around 60 days sooner than when they were set stocked. All the lambs are sold through a producer group to Linden Foods.

Introducing multi-species leys has transformed the profitability and resilience of the sheep enterprise. James finishes all the lambs just off grass. He rotationally grazes the multi-species leys with the sheep, and bales any surplus growth for silage for the cattle. Improvements

in the sheep enterprise are also due to changes in animal genetics; using performance-recorded rams and selecting the best ewes to breed replacements.

James measures the grass using a rising plate meter weekly in the growing season, and says this is the most important job on the farm. He analyses the data using AgriNet software. When supply outstrips demand, he mows the paddocks and bales the grass to feed to the cattle in dry summers.

Reseeding is carried out every 10 years. James sprays off the fields with glyphosate in October and applies

farmyard manure or seaweed taken from the neighbouring beach, at a rate of 25-30t/ha.

The seaweed supplies humus, trace elements and nutrients and stimulates the action of soil organisms. It is harvested and deposited into a new shed where it dries, with any effluent collected.

Following ploughing, James drills winter barley as a break between grass leys and to provide feed and straw. After harvest, he then establishes either a multi-species sward or red clover ley for silage.

Bespoke mixtures

The red clover is cut for three years, before reverting to a grazing ley, while the multi-species leys become a grass sward after two years. Both these bespoke mixtures contain sufficient levels of diploid grass seed to continue as a grazing sward when the red clover and herbs have gone.

James tests his soils every two to three years and uses 120-140kg/ha of nitrogen (N), with 20kg/ha applied after every cattle grazing. One hundred thousand gallons of slurry supplied for free from a local dairy farmer adds further nutrients. A three-cut silage system is in place.

“Back in 2016 we finished 55 calves and now we finish 90, with no additional land,” says James. “Concentrating on our grassland and introducing a range of different forage crops has given us flexibility and the resilience to cope with weather extremes, whilst optimising our animal outputs.”

“Since 2020 we have been a Technical Demonstration Farm for grassland management for CAFRE and enjoy sharing our practices, experiences and success with other farmers. We also belong to AgriSearch's Beacon Farm Network, aiming to improve our carbon efficiency. There is a lot going on and probably still a lot more to learn.”



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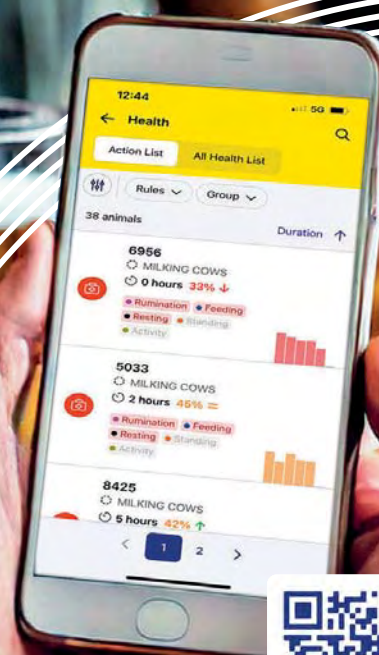
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Farm fresh demanded by communities

The allure of fresh, ice cold milk and milkshakes is strong for consumers of all ages. Isobel Bretherton visits three producers who have reconnected with their communities through direct vending and building local supply chains.

While living and working in North Devon, my 20-something daughter walked to a milk vending trailer every Friday, buying pasteurised milk and milkshakes from a nearby dairy farm. And she's not alone - demand for such self-service dairy delights is soaring.

That particular business is The Milk Cart, launched in November 2023 by farmer Rob Squire's partner Sharon Claydon, who Rob describes as the 'driving force' behind the diversification that rapidly became their core enterprise. Their home, Servis Farm, at Little Torrington, lies midway between Bideford and Barnstaple.

"The trailer has given us a positive link to people in our community."

The Milk Cart's solar-powered mobile milk vending trailer became a sensation almost overnight, and last autumn the business scored a hat-trick in the Taste of the West Awards 2025. "With our marketing, we were thinking about who we are, what it is about our farm, our farm animals, and our history that sets us apart," says Sharon. "Rob's grandfather, Joe, used to take milk up to town in a cart, and that's what we are now doing with the Milk Cart. It's so positive doing this for ourselves."



Dairy Shorthorn cows supply the milk for The Milk Cart vending machine

The vending trailer visits sites in Great Torrington on a rota that changes daily. Parking outside the town's Bluecoat School every Monday and Friday, it captures trade from the school run, while also attracting customers from the surrounding Burwood Estate and the town. "For the parents, and the children, pasteurised whole milk or a milkshake is a nice, easy treat. The kids love it. It is healthy, and it is safe," says Sharon.

"It was a very steep learning curve as we were starting off. As our mobile vending machine is solar-powered, it doesn't require any electricity. That gives us more options and a lot of freedom to visit lots of different types of sites, including shows and events including a local Open Farm Sunday event.

"By visiting sites on a rota, we knew we wouldn't exhaust demand in any particular part of town - and the trailer has given us a positive link to people in our community," she adds.

"Not everyone can drive and many customers walk. It's really nice to talk to our customers; they're really interested. They can see the cows in the field and we've tried to show people our farm and our animals through our Facebook page. We put up lots of different content; sometimes silly stuff, sometimes educational. We do 'meet our cows,' as they're all named and we have a bit of fun with cows' names... People say to us, you really do know your cows individually, so it's very positive."

Rob focuses on farming while Sharon works on marketing and growing The Milk Cart business. He milks 80 Dairy Shorthorn x cows, breeding all his own replacements using a Dairy Shorthorn bull, and runs 200 cattle on the farm at any one time. His recently purchased bull is throwing 70% heifers, and any finished beef animals are processed at Dunbia, near Okehampton.

"The numbers are quietly climbing up," notes Sharon. "We're breeding stock that are suitable for our farm. They're a bit more resilient than some, and not producing high volumes. We wanted a cow that would do well without much interference."

The rationale behind The Milk Cart has been not to waste anything,

and its range has grown with customer demand. After producing semi-skimmed milk for retail and hospitality customers, spare cream was used to make double cream and then clotted cream. The business now supplies cafés and delicatessens with cream, butter, and milk to order.

"A local ice cream company buys our clotted cream to serve with their ice cream," explains Sharon. "Making clotted cream is a dark art; nobody shares their recipes, but we think we've cracked it! Any spare cream we churn into butter, and that's how the idea for brandy butter came about for Christmas - it is sold through delicatessens during the festive season."

Winning awards

Sharon and Rob were thrilled when The Milk Cart won three golds in the Taste of the West 2025 awards for its butter, clotted cream and brandy butter. Sharon had devised the branding, packaging and pots, with the cowprint design, with the simple aim of gaining feedback.

"The Taste of the West Awards were an opportunity to put our product in front of real pros, and we received feedback from experts from retail, environment and marketing backgrounds," she says. "We're growing the business gradually. We're surrounded by holidaymakers and the campsites have been asking about waxed cartons - these would be easier for campers than our glass bottles."



The Oving Cow Shed at Oving Village Hall is run by John Pitts



(L-R) Thomas, Rob and Sharon



The Milk Cart supplies clotted cream, butter and milk to local businesses

“The biggest drive for us is that we want to farm in a way that makes us happy and that we are comfortable with; particularly the way we are able to care for our animals. We’re educating people. And then you get the feedback, and you realise that you are appreciated.

“It wasn’t like this when we were working for the dairies, when we would just get a letter saying: ‘We might pay you this much or that much next month,’ continues Sharon. “It’s much better now.” Although the margins can be slim, the marketing is working. “We’re working harder than ever before, but we’re enjoying it.”

“The milk vending is a fantastic PR exercise.”

Besides The Milk Cart, other milk producers have followed in their ancestors’ footprints, by selling direct to their communities. In West Sussex, organic milk producer John Pitts is a tenant of the Church of England, at Woodhorn Farm, near Chichester. John cites his great grandfather’s milk round as the inspiration for the Oving Cow Shed, his 24-hour vending station at Oving Village Hall, where people buy fresh, pasteurised, non-homogenised, organic milk daily. Grandparents also treat their grandchildren to a milkshake and youngsters cycle over for an evening shake.

“The Oving Cow Shed has really grabbed the community; people absolutely love it,” he says. “It has also become a community concern - we pay a ground rent to the village hall, which then gets a percentage of the sales.” John, who is also a director of

national dairy co-operative Organic Herd, is trialling a second vending site on a soft fruit farm. “While it is fairly marginal, the milk vending is a fantastic PR exercise. We even have a TV screen in the Oving Cow Shed showing customers a video of what is going on down on the farm.”

An instant hit

Back in Devon, Emily Peters devised the Udder Stuff while at university, to add value to a small percentage of milk from her parents’ Devon farm. The Udder Stuff’s vending hub, within a pub car park at Cranbrook, one of Exeter’s newest communities, was an instant hit in 2021. A second vending point is at Greendale Farm Shop, near Exeter, where its gelato is also sold. During summer, an ice cream trailer captures additional custom at shows and events.

“The Udder Stuff has effectively let me come home to Devon and it has provided an opportunity for me to be linked to the family farm - it is run separately,” explains Emily. “We’ve created additional employment, with 1.5 new labour units on top of the jobs that the farm supports.”

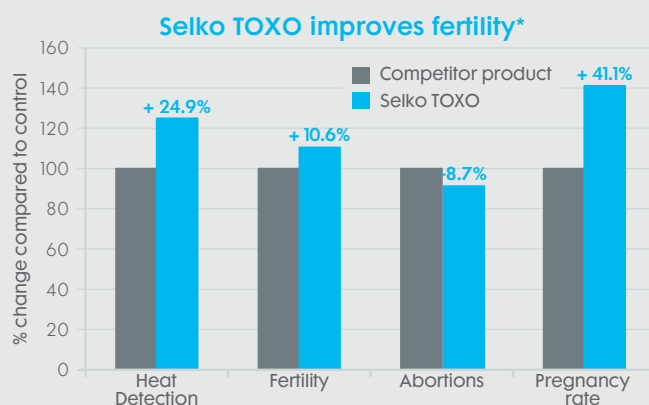


The Udder Stuff opened in 2021



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How to prepare autumn calving cows for a successful transition

Facing increasingly tight margins, optimising the transition period can help farmers reduce the risk of metabolic disorders and declining milk yields. British Dairying reports.

Problems around the transition period can be down to a mismatch between feed intake and increased nutritional demands on the cow during lactation. "If intakes don't catch up, the cow will lose condition, and it will be difficult to bridge the energy gap," explains Colin Byrne, Ruminant Technical Manager at Lallemand.

Matching demand

There can be knock-on impacts on fertility and milk yield. "It's vital to manage the transition period effectively, to get feed intake to match the demand within the first 21-30 days post-calving."

Ensuring sufficient feed intakes, monitoring body condition



Body condition score should be carefully monitored pre and post calving

score (BCS), and maintaining a stable rumen pH are among the steps farmers can take to ensure a successful transition. Negative energy balance and body condition loss are

among the main risks when a cow transitions from the pre-calving phase to lactation.

"If feed intake can't keep up with the large increase in demand for

nutrients, she will get into negative energy balance leading to body condition loss," says Colin. "This is associated with metabolic disorders like milk fever, hypocalcaemia, or ketosis."

Dietary cation-anion balance (DCAB) diets can help to prevent milk fever by promoting the metabolism of calcium reserves, helping to bridge the gap between intake and requirements, he adds. Meanwhile, switching too rapidly from a mainly forage-based diet in the dry phase to one with a higher energy and protein composition causes fibre-digesting bacteria to decline - potentially compromising rumen function.

This can be a risky period for sub-acute ruminal acidosis and



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THE CREAM AWARDS

DAIRY INDUSTRY TRADE AWARDS 2026

....all the winners announced!!!

Celebrating some of the brightest and best – the 'Cream' of UK dairy farming in 2026

The Cream Awards took place at Chesford Grange Hotel, Warwickshire on the 3rd of September 2026.

The event was organised by



A packed ballroom and equally packed agenda of winners and runners up were read out over 16 categories – culminating in the Lely sponsored Cup Winner announcement for 2026 at the end of the evening, and this year's winner of the John Beckett Memorial Cup - **First Milk**.

The evening provided a great opportunity for the dairy industry to take a night off and celebrate - innovative forward-thinking farmers,

vets, business leaders – that help drive our dairy industry today and toward a successful future.

Read more about our Cup Winners **First Milk** on page 9 of the September British Dairying. Plus, inside, details of all our Award for Innovation contenders and winners.

Look out for further winner features in future editions.

THE CREAM AWARD 2026

Sponsored by: **Lely Atlantic**
John Beckett Memorial Cup

Winner First Milk

Recognising the power of farmer cooperation to transform a business through long-term investment, award-winning dairy products, pioneering regenerative farming and strong industry partnerships - The 2026 Cream Award and John Beckett Memorial Cup is awarded to First Milk.

Judges commented how First Milk - under CEO Shelagh Hancock's outstanding leadership - First Milk's members, colleagues and leadership team have rebuilt the co-operative into a secure, resilient and forward-looking business, with long-term customer partnerships working to create a brighter future for British dairying.

Congratulations to our 2026 Cream Award Cup winner – First Milk.



HIGH PERFORMANCE DAIRY FARM AWARD

Sponsored by: **Arla Foods**

Winner

Adam & Jo Sills, Sills Farming Ltd, Ash Tree Farm

Praised by the judges for their steps to maximise their milk price by improving milk solids whilst continuing to improve herd efficiency. The Sills family have clearly made a profitable and sustainable business through their proactive animal welfare strategies, with regular participation in trials and discussion groups. "This farm had the facts and figures to back up the nomination, using that data to effectively inform their decisionmaking," judges commented.



Highly Commended

Sandy Law, Marshall & Law Partners

A fully closed, high performing herd since 1949 with unbroken lineage. The focus on tailored management and animal welfare has resulted in good performance and longevity of cows, commented judges. Proactive bio-security and high animal welfare was noted. Judges said the farmer "Does what's right for his system, not the industry norm and is achieving the results required to make this a high-performing dairy business for generations to come."

YOUNG DAIRY FARMER OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by: **Kite Consulting**

Winner

Isabelle Deacon, Boyes Farm

Isabelle impressed judges with her thorough knowledge of all aspects of the farm and her commitment to developing strategies for the long term. The farm showed good technical performance and feed efficiency scores from their herd of 430 cows, having implemented a significant system change in recent years to improve cow longevity, reduce number of cull cows, lower replacement rates, and reduce labour. Isabelle demonstrates very impressive ambitions, and works hard to achieve the farm's goals for the future.



Highly Commended

Alice Sault, Harper Adams Future Farm

Demonstrating excellent technical performance figures and working hard to use that data to inform decisions. Alice and her team manage a high performance herd of over 400 milkers through a 40 point rotary parlour, three times a day. Alice has proactively looked to develop her own skill set to become an effective leader of this dairy farm, seeing it through significant and positive change for the future. It's not easy managing an educational farm and so judges were impressive what has been achieved for both now and the future.



AWARDS SUCCESS

Winners

LINEUP OF WINNERS, SHOWCASING YET ANOTHER STRONG GROUP OF INDUSTRY LEADERS.

HIGH FEED EFFICIENCY AWARD

Sponsored by: **KW Feeds**

Winner

**Steve Cope, Cope Farming,
Bawhill Farm**

Cope Farming impressed judges with their exceptional fertility, achieving results in the top quartile for Fast Track herds across many parameters. Excellent adoption of technologies and use of data to benchmark, "it is great to see a farm utilising their data so well," commented judges. Strong focus on cow welfare and cow comfort was noted. But what really made this herd stand out to the panel was that they are achieving these results with such a large herd (961 cows in milk) which takes a lot of attention to detail, and shows a drive towards efficiency across the whole business.

Highly Commended

Andrew Paterson, Woodend Farm

Excellent use of data from two robotic milkers with this 160 cow herd, to inform decisions and to set targets and, said judges, they could see improvements across many areas over the last 12 months already. Fantastic use of homegrown feeds. 3.18kg milk solids is exceptional. Good pregnancy rate at 29% and calving interval at 384 days. "The overall focus on cow health, comfort and fertility is great to see."



Bawhill farm

DAIRY VITALITY AWARD

Sponsored by: **Wynnstay**

Winner

Meldrum Farm

Following a structured, data-driven herd health system underpinned by regular veterinary review, nutrition monitoring, and continuous KPI benchmarking - the overarching focus here is to maintain consistent cow vitality across all production groups through prevention, early detection, and rapid intervention. The herd is achieving around 13,000 litres per cow, so attention to lameness control is key: foot bathing, hoof trimming, dry cows and youngstock managed separately, udder health strategies and transition cow health protocols in place. The emphasis is on measurable outcomes, continuous improvement, and early intervention.



Meldrum farm

Highly Commended

**Matt Kingston, Kingston & Sons,
Tresham Farm**

A high performing herd who have invested in technologies to aid performance and with a fertility rate of 28% and an age of first calving at 24 months coupled with average litres of milk from forage at 4,900 litres, this is a high performing herd and a stand out business.

DAIRY FARM DEVELOPMENT AWARD

Anthony Wills Memorial Cup

Sponsored by: **Vilofoss**

In association with TBA Ltd and Hawksridge Holsteins

Winner

Joe Wannop, Wannops Farms Ltd

Each investment is building on what has been done before over decades of improvements, identifying the next weakest link in the chain, seeking to improve that link so it addresses an identified need, and ensuring that the benefit cascades throughout the business. Clearly this is an excellent farm focused on creating a high-quality output and investing in the improvements of the highest standards to position the business for the future. A good team approach with attention to even the smallest detail both from the on-farm team and with stakeholders with an aim that each animal should be as good as it can be, commented judges.

Highly Commended

**Andrew Leggott, GW Leggott,
White House Farm**

A success built on collaboration, trust and shared responsibility. Measurable results, including reducing herd Days in Milk from 190 to 150, improving robot efficiency, advancing genetic progress, improving calf health and driving feed efficiency through close monitoring of data and forage performance. The business has developed significantly in recent years through a combination of investment, data-driven management and empowering individuals within the team to take ownership of their specialist areas.



Wannops farms Ltd.

BRITISH DAIRYING CREAM AWARDS

THE DAIRY SUSTAINABILITY AWARD

Sponsored by: **Trouw Nutrition**

Winner

Isabelle Deacon, Boyes Farm

Boyes Farm demonstrates a well-rounded and practical approach to sustainability. Farm Manager Isabelle has shown outstanding leadership in driving improvements in cow longevity, health, nutrient management, renewable energy use and biodiversity. Combined with her passion for the dairy industry and commitment to future generations. Boyes Farm is a highly worthy winner.

Highly Commended

Andrew & Claire Brewer, Ennis Barton

Andrew and Claire have combined technological solutions to improve animal health with maximisation of milk from forage to increase the resilience of their dairy farming business in Cornwall. "Technology has helped us build a more resilient system. This is critical to having informed conversations about future farming practices, as numbers provide the data to change minds," concludes Andrew.

Highly Commended

ES Burroughs & Son, Wheatacre Hall

A dairy business based at the most easterly point of the UK is going from strength to strength by increasing herd size, introducing milk processing, a farm shop, a newly opened café and above all investing in people. "We're custodians of the countryside," says Lindsay. "We take our environmental responsibilities very seriously and do the best we can, developing best farming practices and conservation successes and getting support with agri-environment schemes where we can."

YOUNGSTOCK HEALTH & WELFARE AWARD

Sponsored by: **MSD Animal Health**

Winner

Sian Evans, SB Farms Ltd, Brynhyfryd

Part of a large farm covering three units, but it is clear that farm staff (and supporting farm stakeholders) communicate well to ensure results are consistent across the units.

Excellent demonstration of alignment under unified protocols for colostrum management, vaccination, hygiene, biosecurity, feeding and environmental monitoring/management. Clearly an impressive farm with low disease incidence and calf mortality. Good connectivity between youngstock management and future productivity, whilst the number of supporters of this application also impressed the judges.



Highly Commended

Leah Griffiths, Bar Hill Farm

Judges were impressed with Leah's management protocols and over all enthusiasm for her role. A smaller unit, and one with less support than many, Bar Hill Farm demonstrates a proactive approach in the nomination detail, particularly when showing past health status vs. current herd health status. Implementing evidence-based health strategies directly demonstrates the 'impact of actions', and positive outcomes for the herd. Changes implemented were well grounded, practical to apply to the farm and to easy to communicate with team.

FERTILITY HEALTH & WELFARE AWARD

Sponsored by: **Volac Milk Replacers (Feed for Growth)**

Winner

Jonathan & Robert Evans, Penlan Argoed

Judges were most impressed with the continued improvement in the health of this herd and outstanding, highly progressive management from brothers Jonathan and Robert. Their nomination from their vet shows that health and welfare really do come first with this team. Both continually seek to improve their knowledge and technical skills to the benefit of their herd. Genomic testing and using the data to improve breeding for their herd, their disease management strategies, reducing antibiotic use by 50% on one unit and 75% on the other shows how prevention rather than treatment pays dividends for this healthy herd.



Highly Commended

Will & John Holliday, Clifton Hall Farm

The father and son team have overseen big improvements on this farm, installing robotic milkers and software which has identified key areas to improve. Impressive pregnancy rates of 39%, well above the industry average, is a clear marker of the health of this herd. Their whole application shows they take welfare seriously and constantly look for ways to improve, testing new products, adjusting diets, behaviour monitoring, a highly progressive team operation.



MOST EFFICIENT AMS FARM

Sponsored by: **Techna**

in association with Advanced Ruminant Nutrition

Winner

Nick Eccles, WA & M Eccles & Son, Sudells Farm

Nick has a genuine passion for robotics and embraces technology wherever it delivers a competitive advantage. His meticulous attention to detail, combined with the dedication of his family team, has helped drive impressive productivity from their 220-cow Holstein herd, achieving high yields and an outstanding feed efficiency score.

With a firm grasp of the numbers and a strong focus on efficiency, he continually optimises every aspect of the business, from lactational persistency to feed conversion efficiency.

Nick showed a clear understanding of how the robotic data highlights the multiple factors involved in achieving top herd performance, especially cow behaviour, health and profitability, enabling him to make informed decisions that are both profitable and sustainable.



DAIRY TEAM AWARD

Sponsored by: **National Farmers Union**

Winner

RM West & Son

Judges were impressed with the ethos and emphasis on providing work life balance at RM West & Son. Enabling their staff to grow and build their careers there, it was great to see a large team consisting of lots of young members too. The aim of this award is to recognise a team that works together to plan and ensure the overall health and wellbeing of both the animals and people on farm, while helping deliver profitability goals the business needs.

