

ALL THINGS DAIRY

AUTUMN 2024

YOUR AHDB DAIRY UPDATE



Driving British
dairy's global reach

Driving change through
accurate on-farm
environmental data

DAIRY MARKETING
sets the pace

Promotional activity steps up in 2024

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AHDB is a statutory levy board, funded by farmers, growers and others in the supply chain. We equip the industry with easy to use, practical know-how which they can apply straight away to make better decisions and improve their performance. For further information, please visit ahdb.org.uk

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WELCOME

Nic Parsons,
Head of Engagement – Dairy



Welcome to the autumn edition of **All Things Dairy**, where we bring you the latest insights and developments from AHDB. This edition kicks off with **Graham Wilkinson** explaining how we're working to unlock our full potential. We also feature a thought-provoking piece from **Paul Flanagan**, whose perspective adds context to our work.

In the realm of marketing, we explore how dairy promotion is setting the pace for the industry, and we look at strategies for educating tomorrow's consumers to ensure a sustainable future for British dairy. We also examine efforts to expand the global reach of British dairy products, showcasing their quality on the world stage.

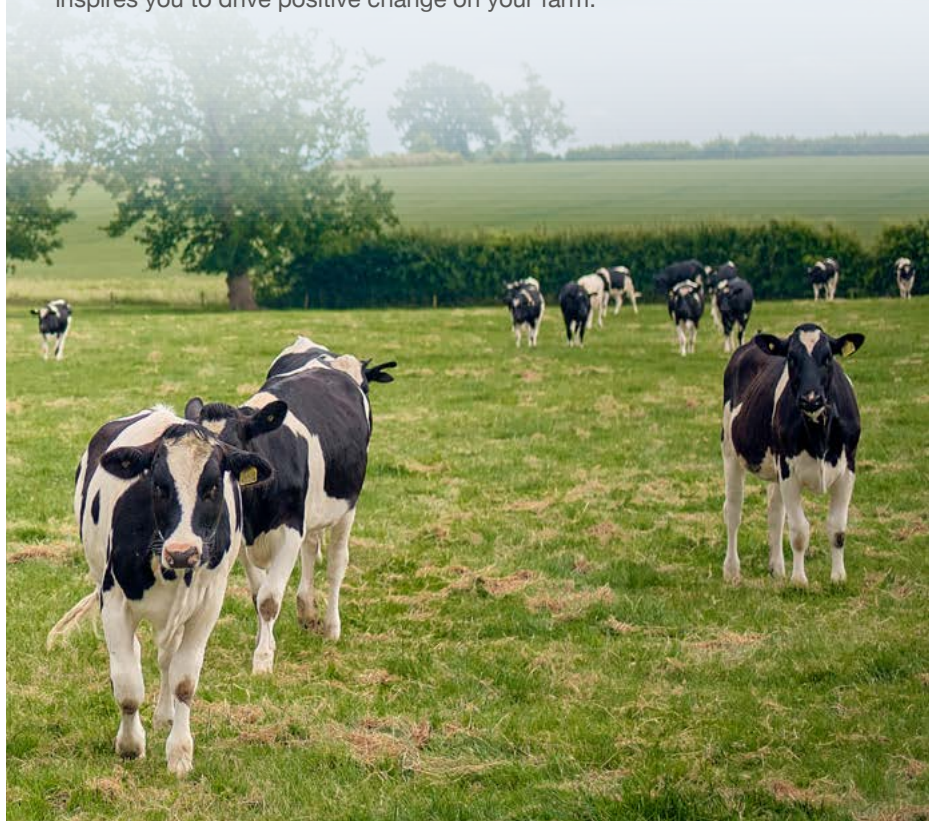
Our environment section addresses the critical need for accurate, on-farm environmental data to drive meaningful change and discusses breeding strategies that contribute to the industry's net zero ambitions.

In the business section, we introduce our new Strategic Farms initiative, designed to foster collective growth. We also revisit grazing foundations with fresh insights and delve into how genomic testing creates new opportunities and challenges by widening the gap between herds.

Health and welfare remain a top priority, with articles focusing on proactive approaches to Johne's disease, enhancing cow mobility and the latest on Bluetongue 3.

We wrap up the issue with essential news and updates to keep you informed and prepared.

This edition is packed with knowledge and strategies, and we hope it inspires you to drive positive change on your farm.





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Unleashing AHDB's FULL POTENTIAL

I have now been at AHDB for six months, and what a six months it has been! I have had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know our teams, travelling across the country to speak with levy payers and stakeholders at events such as the Royal Highland Show, Groundswell and the Farm to Fork summit at Downing Street.

I was delighted to get to know the CEO of the British Universities and Colleges Sport to discuss our exciting new partnership with the Milk Every Moment marketing campaign. I've also spent time with processors, retailers and others from across the dairy industry who joined one of our 'Dairy Insight' days to share the valuable work we're doing on behalf of levy payers.