RM West & Son fully embrace this and understand that there is no 'I' in team, clearly showing that the success of their business and the care taken of their animals would not be possible without them. An excellent showcase of what can be achieved when the team is at the centre of it all.



NATIONAL MILK VENDOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Sponsored by: **Daisy Vending**

Winner

Hewitt Family, Park Farm, Mookshake Shack

Inspiring next generation of farmers. Park Farm have built strong relationships with customers, and exploited social media to their advantage.

The farm has been transformed in just four years - it's inspirational what these three farmers and entrepreneurs have done. What clearly comes across is the local community feel.

'Grass to glass' is a great message and seasonal bottles again offer captivation and engage customers.

Freddie, Abbie & Rosie are clearly brave and bold individuals, whilst supporting their family & community and growing a business that is just inspirational.



Highly Commended

Collinson Family, Bellfield Farm, The Milk Well

A sustainable business, that backs up its claims with facts and figures on how the farm structure has changed, downsizing the herd, whilst maintaining standards of animal welfare, sustainability and developing community engagement. Judges were impressed with details such as their research at planning stages, and how they are now giving advice to other producers. This is a multi-generational small family farm and vending outlet this is a truly important part of their community.

Go to www.creamawards.UK to view all the photos from the event #creamawards

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DAIRY VET OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by: **Virbac**

Winner

Sam Potter BA DrMedVet MRCVS
Hook Norton Veterinary Group

Sam Potter has been chosen as a winner for his progressive, data-driven approach to preventative medicine, successfully moving herds away from reactive "fire-fighting". He has delivered outstanding measurable outcomes, such as reducing mastitis rates from 80 to 8 cases per 100 cows at one farm and boosting calf daily live weight gains by 15% at another.

Beyond his clinical excellence, Sam excels at empowering the entire farm workforce by translating complex data into actionable steps and actively engaging junior staff by sharing his ultrasound screen during visits.

Furthermore, his vital role as a mental health champion within his practice highlights a deeply holistic approach, recognising that a farm's success relies just as much on the psychological well-being of the farmers as the biological health of the herd. Ultimately, his collaborative nature, honesty, and dedication to proactive health planning make him an indispensable and deeply trusted partner to his clients.



Hook Norton Vet, Sam Potter

READ MORE ABOUT ALL OF OUR WINNERS IN THIS AND FUTURE EDITIONS OF BRITISH DAIRYING AND OUR SPECIALIST SUPPLEMENTS

DAIRY VET PRACTICE OF THE YEAR

Sponsored by: **Virbac**

Winner

LLM Farm Vets, Derbyshire

The winning practice grew impressively to become the area's first farm-only practice and pioneered the local VetTech service.

Their outstanding use of data analytics such as their bespoke VetInvest financial tracking tool, Digifarm health tracking, and comprehensive calf dashboards sets them apart.

Combined with their commitment to Nottingham University student training and large-scale clinical audits (such as a major c-section study), they are a true leader in proactive, partnership-led dairy care.

An exemplary practice and winning team.



LLM Farm Vets, Derbyshire



Sarah Tomlinson, AHDB

DAIRY INDUSTRY WOMAN OF THE YEAR - 2026

Sponsored by: **HSBC**

Winner

Sarah Tomlinson, Lead Veterinary Expert AHDB

Consultant to TB Advisory Service, Member of GB Calf Strategy, Calf Action Network and National Beef Association Board

This is a woman who embodies everything that Women in Dairy is about. The award looks beyond Sarah's expertise and leading work on bovine TB, recognising her remarkable ability to engage and influence farmers and the wider industry through her knowledge, words and empathy.

There was not a dry eye on the judging panel as Sarah spoke about supporting farmers through some of their most devastating and difficult times. Her work has brought hope, support and kindness to thousands, while ensuring the human impact of bovine TB is understood alongside the technical and political challenges.

As a working, single mum of two, Sarah also spoke openly about forging a career in male-dominated environments, overcoming imposter syndrome and refusing to be held back. Sarah is extremely modest about her awe-inspiring achievements, and this award goes to her as a thank you on behalf of dairy farmers everywhere, and to recognise everything that Sarah has done for the industry, and the women she has inspired and supported along the way.

Runners up include:

Lorna Burdge, Waterhayne Farms

Through Open Farm Sunday, educational visits and the farm's vending machine, she shares insight about farming with the wider local community and is always so enthusiastic and positive about the industry.

Leanne Bertram, Graham's The Family Dairy

Leanne is a successful female leader in agriculture, she also demonstrates the significant and growing contribution women make across the industry, inspiring the next generation to believe there is a place for them in dairy farming.

Vicky Sloane- Masson, Ballacrickey Farm

Vicky overcame early attitudes that "girls don't farm" to become a respected farmer, businesswoman and industry leader. She is known for her determination, commitment to animal welfare, adoption of innovation, support for young people and promotion of women in agriculture.

AWARDS SUCCESS

Winners

AWARD FOR INNOVATION

Sponsored by: **British Dairying**

Winner

MSD Animal Health: Bovilis Cryptium

An important tool in the box for protecting calves against Cryptosporidium and encouraging maximum growth rates and calf health in the all-critical first few months of life, said judges. Youngstock are the future of our business and beef calves a valuable source of cash flow so getting these off to a good start is vitally important, commented another. "A crypto vaccine for those that calve all year round and have crypto on farm might be a game-changer," commented one judge. The vaccine represents a major breakthrough in calf health management and disease prevention.

Winner

FarmWater

The best and most successful farms always have clean, easy access to water and know what's going in it, said one of the judges.

Winner FarmWater is the first system designed specifically for livestock environments to generate high yield, on-demand ClO₂ at the point of use, a vet-led fully managed and supported water hygiene system. "If FarmWater really makes the difference in yield it would pay for itself," commented judges.

"Proven results from real farm data in providing livestock with clean water and aiding reduction in cell counts and bactoscans and improved health is a win win," judges concluded.



MSD Animal Health: Bovilis Cryptium

Highly Commended

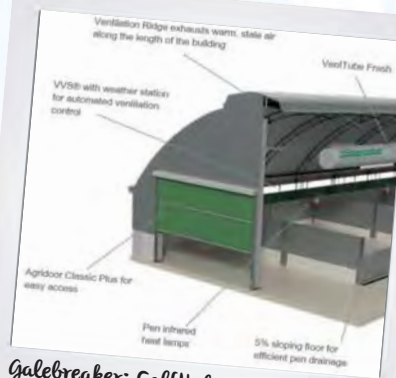
Galebreaker: CalfHub

Reducing workload whilst improving calf health. "We forget about calves sometimes and how important they are – in the winter they want to be warm, in the summer they need to keep cool, farmers need solutions that are easy, and simple – this is the future herd and they need looking after," said judges. The project objectives included designing a low-cost building with embedded ventilation technology and monitoring systems, introducing a novel positive pressure ventilation tube in which incoming fresh air can be pre-heated, and developing an automated control system to maintain a more consistent and optimum environment for calves.

Highly Commended

Precision Grazing Ltd: AIMER

"You can't manage what you don't measure," said one judge and this tool looks to make it easier for farmers to measure grass, and more likely to use if it's easy and not time consuming. I like that it works without a mobile signal too and can be synchronised later." AIMER changes that by allowing farmers and farm teams to measure pasture cover with a smartphone, update the feed wedge, and use that information to make clearer grazing and supplement decisions.



Galebreaker: CalfHub

Commended

milkrite | InterPuls : IPS15 Air Guard

For a healthy, happy herd – the Air Guard is commended by judges for helping improve complete milking performance and udder health. With an estimated 40-50% reduced bacterial transmission, the effect of bacterial reduction and therefore need for antibiotic treatments against mastitis, can only mean healthier livestock, better milk quality and higher yields

Commended

CowManager: FindMyCowFlash

A simple but effective product innovation from CowManager, said judges. Featuring a built-in flashing LED on the CowManager ear sensor, the FindMyCowFlash light is activated remotely via the app or desktop enabling producers to easily identify individual animals that need extra attention, whether in a crowded pen, during sorting, or in low visibility conditions.



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CowManager: FindMyCowFlash

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leaky gut. "Systemic inflammation caused by rapid hormone and dietary changes after calving can result in a weakening of the gut barrier, allowing pathogens and toxins to get through the lining," Colin explains. "Energy will then be redirected to the immune system to bolster natural defences when you really want it to go towards milk production."

Inadequate feed space is one common pitfall leading to reduced feed intake and irregular feeding behaviour during the transition period. Checking rumen fill regularly during transition is a great cow-level signal as to whether you're getting things right. "Ideally, a minimum of 0.6m/cow of feed space is recommended during the dry phase, to ensure she gets sufficient intake," he says.

"A high-quality mineral should be given during the dry phase."

Ensuring feed is always readily available so cows can eat little and often aids rumination. And a chop length of 5-20mm is recommended to prevent sorting. These practices promote good feeding behaviour to reduce sub-acute ruminal acidosis (SARA). As the UK and Ireland have seen another summer of record-breaking temperatures, it's worth noting that heat stress is also known to reduce feed intake, as well as exacerbating the risk of oxidative stress during the transition phase. This can lead to increased somatic cell counts, reduced fertility, and early or even later embryo loss.

"Heat stress reduces feed intake, so if you have an animal that's already under stress due to the transition period, it can potentially reduce that intake even further," Colin explains. "A high-quality mineral containing organic selenium, vitamin E and other antioxidants should be given during the dry phase and into lactation to reduce the risk of oxidative stress."

BCS should be carefully monitored to ensure the cow has a score of 3.0-3.5 at calving. "Anything less than that will increase the risk of negative energy balance, and anything more will increase the risk of ketosis."

BCS should also be used to inform the length of the dry period - a minimum of eight weeks is often recommended, but it's important to look at the BCS to make the

Signs of transition problems in early lactation:

- Poor rumen fill - indicated when the triangle just behind the ribs and below the lumbar on the cow's left side is very pronounced
- Liquid faeces with bubbles in it - can indicate acidosis
- Failure to achieve peak milk yield.

best judgement for the individual circumstances. "If the cow is well below a BCS of three 100 days before drying off, she may need more time to get into condition first, or if she's already fat at that point, she may be able to continue milking for longer as she can afford to lose some body condition."

Meanwhile, maintaining a stable rumen pH is an often overlooked but important factor. "Sudden changes in diet can cause rumen pH to drop to 5.8 or below. That's when we start to get damage to the rumen wall," says Colin.

Rumen support

Trials have shown that adding a rumen-specific live yeast to the diet, like Levucell SC, can support rumen integrity and maintain a more stable rumen pH during the transition period, which also helps maintain the fibrolytic (fibre-digesting) bacteria.

"It's best used as a preventative measure as it takes time for the rumen to adjust, so it should be added to the ration at least three weeks pre-calving," he says. "Depending on the level of challenge expected, up to double the dose can be fed during the transition period."

Nutritional interventions can help support rumen health and comfort, but this should form part of a wider transition strategy that includes adequate feed space, careful body condition monitoring and good dry cow management.



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Building confidence around calving

A carefully managed calving protocol helped reduce incidence of milk fever and made for a smoother transition into lactation at one Cornish farm. British Dairying reports.

For Cornish dairy farmer Chris Knowles, reducing milk fever was never just about lowering the number of cows that went down after calving. It was about giving cows the best possible start to lactation and creating a system that worked efficiently during a busy spring calving period.

Chris manages around 300 spring calving cows at Trink Dairy near St Ives. The herd is mainly small Friesians with around 25% crossbreeds. They calve over a tight nine-week block on a predominantly grass-based system, grazing for as much of the year as conditions allow.

“You have got to get everything else right as well.”

Supplying Arla on contract, the farm also bottles a proportion of its milk for local coffee shops, schools and its own milk vending business. Like many grazing herds, managing calcium balance around calving presents challenges.

“It wasn’t a massive problem, but it was a niggle,” says Chris. “We knew we had cows that were short of calcium. It wasn’t just the cows that were down with milk fever, there were probably others that weren’t showing obvious signs.”

The herd was experiencing clinical milk fever rates of around six to seven percent. While not every affected cow became a severe downer, the condition still created additional management challenges and raised



The 300-head herd graze for as much of the year as conditions allow

concerns about the wider impact of subclinical calcium deficiency.

According to the farm’s vet, Matthew Berriman at Rosevean Veterinary Practice, controlling milk fever in a grass-based spring calving herd can be more difficult than in housed systems, where more complex transition diets are often used. “It is difficult to do dietary cation-anion difference (DCAD) diets on a predominantly grass-based system,” explains Matthew. “We were doing what we could, including using magnesium chloride, but we were still seeing higher rates of milk fever than desired.”

Historically, cows that appeared wobbly or showed signs of milk fever would receive an injectable calcium treatment. However, the aim was to move from reacting to clinical cases towards preventing problems before they developed. Working with Matthew, Chris introduced a protocol

that combines good transition cow management with targeted use of Bovikalc, a two-bolus oral calcium supplement.

Today, cows entering their third lactation or above receive two Bovikalc boluses; one at the start of calving, and another immediately after. The approach sits alongside attention to forage quality, potassium levels and magnesium supplementation where appropriate.

“You have got to get everything else right as well,” says Chris. “It is not a magic wand that makes everything right, but it is certainly helping us a lot.”

Significant results

The results have been significant. Clinical milk fever rates have fallen from around six to seven percent to approximately one to one and a half percent. During the most recent calving season, Chris recorded only four cases.

For Matthew, the benefits extend beyond the reduction in clinical cases. “If cows have subclinical milk fever, they won’t eat as much,” he explains. “Correcting that will improve dry matter intake and everything else moving forwards.”

One of the biggest advantages of using the boluses has been the confidence the protocol provides during the hectic calving period. Previously, there was always a concern that cows moved into cubicles after calving could go down with milk fever and require lifting,

which had been problematic. “Chris now has the confidence that he can come out and the cows are standing up and away he goes with his day,” says Matthew. “Managing downer cows is not something to worry about any more.”

Chris agrees that reducing the risk of severe downer cows has been a major benefit. “The chance of a cow injuring herself is massively reduced,” he says. “Even the few cases we do have tend to be much milder.”

The farm has also seen improvements in how cows transition into lactation. “Cows seem to transition well,” says Chris. “We have very low numbers of retained foetal membranes. They seem to bag up properly and come into their milk quickly, and we’ve seen reduced rates of mastitis - it just seems to work.”

Back to normal

Matthew believes the benefits stem from helping cows maintain feed intake and avoid the knock-on effects associated with calcium deficiency.

“If you get them out of the calving barn quickly and back into their normal system where there is better feed space, and the ration is correct, they are going to eat more,” he says. “That has huge benefits.”

Combined with careful feeding and good transition management, the protocol has helped transform milk fever from a recurring concern into a manageable risk, allowing Chris and his team to focus on getting cows through calving smoothly and into a productive lactation. “To me, it is a nice, simple approach,” Chris says. “It completes the circle of attention to detail and helps us manage our calving and transition system.”



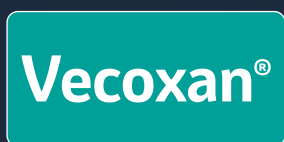
The herd is mainly small Friesians with around 25% crossbreeds



Cornish dairy farmer Chris Knowles

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Finding new ways to prevent mastitis

Reducing antibiotic use, increasing expectations of welfare, and now climate change – the challenges surrounding mastitis prevention are changing. British Dairying reports.

Mastitis remains one of the most significant health and economic challenges facing dairy farms today. Despite decades of effort, it continues to drain profitability through treatment costs, discarded milk, reduced yields, impaired fertility and, in the worst cases, the loss of otherwise healthy, productive animals.

This summer's extreme temperatures have created ideal conditions for mastitis cases to increase. So how can producers make prevention practical, measurable and genuinely effective at farm level, when at the same time, the pressure to reduce antibiotics is intensifying? The good news is that data which farmers already have may hold the answers.

"Managing mastitis depends on a number of different factors - infectious pathogens, housing, milking routines, cow immunity and genetics," says Francisco Malcata, Bovine Health Expert at Vetoquinol. "Now there are additional pressures - the need to reduce antibiotic use, higher expectations on animal welfare, climate change and, in some parts of the industry, real labour shortages that make consistency of practice very difficult to maintain."

"Sometimes we forget that mastitis is also painful."

One factor moving rapidly up the agenda is heat stress. Europe is warming faster than any other continent, and as June and July's heatwaves demonstrated, UK dairy farms are not immune.

High-producing dairy cows are well adapted to cool temperatures, so productivity and health can begin to be affected as heat load increases, particularly when the temperature humidity index (THI) thresholds are exceeded.

Even in Scotland, research using THI monitoring systems has found that dairy cows can suffer over summer. The implications for mastitis are significant. As temperatures



Pulling together available herd health data in one place could help to guide overall mastitis management

rise, cows instinctively seek shade, congregating under the same tree or corner of a yard, creating localised zones of high stocking density and elevated pathogen exposure.

The industry has invested heavily in cubicle provision indoors, with Red Tractor advocating five percent more cubicle places than cows, and RSPCA preferring 10% - but those protections disappear the moment cattle step outside.

"When temperatures rise, cows naturally seek shade, ventilation and cooler areas to reduce their heat load," Francisco explains. "Heat stress affects more than cow comfort. It can impair immune function, alter cow behaviour and increase environmental bacterial pressure - which may all contribute to a higher risk of mastitis."

Sprinkler systems, common in hot climates, are becoming increasingly popular in the UK - and when they're well designed and managed, can be effective tools to reduce heat stress. But they also present risks, as added moisture accumulates in lying areas, increasing the risk of bacterial growth.

The costs of inadequate mastitis control are often invisible until they become acute. Beyond the cost of treatment, mastitis reduces milk production, leads to discarded milk and lost quality premiums. It also impairs fertility; extending calving intervals, and in recurrent cases,

drives the removal of animals from herds when they may only be in their second or third lactation.

"Sometimes we forget that mastitis is also painful," adds Francisco. "Cows in pain ruminate less, are less active, and are simply less efficient. Antibiotics can be part of the solution, but they cannot compensate for good management, housing and milking procedures. If the underlying risk factors are not addressed, treatment will always be playing catch-up. The key is to improve prevention and make better use of diagnostics to intervene earlier, so antibiotics are used only when they are genuinely needed and likely to be effective."

Data-driven

The positive news is that the information needed to drive mastitis improvement already exists on most farms - it's just not always used effectively. Most dairy businesses generate a steady stream of relevant health information; milk recording data, somatic cell count (SCC) figures, calving records, treatment logs and cattle movement data from the British Cattle Movement Service. But the challenge is that it sits in silos, and each data set alone tells only a partial story. Where it really starts to become useful is when these various sources can be overlaid.

This is where the VetImpress platform aims to make a difference. By pulling together data from

multiple sources and presenting it through a single dashboard, farm vets can see what's happening across their clients' herds at a glance, without waiting for a phone call, farm visit or manually compiling reports. "It's a helicopter view of what's happening in those herds," adds Francisco. "If you start to see things wobbling, the sooner you can get involved and start identifying a cause, the quicker you can find a solution - and the more solutions that are available to you."

This shift moves mastitis management from reactive to proactive. "Data can help us to see trends before we have any clinical signs that become evident," he says. "When we have episodes of increasing SCCs or recurring mastitis cases, we can assess which risk factors are linked and try to manage them, rather than simply treating the next cow that goes down."

Key mastitis indicators include bulk tank SCC, the percentage of cows with individual SCCs above 200,000 cells/ml, clinical mastitis incidence, lactation new infection rate, dry period new infection rate and dry period cure rate.

"Not all mastitis is the same," he explains. "Understanding the pathogen profile helps the farm vet to identify likely sources of infection and guide investigations into underlying risk factors." The platform also allows vets to track vaccination compliance in a way that has historically been

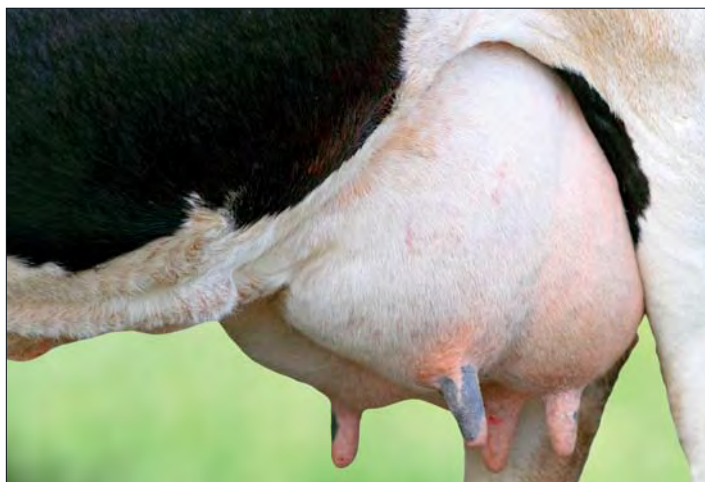
difficult when treatment records and cattle population data sit in separate systems. “Vets can easily see where purchase patterns indicate that a farm vaccinated 13 months ago with a product that has a 12-month duration,” explains Francisco. “Dairy farmers are busy and may not spot that. But that gap might be undoing a lot of good work, and without that visibility, it can go unnoticed for a long time at the expense of animal productivity and health.”

Training

Sometimes mastitis problems are caused by inconsistencies in the daily milking or husbandry routines. Training is key, and so is continuous monitoring of how milking practices are actually being carried out.

“Labour turnover makes this harder still, with inconsistency in teat preparation, cluster attachment, post-milking disinfection or glove use creating the conditions for both environmental and contagious mastitis to spread,” Francisco adds.

Housing management also plays a central role. Clean, dry bedding reduces bacterial load at the teat end. Good ventilation limits moisture and bacterial growth. And adequate



Hygiene, good teat preparation and disinfection limits the risk of mastitis

lying space supports cow comfort and reduces lameness, which is, in itself, another risk factor for mastitis. Transition cow management and calving pen hygiene are particularly important, as cows in the periparturient period are at their most immunologically vulnerable.

Today, vets have access to several diagnostic approaches that can support treatment decisions, including rapid culture systems, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) diagnostics and technologies like

Mastatest. These tools can help identify the pathogens involved and support more informed and targeted treatment decisions, reducing unnecessary antibiotic use while maintaining animal health and welfare. “The goal is not to withhold treatment, but to ensure that the right cow receives the right treatment at the right time,” Francisco explains.

The platform also allows vets to calculate antibiotic use per cow, which previously required manually cross-referencing entirely separate

systems. “This targeted selective treatment approach allows vets to combine diagnostics, clinical judgement and stewardship principles to optimise treatment outcomes while helping preserve antibiotic efficacy for the future.”

Perception

For any farm wanting to reduce mastitis, the first step is to assess what is actually happening rather than relying on perception.

“Sometimes there’s a difference between what people feel is going on and what the data shows,” he says. “That’s understandable. If you’ve been managing a problem your entire working life, it can become routine. It stops feeling like a problem. The data gives you the clear, accurate picture.”

“Farmers are producing more milk from more cows, with greater scrutiny on how they do it, and in a meteorological climate that is increasingly working against them,” Francisco says. “The farmers that will navigate that successfully are the ones that start using the data they already have. It’s all there. It just needs to be brought together and made to work for you.”

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Gen Z backs British farming, but connection is key

by
Steven Evans,
AHDB Lead Consumer Insight Manager

It is easy to assume that younger consumers are becoming disconnected from British farming because they do not value it. However, AHDB's latest research suggests something more encouraging: Gen Z is not turning its back on farmers. The real issue is that many young people simply do not see enough of modern farming to truly understand it.

AHDB's 2025 Consumer Trust study found that 77% of UK consumers agreed farmers are trustworthy, compared with 69% of 18 to 24-year-olds. To understand that difference, AHDB interviewed Gen Z consumers aged 18 to 28 and held focus groups with young farmers from the dairy, beef, lamb and pork sectors.

What emerged was not rejection, but a lack of visibility. Gen Z consumers were open, curious and supportive of British farming and young farmers were pleasantly surprised by that support. One 34-year-old pig farmer from the North West told us: "I'm totally taken aback by that response. In a positive way, quite humbled really that they, although they don't truly understand, are aware of how difficult it is in terms of the weather, you don't get a day off, it's not even a job, it's just a lifestyle, it's a way of life."

Knowledge of modern farming was limited and often shaped by outdated or romanticised images. Farmers and consumers identified the same gap: farming is largely absent from the social media feeds young people use every day, while the content they do see is often negative or sensationalised.

Steven Evans, Lead Consumer Insight Manager at AHDB, said: "Gen Z aren't rejecting British farming, they just don't have enough visibility of it. Both the Gen Z consumers and the young farmers we spoke to told us the same thing: understanding grows when farming is seen, not just described."

"Authentic farmer-led content can show the reality of producing food and the challenges farmers manage. But this cannot sit with one or two farmers alone. Gen Z is ready to learn. Our challenge is to make farming visible, human and relevant on the channels young people use."

"For dairy farmers, the findings offer reassurance and opportunity. The support is there, but connection cannot be taken for granted. By helping younger consumers understand modern farming, we can strengthen trust in British produce and build a more informed relationship with the next generation."

For more information about AHDB's
Gen Z research, visit: [LINK](#)



Consistency delivers top calf performance

A robust health programme for calves has helped bring dividends to one Scottish farm, as British Dairying reports.



Hannah McQuaker leads the calf rearing operation at Blaiket Mains Farm in Dumfries and Galloway

At Blaiket Mains Farm, near Crocketford in Dumfries and Galloway, consistency is the cornerstone of a highly successful calf rearing system. Rodger and Lindsay Callander manage an impressive 900-cow Holstein herd, comprising 600 spring block-calving cows and 300 autumn block-calving cows. Their objective is clear - to rear healthy, productive replacements that calve for the first time at 24 months of age, ensuring the next generation of cows enters the milking herd efficiently and performs to its full genetic potential.

Leading the calf rearing operation is Hannah McQuaker, who has been responsible for the farm's calves for the past five years. Her attention to detail, combined with carefully designed feeding protocols and excellent stockmanship, has helped achieve outstanding calf health and survival rates.

Every calf begins life with a carefully managed colostrum programme. Newborn calves receive four litres of high-quality colostrum as soon as possible after birth.

"Colostrum quality is measured using a Brix refractometer, with anything above 22% Brix reserved for dairy replacement heifer calves, while colostrum below this threshold is fed to the beef calves," Hannah explains. "This helps to ensure replacement heifers receive the highest quality passive immunity at the most critical stage of life."

"Then for the first seven days, calves receive the milk replacer Transformula at a rate of 150g/litre, with 2.5 litres offered morning and evening," she adds. "This early feeding strategy is designed to support the calves' developing immune system while helping to establish a healthy gut microbiome, and we have found it very helpful in providing a good foundation for a robust, healthy calf."

A study conducted at Harper Adams University found that calves receiving 10 days of Transformula transition milk replacer before moving onto a

skim-based calf milk replacer went on to produce an additional 947 litres of milk during their first lactation. They also produced 85kg more combined butterfat and protein, compared to calves that received colostrum before moving directly onto the same skim-based milk replacer. This reinforces the importance of nutritional management during the first days of life and the lasting impact it can have on future dairy performance.

After seven days, calves transition onto Shine Original, also from Bonanza Calf Nutrition, again mixed at 150g/litre. "We have a tried and tested, simple system: Calves receive three litres twice daily through a teat feeder via a milk taxi or six litres/day via the farm's automatic calf feeder," Hannah says. "We keep calves on milk until around 80 days of age as we find it supports good growth."

"After a few tweaks, the system now performs exceptionally well."

The transition onto the second milk replacer was carefully planned. "While Transformula supports immunity and early gut development, Shine Original is used to encourage dry feed intakes, helping to stimulate production of the volatile fatty acids needed for rumen villi development," explains Bonanza's Selina Field, who works with the farm. "This allows for a smooth transition through weaning and helps avoid post-weaning growth checks that can often slow future performance."

The product is formulated using low-heat skim milk and buttermilk, ingredients that are digested in much the same way as whole cow's milk.

"The inclusion of buttermilk also provides naturally occurring milk bioactives and beneficial bacteria that help support gut health, contributing to good digestion and reducing the likelihood of digestive upsets during the milk-feeding period."

The Callanders have used both milk replacers for the past five years as part of a structured nutritional programme. They have become an integral part of the farm's calf rearing system because of the consistency they deliver and the health benefits observed.

Highly palatable

"Both products are easy to mix; even using cooler water, producing a good feed-out quality," remarks Hannah. "And calves find the milk highly palatable, consistently finishing every feed offered."

Only replacement heifer calves are reared on the automatic feeder, allowing the system to operate efficiently without becoming overcrowded. The farm rears approximately 150 dairy replacement heifers from the spring-calving herd and around 90 from the autumn block each year. The remaining calves are beef animals, including Angus,

British Blue, Hereford and Wagyu crosses, with around 450 beef calves in the spring and approximately 180 in the autumn.

The farm operates the automatic feeder at its designed capacity, with 30 calves allocated to each feeder station. "After a few tweaks, the system we run now performs exceptionally well, providing reliable and consistent feeding while fitting into the farm's calf rearing programme," Hannah says.

Around 20 surplus calves are fed using teat feeders supplied by a milk taxi. The milk taxi accurately weighs the required quantity of milk powder for the exact volume of water, ensuring every feed is mixed consistently. Both the milk taxi and the automatic feeder are meticulously cleaned twice daily, maintaining excellent hygiene standards and supporting optimum calf performance. Weaning is carried out gradually by reducing milk allocation by 0.5 litres every other day, encouraging a smooth transition onto solid feed.

Alongside milk, calves receive an 18% crude protein molassed calf blend. Two weeks before weaning, this is gradually mixed in alongside a 17% crude protein calf rearer nut,

before calves transition fully onto the rearer ration. The ration is fed alongside straw, encouraging rumen development and preparing calves for life after milk.

Since introducing their bespoke calf rearing programme in 2019, Blaiket Mains Farm has seen a dramatic improvement in calf health.

"The farm consistently outperforms benchmarks."

Cryptosporidiosis was a challenge, but today scour during the first week of life is minimal. Supporting calves during this period is particularly important, as newborn calves have an immature immune system and rely heavily on the passive immunity transferred through colostrum. Nutritional support during this early stage helps strengthen the calf while its own immune system continues to develop.

"From around 600 spring-born calves this year, Hannah lost just 11

calves," notes Selina. "Remarkably, only four of these losses were associated with scour. The remaining losses were due to unrelated, unavoidable issues, including one calf with meningitis, two suffering seizures and one calf born blind."

"With a calf mortality rate of only 1.8%, the farm consistently outperforms UK industry benchmarks, achieving a figure well below the target of under three percent and the national dairy average of approximately six percent," she adds. "For a unit of this size, these figures demonstrate the effectiveness of a calf rearing programme built on consistency, hygiene, careful nutrition and close attention to detail."

Every stage of calf management has been designed to give calves the very best possible start. Through meticulous husbandry, precise feeding management and a nutritional programme that focuses on immunity, gut development and rumen function, Rodger, Lindsay and Hannah are consistently producing healthy calves that develop into productive youngstock, helping secure the long-term success of the herd.

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A unified approach to herd health

Recognising the value of teamwork and a programme of cross-role training is what drives the management style at Stocken Farm in Buckinghamshire, and the foundation of an impressively well-managed herd health programme. British Dairying reports.

Charlotte West, who farms with her brother, Robert, and parents, Richard and Maxine, oversees the rota and staff training for their 450-cow Holstein Friesian herd at Stocken Farm. Currently, this comprises over 17 staff, many working different hours and days. “With a few exceptions, I train everyone in every role,” explains Charlotte. “This ensures that we all understand the challenges of every job on the farm, how each task fits into the overall running of the herd, and cover is easily available if we have someone off work.”

Because people understand what is being done and why, they are more likely to take ownership of the task at hand, says Charlotte. It also makes the job more interesting. One area that has been particularly successful is herd health. All team members



Charlotte West works closely with Sam Potter from Hook Norton Vet Group who provides advice and training

are trained to identify sick cows and the treatment protocols. “Wherever

that animal is on the farm, from cubicle shed to collecting yard or the parlour, someone will be able to spot the signs of illness and report to the correct person.”

This has been particularly important this year, as heat stress has tested all the herd, especially sick and fresh cows. Every morning, the rota allocates a member of the team to the herd health check. The fresh cow and heifer groups benefit from headlocks, and using the Cow Manager app, animals that have been identified with reduced intakes are checked.

particularly cows with reduced rumination in early lactation.

“As a business, our goal is to have systems in place to prevent health issues,” notes Charlotte. “It’s an area of animal care we have really focused on in recent years and have seen some good results.”

The team have been drenching sick cows for many years, but around two years ago, they focused on how they use the Selekt rehydration system and the product formulae used for a targeted approach.

Four protocols

“We now have four different protocols; restore, off feed, fresh and antacid, so the most suitable action is taken,” explains Charlotte. “So, for example, every third-lactation cow or over gets a fresh cow drench, as we have found the older cows are more prone to health issues and this acts as a preventative measure. Or if a cow has a temp of 40°C or over, she is likely to have reduced feed and water intakes, so she will automatically receive an off-feed formula drench alongside the correct treatment. It’s all about getting the right formula to encourage appetites and get the rumen working.”

Hydration is everything, she notes. “Quite often a drench will save a sick cow. It fills the rumen and with the right formula, the yeast can stimulate the bugs in the rumen and turn them around. I’m in no doubt

**“Quite often
a drench will
save a sick cow.”**

“Having this dedicated person ensures every animal of concern is looked at,” says Charlotte. “You want to see cows’ intakes on an upward trajectory after calving, so any animals not achieving this automatically go on a protocol.”

Charlotte works closely with farm vet Sam Potter, from the Hook Norton Vet Group, who offers advice and training to the team. Together they have developed a comprehensive guide to using hydration products in the herd,






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Stomach pumping is an effective way to supplement cow daily fluid needs

this action has prevented displaced abomasums in our herd, which we rarely see now."

Although this is a year-round approach to animal health, it has additional benefits in the hot weather, when dehydration may be more severe. The herd currently averages 11,870 litres, milked three times a day, so water demand is high. "Cows can quickly become dehydrated, so this system helps us avoid health problems," she says.

High risk

Farm vet, Sam Potter, from Hook Norton Veterinary Group, says calving and illness are high risk events that can lead to dehydration in dairy cows. Add in heat stress or a high yield, and that animal can be severely challenged to drink enough water to meet its demands, which - if not met - can lead to many health issues and even death.

"Stomach pumping is a very effective and quick way to supplement the cow's daily fluid requirements, and one that is routinely used at Stocken Farm and targeted to each individual cow's needs," he explains. For example, the fresh cow is given a mixture that provides additional calcium and yeasts to promote normal rumen function and prevent milk fever and ketosis.

Sick cows are given an electrolyte sachet that also replaces sodium, potassium and chloride ions. "Added dextrose can see a quick response in energy, resulting in eating and

drinking. This aids recovery and therefore results in the animal achieving her potential quicker than if she had a slower improvement."

Early intervention with fluid therapy is a positive and practical task that can be done on any farm to reduce the risk of metabolic disease and improve recovery of sick and fresh cows, says Sam. "I've worked a lot with Charlotte and the farm team to establish a system that everyone can use and is effective. With targeted therapies, the farm has seen a successful outcome which will see extended benefits in terms of yield, fertility and longevity."

In the future, Charlotte will continue to focus on the detail and benefits of the specific formulae and ensure the team are all competent in their roles. "I'm so proud of the team we have. They're all so receptive to learning new skills and have genuine compassion for our herd," she says. "It's a real collaboration to do the best for the animals in our care."

Cow drench protocols

Fresh Cow formula - Fresh calvers third lactation or over, and any milking animal over 24 hours after calving with intakes not increasing.

Off Feed formula - Sick animals to promote eating.

Restore formula - Follow up to Off Feed if intakes not increasing (x2)

Antacid formula - Acidosis



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Artificial intelligence data keeps dairy farmer ahead of the game

Dairy farmer Jon Cleave's investment in detecting health issues earlier through internal monitoring technology has streamlined management and improved cow health for nearly a decade at his family's East Youlstone Farm. British Dairying finds out more.

Fifth generation farmer Jon Cleave has always had a keen eye for detail. Based on the North Cornwall/West Devon border, Jon, alongside his wife, Kate; who is also a vet, and son, Dan, run a dairy enterprise at East Youlstone Farm.

The family milks a 190-head herd of Holstein Friesian cross Scandinavian Reds on a 101-ha grass-based system, with cows grazing for around six months of the year. "We started introducing Scandinavian genetics around 15 years ago as our milk contract with Saputo rewards high fat and protein levels for cheese production, alongside a strong focus on herd health," says Jon.



Jon Cleave milks a herd of 190 Holstein Friesian cross Scandinavian Reds

in health, fertility and behaviour. This means they are aware of potential problems before they become more serious.

"There were only a handful of farmers using it at the time, but they were all impressed with what it could do," he says.

With the herd calving all year round, Jon wanted accurate data to improve calving alerts, insemination decisions and early detection of health and fertility issues. "The system has developed a lot since we first started using it. Initially, it flagged heat detection, but now it gives a clear insemination window, showing the optimum time to artificially inseminate (AI) cows," he explains. "Since using the system, we've improved our calving interval and conception rates. When I last looked at the figures, we had probably taken around 25 days off the calving interval."

"A quicker reaction can reduce antibiotic use quite substantially."

Jon says the real game changer is the accuracy of data gathered from core body temperature readings, which are taken from inside the cow every five minutes. "The core temperature means we can stay ahead of any issues arising. It gives us time to tackle any problems before they become a lot worse," he adds.

"The calving alerts, which also rely on internal temperature data, usually come 12 to 24 hours before calving. When cows are housed, I'd say they are more than 95% accurate and if nothing is flagged, you can be fairly confident nothing is going to calve, which makes a big difference to work-life balance."

The family now uses the boluses in heifers before bulling and

With the farm set high above sea level, cow resilience and the ability to perform from grass are essential. The cows are milked twice a day through a 14/28 herringbone parlour and fed homegrown grass silage and bought in concentrates. "We're aiming for about 8,500 litres annually and milk constituents vary with the grazing system, but we are comfortably averaging 3.5-3.6% protein and 4.5-4.6% fat," he says.

Herd health is at the centre of decision-making, and Jon says recent investments have helped improve fertility, reduce mortality and increase efficiency. "We're always looking at where we can improve, so we upgraded the cubicles to boost cow comfort," he says.

Automated monitoring

"Since 2018, every cow has carried a Smaxtec bolus, which is an automated monitoring system that allows us to track each animal individually. To improve efficiency and reduce overheads, we've also invested in robotic scrapers, wind turbines and solar panels, utilising government schemes where available to help with the upfront costs."

The Smaxtec system uses artificial intelligence to interpret data from each cow's bolus and alerts the team via a phone app if there are changes

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insemination based on the system's data, rather than using veterinary-led oestrus synchronisation. "The app stores the cow's data and knows when her last identified heat was. It can then detect abortions and knows if the cow hasn't progressed in calving. It is an invaluable management tool," says Jon.

Alongside the benefits seen in the calving shed, early alerts of potential health issues have reduced vet and medicine costs. "Usually on farms, if a vet comes out to examine a sick animal, one of the first things they will do is take its temperature. But, with the bolus system, we already have a reading, along with the full history, so it is a really useful tool to use alongside the vet," he explains.

Illness indicator

It is particularly useful for identifying mastitis in the dry period, which can be a real challenge because those cows are not coming through the parlour twice a day. "With mastitis, the system gives both a temperature alert and a high temperature alert, which is a very good indicator for illness. We typically get that alert around 12 hours before we would see any visible symptoms.



The smart bolus system sends alerts 12 to 24 hours prior to calving

"Over the eight years we have had the system, we have had around 10 dry cows flagged with mastitis, but it is very rare for us to lose the quarter due to this early intervention," he adds.

This has led to a reduction in antibiotic use. "A quicker reaction can reduce antibiotic use quite substantially and, depending on the treatment used, there may be little or no milk withdrawal."

Nutrition monitoring has also been a useful indicator when cows are unwell. "Rumination, water intake and activity are important to monitor anyway, but when a cow is unwell, we know if she is hydrated and actually getting up to drink," explains Jon. "It is also useful for freshly calved cows, because good fluid intake is an important part of making sure she transitions well into milk."

With round-the-clock monitoring, the Cleave family has found a better work-life balance, simplified farm practices and given confidence to the less experienced staff. "Even if you're on holiday, the system helps you plan so if a cow is likely to calve, you can ask staff to do a night-time check or log into the CCTV yourself from wherever you are," says Jon.

"Since there are fewer people living on the farm, the system gives us and the staff much more confidence, particularly at night - it's like having an extra pair of eyes. There is no substitute for looking over an animal, but the app gives you both current and historic information, which helps build a clearer picture of what might be wrong."

Looking ahead, the focus is not on expanding cow numbers, but on continuing to improve efficiency, energy use and the overall resilience of the business. "We are probably close to where we want to be in terms of herd size, so the focus now is on doing things better rather than simply getting bigger," he says. "Thanks to the technology, we can keep making refinements. We've seen small changes make a big difference to the herd and ourselves."

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Rethinking gram-negative mastitis

Gram-negative mastitis is typically blamed on a dirty environment – but new research suggests that it's more complicated than that, with a close link to nutrition. Italian vet Dr Pierangelo Cattaneo reports on his presentation to the British Mastitis Conference.

For many decades, acute gram-negative mastitis, like that caused by *E. coli*, has been explained mainly by a simple mechanism. This is that bacteria from the environment enter the mammary gland through the teat canal; a process often associated with contaminated bedding, manure, poor hygiene, or milking errors. This view is still widely accepted by many dairy advisers and veterinarians.

However, recent research has highlighted a more complex scenario, suggesting that what happens inside the cow's digestive system may strongly influence how susceptible she becomes to severe mastitis and how intensely she responds to infection, especially during the challenging period of early lactation.

Energy demands

To support the extremely high energy demands of modern dairy production, cows are commonly fed diets rich in starch and rapidly fermentable carbohydrates during the first weeks of lactation. While these feeds are essential to sustain milk production, they can also increase the risk of subacute ruminal acidosis (SARA).

During SARA, the delicate balance of the rumen and intestinal microbiota is disrupted. This disturbance can lead to increased death of gram-negative bacteria, releasing large amounts of lipopolysaccharides (LPS) from their cell walls. The most biologically active component of LPS, known as Lipid A, is responsible for triggering



Dr Pierangelo Cattaneo shared his report at the British Mastitis Conference

strong inflammatory reactions in the animal.

Under normal conditions, the intestinal lining acts as a highly selective barrier, preventing harmful substances from entering the bloodstream. However, metabolic stress, inflammation, and ruminal disturbances can weaken this protection by affecting the tight junctions, the structures that keep intestinal cells closely connected.

As intestinal permeability increases; a condition often referred to as leaky gut, bacterial components like LPS can cross the intestinal barrier and reach the circulation. Once in the bloodstream, these endotoxins are detected by immune receptors, activating a powerful inflammatory response throughout the body.

More liquid passes through the mammary gland than almost any other tissue in the dairy cow. Approximately 400–500 litres of blood are required to produce one litre of milk, meaning that the udder is continuously exposed to circulating nutrients, metabolites, and inflammatory signals.

When the bloodstream carries elevated levels of endotoxins and inflammatory mediators, the mammary tissue may become more vulnerable to an exaggerated immune

reaction. The result can be severe inflammation, a sudden reduction in milk production, fever, and the clinical signs commonly associated with acute *E. coli* mastitis.

Current evidence suggests that *E. coli* mastitis is more than simply a local disease of the udder. Increasing evidence indicates that intestinal health, microbiota balance, metabolic status, and systemic inflammation all contribute to determining how severely a cow responds to infection.

Therefore, mastitis prevention should go beyond environmental hygiene and teat disinfection alone. Nutritional management, prevention of SARA, maintenance of gut integrity, and reduction of systemic inflammation are equally important components of a comprehensive strategy.

Gut-udder connection

Rather than replacing the traditional explanation of *E. coli* mastitis, the gut-udder connection expands our understanding of the disease. It highlights that the mammary gland does not function in isolation, but is influenced by the overall health, metabolism, and immune status of the entire animal.

How often are sterile milk samples taken during acute mastitis, only for the results to be disappointing, from

a certain point of view, because no bacteria are detected or because ubiquitous bacteria are reported which have little to do with the clinical picture we were faced with?

This evolving understanding of *E. coli* mastitis requires a broader approach to prevention. If systemic inflammation and intestinal health influence the severity of disease, then mastitis control cannot rely only on measures applied at the udder level.

Excellent milking hygiene, proper teat disinfection, and clean housing conditions remain essential, particularly for preventing contagious mastitis pathogens and reducing environmental exposure.

However, environmental control alone cannot fully protect cows that are already compromised by metabolic stress and impaired immune function. A cow with a disrupted gut barrier and excessive systemic inflammation may be less capable of controlling bacterial challenges, even when hygiene practices are excellent.

“Intramammary antibiotics should be avoided.”

Preventing severe gram-negative mastitis requires a strong focus on transition cow management, especially during the critical period surrounding calving and early lactation.