I really believe in AHDB and that it has an important role within our industry. To fulfil that role we need to make sure we are fit for purpose, and work is underway to make sure that is the case. We have been busy reviewing our sector plans,

listening to key internal and external stakeholders and gaining feedback from the people who work here.

Our success relies on us:

- Being levy payer obsessed and maintaining a critical focus on your success
- Showing strong, brave and decisive leadership
- Focusing on our culture and people, creating a work environment fit to thrive, enabling us to attract and retain industry-leading talent
- Driving expertise and excellence to support our growth

The need for change is now and work is already well underway. In July, I restructured my leadership team – an important first step in getting AHDB on the right path. This included consolidating some functions and, crucially, creating sector director positions. These roles put levy payer needs and priorities at

the executive level of our organisation. This will be key to our success in delivering for our sectors, ensuring we engage and support all levy payers in the things that are important to them.

Along with my leadership team, I want to bring clarity to our vision, purpose and strategy, which will enable us to create greater collaborations and powerful partnerships with industry.

We are a few months into this journey, but there is still much to do, and I look forward to keeping you updated on our progress.

Graham Wilkinson
AHDB CEO

DELIVERING REAL VALUE to our dairy farmers

Our main job at AHDB can be summed up in one phrase – having farmers' backs. Paul Flanagan, Dairy Sector Director, explains how levy funds the challenges that cannot, or will not, be addressed by individual farmers, commercial companies or governments.

A couple of years ago, during our Shape the Future consultation, you had your say on what work we should be doing on your behalf.

You told us exactly what you wanted from us:

- Promote the reputation of dairy and dairy farming
- Back that reputation with solid data and evidence
- Boost exports

These weren't new areas for us, but hearing it directly was a powerful reminder of where our focus needs to be.

Our main marketing initiative, Let's Eat Balanced, is a cornerstone of this effort. It works to enhance consumer attitudes to dairy on TV, social media and in supermarkets. We do this by positioning dairy as a vital part of a healthy, sustainable diet. At the same time, our Exports team are laying the foundation for success abroad, forging connections with exporters and buyers.

We know there has been an increase in requests for farmers to provide public goods such as affordable food, carbon removal and nature recovery in recent years. We understand the drive for this comes from consumers, governments and the supply chain. How can we help you manage these requests and make your business more productive and profitable?

The Dairy Sector Council built your priorities into a sector plan that guides our work with a clear sense of direction. With the first dairy levy increase in 20 years taking effect on 1 April 2024, we will now be able to do even more of what you've asked for.

This additional funding enables us to invest more in the Let's Eat Balanced campaign. We are specifically targeting those who are cutting back on dairy. If you haven't seen the campaign, it means we have got our consumer targeting right because we're not aiming at dairy enthusiasts like you. We're trying to reach the ones who need a bit more convincing.

The extra budget has also allowed us to connect with 18–24-year-olds through our new Milk Every Moment campaign. By partnering with British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS), we're talking with university and college students about the role milk plays in a healthy diet. And it's not just about today's consumers – we're also investing in tomorrow's. Through our levy-funded education programmes, we help schoolchildren understand where their food comes from and build their confidence in cooking and nutrition.

While our domestic marketing efforts are crucial, we haven't lost sight of the importance of exports. The income from exports is reinvested in the UK dairy market. With increased levy investment and support from the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), we're better positioned to target overseas markets. We've already recruited full-time agents to focus on dairy in North America and the Middle East and expanded our Export team to seize these new opportunities.

But our reputation isn't just about marketing and exports, it's also about sustainability. With the support of the sector council, we've launched an Environment Baseline Pilot. This project will establish net carbon levels and greenhouse gas emissions on 50 dairy farms across Britain, providing

the accurate data we need to safeguard the future of UK agriculture with fair recognition and reward.

While these are the key areas you've asked us to focus on, our work doesn't stop there. We're still leading the way in dairy genetics, providing vital market information and offering practical support to farmers every day.

Every decision we make at AHDB is guided by your needs and priorities. Whether we're working on marketing, defending the sector's reputation, or supporting exports, our goal remains the same: ensuring a sustainable and profitable future for GB dairy farmers.

The Dairy Sector Council reviews the budget annually to make sure every penny you invest is allocated where it will make the biggest difference for you and the industry.

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DAIRY MARKETING sets the pace

Our marketing activity has really taken a step up this year.

Let's Eat Balanced continues to build on the success of its predecessor by enhancing dairy's image as a key part of a healthy, sustainable diet. This year, we've improved public perceptions, with a notable rise in recognition of dairy's nutritional benefits.

At the same time, our new Milk Every Moment campaign targets young athletes and students, promoting milk's benefits and countering misconceptions. Track star Christine Ohuruogu MBE helped to highlight milk's value in supporting athletic performance and healthy lifestyles.

Let's Eat Balanced

The campaign builds on the success of We Eat Balanced, focusing on promoting British red meat and dairy as part of a healthy and sustainable diet. This year's

increased investment allows for more frequent visibility on TV, in supermarkets, newspapers and on social media.

January's push significantly enhanced the perception of dairy as a crucial part of a balanced diet. The campaign reached 47 million adults, with social content viewed 94 million times. This led to a 5% increase in people perceiving dairy as an important part of a balanced diet and a 6% rise in shoppers who believe dairy provides a range of vitamin and minerals and is natural and sustainably produced.

Let's Eat Balanced continues to promote the health, sustainability and natural benefits of dairy products via Instagram and Facebook all year round. Further bursts of promotional activity took place during September and will resume in January.

Empowering the next generation

In July, we launched our Milk Every Moment campaign to promote the benefits of milk among young athletes and students. This three-year collaboration with British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) aims to educate students across 165 universities and colleges about milk's role in a healthy diet.

BUCS, which engages over 500,000 student-athletes and sports enthusiasts, will help us deliver relevant and engaging content that showcases milk as a nutritional powerhouse, competing with high-sugar energy drinks and milk alternatives.



© BUCS



Let's Eat Balanced Campaign

Delivering for levy payers

LET'S EAT BALANCED

Reached

47

million adults*



15 million

on-pack stickers appeared in 6 supermarkets



+4%

POINTS***

Positive movement in consumer perceptions that red meat and dairy can be enjoyed as part of a healthy balanced diet.



Generated nearly

94 million

social media impressions*



Very entertaining, motivating and informative. I like that it is upbeat and positive about meat and dairy**

Consumer quote on the TV advert:

7/10

consumers who saw the TV ad said it gave them new information about meat and dairy**



*TV and social analytics **Independent Qualitative Research. Two Ears One Mouth. Feb 2024 ***Source: Two Ears One Mouth, free association Feb 24 vs Aug 23

The campaign targets university students and Gen Z (ages 18–25), who are making independent dietary choices and often face misinformation about dairy milk. We aim to counter myths with evidence-based information on milk's benefits, like its high protein content, and encourage its daily inclusion in their diets.

Milk Every Moment will be promoted through BUCS's social media channels, emails, website and at events. We are also sponsoring the renamed Men's and Women's BUCS Super Rugby Milk Championships.

Our pilot earlier this year reached over 1.5 million people and engaged 200,000 students and fans, confirming the campaign's potential and leading to our long-term partnership with BUCS.

Find out more about our marketing work at ahdb.org.uk/marketing



© BUCS

Track star Christine Ohuruogu swaps gold medals for gold paint

Back in July, track star Christine Ohuruogu MBE went gold and raised a glass of milk as part of our Milk Every Golden Moment campaign to highlight the importance of milk in sport.

The gold-medal-winning former track and field athlete, together with four of

the UK's up-and-coming gold-medal prospects, was painted head to toe in gold to highlight why so many British consumers rely on milk to support their sporting goals.

She was joined by four potential Team GB gold prospects who have

competed in British Universities and College Sports (BUCS) competitions – rower Vwairé Obukohwo, para-swimmer Faye Rogers and volleyball duo Javier and Joaquin Bello.



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EDUCATING tomorrow's consumers

Roz Reynolds, Head of Education, highlights the importance of educating children about food and farming and outlines our key initiatives to tackle this important area.



As someone deeply invested in the future of the farming industry, I believe that educating tomorrow's consumers is crucial for our long-term sustainability. That's why I am passionate about our levy-funded education work, which aims to increase children's understanding of where their food comes from and build their confidence in cooking and knowledge of nutrition.

To help children become more confident in preparing meals and eating healthily, we collaborate with the British Nutrition Foundation to deliver the Food – a fact of life programme. This initiative offers a wealth of resources teachers can use in their lessons. We organise teacher conferences and interactive events to enhance classroom delivery. Additionally, our ingredients into schools initiative allows teachers to offer practical cooking lessons even when cost is a barrier, ensuring all children can learn these essential skills.

Our school farm visits support programme is one of my favourite projects. It helps farmers provide impactful on-farm experiences for schoolchildren, giving them a first-hand look at where their food comes from.

We also proudly sponsor LEAF Open Farm Sunday, enabling children to visit working farms and witness them in action. Our partnership with Countryside Classroom also provides teachers with resources on food, farming and the natural environment, further enriching students' learning experiences.

Working with and supporting various organisations across the agri-food sector is vital to our mission. Each organisation plays a unique role in

improving children's understanding of the importance of food and farming.

Through these collaborations, we are creating a more informed and engaged generation of consumers who will value and support the UK's food and farming industry for years to come.

Ingredients into schools: A recipe for success

Earlier this year, as part of our education work to build children's confidence in cooking, we launched an innovative pilot initiative to provide free ingredients to schools.

In collaboration with the British Nutrition Foundation, this ambitious programme aimed to empower students with practical cookery skills.

The programme supplied essential ingredients, such as British pork, beef, flour and dairy products, enabling schools to offer practical food lessons that many would otherwise struggle to afford. Three mini pilots focused on different ingredients over separate fortnights.