Key strategies include:

- Aiming to reduce the risk of SARA
- Aiming to maintain a stable rumen environment
- Aiming to support a balanced intestinal microbiota
- Aiming to preserve intestinal barrier integrity
- Aiming to minimise excessive inflammatory responses.

By shifting our attention from the external environment to the internal physiology of the cow, we can develop a more complete strategy for protecting mammary health. The udder should not be considered an

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isolated organ, but rather as part of a complex biological system in which nutrition, metabolism, immunity, and gut function are closely interconnected.

This broader understanding also influences how we approach the treatment of severe *E. coli* mastitis. Treatment must certainly include appropriate veterinary evaluation and, when indicated, the use of antimicrobial therapy, especially in cases where viable bacteria are present within the mammary gland. However, in many severe gram-negative infections, the clinical damage is not caused by the bacteria themselves, but by the intense inflammatory response triggered by bacterial components like LPS.

Therefore, successful treatment requires more than simply eliminating bacteria. It must also support the cow's ability to restore normal physiological balance and control the systemic effects of inflammation. Important therapeutic goals include:

- Aiming to reduce the impact of endotoxemia
- Aiming to support circulation and hydration
- Aiming to control inflammation



A ration can affect each cow differently due to their unique metabolisms

- Aiming to restore feed intake and metabolic stability
- Aiming to help the immune system return to normal function.

Treatment guidelines are a direct consequence of understanding how the disease develops. General guidelines must then be assessed with your vet on a case-by-case basis, depending on the severity of the mastitis, the stage of lactation, the cow's age and her breed.

One important point is not to focus exclusively on the condition of the udder, but to carry out a full examination of the cow. Check her rumination, temperature, intestinal bloating and faeces consistency, as well as her cardiac function; this will provide important guidance on treatment. The first rule is to counteract the severe LPS toxicity and preserve the integrity of the blood circulation.

First of all, ideally isolate the cow, although this may not always be possible, so conditions must be created to enable the administration of a complete change in the diet, reducing the ration by 40% and replacing it with grass hay for at least three days. Due to the mastitis, her milk production will be extremely low, so a reduced ration will not pose any additional risk, for example, of ketosis.

As soon as possible after mastitis has been detected, I recommend administering 7.2% hypertonic sodium chloride solution: For a cow weighing 650kg, administer 2.5 litres intravenously

via a 14G jugular catheter over 10 minutes.

To this solution, 30IU of oxytocin may be added, and if the cow is not pregnant, dexamethasone - 30 years of clinical practice has taught me that this is an important point. Intramammary antibiotics should be avoided, while systemic antibiotics should only be administered if there is hyperthermia, or treatment where conditions warrant it - for example, in cases of particularly loose faeces, cows with concomitant conditions, or other factors that your vet can assess.

In conjunction with this treatment, a 20-litre drench should be administered. After approximately 12 hours, I advise following up with Ringer's lactate supplemented with flunixin meglumine and oxytocin; this will help the cow to restore her mineral balance. Then, depending on the cow's general condition, the treatment should be tailored to her needs.

Appropriate response

Early intervention greatly improves the likelihood of a favourable outcome, although the response will always depend on the severity of the disease and the individual cow.

When a cow develops acute *E. coli* mastitis, the question should not only be: 'Were the cubicles clean enough? Or were the teats disinfected correctly?' Those factors remain important, but a broader question must also be considered: 'What happened to this cow's metabolic and intestinal health that allowed such a severe inflammatory response to develop?'

By improving gut health, supporting transition management, and reducing metabolic stress, we may unlock new opportunities to prevent and reduce one of the dairy industry's most challenging diseases.



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Tips for preventing cryptosporidiosis

Boosting the robustness of a calf's gut by feeding plenty of clean colostrum and a tailored milk replacer is part of cryptosporidiosis control, as British Dairying reports.

Reducing pathogen challenges and maximising calf robustness are key when it comes to winning the ongoing battle with cryptosporidiosis. Cryptosporidiosis, which is caused by a protozoan parasite, is the most common cause of infectious scour in GB, according to MSD Animal Health's National Youngstock Survey 2020. Its impact is significant, causing reduced growth rates, high treatment and labour costs and increasing the likelihood of calves suffering from other diseases like pneumonia or even death.

It is a big issue regardless of calving pattern and requires a multi-pronged preventative strategy guided by a vet. "You need to take a holistic look from the dry cows, through to the calving pens because it is multi-factorial," explains Lucy Hepworth, Vet at Friars Moor Livestock Health.

The foundation of a strategy is lowering pathogen challenge in the



Getting calf nutrition right is part of making robust calves, says Alan Smith

calving environment and boosting the robustness of the calf's gut by feeding plenty of quality colostrum as well as a calf milk replacer (CMR) that's easy to digest, she says.

"Crypto can take advantage of a calf that's already compromised in some way. It may be that the calf has already got bacterial load in the gut from drinking dirty colostrum, for example," she explains. "The happier and healthier the gut, the more resilient the calf."

There are six main areas for attention:

1. Prioritise colostrum

Feeding plenty of clean, high-quality colostrum quickly is fundamental to building calf robustness so it's better equipped to fight off disease challenge. Colostrum contains immunoglobulins or natural cow antibodies which are essential for protecting the calf from pathogens before its own immune system has matured.

Monitor colostrum antibody levels and aim to feed colostrum measuring over 22% on a Brix refractometer or in the green zone on a colostrumeter. Aim to deliver 10% of the calf's body weight within two hours of birth.

Harvest colostrum cleanly and then feed it within an hour as bacteria can double every 20 minutes out of the fridge. Alternatively, it should be quickly refrigerated for up to 48 hours or frozen.

2. Choose replacer carefully

Choose a CMR that's easy for the calf to digest.

"Know what you're feeding and its ingredients, and talk to a trusted adviser who knows what those ingredients are," Lucy says.

Feeding a CMR made of all dairy protein can be beneficial in calves which are exposed to challenge.

"You've got to give the calf the best nutritional chance it can get," says Alan Smith, Business Manager at Feed for Growth (Volac Milk Replacer). "That's all part of the jigsaw in making the calf more robust. Whole milk protein is highly digestible so if a calf is under challenge, it's worth choosing a CMR that is made from concentrated whey protein or skim."

It's also worth considering what additional health packages are included in a CMR. This might be natural ingredients that support gut health and the immune system, like garlic-derived products, the resin of coniferous trees or hydrolysed yeast.

"Calf pens should be mucked out, steam cleaned and disinfected."

The CMR Imunogard is made from 100% dairy whey protein concentrate and includes the hydrolysed yeast culture Celmanax which claims to improve gut function and mitigate the effects of some harmful pathogens. A study published in the Journal of Animal Science showed that calves supplemented with Celmanax shed three times fewer crypto oocysts than those which were not, helping to reduce the spread of disease.

Be fastidious when weighing out CMR and ensure a consistent mix at the appropriate concentration, as this will reduce pressure on the calf's gut.

3. Focus on cleanliness

Cryptosporidiosis oocysts are shed in the faeces of infected cows and calves, so preventing calves from being exposed to contaminated material - be it bedding, food or water - should be a priority. And this starts by ensuring calves are born into a clean environment.

"Calves will multiply up the crypto challenge, so calf pens should be mucked out, steam cleaned and disinfected and rested between groups," says Lucy. Choosing the right disinfectant is

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important. "Use a disinfectant that's effective against crypto and at the mixing rate given for crypto. Make sure you work out the dilution rate and leave it for the minimum contact time for that disinfectant," she adds.

People handling livestock can also be a source of infection via contaminated clothing so ideally footwear should be disinfected between pens and separate wellies and waterproofs used in the youngstock areas.

4. Clean feeding equipment

Ensure equipment washing protocols are in place and followed, including everything from buckets to teats and milk taxis, as this will help to prevent and remove bacteria biofilms.

"A biofilm is usually undetectable by eye but in extreme cases can cause a yellow or white scum," Alan explains.

"These biofilms release bacteria and contaminate the milk every time equipment is used, placing the calf under disease pressure, so it's vital to have an effective cleaning routine."

To control biofilms, the initial rinse water should not be too hot.



It's important to take a holistic approach, says Vet Lucy Hepworth

Ideally, rinse with water at 32-28°C, soak in water at 54-57°C with a liquid detergent, scrub, wash at 50°C, rinse again, add a sanitiser and dry.

To efficiently clean, it's important to use both a detergent and disinfectant. An easy-mixing CMR will also mean less residues on feeding equipment, making them easier to clean.

5. Consider vaccination

Vaccinating cows against cryptosporidiosis can be a useful tool as part of a control strategy.

"By vaccinating the cow, antibodies to the disease are passed to the calf via colostrum and transition milk, and the full benefit is seen when colostrum/transition milk is fed for the first five days," says Lucy.

"It's for when you've got all those other things right. If you've got too many bacteria in colostrum/milk, rotavirus in the background or are feeding a less digestible CMR, you need to address that first," she explains. Vaccinating dams against rotavirus, coronavirus

and E. coli can also help to reduce disease challenge from these specific pathogens and reduce pressure on the calf.

6. Identify and treat promptly

Be quick to pick up and treat scour cases. Give a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) for pain relief and electrolytes as soon as a calf has noticeably reduced its milk intake, says Lucy.

Dehydration is one of the main causes of death from cryptosporidiosis, so by treating early, calves are likely to be off their milk for less time and more likely to recover.

"Dehydration can cause a calf to become acidotic and lose their suck reflex - and that's part of the demise of a dehydrated calf," Lucy explains.

"Make sure you choose an appropriate electrolyte to address dehydration and acidosis, as not all electrolytes are the same. And create a rehydration protocol with your vet that all staff can follow."

Tackling cryptosporidiosis begins with an in-depth look at the risks with a trusted adviser, followed by a focus on which areas will have the most beneficial impact on reducing the disease.



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Backing himself: From Farm Manager to Dairy Business Owner

With no family farm to inherit and little capital behind him, Pembrokeshire dairy farmer Joe Doyle has built his own route into milk production through determination, sound business planning and a willingness to back himself. Just over a year after taking control of Southern Pitts, he is already looking towards the next opportunity.

For young people entering dairy farming, access to land and capital remain two of the biggest barriers. For Joe Doyle, neither was readily available.

Born in rural West Cork to an Irish father and Pembrokeshire mother, Joe grew up in Ireland but spent holidays on his grandparents' Pembrokeshire dairy farm.

"That's where the interest came from, my grandfather," he says.

Unfortunately, there was no obvious route into the family business. His grandparents had a son who would succeed them, meaning Joe knew he would have to create his own opportunity.

At 15, he returned to Pembrokeshire and enrolled at Gelli Aur College, studying agriculture and dairy business management. He later spent 18 months working for Richard Anthony near Bridgend, gaining experience in lambing, arable farming and soil science.

"Richard deserves a lot of credit. I learnt a lot from him," says Joe.

It also confirmed what he didn't want to do. At 17 he moved in with his grandparents and worked for a silage contractor. A year later, aged 18, he arrived at Southern Pitts.

From farm manager to business owner

Joe initially managed the dairy for its owner Richard Morris before increasingly taking responsibility for the whole operation.

"I ran the place as if it was my own."

By 2022–23, discussions had begun about Southern Pitts potentially becoming Joe's opportunity.

"He said to me, 'If I can use Southern Pitts to set you up, it's done more than I'd ever have wanted.'"

There was one condition: Joe had to find the money.

The route to finance began at Narberth Grassland, where Joe heard Huw Tudor speak on behalf of Oxbury Bank about its NewGen scheme for new entrants. It prompted a conversation with Richard about buying the business. His response was straightforward: if Joe could raise the money, he could buy it.

With the business valued at around £1.3m, Huw visited Southern Pitts and Joe worked with CARA to develop the business plan and financial forecasts required for funding.

When the proposal reached Oxbury's lending panel, Joe was asked what his biggest worry about taking on the business was

"If you give me the money, I don't have any worries." Was Joe's answer

The £1.3m deal was funded without a deposit, with the strength of the business plan and confidence in the person running it fundamental to securing finance. Repayments were structured around the dairy's seasonal cash flow. Based around a 15-year lease, the deal saw Joe formally take control on 1st April 2025 with 500 acres and 400 cows.

Building a 500 cow business

Today Southern Pitts operates across approximately 750 acres milking 480 cows, with the aim of establishing a strong, sustainable 500-cow unit.

Previously a strict 12-week spring-calving herd, Joe has introduced an autumn block, both to capitalise on autumn milk and create a more level production profile.

"I genuinely think going forward milk buyers don't want the block-calving milk," he says.



The business has faced a challenging milk-price environment, receiving 26p/litre at its lowest against a cost of production of approximately 35p litre. Yet Joe remains positive.

"To me it's still surreal. I've been gearing myself up for years for this."

He credits surrounding himself with progressive farmers and advisers as an important part of that mindset.

"When you're around people who do a good job, you listen to your peers. I think it's important to talk to people who are doing a good job."

Breeding Efficiency

The herd has changed considerably. Originally based around a 450kg Jersey-cross-Holstein, Joe began breeding towards a larger Holstein-type cow, initially using Alta genetics.

Cow size moved towards 600kg, but Joe wanted to retain Friesian influence, leading to a switch to Cogent in 2024. The target is now a robust 600kg Holstein-Friesian cross producing around 8,000 litres and 500–550kg of milk solids. Last year's average was around 7,500 litres.

The herd aims to have a 28% replacement rate however 7% more heifers are bred to allow for herd expansion. Joe has also become more decisive on culling.

"Before, we'd give a cow more of a chance. Now, if she's not putting milk out, we get them gone. We need to keep more efficient cows rather than just numbers."

Cows leaving the business have averaged around £1,100/head over the past year, with Joe targeting £1,300 through improved nutrition and condition.

Don't be afraid to feed cows

Nutrition has been another major change. Drought conditions have increased supplementary feeding, with concentrate use expected at two tonnes per cow. Around 60–70% of the diet remains grass.

"The biggest thing I've learned is not being afraid to feed cows," says Joe. "It's a big bill, but it takes courage to feed these cows properly. Feed a cow and she'll look after you."

Joe places particular emphasis on the dry cow period, with cows split into two groups and fed diets tailored to their stage of pregnancy. Far-off dry cows receive 1kg of dry cow blend alongside grass silage and straw. At 21 days pre-calving, they move into the close-up group, where the ration is stepped up to include grass silage, maize, 3kg of dry cow blend and a dedicated dry cow mineral.

The results speak for themselves. This year, Joe has calved 480 cows, and experienced minimal cases of milk fever. Retained cleansings have only occurred in cows carrying twins, which is a strong reflection of the attention paid to transition cow nutrition and management.

Cows start calving in mid-March, aligning freshly-calved cows with increasing daylight, grass growth and turnout. Cows then progress towards day-and-night grazing, but are buffer fed 8kg of maize silage and 8kgs of grass silage along with a starch based blend. The protein of the blend is balanced to take into account the high protein levels in spring grass.

It reflects Joe's wider philosophy: no system is retained simply because that is how it has always been done.

Heifer replacements are a crucial part of the business. This year, calves were fed whole milk due to the low milk price, but Joe plans to return to milk replacer for the autumn-calving group. He feels calves performed better on milk replacer and credits this to the greater consistency that milk powder provides.

Maintaining daily liveweight gain (DLWG) remains a priority throughout the grazing season. Heifers are regularly weighed, with smaller animals identified and managed separately with additional concentrate. This helps ensure they reach the required serving weight of 330kg by 13 months, keeping them on track to achieve the target of calving at two years of age.

Back yourself

Over the next five years, Joe wants to consolidate Southern Pitts as an efficient 500-cow unit then go again. "The next five years involves maintaining a strong 500-cow unit at Southern Pitts and then looking at the next opportunity with another unit."

As a tenant farmer, land represents long-term security.

"The best way to secure your future is land. That's what we'll be working towards, buying a farm and doing it again."

His other motivation is his family. Joe has two young sons, Owen, seven, and Freddy, six.

Despite the demands of combining a young family with farming, he wouldn't change the path he has chosen.

His advice to other aspiring farmers without an inherited farm is equally straightforward.

"Back yourself. Surround yourself with positive people who are actually doing a good job. Take advice from people who have actually done it."

From little capital and no farm to inherit to securing £1.3m of funding and building towards a 500-cow dairy business, Joe's story shows what can happen when opportunity meets preparation.

And just over a year after taking control, he is already looking for the opportunity to do it again.

By Rebecca Davies (Head of technical services Wynnstay Group PLC)

Reducing dietary protein to support margins

Dairy farmers who challenge dietary protein levels are discovering that there are benefits for margins, welfare and environmental impact, as British Dairying finds out.

Proteins are an expensive core ingredient in dairy rations, yet UK dairy farmers are feeding more protein than required. Pushing up costs, while increasing nitrogen excretions, this can impact on the environment and have health and welfare repercussions.

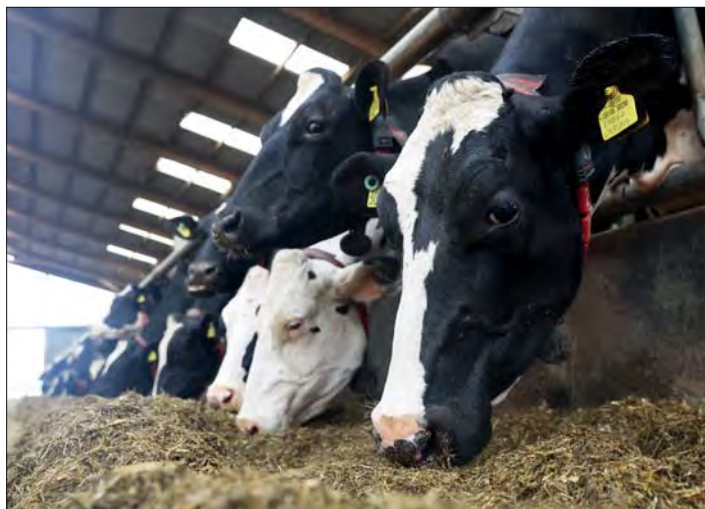
"Dairy rations in the UK typically include higher crude protein levels than other major milk producing countries, typically at 17-18%," says Dr Phil Holder at molasses blends specialist ED&F Man. "With margins under continuing high pressure it will be important to challenge all aspects of nutrition to drive production efficiencies. Are all ingredients needed at current levels and can we be more precise?"

"The standard approach has been to overfeed protein in the diet."

"Protein is a good place to start, given the rising prices and volatility of these ingredients and the concerns around EU Deforestation Regulations. We know that most dairy diets are being formulated to oversupply protein in order to meet demands."

Cows don't actually need protein, but amino acids, which are the building blocks that make up protein. These amino acids are used by the animal to produce different types of proteins, including milk proteins.

All proteins are made up of combinations of 20 different amino acids, with 10 of these being 'essential', meaning they must be supplied in the diet. A significant proportion of dietary protein is broken down into ammonia and amino acids in the rumen. Rebuilt in the rumen into microbial protein, this then passes into the small



An estimated 90% of dairy diets are deficient in the amino acid methionine

intestine to supply amino acids to the cow. An effective diet must supply all the amino acids required by the cow to produce microbial protein.

This is not directly linked to the amount of protein fed. As soon as an amino acid becomes limiting, i.e. not enough to meet the cow's requirements, the cow's performance is affected.

In most UK dairy diets, methionine is the first limiting amino acid, with an estimated 90% of diets being deficient.

Imprecision

"To ensure that the cow is supplied with enough of all the amino acids, the standard approach has been to overfeed protein in the diet in the hope of meeting amino acid demand," notes Phil.

"This is imprecise and pushes up protein use and costs. Excessive protein feeding increases nitrogen excretion, either as urea in the urine or the manure, contributing to environmental pollution. And farmers get no return on the cost of protein ingredients." Removal of excess protein by the cow requires around 0.8MJ per 100g, meaning less energy is able to be utilised productively. It can also increase

milk and blood urea levels, which are known to impact on fertility.

It is possible to be more precise in feeding protein, supplementing diets with specific amino acids. This means farmers can reduce the total amount of protein fed, cutting costs and improving the efficiency with which protein is used.

"The majority of herds in the US and many European countries are fed diets formulated for balanced amino acid supply, and are closer to 15% crude protein, which is a significant reduction," says Phil. "The question has to be why can't we do the same here?"

Supplementation

Supplementing diets with sources of rapidly fermentable carbohydrates like sugars is proven to enhance rumen nitrogen capture and reduce nitrogen losses by improving microbial protein synthesis. Microbial protein is the cheapest protein source for the cow, so needs to be optimised, he explains. This can be done by supplying a synchronised balance of energy and protein to the rumen to enhance rumen efficiency.

At this year's British and Irish Society of Animal Science (BISAS) conference, new research was

presented from Reading University, funded by ED&F Man. The trial assessed whether the nitrogen efficiency benefits of feeding sugars were retained in reduced protein diets. In addition, it explored whether methionine supplementation offered additional advantages.

In the trial, three groups of Holstein cows were fed different diets over a nine-week period. The first was a conventional farm control diet with around 17.5% crude protein, while the other two diets were formulated to 15.5% protein. One used Regumix; a 27% protein, highly palatable, molasses-based liquid, while the other included Regusmart; a molasses liquid based on Regumix but with added methionine (MetaSmart from Adisseo).

"Look to formulate lower crude protein diets with supplementation."

The diets were designed to test how cows perform when crude protein is reduced but amino acid balance, especially methionine, is optimised. In the lower protein diets, 1.1kg of a protein blend was replaced with 1.4kg of either Regumix or Regusmart.

The results showed no difference in milk yield across the three diets, despite two having lower protein levels. Where diets were balanced for methionine milk quality was improved (see table). A 0.1-0.2% increase in milk protein combined with a 0.1% increase in milk fat is worth 15-30p/cow per day, depending on the milk contract, notes Phil.

But the real difference came in how efficiently protein was used. Total protein efficiency (TPE), which measures how much milk protein is produced per unit of dietary protein,



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improved significantly in both liquid feed groups. This shows that better use is being made of the protein fed, so reducing waste.

The Regumix group reached 0.32 TPE. The Regusmart group, which received additional methionine, achieved a TPE of 0.34; a 17% improvement in protein efficiency compared to the control of 0.29 TPE, without feeding more, and without compromising performance.

"This has significant implications on farm," says Phil. "Higher TPE means more of the protein you buy is converted into saleable milk protein and less is excreted as waste. This reduces nitrogen loading in slurry, helping meet environmental goals, while also reducing the metabolic burden on the cow. Lower milk urea levels were seen in both the liquid feed groups, indicating improved nitrogen metabolism and lower rumen ammonia. From a fertility standpoint, that matters."