British dairy and flour fortnight was held in March, involving 910 students from 10 schools. They learned to make home-made butter and crumpets – an experience that delighted both students and teachers.

Afterwards, 100% of teachers agreed that the activity increased students' skills and confidence in cooking. And 27% of schools reported a positive effect on student attendance levels, underscoring the programme's broader benefits.

The goal is to expand the initiative to more schools, continuing collaboration with partners to support its growth.



Bringing the classroom to the countryside

Dobcross Hall in Cumbria opened its gates to eager young minds from William Howard School in Brampton as part of our school farm visits support programme.

Farmer Helen Holliday, one of 20 successful applicants for the pilot programme in 2023, received fully funded Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS) training and one-to-one support.

This collaboration with LEAF Education aims to enhance students' understanding of farming and food origins by delivering high-quality, safe and memorable on-farm experiences.

Helen held her first school visit in May and aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the dairy cow life cycle, cow health and welfare and the farm's work on sustainability and technology, such as robotic scrapers and silage pushers.

The day started with a tour of the calves and the main cow shed. Highlights included watching an artificial insemination and hoof-trimming session. A healthy soils workshop allowed students to conduct soil health checks and worm counts. The visit concluded with a stock judging activity, where students evaluated the farm's cows.

Feedback from the school was overwhelmingly positive. The headteacher expressed interest in a lasting partnership with Dobcross Hall, integrating farm visits into the school's curriculum for Years 8 and 9. Students particularly enjoyed the hoof-trimming session, observing robotic technology and interacting with newborn calves.

Helen was delighted by the students' enthusiasm and curiosity, which brought joy and pride to the farm staff. She highlighted the importance of the CEVAS training and one-to-one support, which significantly boosted her confidence and knowledge.

Find out more at
ahdb.org.uk/education

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Driving British dairy's **GLOBAL REACH**



The Paris Olympics may well have taken centre stage this summer, but we have been busy making sure Britain's world-class dairy produce stay on top of the global agri-food exports podium – Lucy Randolph, Head of International Trade, explains how.

As part of our ongoing work to help drive international success for British dairy produce, last month (September) saw us bring key buyers from around 30 countries to the UK to take part in the DBT-led Dairy Showcase. Around 65 of our dairy exporters also took part in the week-long programme, which included tours to processors, farm visits, one-to-one meetings and a gala reception. The showcase formed part of the Dairy Export Programme, which was the result of the £1m committed by the former Government to boost UK dairy exports, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The programme showcased the best of everything British, with world-class dairy products produced by our levy payers taking pride of place in front of a global audience. Trade is about people making connections, and these events play a critical role in helping us maximise export opportunities for UK dairy exports.

Ultimately, there's no point having world-class produce if you're not shouting about it. The showcase was another example of how we're supporting the dairy sector's global reach. It followed us promoting dairy at Restaurant and Bar Hong Kong and our participation at the International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA) trade show in Houston, USA, in June.

Our new US in-market specialist, Victor Willis, supported exporters showcasing high-quality cheese to foodservice and retail buyers at IDDBA. This highlights our and DBT's commitment to maximising opportunities for dairy in the USA. Victor's role, co-funded by AHDB and DBT as part of the Dairy Export Programme, has also been replicated in the Middle East with the recent appointment of

Adil Khan to develop opportunities for dairy in that region. A similar appointment for the Asia region is imminent.

International trade development remains a key area of work at AHDB. It is something our dairy levy payers have told us they want to see more of. Our job is to support export growth and help our exporters thrive in markets around the world.

The Dairy Showcase and our participation in the IDDBA are the latest events in what has already been a busy year for our Dairy Export team. We started the year with 16 exporters taking part in the British Cheese Night at the Foundation Rooms, Mandalay Bay Hotel, hosted by AHDB. The event, coinciding with the Winter Fancy Food Show, brought together exporters with existing and potential customers. It attracted over 80 high-end buyers from hotels and retailers, as well as chefs and distributors. The event featured cheese displays and tastings, showcasing what British dairy exporters have to offer.

In February, seven more dairy exporters joined us at Gulfood in Dubai, which is quickly becoming a major global food and drink show – to promote world-class produce to thousands of buyers from around the globe. Our dairy stand featured cheese, butter, infant formula and milk powders. Before the show, there was a dedicated dairy buyer breakfast meeting event, with 11 British dairy companies taking part – the seven businesses accompanying AHDB and four others – and they met with over 20 buyers.

Throughout March, dishes featuring high-quality British dairy and red meat were cooked up by three of Hong Kong's most talented chefs and used in their restaurant menus as part of a month-long

campaign. Hong Kong is an important dairy importer and the market presents opportunities for premium dairy products from the UK in the foodservice sector and with high-end retailers. Our campaign was aimed at raising the profile of our high-quality produce with consumers.

March also saw British dairy making its mark in Singapore with the help of the executive chef from two-Michelin star restaurant JAAN. Kirk Westaway headlined an exclusive Singapore meat and dairy chef's demonstration organised by us. Twenty-one chefs from Singapore representing some of the top restaurants attended the event, which was topped off with a sumptuous cheeseboard featuring all the best cheeses available in market.

So it's already been a busy and productive 2024, but the work doesn't stop now. This month (October), we will be taking part in a dairy reception in Paris to coincide with SIAL – the world's biggest food trade exhibition. We will be following that up with our participation at FHC in Shanghai in November.

International trade development therefore continues to be a key strategic objective for AHDB, and we will continue to work with industry and government through 2024 and into 2025 to ensure consumers in multiple global markets continue to enjoy world-class British dairy produce.

Find out more at
ahdb.org.uk/exports

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5L1-03
GREAT
BRITAIN & NORTHERN IRELAND

**QUALITY
CHEESE**
from Britain



“ Our job is to support export growth and to help our exporters thrive in markets around the world ”

DRIVING CHANGE

through accurate on-farm environmental data



We are addressing the intense pressure faced by farmers to deliver on environmental targets through our new baselining pilot. Our Environment and Livestock Science Director, Chris Gooderham, tells us more.

Agriculture is facing the biggest challenge of a generation in demonstrating the positive impact farming systems can have on the environment, amplified by a lack of accurate on-farm-level data.

To tackle this issue, we have launched, with support from Quality Meat Scotland, our baselining pilot which will collect a range of accurate on-farm environmental data.

The pilot will also allow the industry to demonstrate how it delivers a collection of critical public goods, benefiting all of society, such as improving water quality, reducing greenhouse gases, building carbon stocks, enhancing soil health and supporting biodiversity both above and below ground.

Farmers want to know their numbers

We had a great response to the launch, receiving 509 expressions of interest to take part in the project, with 149 having dairy enterprises. But we could only take 170 farms through and so spent most of August scrutinising the applications and getting additional information where needed.

Then, by using data tools to ensure completely unbiased selection, we identified the final 170 that represent the wide variation in British agriculture's different production systems, soil types and land management styles.

Empowering farmers

The first stage of on-farm work will start in November and the selected 170 will gain a full understanding of their individual farm's environmental performance, obtaining unique knowledge and confidence to make impactful changes to safeguard their future.

The following activities will take place on farm:

- Aerial LiDAR (light detection and ranging) scanning to assess above-ground carbon stocks in trees and hedges, as well as mapping run-off risk
- Assessment of soil carbon levels and soil health analysis
- Carbon audit and action plan

We aim to explore and demonstrate the range of tools available to farmers, the win-wins, the win-loses and ultimately the scale of the potential improvements British agriculture can deliver with the right insight and support.

Rewriting the narrative

Ultimately, this project is more than just a pilot, it's a movement to redefine how farmers are recognised for delivering food and environmental goods simultaneously. Demonstrating the true environmental impact of agriculture in Great Britain, the scale and potential of natural carbon stocks and sequestration and the industry's progress towards net zero and facilitating a transition to more informed action and debate about British agriculture.

To find out more, visit ahdb.org.uk/baselining

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Breeding to achieve NET ZERO

Better breeding can play a major role in achieving net zero. Marco Winters, Head of Animal Genetics, says that by simply selecting better genetics, it's estimated that the dairy industry can reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 20% over the next 20 years.



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Dairy farmers have been breeding to reduce GHGs since at least the 1990s when genetic indexes to improve fertility, health and lifespan began to be introduced. This is because every step taken to improve the efficiency of dairy production is a step towards reducing emissions.

We pushed this direction of travel further by developing EnviroCow, a genetic index specifically designed to improve the environmental efficiency of milk production.

The index incorporates cow lifespan, milk production, fertility and, most importantly, our Feed Advantage index, which reflects that the most feed-efficient animals produce the least methane.

Feed Advantage predicts how much feed can be saved while maintaining a cow's milk production. The difference between the progeny of the most and

least efficient Feed Advantage bulls is not insignificant, and the feed saving for one animal can be as much as 500 kg of dry matter per lactation.

EnviroCow is published for both bulls and cows, with a higher figure reflecting better environmental credentials. All milk-recorded producers can gain access to their own herd's EnviroCow indexes, which are available through AHDB in our Herd Genetic Report.

They will also note the strong correlation between £PLI and EnviroCow, confirming that animals which excel financially also tend to have better environmental credentials.

However, if breeders choose to target EnviroCow as their priority index, it is predicted that they'll have scope to reduce their herd's GHG emissions by around 1% per year. As genetic changes are

permanent and accumulate over the generations, this means that over 20 years they could reduce their herd's emissions by 20% through breeding alone.

All of this illustrates the power of genetics to help significantly and permanently address the dairy industry's challenges. This will be enhanced as new genetic traits come on stream, giving an increasingly favourable outlook for cutting carbon emissions.

To find out more, visit
ahdb.org.uk/dairy-breeding-genetics

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GROWING TOGETHER: introducing our new Strategic Farms



Doreen Anderson, Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager, introduces us to the four new farms we have launched since our spring update.