Trial results

Cows on the ReguSmart diet showed better body condition scores in late lactation, indicating better energy balance. "The results demonstrate that it is worth challenging traditional protein levels when constructing diets with your nutritionist this winter," he adds. "Look to formulate lower crude protein diets with appropriate supplementation as a way to offset the impact of higher protein commodity prices squeezing margins."

Using the trial results, the reduction in crude protein would be equivalent to reducing soya inclusion by 0.3kg/cow per day with no impact on milk yield, but with significant costs and environmental benefits. For a 250-cow herd, fed a total mixed ration for 200 days, the saving would be 15t of soya, explains Phil.



Dr Phil Holder at ED&F Man

"With higher protein grass silage being reported this year, nutritionists may look to supplement silages with lower protein concentrates to reduce diet costs, while still supplying the same total dietary protein. But this will still leave cows overfed protein.

"An alternative approach should be to first challenge the total protein in the diet, looking to reduce dietary protein levels. Meet cow requirements more accurately and then look at ingredients, rather than leaving total protein the same and hoping to reduce protein in concentrates," he continues.

"Precision feeding with molasses-based liquid feeds and amino acid balancing is a sustainable alternative to traditional high crude protein diets and will help support margins this winter. The starting point is to be prepared to challenge convention and get your nutritionist to formulate a lower protein content."

Diet	Control	Low protein no extra methionine	Low protein balanced methionine
Formulated CP%	17.5	15.5	15.5
DMI (kg/day)	23.6	23.5	23.6
Milk fat (%)	4.34	4.35	4.42
Milk protein (%)	3.14	3.12	3.21
Urea (mg/kg)	242	162	170
Total protein efficiency	0.29	0.32	0.34

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A whole-farm approach for high-performance

With milk market volatility putting continued pressure on dairy margins, building efficient, resilient herds is becoming increasingly important. British Dairying reports.

The most successful dairy businesses are shown to be taking a whole-farm approach, recognising that nutrition, health, mobility, fertility, cow comfort and management all have a role to play. And it's the interactions between them that are just as important as each individual piece of the puzzle.

"Market volatility has become a reality for dairy farmers over the past five to 10 years," said Eoghan Mullery, Technical Director at Advanced Ruminant Nutrition (ARN). "That makes efficiency increasingly important - but efficiency isn't simply about producing more milk. It is about making sure the whole system is working as effectively as possible."

This was a key message emerging from a recent series of meetings held by ARN with dairy producers across Devon, Lancashire and Dumfriesshire. The meetings brought together specialists from



ARN meetings were held across Devon, Lancashire and Dumfriesshire

across the dairy sector to examine the different factors influencing herd performance, with emphasis on practical measures that producers can introduce.

"A whole farm approach requires the farm team to be working together," said Eoghan. "And for the top-performing herds, that team includes their nutritionist, vet, foot trimmer and financial advisers."

"The more progressive a farm is, the more progressive our approach needs to be," he added. "Our role is to provide cutting-edge nutritional and management advice that supports the whole team around the farm. An integrated approach is key across the whole team, the herd and the environment."

Nutrition can influence many parts of the system; for example,

transition management influences fertility and calf health can determine future productivity. "What we need to do as farm advisers, producers, nutritionists and vets is to understand the value of these interrelationships," he said.

The meetings picked up on these interrelationships, utilising some of the partners that ARN already collaborates with on farm.

Market volatility

Chris Walkland set the scene with his market analysis and outlook, highlighting the factors producers can't control, and the importance of efficiency and resilience in the face of volatile markets. "Over the past year, producers have faced significant market volatility and a prolonged downturn," he said.

"But we are now beginning to see conditions move in a more favourable direction. However, with prices largely out of the farmers' control,

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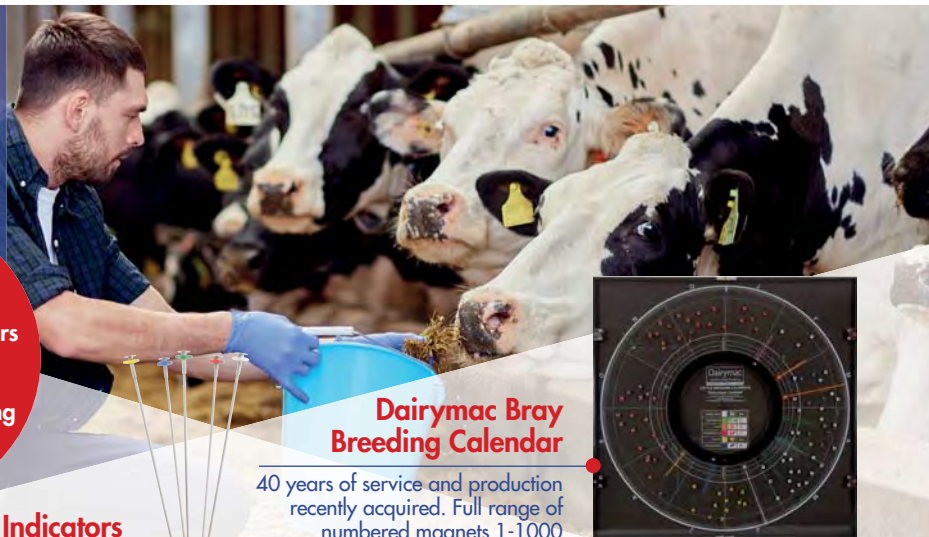
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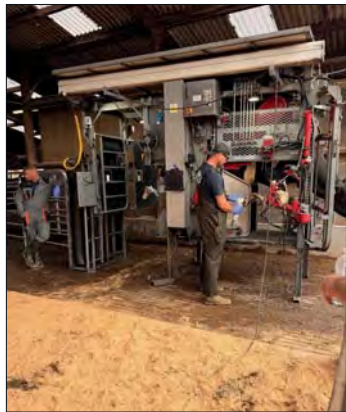
their focus needs to be on what they can control. So improving efficiency and strengthening profitability become even more important."

Travelling over from France, Marie-Laure Ocana at Zinpro Europe focused on the factors that allow cows to express their genetic potential. While genetics establish the potential of the animal, she highlighted the importance of management from birth in determining how much of that potential is ultimately realised. Her presentation also covered research into isoacids and muscle depth in transition cows, reinforcing the importance of getting the foundations right throughout the cow's development and productive life.

"There are many things that farmers simply can't control."

Ensuring good management in the dry period underpins future performance, as this allows for better fertility. One particular area is making sure there is enough protein fed in critical stages, as in late pregnancy and early lactation, there can be muscle condition loss. And although body condition scoring is common, she suggested that muscle depth does play a crucial role in overall cow resilience.

Grooved flooring and hoof trimming specialist Joe Kirby at Kirby Cattle Services shared his practical experience of hoof health and trimming, alongside Leigh Fletcher from LMF footcare. The team at ARN works with Joe through its mobility programme, with the relationship providing an example of how nutritional and practical expertise can complement one another.



Leigh Fletcher at LMF footcare



Joe Kirby at Kirby Cattle Services

Veterinary expertise came from Colin Mason at CMVet Consultancy, who reinforced the importance of preventative herd health. His recommendations included managing disease pressure alongside immunity, preventing lameness rather than simply treating it once established, and paying close attention to calving management, hypocalcaemia and heat stress.

These sessions demonstrated that having a comprehensive mobility strategy - beyond just footbathing and foot trimming - can have a big impact on herd productivity. It's important to understand the causes of lameness and assess the cow environment too.

In Devon, Phil Elkins at FarmWater highlighted an often-overlooked part of the production system - water. High-producing cows have a substantial demand for clean, readily available drinking water, yet water quality and availability can sometimes receive less attention than other aspects of herd management.

Efficient and effective

"The challenge is that there are many things affecting a dairy business that farmers simply can't control," said Eoghan. "What they can control is how efficiently their cows perform, how effectively they manage their resources and how well the different parts of the business work together."

For high-performing herds, the message is that there is rarely one area of focus. Instead, sustained performance comes from consistency and a team approach to understand how every part of the system works together.

"It's about understanding what is happening across the whole system and identifying where the real bottlenecks are, and making a series of good decisions throughout every stage of the cow's lifecycle, from calf rearing and transition management through to hoof health, cow comfort and longevity."

Q Fever

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- *Coxiella b.* can be carried on the wind^{3,4,5}
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This information was provided by Ceva Animal Health Ltd, makers of Coxevac® COXEVAC® suspension for injection for cattle, sheep and goats contains inactivated *Coxiella burnetii*, strain Nine Mile 72 QF Unit/ml. *Q-fever Unit: relative potency of phase I antigen measured by ELISA in comparison with a reference item. LEGAL CATEGORY: UK [POM-V] For further information, please refer to the product SPC, data sheet or pack insert. Prescription decisions are for the person issuing the prescription alone. Use medicines responsibly (www.noah.co.uk/responsible)

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Precision nutrition for future resilience

Ensuring feed efficiency is not only key for profitability but sustainability too. And forage analysis technology could play a part in achieving it. British Dairying reports.

Future government policy direction was outlined in the Farming Roadmap 2050, released in June 2026. One message was the need for a stronger focus on feed efficiency, and ultimately nutrient balance. This was part of an overall emphasis on targeted inputs, improving production, and reducing nutrient losses to the environment.

Processor incentives and standards reiterate the Roadmap goals, with strong emphasis around feed and protein efficiency, making a focus on precision nutrition a key consideration for dairy producers. “While we should always strive to improve, the reality is that as an industry, we need to embrace innovation, data and technology to help drive nutrient efficiency now, if we are to support a resilient dairy sector for the future,” says Anna Dinsdale, Ruminant Technical Manager at Trident MicroNutri.



Feed management systems can track exactly what is going into the ration

“This future government policy direction, along with current processor incentives and advantage programmes, only reinforces the

position. This is not an aspirational approach any more, it is a must, for the here and now, and embracing it can bring rewards in terms of milk payments and herd performance, as well as reduced waste and carbon emissions,” she adds.

And the tools already exist to help drive decision-making and improve feed and nutrient efficiency. For example, making use of on-farm data to help tailor strategies, and applying feed intelligence to understand the baseline of rations and make the most of homegrown forages, can all help to optimise feed use.

The six rations

“The starting point is getting the ration right - but what do we mean by that? It can be argued that there are six rations on farm; the one that is formulated, the one purchased, the one loaded, the ration that is fed out, the one the cows actually eat, and the ration that is left,” she says.

“In theory, these six potential rations should have little variation from diet formulation to feed left over at the end of the day. But even if using a fantastic rationing programme, it can still potentially fall down, if the recipe has not been followed correctly, or if it has not been weighed properly.”

Feed management systems like Feedlync, with its load accuracy feature and reports, can provide an indicator of whether the ration that has been formulated is what is being weighed into the mixer wagon.

“We have seen a direct correlation between a ‘green’ loading accuracy dashboard; indicating the recipe has been followed and weighed accurately, with very consistent milk yields, every day,” says Anna. “On farms where accuracy has fallen slightly, which will be indicated by more reds and ambers on the dashboard, it is very evident in the bulk tank yield, and we have seen significant fluctuations from one day to the next.

“In one example, results recorded the day after the loading accuracy had been flagged as red, and the ration had therefore not been weighed according to the formulated recipe, we saw a drop of nearly four litres per cow. That is a significant impact on performance, by simply not weighing out properly,” she adds.

“The important thing is to regularly analyse your silage.”

Ultimately, before the ration is formulated, the key is to establish the baseline by understanding the nutrient provision for forages. “Forage is probably the most variable feedstuff in the ration, with different cuts from different fields in different growing conditions, meaning changes in quality can be vast, even across a single clamp,” explains Anna. “We may have got it weighed out



NIR technology can analyse forage

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properly, but crucially, we need to understand the nutritional content of what is being weighed as best we can.”

This is why the use of near infra-red (NIR) spectroscopy, to provide accurate predictions of the nutritional components of forages, is key to optimising diet formulation and ensuring quality control. “The important thing is to regularly analyse your silage,” she says. “Using technology like a handheld NIR (HHNIR) makes analysing regularly simpler, with results being displayed in seconds.”

The ‘W’ method

It is also key to take samples from multiple points of the clamp, by applying the ‘W’ method. “Picture a giant W across the front of your clamp - we want to ideally be taking nine samples, along the top, middle and bottom points of each line of the W. You are therefore testing across the width and height of the face of the clamp,” she says. “If we are being honest, do we do this every time? Or do we just walk up to the clamp, take a sample and analyse that?”

Results can vary widely across the clamp. “We have seen examples showing variations of more than



Ideally take nine samples in a ‘W’ pattern across the front of the clamp

15% dry matter (DM) across the nine samples taken from a clamp face using the ‘W’ method, and protein varying by more than 3%, so taking a single sample leaves you open to a less representative analysis of what is in the clamp.”

For example, if protein levels are underestimated, and cows are subsequently supplemented with additional protein sources, the protein efficiency of the herd could be compromised. Nitrogen efficiency will also be impacted, with more nitrogen excreted and associated wastage and environmental impacts.

“Conversely, if you overestimate, and fail to feed enough additional protein, then the cow may not be supplied with the nutrients required to perform to her full genetic potential,” says Anna. “If we know what the foundation is, we know what the additional bought in requirement is for the herd, and we can help avoid under- or over-supplying.”

Sampling frequency

By increasing sampling frequency, the producer can get ahead of changes in forage quality. Using the HHNIR supports more regular sampling, as

it is quick, easy and robust. “Once armed with the baseline from your forage, this will determine what is needed to be bought in to fill the gap, to enable the herd to meet its potential,” adds Anna.

Feed efficiency and protein efficiency are two of the top five levers in Arla’s Sustainability Incentive Framework, while rewards for the use of sustainably sourced feeds are also helping to drive action to reduce emissions on Arla farms. “Using Arla’s FarmAhead Incentive Guide, producers can earn up to 13 points from producing more milk per feed input unit, up to 11 points under sourcing sustainable feeds focusing on soy use, and a further eight points allocated to the focus on protein efficiency,” explains Anna.

“Feed monitoring, including through the Feedlync feed management system, also counts towards a further two points, and each point leads to a potential addition to the milk payment.

“As an industry, we have access to simple and effective tools that will not only help to keep pace in the face of new policies and standards, but to benefit from greater efficiencies across the farm.”

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Sally Williams,
Dairy Farmer, Scotland

Managing maize silage variability

Exceptionally early maize harvests are likely to show a wide variation in crop quantity and quality. So how can producers best manage their silage? British Dairying reports.

This year's rapid progress and early maize harvest reflect an unusually warm season. Although rainfall was generally very low, crops in western counties benefited from better moisture availability compared with the East, where lighter soils and lower rainfall increased the pressure on plants as the season progressed.

Heat units in Gloucestershire, for example, were 20% above the 10-year average by mid-August, according to Andrew Cook at seed breeder KWS. Drought conditions stunted growth in some cases, although one Dorset producer who started cutting his KWS Anastasio on August 9 was very pleased with the results.

Pre-harvest differences

Differences were also apparent pre-harvest, with a field of maize on one side of the road in Cheshire very green and showing excellent potential, while the crop on the opposite side looked extremely dry, with nowhere near the same stature.

"I would expect the final harvest results to show a wide spectrum, with both quantity and quality varying considerably," notes Andrew. "Early drilled crops on moisture-retentive soils have mostly performed well, achieving acceptable yields."

"By contrast, some later drilled maize on light, drought-prone soils have struggled. This underlines the influence of establishment date, soil type and moisture availability on crop development this season. It appears that soils with high organic matter levels have been more efficient at retaining moisture."



Andrew Cook recommends leaving clamps closed for as long as possible

The dry conditions led to the rapid dry-down of some maize, with green leaf disappearing quickly. Some crops therefore had to be harvested before starch lay-down was complete. "Producers had little alternative, because leaving crops standing risked producing dry, papery material that would have been difficult to consolidate effectively in the clamp."

Where circumstances allow, producers should leave clamps unopened for as long as possible, allowing the crop to stabilise for

optimal feedout, suggests Andrew. The variability in maize dry matter figures means that silage analysis will be more important than ever.

"The ideal strategy is to leave clamps untouched for at least six weeks to give the crop the best chance of a successful fermentation," he says. "Maize quality improves with age, because the ensiling process breaks down the kernels, boosting starch rumen degradability. Nevertheless, with poor grass performance in many regions, this may not be easy to achieve in practice."

"The nutritional value of this year's maize, as well as other forage crop results, may not mirror the standard results for the farm, so analysis is highly recommended. There will likely be variation from field to field and clamp to clamp. High maize silage dry matter levels will have a knock-on effect on dietary composition, and the addition of water or a low dry matter feed may be useful for bringing a total mixed ration into balance."

"Harvest catch crops in a timely fashion in the spring."

Crops that have dried down excessively present a specific clamp management challenge, he warns. Dry, fibrous material is harder to consolidate, increasing the risk of air being trapped within the clamp during the ensiling process. This can lead to heating and spoilage when the clamp is opened, making careful management at silage removal particularly important.

"In cases where maize silages are very high in dry matter content, it is advisable to move across the clamp face rapidly," says Andrew.

"The shear-grab teeth should be sharp to leave a clean, even finish. Sheets should not overhang the feed face. These actions will reduce

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microbial spoilage and minimise clamp wastage. "Once the sheet has been removed, at least one metre of silage depth should be taken per week.

"This will minimise oxygen penetration and reduce the risk of heating, helping to limit crop losses in a year when widespread forage shortages have been predicted."

The exceptionally early harvest does, however, provide an opportunity to establish a following catch crop, he points out. An early start to autumn sowing could go some way to providing grazing and/or a forage crop to utilise in the spring and mitigate shortages. While acknowledging that no two seasons follow the same pattern, there may be a lesson to learn from this year, he says.

Full potential

"Where conditions allow, harvest catch crops in a timely fashion in the spring. This will give the new maize seed the greatest chance of being sown into moisture and established in good time for the 2027 growing year. That way, the maize crop will have the opportunity to fulfil its full potential."

This season has brought into sharp focus the need to breed maize varieties capable of performing well across a wide range of growing conditions, Andrew says. "There is little comparison with 2024, for example, when cool, wet weather meant that some crops struggled to reach maturity.

"Each season seems to bring varying circumstances, and resilience has become one of the most critical objectives for the KWS maize breeding programme.

"Part of our approach is to use a combination of flint and dent parents. The flint lines bring earliness and cold tolerance, while the dent genetics



Nutritional value may vary this year

contribute high yields and good economic results," he explains.

The latest genetics are showing enhanced value where moisture is scarce, although there are clear limits to what breeding can achieve when water becomes the overriding constraint. Where soil moisture restricts the amount of dry matter that a crop can produce, genetic potential alone cannot overcome that limitation.

"Our aim is to develop varieties that make the best possible use of available moisture, while also retaining the ability to deliver yield when conditions are favourable. This becomes increasingly relevant as crops are exposed to greater variation in moisture availability over the season.

"Varieties need to perform consistently across contrasting seasons, rather than being suited to one particular set of conditions," notes Andrew. "With weather patterns appearing to become erratic, combining earliness, cold tolerance and yield potential in maize varieties will be the key to achieving consistent economic yields."



Careful clamp management when removing silage is particularly important

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Grassland: Reseed or overseed?

With large areas of grassland damaged by this summer's hot dry conditions, farmers will need to plan carefully to repair their worst affected fields. But which strategy is best: Overseeding existing swards or a complete reseed? British Dairying finds out.

Proactively reseeding or overseeding a drought-damaged or time-worn sward should be viewed as a positive investment in the farm's resources. So says James White from grass breeder Barenbrug. "While the cost outlay can feel daunting, the improvement in the quantity and quality of homegrown forage - especially over several years or as an alternative to purchasing many tonnes of feed - is more than worth the time and money needed to get the job done."

"Repetitive early grazing will damage the new sward."

Barenbrug data shows that total reseeding costs, including cultivation, soil sampling, lime application, seed drilling, fertiliser application, weed control and seed inputs, can add up to £887/ha. The seed element (£150/ha) accounts for just 17% of the total cost. In comparison, an equivalent overseed will cost an estimated £643/ha, with the seed (£150/ha) accounting for 23% of the overall cost.

"Those figures might seem onerous, but the increase in dry matter tonnage per hectare, improved sward palatability and amplified metabolisable energy or D-value production will easily pay



Overseeding or reseeding can bring drought damaged pastures back to life

for itself in terms of greater daily liveweight gains, increased milk production and improved livestock health and fertility."

Overseeding: A short to medium-term fix

Overseeding is the quicker and cheaper of the two seeding options, but it only offers a short to medium-term solution, James explains.

"Overseeding provides a quick fix and is an effective method of improving pasture productivity at a lower cost point. It is ideal for situations where it isn't feasible to take a field completely out of production. If implemented carefully, overseeding has the potential to improve pasture productivity by 30-40% for a period of three to four years depending on soil type and quality, and the species of grasses used."

When overseeding, it is crucial to use a seed mixture designed specifically for the purpose. "Existing grasses in the ley will already have an established root system to access nutrients and moisture, and an established leaf canopy to capture light for photosynthesis. Any grass seed

that is introduced therefore needs to be able to compete against these factors, with mixtures like Barmix Renew formulated accordingly."

Reseeding: A long-term solution

Carrying out a complete reseed requires a larger budget compared to overseeding but will deliver longer lasting and more impactful benefits, James says.

"Reseeding negates the dangers associated with existing plants outcompeting new seedlings for light, water and nutrients, and ensures the establishment rate achieved by the newly drilled seed is much higher."

"As with overseeding, the choice and quality of the grasses selected is an important consideration, with specialist mixtures available for a range of purposes including grazing, silage or a combination of the two," he adds.

"Careful selection of a combination of rapid-establishing species like ryegrasses, fescue, clover, Timothy and cocksfoot contained within Barmix will suit a lot of scenarios, with the option to include additional herbage species like chicory and plantain to boost protein production."

Overseeding: A step-by-step guide

1. Dig a soil test pit to highlight any compaction issues: Address compaction so that plants can root freely to at least 30cm.
2. Test soil pH and nutrient availability in the top four inches of soil. Take steps to correct any deficiencies.
3. If grass weeds make up more than 30% of the sward, harrow hard to remove them. For a sward containing more than 70% grass weeds, the best option is to reseed. Control perennial weeds before seeding by spraying with a selective herbicide on advice from a BASIS qualified agronomist. Observe chemical withdrawal periods for grass and clover.
4. Minimise competition to new seedlings by grazing tightly with sheep or taking a silage cut. Do not fertilise before overseeding, as this will favour existing plants and increase competition.
5. Choose a grass seed mixture designed for the job. Sow when soil temperature and moisture levels are appropriate, or when moisture is forecast. Drill seed slowly and to a shallow depth to maximise germination and emergence.
6. Roll the seedbed to ensure good seed-to-soil contact and to conserve moisture.
7. As soon as practicable, graze lightly, but do not allow new seedlings to be pulled out of the ground.