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Each farm is at various stages in its journey towards achieving its business objectives, yet all share a common desire to learn and share their experiences with other farmers.

Our new cohort of farms have already been focused on a variety of topics, including setting farm KPIs, forage, youngstock, slurry store upgrades, soil health and mobility.

There's lots more to come too, as we'll be covering areas such as slurry utilisation, calf pneumonia, housed cow mobility, soils and staff management at upcoming meetings.

In May, we started recruitment for farms in Wales, helping to spread farmer-to-farmer learnings far and wide. We are looking forward to sharing more information on them later in the year.

Whitewool Farm

Owned by Jamie and Will Bulter, Whitewool Farm in Hampshire is a mixed-enterprise business offering glamping, fishing and self-storage alongside their dairy and arable units. This farm is made up of 1,100 acres of owned land and 145 acres of rented land. Their herd contains 400 Holstein-Friesian cows on an autumn block-calving system. Jamie and Will are focused on productivity and efficiency, as well as continuing their journey to net zero.



Bentley Ford Farm

Shropshire-based dairy farm Bentley Ford Farm is owned by the Higgins family – Cheryl, David and Robert. It is home to 210 fully housed, pedigree Holstein cows, on an all-year-round calving system. The cows are averaging 10,000 litres, with 3,800 litres from forage, at 4.0% fat and 3.3% protein. Over the next three years, they want to improve what they are doing, look at infrastructure changes, such as improving their parlour, and continue to maximise milk from forage.



Curtis Hulme Farm

Cheshire farmers David and Caroline Williams run a herd of 450 cows on a split-block-calving system. The cows are a three-way cross with Holstein-Friesian, Norwegian Red and Montbeliarde, yielding approximately 8,600 litres per cow. The farm is made up of 540 acres, 200 acres of which is rented and the rest is contract farmed, growing maize, wheat, barley and grass with clover leys. During their time as strategic farmers, they want to look at soil mapping and increase herd productivity.



Wolfhall Farm

Herd manager Anthony Mitchell and farm owner Tom Blanchard run a 600-cow, crossbred herd in Wiltshire. Their split-block-calving herd yields approximately 6,000 litres per cow. The farm is made up of 600 ha, with a 175 ha grazing platform offering grass, maize, fodder beet and lucerne grown to support the dairy.



To get involved with the Strategic Dairy Farm Programme and see upcoming events, visit ahdb.org.uk/strategic-dairy-farms

Or follow AHDB Dairy on Instagram, X or Facebook

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Rethinking grazing foundations

Thom Washbourne, Knowledge Exchange Manager, shares how the team at Lydney Park Farm in Gloucestershire have been reassessing their farming practices to increase dry matter yields.



Lydney Park has a history of adaptation, transitioning from a fully housed system to a low-input grazing model, which has benefitted both the land and profitability. Yet, the team continues to evaluate what works best, setting key performance indicators (KPIs) and specific profit targets to guide operations.

As a newer member of our Strategic Dairy Farms, the team has collaborated with Dr Brendan Horan from Teagasc to gain a deeper understanding of the business and establish clear goals. Discussions have focused on soil nutrients and forage production. With input from a steering group of experts, including dairy farmers and consultants, the farm has developed a detailed report highlighting strengths and identifying opportunities for improvement. The report also introduced KPIs to support ongoing monitoring.

One of the farm's strengths is its extensive milking platform, which has historically produced high yields, sometimes exceeding 15 tonnes of dry matter per hectare (DM/ha). However, recent years have seen a decline in pasture production due to wetter winters and drier summers. Farm manager Gavin Green notes that increasing forage yields while reducing milk production costs is a key area for improvement.

Brendan's analysis led to recommendations for reseeding underproductive swards and enhancing soil fertility by incorporating clover and plantain. These actions are intended to be implemented gradually over time.

Reseeding the milking platform

To boost forage production, the farm plans to reseed 15% of the milking platform annually with a mix of perennial ryegrass (PRG) and medium-leaf white clover. Although the steering group considered more diverse seed mixtures, they concluded that establishing pastures with PRG and clover would be most effective in reducing reliance on nitrogen (N) fertiliser. Keith Davis, Lydney Park's retained farm consultant, explained that they are also exploring the use of minimal tillage to improve soil health and yields.

The long-term objective is to achieve a pasture composition of 75% ryegrass and 25% clover while reducing artificial N fertiliser use to less than 100 kg N/ha per year. This strategy is expected to cut costs on purchased fertilisers and boost animal performance by 10%, potentially increasing farm profitability by £450 per hectare annually.

Soil health and fertility

Improving soil health and fertility is crucial to supporting the reseeding efforts. Fertile soils could increase yields by up to 2 tonnes per hectare annually, potentially lowering purchased feed costs by 1.5 pence per litre of milk and increasing N use efficiency from 22% to 35%.

Between December 2024 and January 2025, all paddocks at Lydney Park will undergo soil testing to identify areas needing



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additional liming and phosphorus (P), potassium (K) and sulphur (S) application. The farm has increased its herd size in recent years, raising P and K offtakes, so achieving optimal soil fertility will be essential for the successful establishment of new swards.

For new swards, it is recommended to apply 40 kg of P and 80 kg of K per hectare during reseeding, followed by annual maintenance applications of 20 kg of P, 40 kg of K and 20 kg of S per hectare to maintain soil fertility and maximise pasture production.

In 2023, Lydney Park's total N and P surpluses were 168 kg/ha and 9 kg/ha, respectively, which are typical for pasture-based dairy farms. However, the N surplus is concerning as it could lead to increased N losses. Brendan recommends reducing the N surplus to 100 kg N/ha. The incorporation of clover in grazed swards could significantly reduce both chemical N fertiliser application and the need for summer concentrate supplementation. By growing higher-quality pasture, animal intake and performance are expected to improve, reducing the need for mid-season supplements and potentially lowering N inputs and surplus by 40 kg N/ha.

Lydney Park Farm's ongoing efforts to adapt and optimise their practices reflect a commitment to sustainable and profitable farming. Through careful planning and collaboration with experts, they aim to enhance their operation's efficiency and resilience in the face of changing conditions.

LYDNEY PARK FARMS

Lydney Park Farms is located 2 m above sea level on the land bank of the River Severn and milks 800 Jersey X cows on a 32-point rotary. The dairy farm comprises 537 ha, with a 300 ha milking platform and a 237 ha youngstock area.

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“ This strategy is expected to cut costs on purchased fertilisers and boost animal performance by 10% ”

GENOMIC TESTING

widens the gap between herds



Since 2012, dairy producers have increasingly adopted genomic testing of heifer calves, resulting in a widening gap in genetic quality between herds that test and those that do not, says Marco Winters, Head of Animal Genetics.

This has led to a significant divergence in the Profitable Lifetime Index (£PLI) between the most and least engaged herds. For example, herds testing 75–100% of their heifers had an average PLI of £430 in 2023, compared to just £237 for those testing only 0–25% of their heifers. The difference in PLI can translate into over £50,000 in additional farm margins for herds with superior genetics.

Genomic testing's impact extends beyond overall genetic merit, influencing specific traits like fertility and maintenance costs. Herds that test their heifers show a higher average Fertility Index (FI) of 4.7, compared to 3 in non-testing herds, leading to shorter calving intervals and better fertility outcomes. Additionally, herds engaged in testing breed smaller, more cost-efficient cows, reflected in lower maintenance costs.

A key benefit of genomic testing is correcting parentage errors. Approximately 17% of calves have their recorded sires corrected after genotyping, which is essential for avoiding inbreeding and ensuring accurate breeding programmes. Misidentification of dams, though less common, can also affect the quality of herd replacements.

“ The difference in PLI can translate into over £50,000 in additional farm margins for herds with superior genetics ”

The uptake of genomic testing has grown significantly, with about 100,000 dairy heifers tested annually, representing around 20% of all dairy heifer calves born in recorded herds. This number is expected to rise by 15% in 2024, indicating that genomic testing is becoming a standard tool for improving herd genetics across various breeds.

Genetic progress driven by testing is evident across multiple traits, such as fat percentage and maintenance costs. Herds engaged in testing have made the most significant improvements, reflecting a broader industry shift towards smaller, more efficient cows.

Genomic testing offers a cost-effective and sustainable way to enhance long-term herd performance. While it plays a crucial role, it is often part of a broader approach by more genetically engaged farmers who make better overall genetic selections, which can lead to significant financial gains.

In the UK, testing is carried out by AHDB, irrespective of which company or organisation undertakes the test. However, farmers are advised to make sure they can offer UK £PLI values to maximise return on investment.

As more farmers adopt genomic testing, the gap between herds is likely to continue widening, emphasising the importance of genetic information in modern dairy farming.

Find out more about EnviroCow at ahdb.org.uk/dairy-breeding-and-genetics

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A proactive approach to JOHNE'S

Farmer, Caroline Williams has been at the forefront of implementing effective Johne's control measures says James Hague, Knowledge Exchange Manager.



Caroline's journey to address clinically affected cows and the impactful measures undertaken by the farm provide valuable insights into the proactive steps necessary for maintaining herd health.

For several years, Curtis Hulme Farm, one of our Strategic Farms, dealt with test-positive cows. Initially, the farm started testing with a cohort of 30 cows, gradually expanding to testing the entire herd more frequently. Caroline Williams reflected on this challenging period, noting, "Seeing poorly cows and the effect it has on the herd really gets you down, but starting the testing has been a positive step for us."

The decision to take action came naturally, driven by encouragement from their vet and requirements from their milk contract. "The more we did, the more we found and gained from it," Caroline explained.

To manage high-risk cows and contain infection, Curtis Hulme Farm implemented several strategies. One significant measure is tagging cows with a positive reading with a bright orange J tag – a visual marker that helps to

identify and manage cows separately. Caroline emphasised, "We do our best to ensure these cows calve in a designated dry-cow pen, keeping them away from the main calving area."