The pluck test

To determine when it is safe to start grazing a new sward (typically six to eight weeks after seeding), carry out a simple 'pluck test' to assess root strength and establishment:

- Grasp the grass seedling firmly between thumb and forefinger and tug upwards in a single, quick movement (to mimic an animal biting)
- If the leaf of the plant breaks off and the roots stay in the ground the pluck test is passed.
- If the plant's roots are pulled out of the ground, the pluck test is failed, and it is too early to graze.

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Reseeding: A step-by-step guide

1. Dig a soil test pit to highlight any compaction issues: Address compaction so that plants can root freely to at least 30cm.
2. Test soil pH and nutrient availability in the top four inches of soil, especially in high rainfall areas where soils will be more prone to leaching losses. Take steps to correct any deficiencies.
3. Prior to cultivation, check which species of grass, herbs and weeds are present as this will inform how to plan for weed control before and/or after tillage and early in the life of a new pasture.
4. Seedbed preparation will depend on the farm's approach to tillage, available machinery and soil type. It can include ploughing, a chemical termination of the existing sward with glyphosate, direct drilling, or a light till with a rotavator. Regardless of the approach, the goal is to plant seeds into a fine, firm and clean seedbed.
5. Choose a grass seed mixture designed for the job. Sow when soil temperature and moisture levels are appropriate, or when moisture is forecast. Drill seed slowly and to a shallow depth to maximise



Overseeding can improve pasture productivity by 30 to 40%

- germination and emergence. Seeds placed too deep can take extra time to emerge or may not emerge at all, resulting in a patchy sward susceptible to weed ingress.
6. Roll the seedbed to ensure good seed-to-soil contact and to conserve moisture.
 7. Take every feasible step to control weeds. The best defence is a strong grass stand, so protecting the young forage plants while the sward fills in will pay dividends over the life of the field.

8. Newly sown leys should be considered as 'establishing' for their first 12 months: Careful management during this time is critical to the sward's long-term persistency and performance. Use light applications of fertiliser and keep on top of weed control. Graze carefully to avoid damaging the new sward and to prevent roots being damaged. If in doubt, do a 'pluck test' (see box) to determine when grazing can commence.

When to graze

"Grazing a newly established sward too early can damage the ley's longevity and persistency," James explains. "Livestock shouldn't be introduced until the new seedlings have reached the 2.5 to three-leaf stage."

"Repetitive early grazing will also damage the new sward, especially if stress factors like drought persist, so rotate livestock across as many fields as possible to give each ley time to recover."

Similarly, if the new sward is left to grow too long (>3,500kg/ha of dry matter, or more than three leaves per tiller), the bottom leaves will start to die off and there will be little additional contribution to biomass.

If this dead material is allowed to build up, the sward's overall quality will be reduced, clover will be starved of light due to shading, and the risk of disease caused by rusts and other fungi will increase.

"Treat any new sward as though it were a high value combinable crop: Treat it carefully, feed it everything it needs, and don't be tempted to rush into grazing or cutting it too soon."



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NMR's Hillington lab near Glasgow tests over 400,000 BVD tissue samples per year. "In the peak season between April and May, the numbers can double in the lab, but we still need to maintain a two-day turnaround. Within those two months alone this year, we actually tested 108,000 tags," says Lorraine McGilp, the Laboratory Manager.

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Tagging calves early means that PIs are identified quickly and can be isolated and removed before too much damage is done. Youngstock blood screening and bulk milk testing can also be used alongside Tag & Test for a complete picture of BVD in your herd. Bulk milk screening is simple, and when testing with NMR, no additional sampling is required.

But of course, testing is only part of the toolbox farmers have to tackle BVD. Detailed record keeping, strict biosecurity measures and a comprehensive vaccination program along with BVD Tag & Test and surveillance measures can all help manage BVD in your herd.

Don't forget, not only can NMR help you with a wide variety of tests to suit your farm, including vet support with PI hunting, but you may also be eligible for financial support through the Animal Health & Welfare Pathway. Always consult your vet for BVD advice.

* Bennett and Ijpelaar, 2005

To request a BVD test on your bulk milk sample, simply call our lab on 01902 749920 or visit nordicstar.co.uk to view the wide range of official BVD TST ear tags.



The hidden dangers on British dairy farms

Knowing how to react to hazards makes all the difference. Stuart Maitland-Knibb, Critical Care Consultant and Clinical Expert behind RABI's FarmersAid app, reports.

The modern dairy farm is a marvel of productivity. From precision nutrition and automated milking to intensive grassland management and round-the-clock herd monitoring, today's dairy managers can operate at the absolute cutting edge of British agriculture. Yet, there remains an inescapable reality - farming is the UK's most hazardous occupation.

Tragically, agriculture has a fatality rate 22 times higher than average. Within this sector, dairy farming carries its own concentrated set of risks. The relentless, 365-day nature of milk production means there is no off-season. When you are operating on an unrelenting schedule, balancing tight margins, and running on empty, safety can naturally slip to the back of your mind.

"Let's make a collective commitment to look out for one another."

Standard health and safety compliance, paperwork, and risk assessments are essential for preventing accidents. Working with RABI, we recognised a critical gap in the industry's safety net - many simply do not know what to do when the worst-case scenario occurs.

To bridge this gap, RABI launched FarmersAid, a free smartphone app. This isn't a regulatory checklist or a lecture on what you should have done. Instead, it is a critical care training tool designed for high-stress, real-world farm environments. It focuses entirely on the Platinum 10 Minutes, the vital 10-minute window which is critical to survival following a severe accident.

By tracking a typical 24-hour cycle on a dairy unit, it becomes clear how quickly routine tasks can spiral into life-or-death emergencies, and why immediate medical knowledge is just as vital as any tool in your workshop.

05:00 – The morning milking and sire selection risks

The day starts long before the sun rises. In the quiet calm of the morning, your mind is focused on getting cows through the parlour. You step into a pen or collecting yard to move a group of cows, a routine task you have done thousands of times before. However, livestock are inherently unpredictable. In a dairy setup, the danger of

being cornered, trampled, or crushed against a gate or feed barrier by a startled 700kg animal is a constant threat. The risk escalates significantly when handling stock bulls or freshly calved heifers acting on protective maternal instincts.

Because much of this early-morning work is performed alone, a severe livestock crush at dawn can go unnoticed for hours. In those crucial opening 10 minutes, knowing exactly how to handle a severe crush injury, manage internal trauma, and keep a casualty's airway clear while waiting for help is a genuine lifeline.

13:00 – The midday scraping and machinery rush

By the afternoon, the tempo on a dairy unit shifts dramatically. The yard is loud, contractors might be arriving, and heavy machinery is out in full force. Whether it is a telehandler scraping out cubicle passages, a tractor mixing a fresh total mixed ration (TMR), or a contractor rushing to clear fields during a tight silage window, the pressure is mounting.

When you are hurrying to keep the day on schedule, it takes only a split second of distraction, a loose sleeve, or a bypassed guard for catastrophe to strike. Becoming trapped in a power take-off (PTO) shaft or tangled in feeder-wagon machinery is a nightmare no dairy farmer wants to picture.

In incidents involving a catastrophic limb entrapment or a severe tear, you have a window of just 60 to 90 seconds to intervene and stop fatal blood loss. When a farm is miles down a narrow lane, a colleague who can push past the panic, apply a tourniquet correctly, and immediately provide an exact what3words location to emergency call handlers is the only thing standing between life and death.



Handling stock bulls can bring safety risks



Stuart Maitland-Knibb, Critical Care Consultant and Clinical Expert

17:00 – Late-afternoon stock movement and yard fatigue

As the afternoon milking gets under way, a long day of physical labour catches up with the team. Fatigue sets in, reactions slow down, and your focus easily shifts to just getting the final jobs completed so you can head inside.

The late-afternoon dairy yard is a minefield of moving vehicles, scraping systems, and high-altitude maintenance tasks. It might be quick dash up a ladder to fix a drainpipe, adjusting a faulty ventilation fan in a cubicle shed, or stepping into a telehandler's blind spot because you assume the driver knows you are there.

A severe fall from height or being struck by a moving vehicle can instantly cause complex fractures or severe spinal trauma. Knowing how to stabilise an injured worker and manage shock immediately, without moving them and worsening a potential spinal injury, is a vital skill that dictates their long-term recovery long before the flashing lights of an ambulance appear at the farm gate.

22:00 – The night shift: Slurry, gases, and silent killers

Even when the parlour washes down for the final time, the dangers do not sleep. Late-night checks or nocturnal maintenance around slurry stores introduce silent, invisible threats when operators are already exhausted.

Slurry gas is a lethal cocktail of hydrogen sulphide, carbon dioxide, and ammonia. It can knock a person

unconscious in a single breath and kill in seconds, particularly when crusts are broken or pumps are turned on. Tragically, history shows that many slurry-related fatalities involve a family member or co-worker who instinctively runs into a pit to help a fallen colleague without thinking.

Understanding these invisible atmospheric risks, recognising the immediate signs of gas inhalation, and knowing strict rescue protocols, like never entering an enclosed space without breathing apparatus, are what will get you and your team through the night shift safely.

Bridging the gap

Accidents happen in a heartbeat, but the real danger comes when panic takes over. By placing critical care training and real-time location tools directly in your pocket, FarmersAid bridges the gap between the moment an accident happens and the arrival of the emergency services, turning a helpless bystander into a lifesaver.

As we look to the future of the British dairy sector, let's make a collective commitment to look out for one another. Protecting our workforce means being ready for the unexpected.

Equipping your family and team with the confidence to handle those first 10 minutes is the most vital step you can take to ensure that every worker across our industry makes it home safely at the end of the shift. Download FarmersAid now from the Apple Store or Google Play.



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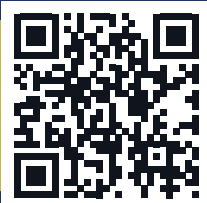
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Shorter gestation drives profit in beef-on-dairy

Choosing the right beef sire is important, particularly when it comes to gestation length – an important factor in producing stronger margins, as British Dairying reports.

When farmers pick a beef sire to use over their dairy herd, there are two main factors they consider – the price of the straw and the value of the calf at the other end. “What rarely gets a second thought is the number of days between insemination and calving – an overlooked cost in beef-on-dairy systems,” explains Rachel Dickinson, Beef on Dairy Specialist at Cogent.

According to AHDB data, gestation length is both predictable and genetically selectable and can have a big impact on the bottom line. And gestation length varies both between breeds and within a breed. “It is highly heritable, at around 43%, which means it’s not down to luck or management alone; it is a trait you can select for,” she says.

“Cost per pregnancy is often the more meaningful measure of value.”

“The spread between sires can be considerable; gestation length can vary by up to a week or more depending on which bull you choose. And each one-point change in predicted transmitting ability (PTA) equals roughly a day’s difference. This matters, because a week shorter gestation means a week earlier into milk and a week earlier into cash flow.”

Holstein dairy herds are built around a roughly 280-day gestation



A shorter gestation can bring benefits in an earlier return to service, optimal fertility cycles and more days in milk

cycle, as 75% of Holsteins calve between days 275 and 285, when in Holstein x Holstein matings. So any variation on that number has a direct knock-on effect on when a cow starts producing saleable milk again.

The dry period itself is a fixed, farm-managed decision, averaging around eight weeks, and isn’t shortened simply by using a shorter gestation sire. “What shorter gestation does change is timing; a shorter gestation means a cow reaches her due date, and starts drying off, earlier,” says Rachel.

“That cuts short the tail end of her current lactation; the point where she’s producing her least profitable milk, rather than extending the time she spends dry. Over her

lifetime, that adds up to more days spent in the most profitable early-lactation window, and fewer in the low-yielding stretch at the end.”

Earlier calving also means earlier return to service, which supports a tighter calving interval. Optimised fertility cycles and days in milk will improve lifetime performance and result in better herd turnover.

Genuine tool

For block calvers, the effect compounds further. “AHDB highlights gestation length as a genuine tool for pulling later-calving cows back into the block, tightening the pattern, reducing the tail of late calvers, and easing pressure on labour at calving time,” she notes.

The instinctive assumption; that the cheapest straw delivers the best margin, doesn’t hold up once you look at the real economics, says Rachel. “The real semen cost depends on the conception rate and the number of straws typically needed to get a cow in calf, not the price of the straw.”

“AHDB modelling uses this semen costing methodology, resulting in a total cost driven by conception rate,

straws used, and system efficiency. That is why cost per pregnancy, rather than cost per straw, is often the more meaningful measure of value, particularly when gestation length and wider herd performance are considered.”

It’s not as simple as a cow suddenly producing milk where she previously produced none – most farms already manage the dry period to suit gestation length, so a shorter gestation doesn’t conjure extra days in milk from nothing. What it does is shift days from the least profitable part of the lactation to the most profitable.

“Take a cow calving six days earlier than she otherwise would. Those six days would have fallen late in her current lactation, when an average Holstein dairy cow is typically down to around 24 litres/day. Calve her six days earlier, and those six days fall at the start of her next lactation instead, when she’s closer to peak yield – say 42 litres/day. That’s an 18-litre gain for each of the six days, or 108 litres of extra milk/cow bred to beef – worth around £37 at the current 34.2ppl milk price.”

Benefit	Per cow	Herd of 100
Extra milk income (shift to peak lactation)	£36.94	£3,694

Figures assume a six-day shorter gestation and a milk price of 34.2ppl. The milk income figure reflects the value of shifting days from late lactation (around 24 litres/day) to early lactation (around 42 litres/day) for an average Holstein dairy cow, based on a typical lactation curve – not a straight comparison of dry versus in-milk days.

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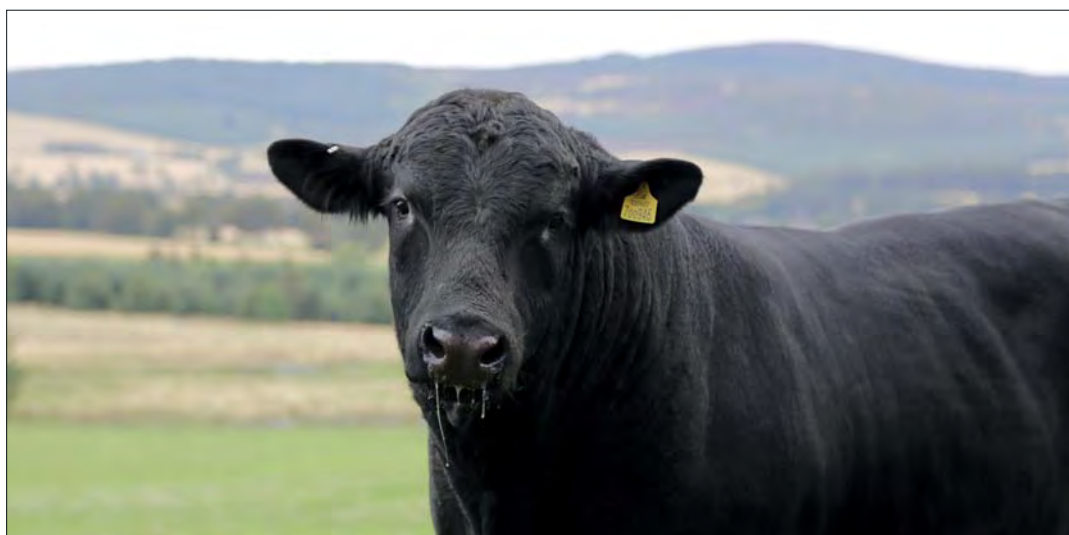
Figures assume a six-day shorter gestation and a milk price of 34.2ppl. The milk income figure reflects the value of shifting days from late lactation (around 24 litres/day) to early lactation (around 42 litres/day) for an average Holstein dairy cow, based on a typical lactation curve - not a straight comparison of dry versus in-milk days.

The gestation benefit alone - worth over £35/cow through the peak-lactation shift - demonstrates how sire selection can influence profitability beyond the initial straw purchase. Add in the fertility, production and efficiency gains associated with stronger genetics, and the value becomes even more significant. "Cost per pregnancy, not cost per straw, is what should be driving the decision," says Rachel.

"The cheapest straw rarely produces the cheapest calf."

It's important to choose the right breed, and the right bull within it. Aberdeen Angus has the shortest gestation length of the major beef breeds, typically around 283 days - close enough to standard dairy gestation that it causes minimal disruption to the herd's rhythm. The elite bulls come in at 276, that translates into earlier calving, better system fit, and consistently strong demand in the beef market.

"Blackhaugh Master Justin X218 is a good example. A short-gestation



The Aberdeen Angus has the shortest gestation length out of all the major beef breeds, typically 283 days

Angus sire at 276 days, with a calving difficulty figure of just 1.8% and a strong growth profile for his progeny (an Elite Cogent Growth Index sire), Justin shows that easy calving and shorter days in-calf don't have to come at the expense of performance."

British Blue remains one of the most widely used beef-on-dairy breeds in the UK, prized for the higher value calves it produces. The trade-off is greater variation in gestation length between individual bulls, with an average of 286 days.

"CBL Sprite is a great example of the success of our Beef Impact breeding programme," says Rachel. "One of the leading gestation-length British Blue sires available, at just 275 days, combined with easily born, well-muscled progeny (97.9% calf quality), Sprite is proof that with the right sire you can achieve both the value you want for your calf and protect your calving pattern."

Overall, fewer straws used, earlier calving, better-timed days in milk, improved fertility and stronger calf prices aren't separate wins, they stack.

Profitable choice

"The cheapest straw rarely produces the cheapest calf, and the sires that look like a premium on paper often work out the more profitable choice once everything is factored in," says Rachel.

"When you are next reviewing sire choices, don't stop at price per straw or calf value alone, check the gestation length PTA too. Sires like Justin and Sprite show that shorter gestation, easy calving and strong progeny performance can go hand in hand."

Over a whole herd, those extra days add up to real money. "When every day has a cost, shorter gestation isn't just a trait - it's a profit driver."



In Holstein x Holstein herds, gestation length is usually 275 to 285 days





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Bull proofs: New at the top

The August genomic Holstein proofs were pretty groundbreaking, with a new number one and four bulls scoring over £900 on the profitable lifetime index. Independent Breeding Consultant Kevin Lane considers the best bulls to suit your system.

There is a new number one sire at the top of the AHDB August rankings for genomic bulls, and both the top two are from Genosource. It's a good run for Cogent Breeding, with four of the top five and six of the top 10 bulls being marketed under its banner.

The new number one is **Genosource Jumpstart** with a profitable lifetime index (PLI) of £919. He offers 775kg of milk with 56.8kg of fat at +0.28% and 35.9kg of protein at +0.12%. His maintenance figure is a low -10 with a solid FeedAdvantage value of +200. And he scores well for HealthyCow on £183, including +2.4 LamenessAdvantage, -11 somatic cell count (SCC), +3 CalfSurvival, +101 lifespan and +5.5 fertility. He is a son of Genosource King, who ranks 12th in this proof run.

Into second place is **Genosource Judo** with a PLI of £917. He is the highest milk and protein bull in the top 20, with 1,288kg of milk and 47.2kg of protein. He also shares the highest EnviroCow score among the leading bulls at +4.9. While excelling for production and FeedAdvantage on +270, along with maintenance on -23, his health credentials are very average, with an HealthyCow value of £119, an SCC of -5, a lifespan of +82 and a fertility score of +2.7.

In third place is newcomer **Peak AltaSpinwin** (£907) who is similar to Judo in offering high production but moderate health. His milk is a high 932kg with 57.5kg of fat at +0.22% and 37.3kg of protein at +0.07%. Maintenance is a very low -24 and FeedAdvantage a high +261. His HealthyCow value is £138 with +4.9 EnviroCow, LamenessAdvantage at +1.1, SCC -14, lifespan +104 and fertility +6.8.

Up from 10th with an £83 increase is **OCD Thorson Ripcord** (£905), another strong feed-saver bull with +271 FeedAdvantage and a maintenance score of -32. He has a fertility index of +10.3, a lifespan of +92 and CalfSurvival of +3.7. Production is high at 942kg for milk, 54.3kg of fat at +0.18% and 35.7kg of protein at +0.05%. The best bull for fitness in the top 10



The grandam of Genosource Jumpstart, the new number-one genomic bull with a PLI of £919 and 775kg of milk

is fifth-placed **Genosource Hemi** who offers a PLI of £891, 620kg of milk, 46kg of fat at +0.24%, and 29.5kg of protein at +0.01%. He has a FeedAdvantage of +234, a HealthyCow of £249, an EnviroCow of +4.5, a LamenessAdvantage of +3.2, +153 lifespan and a high +11.5 fertility.

Completing the top six is **Denovo Canterbury** (£887) with almost 100kg of combined fat and protein (CFP), made up of 60.3kg of fat at +0.29% and 37.8kg of protein at +0.11%. This outstanding milk solid transmitter also offers -10 maintenance, +177 FeedAdvantage and +4.8 EnviroCow.

Seventh-placed **Peak AltaRotation** (£880) drops five places but increases his value by £13 and stands out for his excellent predicted transmitting ability (PTA) for protein at +0.16% and 37.5kg, along with 716kg of milk, 47.8kg of fat at +0.21% and 85.3kg CFP. He also offers +131 days lifespan and +6.7 fertility, with £154 HealthyCow and +4.5 EnviroCow.

Also in joint seventh on £880 is **Genosource Lingo**, who is a high component transmitter albeit with slightly lower milk. His milk is

562kg with 55.8kg of fat at +0.38% and 33.2kg of protein at +0.17%. Maintenance is -15, FeedAdvantage is +172, HealthyCow £167, EnviroCow +4.3, LamenessAdvantage +3.2, SCC -17, lifespan +76 and fertility +2.6.

Staying in ninth position is **OCD Radical Josh Allen** (£879 – a rise of £55), combining a very high milk yield of 1,180kg with a CFP of 96.4kg and positive percentages, with +235 FeedAdvantage. LamenessAdvantage, lifespan and fertility are solid on +2.3, +85 and +5.2 respectively.

Making up the top 10 – down from third but increasing his PLI by £17 – is **Peak AltaFanbase** (£871), who is very high in fat, transmitting 56.1kg at +0.25%, combined with 33.8kg of protein at +0.07% and a highly favourable maintenance score of -32.

This is reflected in an exceptional breed-leading FeedAdvantage value of +298, (which is the kilograms of dry matter intake predicted to be saved during each lactation for the same adjusted litres of milk) and this also contributes to a high EnviroCow value of +4.7. Other bulls of interest include the high component, high

health bull **Peak AltaVaughn** (£867) in 11th position. He is a full brother to AltaRotation and transmits a slightly lower volume of milk than the other top bulls, with 473kg at 47.4kg of fat at +0.33% and 29.7kg of protein at 0.16%. The HealthyCow value for this bull is a very high £238, with EnviroCow at +4.2, SCC at -15, lifespan at +143 and fertility at +10.4.

In 12th place is **Genosource King P** (£865) who is the sire of number-one bull Jumpstart, and like his son he offers a good balance of production, health and environmental credentials. His milk is a high 947kg, fat is 53.9kg at +0.17% and protein is 35.1kg at +0.04%, while maintenance is a low -26 and FeedAdvantage a high +242. HealthyCow is £163, with EnviroCow at +4.5 along with +2.6 LamenessAdvantage, +98 lifespan and +4.1 fertility.

Other bulls of interest in the top 20 include newcomer **SFH Scudetto Red** (£865), who is not only a slight outcross being the son of Koepen Simply Red, but also offers the highest lifespan value in this group at +192 days. His milk is exactly 1,000kg with 32kg of fat and

34.4kg of protein; albeit at -0.09% fat, but he also offers -18 maintenance, +191 FeedAdvantage, a huge £300 HealthyCow, +4.3 EnviroCow, -31 SCC and +6.8 fertility.

The highest fat transmitter in the group is **Peak AltaSovereignty** (£857) who, along with 788kg of milk, has a huge 63.5kg of fat at +0.35%. Protein is also solid at 33.7kg and +0.09%, with a FeedAdvantage of +133, a HealthyCow value of £142, an EnviroCow figure of +4.3 and a fertility index of +5.8.

Another strong milk transmitter is 17th placed **OCD Sheepster Mike** (£854), down 10 places but up £26, who offers 1,169kg of milk, 47.5kg of fat, 38.3kg of protein and a FeedAdvantage of +253. He has a maintenance value of -25 and a HealthyCow value of £155 including +5.1 fertility.

One place lower is **Denovo Caterpillar** (£853), a solid production bull with 932kg of milk, 79.6kg CFP and positive percentages. His FeedAdvantage is a high +272 with +4.6 EnviroCow and +£187 HealthyCow, including +128 days lifespan. With an even higher HealthyCow value of £212 is **ABS 18 Galactic** (also £853) who not only offers +107 lifespan and +9.9 fertility, but 567kg of milk with 54.4kg of fat at +0.36% and 30.1kg of protein at +0.13%.

“There are 55 bulls offering over 1,000kg PTA for milk.”

The April number-one sire, **Denovo 22750 Lorenzo** (£845 down £29), sits in 22nd place and still offers excellent fitness traits alongside solid production. His proof is 1,038kg of milk with 43.8kg of fat at +0.02% and 34.3kg of protein at +0.00% with -12 maintenance. He offers good daughter fertility at +9.2, excellent LamenessAdvantage at +4.2 (the highest in the top 20), and good udder health. He also has an exceptional daughter lifespan index at +165 days as well as an outstanding HealthyCow value of £251.

Finally, in 26th and 29th, **Adaway Beyond Faithful** (£837) and his maternal half-brother **Adaway Beyond Fitness** (£835) continue to offer excellent figures. Faithful's milk is a high 915kg with 42.8kg of fat at +0.07 and 36.6kg of protein at +0.07%. HealthyCow is a



Denovo Canterbury offers almost 100kg of CFP and sits in sixth place on the proof run, with a PLI of £887

solid £205 with +7.1 fertility, +107 lifespan and +2.9 CalfSurvival. Fitness's milk is a little lower on 742kg, with 42.1kg of fat at +0.14 and 34.2kg of protein at +0.11%, HealthyCow is also good on £201 with +10.3 fertility, +128 lifespan and +3.1 LamenessAdvantage.

This proof run sees the usual stability at the top alongside newcomers offering some fresh genetics; it has 58 bulls over £800 PLI, a further 134 bulls over £700 and another 145 (out of over 620) over £600, giving farmers plenty to choose from, irrespective of system. The top 100; £763 PLI and above, shows lots of new entries as usual, some fallers, some risers and some from the last run holding their positions.

High milk bulls

As usual, we break down the key areas to see which bulls are performing well, should farmers wish to initially select for particular traits, starting with the high milk sires.

There are 55 bulls offering over 1,000kg PTA for milk and 28 over 1,100kg, with **OCD Radical Liev** (£831 PLI) the one of only two over 1,300kg. Alongside his high milk of 1,397kg, he offers 94.9kg CFP with small negatives on percentages. His maintenance is good on -16 with +257 FeedAdvantage and +4.4 EnviroCow. Given this exceptional production he also scores well for udders at +1.34. Second in this ranking is **Genosource Jefferson** (£633)

offering 1,329kg and 73kg CFP (although negative for percentages). His health traits are moderate but he is almost 1.5 points type merit. In third is newcomer **EHS Beast Red** (£776), another son of Koepon Simply Red. Beast hits 1,291kg of milk with 64.7kg CFP but only 29.6kg of fat at -0.23%. His health traits are excellent with a £275 HealthyCow made up of -28 SCC, +2.9 LamenessAdvantage, +183 lifespan and +8.2 fertility.

Next is the number-two bull **Judo**, followed by **Genosource Yesterday** (£737) with 1,250kg of milk, 58.7kg of fat and 42.1kg of protein, giving him a huge 100.8kg CFP. He also offers -17 maintenance, +218 FeedAdvantage and +4.2 EnviroCow, but his -£19 HealthyCow indicates poor fitness traits.

Pen-Col Denovo Glasgow (£656), with 1,240kg of milk, is followed by **Peak AltaPinball** (£781), offering 1,234kg of milk, 51.1kg of fat, 39.7kg of protein and a CFP of 90.8kg. Maintenance is a solid -27 with +265 FeedAdvantage, +4.4 EnviroCow and +2 CalfSurvival.

He is followed by **OCD Thorson DARTH Vader** (£804) on 1,220kg of milk, -27 maintenance and +288 FeedAdvantage; however, HealthyCow is just +£14 and SCC is +9; mastitis is +2, lifespan just +18 and fertility -1.8. The only other bull over 1,200kg for milk is

Denovo 21053 Energize (£682), who sits on 1,207kg with 76.4kg CFP, albeit negative for percentages. Maintenance is -23 and FeedAdvantage +222 with +3.9 EnviroCow and £97 HealthyCow.

High fat and protein bulls

There are 103 bulls over 80kg CFP, with 29 over 90kg; 17 of these 29 are in the top 50 PLI and only six are outside the top 100. The top bull is the aforementioned **OCD Thorson DARTH Vader** on 102.4kg followed by **Denovo 22192 Sector** (£842), who is a tremendous components bull with 850kg of milk, 63kg of fat at +0.32% and 39.3kg of protein at +0.12% giving him 102.3kg CFP. However, his HealthyCow is only £33 and he's a negative for mammary.

Peak AltaPurpose (£832) is next on 101.5kg and is also lower milk but high components: 656kg, 64.3kg at +0.43%, and 37.2kg at +0.17%. He scores well for maintenance at -8 and EnviroCow at +4.3, but most other traits are moderate.

Genosource Yesterday comes next, followed by **Peak AltaYoshi** (£812), who is the last of the '100 Club' for CFP, hitting 100.3kg with 1,140kg for milk, 59.3kg of fat at +0.14% and 41kg of protein at +0.04%. FeedAdvantage is +104 with £84 HealthyCow, +4.1 EnviroCow and -12 SCC.

Three of the next four are all in the top 20 PLI; Canterbury, Judo and AltaSovereignty, with the middleman **Genosource JuiceBox**

(£847); a 1,014kg milk bull with 97.6kg CFP and good components. He also offers -17 maintenance, +212 FeedAdvantage and +4.4 EnviroCow. His CalfSurvival value of +4.5 is the highest in the genomic list.

High fertility bulls

Some 17 Holstein bulls have a PTA for fertility index of +12 or greater (27 if you include the Irish Holstein Friesians) and 48 Holsteins of +10 or more. Fertility is a key selection index for many farmers, given the influence that the trait has on farm profitability.

Of interest is that, of the top 50 genomic Holstein bulls ranked on fertility, only 18 are in the top 100 for PLI (and just four in the top 20), and most, although not all, have more moderate production levels but good scores for other health and fitness traits. The HealthyCow average for these top 50 is £219 (fertility is a component of HealthyCow), and the PLI average a solid £713.

Once again, there are a number of Irish-bred bulls in this fertility ranking, including 12 of the top 40; this number has dropped a little from April. Are Holstein genetics catching up for this very profitable trait?

The highest value of the Irish contingent is, once again, **Stamullen Mozart** (-£137) on +17.8, followed by **Glenaboy Allstar** (£95) on +14.7 and **Bauravilla Pistol** (-£143) on +13.7.

Next is **Tinnakill Grandslam** (£125) on +13.6 and **Ballygown Pete** (£108) on +13.3. Virtually all the Irish are at least minus 500kg of milk on the Holstein base, so will be discounted by most bar grazing enthusiasts.

However, the best Holstein fertility bull once again at +16.4 is **Progenesis Triggerpoint** (£629), who's ranked 289th on PLI. He offers a good fitness profile with +128 lifespan, -8 SCC, +1.4 LamenessAdvantage, and £232 HealthyCow. His production is solid with 493kg of milk, 29.3kg of fat at +0.11% and 20.4kg of protein at +0.05%. The aptly named **Denovo 23176 Highfert PP** (£710) is next best and he's a moderate milk sire with 265kg, but offers 61.2kg of CFP with +0.37% fat and +0.12% protein, £266 HealthyCow including +149 days lifespan, +14.7 fertility and -15 SCC. On +14.4 fertility is **Peak AltaDarude** (£681) offering 455kg of milk, 55.5kg CFP with very positive components, and £236 HealthyCow including +3.3 LamenessAdvantage, +2.2 CalfSurvival and +122 lifespan. He is just ahead of **Winstar Elixir PP**



A daughter of OCD Trooper Sheepster, the number-one proven bull and sire of Aurora Sheepster Poplar

(£505), who has been in the high fertility lists for a while now. He is a high health trait bull with a solid £241 HealthyCow and +14.2 fertility.

He also offers a negative -162kg of milk and 31.5kg CFP, -19 SCC and -2 mastitis, +128 lifespan days and +2.1 EnviroCow.

Denovo Mascot (£769) offers a balanced mix of production and health, with 699kg of milk, 70.2kg CFP at +0.16% and +0.05% respectively. He is also a high fitness bull with £205 HealthyCow, +13.8 fertility, +2.4 LamenessAdvantage, +131 lifespan and +169 FeedAdvantage.

Just a couple of places lower is **Aurora Sheepster Poplar** (£753), a son of the number-one proven bull, OCD Trooper Sheepster. He has a solid look to his proof offering 627kg of milk, 61kg CFP, with +0.12% fat and +0.05% protein, alongside -6 maintenance, +102 FeedAdvantage, and +3.3 EnviroCow. He has +£275 HealthyCow with +2.5 LamenessAdvantage, -15 SCC, -2 mastitis, +134 days lifespan and +13.4 fertility.

Close up on +13.2 is **Denovo 19915 Veejay PP** (£636) offering 49.2kg CFP with just 6kg of milk, +0.44% fat and +0.15% protein. He also has a £222 HealthyCow value and +107 lifespan, but is of interest as he carries the homozygous polled gene.

High lifespan bulls

Lifespan is another key trait and one that enhances profitability through extra lactations and a reduced

replacement rate. There are 28 bulls offering +150 days or more lifespan and 10 over +170 days. The high correlation between lifespan and HealthyCow is evident, with the +150-day group averaging £229 HealthyCow (the top 100 PLI bulls average £162 HealthyCow).

There are seven bulls over 180 days, the best being the aforementioned SFH Scudetto Red on +192 days, followed by **Denovo 22702 Burlap** (£600) on +186 days. He offers a nice balance of production and fitness with 408kg of milk, 45.4kg CFP with +0.07% and +0.11%, -16 maintenance, £208 HealthyCow, +2.3 LamenessAdvantage, -15 SCC and +8.5 fertility.

In joint second is **Delta Primetime PP Red** (£518) also with +186 days, although he is a low production sire with -7kg of milk and 22.8kg CFP with plus percentages of +0.13% for fat and +0.15% for protein. HealthyCow is £280 and SCC is -24 with mastitis at -5; the breed leader.

EHS Beast Red is one of three bulls on +183 days; the others being **Denovo Ashland P** (£696) with 497kg of milk, 33.6kg of fat at +0.16% and 19.4kg of protein at +0.03%. He scores a high £260 HealthyCow, -14 SCC, +2.8 LamenessAdvantage and +12 fertility.

Denovo 19493 Epsilon PP (£535) offers a low production proof of -24kg of milk, 31.5kg of CFP with positive percentages (particularly fat at +0.32%), good udder health at -23 SCC and -3 mastitis, +12

fertility and an even better £270 HealthyCow. Apart from Scudetto Red, only one other high PLI sire sits in the top 10 for lifespan: **Badger Siemers Day Trip** (£845), who has higher production than some of the high lifespan bulls with 926kg of milk, 78.1kg CFP, £211 HealthyCow, +222 FeedAdvantage, -18 SCC and +1.8 LamenessAdvantage.

High HealthyCow bulls

The HealthyCow index is a useful composite of key fitness traits and a quick selection filter: Just 26 bulls are over £240 and 76 over £200.

Most of the top half a dozen also have other strong health traits and have been mentioned in previous criteria, but the top bull is **Siemers SSI TRNS Phlegon** (£802) on £301. Transmitting 701kg of milk, 28.8kg of fat at +0.01% and 31.6kg pf protein at +0.10%, he has an EnviroCow index of +3.4, -33 SCC and -4 mastitis, +116 lifespan and +11.5 fertility.

Next is SFH Scudetto Red again, followed by **Vox Pedri Red** (£612). He's not the highest production bull, offering 410kg of milk, 34.4kg CFP at -0.02% and +0.07%, but his HealthyCow value of £297 is reflected in +8.1 fertility, +2.7 CalfSurvival, +156 lifespan, -27 SCC and +3.2 LamenessAdvantage. He is a -5 maintenance sire with 1.9 points udder and +1.4 type merit.

Continued on page 80.



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Continued from page 78.

Next are Denovo 19493 Epsilon and Delta Primetime PP Red, followed by **Trophy** (£778), who offers great type with his production and health traits. He offers +165 lifespan, +10.8 fertility, +2.3 CalfSurvival and £277 HealthyCow. Production is solid at 519kg of milk, 38.3kg of fat at +0.20% and 25.4kg of protein at +0.10%. He is also a high type sire, with 2.03 type merit, 2.42 udder composite and 2.11 feet and leg composite

The other high PLI and high HealthyCow bulls are EHS Beast Red, Aurora Sheepster Poplar and **S-S-I Foughty Bubba**. All bar three of the top 40 HealthyCow bulls are over +100 days lifespan, and all of the top 100 bulls for this index are negative for SCC (average -17).

Best FeedAdvantage bulls

There are 27 bulls over +220 for FeedAdvantage (each point is a kg dry matter intake (DMI) saving per lactation for adjusted milk yields) and only 11 of these are outside the top 100 for PLI.

There is a strong correlation between FeedAdvantage and maintenance and therefore PLI, and there are 45 bulls with a PTA of over +200 for FeedAdvantage. None



Marco Winters says genetic gain can now be achieved without compromise

of the bulls in the top two dozen FeedAdvantage ranking is greater than -12 for maintenance (negative indicates a smaller but more efficient animal) and only four bigger than -20; the average maintenance for the top 25 is -25.

The ranking starts with **Lars-Acres FB Wellness** (£752) with a very high value of +302 FeedAdvantage. This 112th ranked PLI sire is also a 1,110kg milk bull

with 69.1kg CFP, +3.9 EnviroCow, +5.4 fertility and -34 maintenance. Second ranked is Peak AltaFanbase on +298 FeedAdvantage followed by Darth Vader (+288), Denovo Caterpillar (+272), and then Ripcord and Judo.

Next is **Denovo 19495 Hargrove P** (£713) on +267, a 669kg milk bull with 77.7kg CFP and -29 maintenance. The top 10 is completed by AltaPinball and AltaSpinWin mentioned earlier.

Best EnviroCow bulls

There is a high correlation between EnviroCow, FeedAdvantage and PLI. Of the top 34 bulls for EnviroCow; with a value of +4.3 up to +4.9, two are in the top 25 for PLI, and all are in the top 100 PLI bar one, and their average FeedAdvantage value is +217.

The previously mentioned Judo, SpinWin, Canterbury, AltaFanbase, Ripcord, Josh Allen, Caterpillar, Day Trip and Jumpstart all make up the top 10.

Some 77 bulls score +4 or more for this trait, with just two of these under +100 on FeedAdvantage.

Marco Winters, head of animal genetics at AHDB says: "What stands out in this evaluation is that the top bulls no longer excel in just one area. Today's leading sires combine strong milk solids with improvements in health, fertility, efficiency and environmental performance, giving breeders greater confidence that genetic gain can be achieved without compromise."

"The presence of high-ranking red and polled sires in the top 20 [see table] also demonstrates the continued broadening of breeding options available to UK dairy farmers."

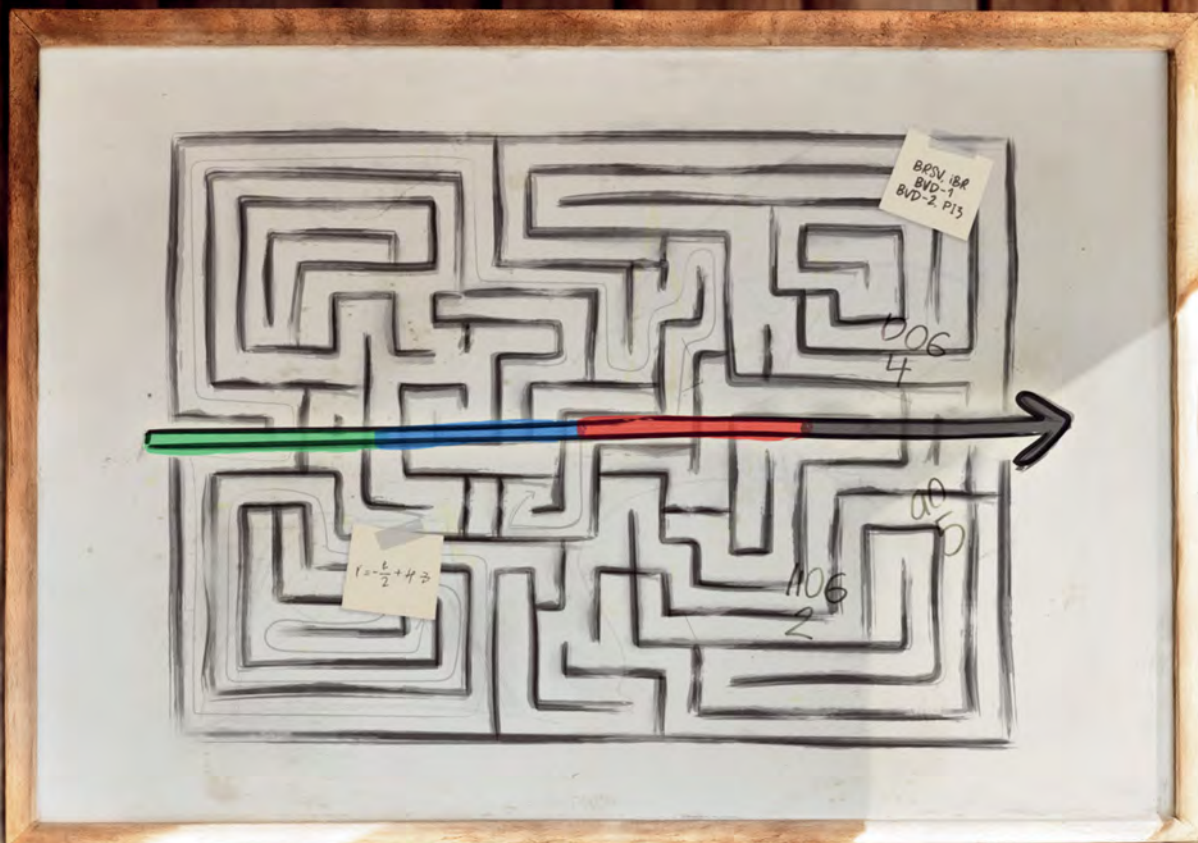
TOP 20 HOLSTEIN BULLS WITH GENOMIC INDEXES RANKED ON PROFITABLE LIFETIME INDEX (PLI) AUGUST 2026

PLI	Bull name	Milk kg	Fat kg	Ptn kg	Fat %	Ptn %	SCC	Mast	LA	LS	FI	£HC	Feed Adv	TM	Sire x maternal grandsire	From
919	GENOSOURCE JUMPSTART P	775	56.8	35.9	0.28	0.12	-11	-2	2.4	101	5.5	183	200	0.41	King P x McGuire	CBL
917	GENOSOURCE JUDO	1288	50.8	47.2	-0.01	0.05	-5	0	2.9	82	2.7	119	270	0.68	Radical x Thorson	CBL
907	PEAK ALTASPINWIN	932	57.5	37.3	0.22	0.07	-14	0	1.1	104	6.8	138	261	-0.66	AltaMakeover x Masterpiece	ALT
905	OCD THORSON RIPCORD	942	54.3	35.7	0.18	0.05	1	0	2.2	92	10.3	189	271	-0.06	Thorson x Captain	CBL
891	GENOSOURCE HEMI	620	46	29.5	0.24	0.1	-1	0	3.2	153	11.5	249	234	0.32	Ripcord x Sheepster	CBL
887	DENOVO CANTERBURY	841	60.3	37.8	0.29	0.11	-7	0	1.4	119	2.5	120	177	-0.11	Absolute x Benefit	GEN
880	PEAK ALTAROTATION	716	47.8	37.5	0.21	0.16	-12	-1	0.8	131	6.7	165	154	-0.3	AltaInspire x MirrorImage	ALT
880	GENOSOURCE LINGO	562	55.8	33.2	0.38	0.17	-17	-2	3.2	76	2.6	167	172	0.57	Bonjour x VanGogh	CBL
879	OCD RADICAL JOSH ALLEN	1180	54.7	41.7	0.08	0.03	-4	1	2.3	85	5.2	123	235	0.33	Radical x Thorson	CBL
871	PEAK ALTAfanbase	829	56.1	33.8	0.25	0.07	-11	0	2.8	85	4.6	130	298	-0.3	AltaMakeover x Olympus	ALT
867	PEAK ALTAvaughn	473	47.4	29.7	0.33	0.16	-15	-2	1.5	143	10.4	238	129	0.61	AltaInspire x MirrorImage	ALT
865	GENOSOURCE KING P	947	53.9	35.1	0.17	0.04	-11	-1	2.6	98	4.1	163	242	-0.43	Thorson x Captain	CBL
865	SFH SCUDETTO RED	1000	32	34.4	-0.09	0.02	-31	-3	1.9	192	6.8	300	191	0.9	SimplyRed x Rammstein	GEN
858	DENOVO 24249 HEATHROW	919	49.5	36.3	0.14	0.07	-10	0	2.5	113	9	187	175	0.14	Whoops x Leeds	GEN
857	PEAK ALTASovereignty	788	63.5	33.7	0.35	0.09	-9	0	1.7	95	5.8	142	133	0.83	AltaMakeover x Achieve	ALT
854	PEAK ALTATalltale	875	46.8	37.7	0.13	0.1	-20	-3	0.9	146	4.7	199	94	0.45	AltaInspire x Achieve	ALT
854	OCD SHEEPSTER MIKE	1169	47.5	38.3	0.01	0	-5	0	1.7	79	5.1	155	253	1.01	Sheepster x FrostBite	WWS
853	DENOVO CATERPILLAR	932	45	34.6	0.08	0.04	-29	-3	1.4	128	0.1	187	272	0.31	Columbia x Allied	GEN
853	ABS 18 GALACTIC	567	54.4	30.1	0.36	0.13	-6	-1	3.8	107	9.9	212	106	1.06	Hierarchy x Sheepster	GEN
848	DENOVO 6856 HOTSHOT	774	50.9	38.5	0.22	0.14	-12	0	2.4	104	3.1	113	186	-0.1	Shadow x Perfect	GEN

Source: AHDB Dairy. ALT = Alta Genetics; CBL = Cogent Breeding; GEN = Genus ABS; SMX = Semex; WWS = World Wide Sires UK. PLI = Profitable Lifetime Index; Mast = Mastitis; LAdv = Lameness Advantage; LS = Lifespan; FI = Fertility Index; £HC = HealthyCow; Feed Adv = Feed Advantage; TM = Type Merit.

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Innovation recognised at the Cream Awards

The keenly contested Award for Innovation was one of the 16 accolades at this year's Cream Awards. The entries, submitted by individuals or businesses, had to be innovations either launched or developed in the past two years. Howard Walsh reports.

This coveted award is sponsored by British Dairying and was judged by a group of previous Cream Award winners. This included Robert Craig, David Cotton, George Lester, Chris Gowan, Joe Ives, Alice Sault and Mark Adams.

The results were announced at the Cream Awards dinner on September 3, in front of a large gathering of farmers, vets, advisers, suppliers and other industry representatives.

There were two winners this year; Exmouth-based FarmWater, with its fully managed water hygiene solution, and Milton Keynes-based MSD Animal Health with Bovilis Cryptium, a vaccine to help protect calves against cryptosporidiosis caused by *Cryptosporidium parvum*.

Winner - FarmWater

FarmWater is a pressure-driven chlorine dioxide (ClO₂) system designed to improve water hygiene, animal health, and farm efficiency in ruminant livestock enterprises. The system generates high-output, on-demand ClO₂ - an effective biocide - at its point of use and is said to reduce chemical use by between 40% and 70%, potentially lowering costs and environmental impact.

The average dairy cow will drink between 60 and 120 litres/day, but often more consideration goes into their feed ration than their drinking water.

However, borehole, spring, or even mains water is not necessarily clean. Contaminants can develop on the water's journey from its source to the trough, or from the environment



FarmWater vet Phil Elkins receiving the award from Daniel Zeichner MP

like bird droppings, badger saliva, and cows' own faecal matter. So water quality can be improved by removing pathogens, biofilm and contaminants.

The improved water quality enhances animal health, including a reduction in mastitis, somatic cell counts (SCC), and other bacterial issues. The system can handle variable flow rates and organic loads without any manual adjustment and is supported by veterinary monitoring and data analysis. A 24-month study showed a 37% reduction in clinical mastitis, a 28% reduction in bulk tank SCC, and an 81% reduction in bactoscans.

What differentiates FarmWater is that conventional systems have used pre-generated ClO₂, manual dosing, or unstable chemical mixes that can

degrade rapidly, lose potency, or require constant adjustment.

In the FarmWater system, ClO₂ is produced only when water flows, ensuring stable dosing across variable demand, ranging from a single calf drinker to water for the full milking herd. By generating it on farm and keeping the ClO₂ within a sealed system before dosing, there are no concerns about chemicals escaping into the environment.

It was officially launched to the dairy sector at the British Mastitis Conference in 2025.

Winner - MSD Animal Health

The Bovilis Cryptium vaccine, says MSD, marks a major advance in preventing calf cryptosporidiosis, by shifting the focus from treating disease to protecting calves from birth. It's the first and only vaccine approved in GB to help protect calves against *Cryptosporidium parvum*, now the most common cause of infectious calf scour in the country.

It has been developed over the past 20 years and is intended for use in pregnant cows, stimulating antibody production in colostrum which then enables calves to receive passive immunity from birth.

Cryptosporidiosis has historically been one of the most frustrating and costly diseases for farmers and vets due to its infectious nature, environmental persistence and limited control options. It also can

be extremely difficult to eradicate once established on farm, so remains one of the most significant health and welfare challenges facing the industry.

It is estimated to cost the sector more than £11m/year and reportedly contributes to some 50% of calf deaths. Furthermore, it causes gut damage and reduced lifetime productivity.

The vaccine also supports responsible antibiotic use through proactive disease prevention. To date, more than 250,000 doses of the vaccine have been sold in GB since its launch at the end of 2024, with producers reporting significant improvements in calf health and productivity, reductions in scour and lower antibiotic use.

One farmer said: "If it wasn't for the vaccine coming out when it did, I would have stopped keeping the cattle." Another said the reduction in calf mortality alone more than paid for the vaccine used, and others reported no scour at all in their calves in 2025, after vaccinating the dams.

A further two entries were highly commended, and two commended. Highly commended were Galebreaker's CalfHub, and Precision Grazing's AIMER. The two commended by the judges were Milkrite's InterPuls IPS15 Air Guard, and CowManager's FindMyCowFlash.



Winners MSD Animal Health (L-R) Rob Simpson, Kat Baxter-Smith, John Mayer



Highly Commended - the AIMER tool

Highly Commended - Galebreaker - CalfHub

CalfHub is said to be a genuinely new approach to calf housing. Developed out of the 'Cost Effective Ventilated Environment for Calves' project, and subsequently commercially launched as CalfHub, it is an integrated calf-rearing system.

It combines building design, environmental control, automated monitoring, ventilation technology and practical management protocols. The developers identified calfhousing as often the 'poor relation' of dairy infrastructure investment. Many farms, it says, rely on repurposed buildings or hutch systems which can expose calves to poor air flow, temperature swings, stale air and inconsistent management, resulting in higher incidences of respiratory disease, reduced growth and increased labour requirements.

The new system's controller monitors external weather, temperature and humidity in each pen, as well as carbon dioxide and ammonia, light levels and power use. It also combines data like calf feed intake, weight, ear temperature and behaviour. It can then automatically adjust curtains, lighting and ventilation settings in response, and in colder conditions, a heated VentTube pre-warms fresh incoming air.

Highly Commended - Precision Grazing - AIMER

AIMER is a smartphone-based pasture measurement and grazing decision-support tool, now launched in the UK through an exclusive partnership between New Zealand agritech business AIMER Farming and UK grazing consultancy Precision Grazing.

More than 500 farms in New Zealand are already using the technology, and its launch in the UK follows 18 months of testing, data collection and development on commercial dairy farms.

Although traditional methods like plate meters, sward sticks and visual assessment all have a role, each brings limitations. With AIMER, farmers measure pasture cover by taking a short smartphone video in the paddock. The app estimates grass cover in kg of dry matter/ha and updates the farm's feed wedge and dashboard.

This helps turn readings into practical insights like which paddock to graze next, whether to supplement, if grass supply is building or falling, and predictions for the next two weeks.



The Highly Commended CalfHub is an integrated calf rearing system

Commended - Milkrite-Interpuls - IPS15 Air Guard

The IPS15 Air Guard milking liner combines engineering, science, animal welfare, and sustainability. It claims to improve milking performance, reduce disease transmission, support antibiotic stewardship and lower the environmental impact. The new liner has patented triangular vented technology which allows for a more uniform close around the teat, reducing pinching and slippage.

The innovative antibacterial silicone elastomer inhibits the survival and proliferation of bacteria and viruses on the liner surface throughout the product's entire lifecycle. Laboratory testing demonstrated that after 24 hours, almost all bacteria present on the IPS15 Air Guard liner surface had died, whereas conventional liner materials retained more than 95% of bacteria.

Commended - CowManager - FindMyCowFlash

FindMyCowFlash monitors an individual animal's fertility, health, nutrition and transition status via continuous real-time data from a lifetime ear sensor.

Launched in early 2026, its smart identification feature enables instant visual recognition of individual cows, heifers, or calves within a herd. A built-in flashing LED on the ear sensor, which is activated remotely via the CowManager smartphone app or desktop, enables easy identification of animals that need extra attention, whether they are in a crowded pen, during sorting, or in low-visibility conditions.

This simplifies manual sorting and daily herd management tasks by reducing time spent searching for animals, and improves operational accuracy. It also minimises stress for both animals and staff by reducing handling time.



The FindMyCowFlash ear sensor monitors calf, heifer and cow health

Worthy contenders

There are several other contenders which are worthy of a mention.

• Herdwatch

These contenders include FarmSync from Shropshire-based Herdwatch. An integration platform that connects a farmer's on-farm technology directly to the Herdwatch farm management app, it automatically synchronises herd and lactation data between systems. By May this year, it was being used on 102 dairy farms in the UK and Ireland.

• Shield Agriculture

The submission from Shield Agriculture in Lancashire centred on its achievements in supplying cow comfort products. These include, not least, Kraiburg agricultural matting, along with a selection of high-quality cow comfort equipment from European manufacturers.

• Silclear

Silclear, based in Hampshire, has developed Re-Sil, the world's first food-grade recycled silicone compound. It has been developed to tackle a long-standing issue within the dairy supply chain - the lack of a viable recycling route for silicone used in critical applications like tubing, liners, and processing components.

• The Pembrokeshire Project

The Pembrokeshire Project was formulated to manage the residual disease of bovine TB on farms in the county. Replacing frustration and helplessness with optimism, collaboration and practical action, the project is all about empowering farmers and vets to work together proactively. Using science, data and local knowledge they can make informed decisions that improve herd health, business resilience and long-term sustainability.

• UFAC

Suffolk-based company UFAC, in collaboration with the University of Nottingham's Professor Phil Garnsworthy, has developed a cost-effective and economic partial replacement for soyabean meal in dairy cow rations - Enviropro. The aim is to help protect the environment by reducing the feeding of soyabean meal while reducing palm deforestation.

• Wolfenden Concrete

Wolfenden Concrete, based in Lancashire, entered its AgriStride range of flooring systems, which it says helps increase cow confidence while ensuring a clean and safe environment. It aims to address lameness before it becomes an issue, rather than waiting to detect and treat the problem.

Can-Am unveils new 2027 utility range

Can-Am is putting utility at the forefront of design with its latest range, offering both side-by-side (SSV) and all-terrain (ATV) options designed with the user in mind. "Utility work does not follow a single pattern, and neither should the vehicle," says Aymeric Collet, Business Development Manager at BRP.

Suitable for operations both on and off the road, the latest models have been designed to create the ultimate workhorse.



The Can-Am Traxter 6x6 XU HD10 features more engine power options and refinements which promise to make tasks significantly easier. For example, the 80hp (58.8kW) Rotax triple-cylinder engine runs more quietly, with less vibration. This, combined with the redesigned chassis, helps reduce operator fatigue and keeps noise low around livestock.

The 2027 Traxter HD11 is equipped with BRP's latest 10.25-inch Wireless Touch display, featuring embedded navigation powered by BRP GO! that

keeps map and vehicle data available offline - ideal for those operating in more remote areas. The display also features a digital camera, to assist when reversing to a hitch or with a loaded cargo box.

Meanwhile the Can-Am Outlander Pro ATV features firmer, work-oriented suspension settings, a continuously variable transmission calibrated for utility applications, front and rear bumpers, A-arm protectors and thicker-ply tyres.

www.can-am.brp.com

AI cow lameness detector wins innovation award

MooMore has been named a winner of the Innovate UK Women in Innovation awards 2026. The visual artificial intelligence technology developed by Petiole is designed to detect the early signs of lameness in dairy cows.

Using thermal (infrared) imaging, photos and video data captured during routine health checks or as cows leave the milking parlour, the tool can detect lameness before visible symptoms appear. Lameness is one of the costliest and welfare-critical

conditions in British dairy farming, detecting problems early could make a big difference.

"We're giving farmers a heads-up that something might be developing, at a point when they can still act cheaply and quickly," says Maryna Kuzmenko, Founder of MooMore.

Thanks to Innovate UK support, MooMore will now be put through its paces on a Staffordshire dairy farm which will host a 12-month pilot.

www.moomore.com



Harbro acquires Cargill Animal Nutrition and Health's business

Harbro has acquired Cargill Animal Nutrition and Health's business in Dalton, North Yorkshire - including the feed plant and associated operations.

This broadens the company's product offering, strengthens its supply chain, and adds further depth of expertise across species, manufacturing, innovation, and animal performance.

"By combining the strengths of both teams, we enhance our

nutritional solutions and support improved performance for farmers, wholesale partners and the wider livestock industry," said Chris Baxter, CEO at Harbro.

Cargill's Dalton business will continue to operate as a separate company while the two teams work together to ensure a smooth integration of systems and processes, which is expected to be completed by early 2027.

www.harbro.co.uk

Kverneland launches round baler range

Kverneland has extended its portfolio with a range of fixed and variable chamber round balers, designed for grass and straw crops.

New models include the heavy duty Kverneland 6500F fixed chamber baler, the Densus 7060 and 7090 variable chamber balers, and the FastBale - a non-stop fixed chamber, baler wrapper combination.

www.kvernelandgroup.com



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Eco Balance sole supplier for biological products



Northern Ireland-based Eco Balance has become sole supplier for Microbe-Lift and Quantum Growth biological products in the UK and Ireland.

"Eco Balance is bringing farmers access to 50 years of specialist experience in bacterial biotechnology," said Clem FitzGerald, Eco Balance Director. "Our job is to combine that technology with proper farm assessment, crop-specific programmes and

measurable evidence under UK and Irish farming conditions.”

Developed by US manufacturer Ecological Laboratories, the products have been developed to improve soil biology and help crops use nutrients more efficiently. Microbe-Lift helps with the biological optimisation of dairy, beef and pig slurry while Quantum Growth is a biological crop and soil-enhancement range containing selected communities of live, naturally occurring beneficial micro-organisms.

The products can be used as part of an integrated nutrition cycle to allow farmers to extract more value from the nutrients they already have on farm, with savings estimated at £500-£1,000 for a 1m-litre slurry tank, said Clem. "Our message is straightforward: Before buying more nitrogen, make sure you are getting the maximum possible value from the nitrogen you already have."

www.eco-bl.com

Polaris unveils 2027 off-road range

Polaris Off Road has unveiled its 2027 model range for Europe, led by the new Ranger Diesel Nordic Pro. This factory-cabbed diesel workhorse is designed to provide all-weather comfort to operators, working in even the most challenging conditions.

Powered by a 25hp Kubota diesel engine, the Nordic Pro combines Polaris' Ranger Diesel platform with a cab with heating, demist and defrost functionalities, manual-crank windows, under-seat storage and an integrated noise-reduction system. This offers greater year-round comfort without compromising on practical capabilities.



The new Ranger 600 model also has Gen 2 transmission; delivering 50% easier shifting, upgraded electronic power steering, a new colour display and an updated engine controller with integrated speed-limiting capability.
www.polarisbritain.com

Omex invests in new liquid fertiliser distribution facility

Liquid fertiliser producer, Omex Agriculture is constructing a new purpose-built liquid fertiliser distribution facility at Portbury, Bristol, marking a major step in supporting growers.

The facility will triple storage capacity, quadruple load-out capability and provide 24-hour operational support to farmers across the West. Designed with future growth and speed of service in mind, the new site provides eight times the daily loading capacity of the existing facility, offering farmers high-quality

liquid fertiliser when they need it most. As liquid fertiliser continues to grow in popularity, the expanded facility will use state-of-the-art technology to halve load-out times, speeding up delivery to farm.

www.omex.com/uk



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Joined-up thinking on disease



Ian Harvey

NFU Dairy Board Chair

For many dairy farmers, bluetongue has gone from being a concern on the horizon to an immediate reality. It has rapidly developed into a significant issue, bringing uncertainty, disruption and anxiety for dairy businesses at a time when many are already managing considerable economic pressures.

For me, this is not just a wider industry issue; the virus reached my own farm several weeks ago, giving me first-hand experience and bringing home the very real challenges that accompany a disease outbreak.

If we are serious about strengthening the UK's ability to prevent and control livestock disease, the government must ensure that we have the right tools, data and support in place. Effective disease management is a shared responsibility, and government support in these areas would strengthen the resilience of UK livestock farming.

A strange enemy

Bluetongue has always felt like one of those diseases that happens 'somewhere else' - usually in sheep, usually abroad, usually something we read about in the farming press rather than face in our own yards. But the 2026 season has changed that. As I write this, there are now more than 500 confirmed cases of BTV 3 across the UK and many more not appearing on official statistics.

Bluetongue is a strange enemy. It's not spread by nose to nose contact or sloppy biosecurity - it's carried by biting midges, tiny insects that don't care about county boundaries or farm assurance schemes. Once temperatures rise enough for the virus to replicate inside them, transmission takes off. This year, midges became active on March 31, and by July the disease was moving fast, with the South West first in the firing line. As dairy farmers, we're used to managing what we can control: nutrition, genetics, housing, hygiene. Bluetongue reminds us that some threats drift in on the wind.

Sheep show the worst signs, but cattle are far from unaffected. The official list includes acute lameness, crusty erosions around the muzzle, nasal discharge, watery eyes, fever, milk drop, and even abortion or stillbirths.

On our farm in Cornwall, we have seen all of the above, but the first severe sign was a redness just above the hooves and a stiffness in walking. This leads to a cow that's off her feed for a day or two, which then can take up to two weeks to recover production.

But at the moment, with prompt treatment with amoxicillin and anti-inflammatories, coupled with some residue of last year's vaccinations, this period can be shortened to five days. However, while some cattle show only mild signs, they can remain infectious for weeks - a silent risk within the herd.

Youngstock (circa 12 months) can respond quicker and, treated in the first 24 hours of visible symptoms we have seen recovery within 12 hours, which is encouraging - and these wouldn't have been vaccinated in 2025.

The situation is particularly challenging because many dairy businesses operate within tightly managed production systems. Decisions made months or even years ago on breeding, genetics and herd growth can suddenly become much harder to implement. Farmers are now finding themselves reassessing plans, delaying movements and navigating additional administrative requirements, often at short notice.

My current concern is unvaccinated cows now approaching calving. The culmination of challenges of hot weather, calving and bluetongue infection are proving to be fatal in some cases. I cannot stress enough the importance of having conversations with your vet about vaccination.

Vaccination is not a silver bullet. It will not remove every challenge associated with bluetongue overnight, nor will it eliminate the need for wider disease control measures.

However, it represents one of the strongest defences available. By helping reduce the impact of disease in susceptible animals, vaccination can play a critical role in protecting animal health and supporting business resilience.

There have been challenges in getting the number of vaccines needed out to vet practices. We know manufacturers are working extremely hard to increase supplies and make more doses available. We now have the added challenge where the prevalence of the disease is acute, of deciding when best to vaccinate. This is where conversations with your vet are vital.

No one-size-fits-all

The dairy sector has a strong track record of embracing science and innovation when it comes to animal health. Farmers understand the importance of prevention and are accustomed to taking proactive steps to safeguard their herds. Bluetongue vaccination should be viewed through that same lens.

Of course, the success of any vaccination strategy depends upon confidence, availability and clear communication. Farmers need straightforward information about products, eligibility, timing and administration requirements. We need practical guidance that helps us make informed decisions for our individual businesses. Most importantly, we need certainty wherever possible in what remains a rapidly evolving situation.

We must also recognise that different regions and different farming systems may face varying levels of risk and impact. A one-size-fits-all approach is rarely effective in agriculture. Disease control measures need to be practical, proportionate and informed by the realities of farming on the ground.

Practical support is another critical part of the response. For dairy producers, managing bluetongue is not simply a matter of following guidance. There are often additional costs, labour

requirements and management burdens associated with disease mitigation. These challenges can accumulate quickly, particularly for businesses already operating under tight margins.

Where support mechanisms can help reduce barriers to disease control, they should be explored. Encouraging vaccine uptake, improving access to information and ensuring efficient administration of disease management measures can all contribute positively to the sector's resilience.

Veterinary professionals will also remain central to our response. Farmers consistently place enormous value on the trusted advice provided by their vets. As businesses assess vaccination options and navigate changing circumstances, veterinary expertise will continue to be indispensable.

Looking ahead, we must acknowledge that the factors influencing bluetongue are unlikely to disappear. Changes in weather patterns and disease dynamics mean the livestock sector increasingly faces challenges that were once considered less common or less widespread. That reality reinforces the importance of preparedness, surveillance and rapid response capabilities.

Practical support is needed

The UK's dairy farmers are incredibly resilient, but resilience should never be mistaken for invulnerability. Businesses need the right tools, information and support networks to adapt effectively. Strengthening those foundations today will help protect the industry against future animal health threats as well as the current challenge.

While industry continues to invest heavily in biosecurity and disease prevention, there are areas where government policy could do more to support effective disease control. Improved reporting mechanisms, including veterinary-attested records of holdings where testing has not been undertaken, would provide a more complete picture of disease risk when incorporated into national mapping systems.

We also need practical systems that allow vaccination information to be recorded at an individual animal level, giving farmers and authorities better oversight of disease protection across the national herd.

Government must also ensure that vaccine availability is not compromised by supply chain or regulatory barriers. Farmers need certainty that a mix of UK and imported vaccines can be deployed quickly and efficiently when required. Alongside this, support with the costs of fallen stock collection across the livestock sector would recognise the important role that responsible carcass disposal plays in maintaining high standards of animal health and biosecurity.

Bluetongue is disruptive, unpredictable, and emotionally draining. But farmers are adapting - watching stock more closely, reporting signs quickly, and preparing for vaccination.

We don't fear bluetongue, but we respect it. And with good science, strong communication, and practical support, we can manage it. For now, we keep going - because that's what dairy farmers do.



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