Efficient management extends beyond the barn. The farm uses a colour-coded headlist to identify cows based on their health status, making decision-making on culling and breeding easier.

The initial phase was daunting, with a significant portion of the herd identified as high-risk. Caroline described the early challenges: "Managing the risk and setting realistic expectations were crucial. It felt overwhelming at times, but it was necessary for the future health of the herd."

One of the most successful strategies has been breeding not only positive cows but also their female offspring to beef, reducing the number of replacements from high-risk animals.

Caroline praised her team for their understanding and cooperation: "They see the impact of clinical cases and understand the importance of our measures. The positive results are evident."

The efforts at Curtis Hulme Farm have led to improved overall health. Caroline noted that cows with conditions such as lameness or mastitis also often test positive for Johne's. Cleanliness and timely intervention in the calving pen have played crucial roles in reducing Johne's spread and had the added benefit of enhancing calf health, reducing infectious diseases and improving the wellbeing of both the animals and the farm team.

The journey may be tough, but the rewards of healthier herds and a more manageable farm operation are well worth the effort.

Find out more about Curtis Hulme at ahdb.org.uk/farm-excellence/dairy

For further information, contact:

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Taking steps to enhance **COW MOBILITY**



One of the most significant challenges we face in the dairy industry is managing lameness in cattle, says vet Sara Pedersen. This problem not only affects animal welfare but also has significant economic and reputational implications for farms.

Lameness, first and foremost, is an animal welfare issue. A lame cow experiences pain and discomfort, and it is our responsibility to minimise the risk of lameness to ensure that our animals can lead healthy, pain-free lives.

Lame cows are less likely to reach their milking potential, which in turn affects the overall profitability and efficiency of the farm. Lower productivity also undermines the sustainability of dairy farming, as farms must operate with lower margins and increased resource use.

As an easily observable condition, it influences public perception and consumer trust. With increasing scrutiny on animal welfare practices, it is essential for farms to address lameness proactively to maintain a positive image.

Economic impact of lameness

The financial cost of lameness on farms can vary widely, depending on its cause and severity, as well as the number of affected cows. Culling is one of the biggest contributors to overall costs. A cow with a sole ulcer has a 50% increased risk of being culled from the herd. Lameness also impacts fertility and milk yields, and treatment costs, while necessary, add another layer of expense.

To put this into perspective, the losses associated with a cow with a sole ulcer are around £1,000, and white line disease about £800. Digital dermatitis,

another common cause of lameness, can cost around £100 to £125 per case.

When these costs are broken down on a daily basis, the financial impact becomes even more evident. A cow with a mobility score of 2, indicating moderate lameness, costs the farm around £2.25 per day. If the lameness progresses to a score of 3, the cost rises to £6.80 per day. Even with prompt treatment, a cow may take four to six weeks to recover fully, escalating costs further.

Lameness in grazing herds

For grazing herds, a significant contributor to the risk of lameness is how cows are moved to and from pastures. The condition of cow tracks is crucial; they must be of an appropriate width, made from suitable materials and maintained regularly. Poorly designed or maintained tracks, combined with poor herding practices, can increase the incidence of lameness, especially due to white line disease. In wet weather, the risk of poaching around gateways increases, leading to conditions that soften the skin and make cows more susceptible to infections such as foul in the foot.

Successful management of lameness in grazing herds is driven by good cow management. This includes maintaining tracks, ensuring stress-free stockmanship and allowing cows to move at their own pace without being rushed. These factors are some of

the core elements of AHDB's Healthy Feet Programme, which aims to promote low levels of lameness through a multifaceted approach.

Key strategies for reducing lameness

For farms struggling with lameness, the first step is to identify the underlying cause as it will be different on individual farms. Speak to your foot trimmer and work alongside your mobility mentor or farm vet to analyse the foot-trimming records. Find out the main lesion causing lameness and address the risk factors specific to that lesion. For example, addressing sole ulcers may involve improving cow comfort and reducing standing times, while managing digital dermatitis might require better slurry management and improved footbathing protocols.

By addressing these factors, farms can significantly reduce lameness, improve animal welfare and enhance overall farm productivity and sustainability.

Sara Pedersen

Veterinary Consultant at Farm Dynamics



CONFIDENT STRIDES

We recently hosted meetings across Great Britain focused on enhancing mobility in grazing cattle. Keep an eye out for our next series of mobility events in the new year, where we'll explore improvements that can be made while cows are housed.

TOP TIPS TO IMPROVE LAMENESS IN GRAZING HERDS

- Ensure tracks are well maintained and appropriately designed for the herd size. Narrow tracks or those with poor surfaces can contribute to lameness
- Prioritise excellent cow flow and stockmanship practices to reduce the risk of lameness when herding
- Implement EDPET (Early Detection and Prompt Effective Treatment) to minimise the duration and severity of lameness

BLUETONGUE 3:

What you need to know

Writing in early September, as the first cases of the BTV-3 strain of bluetongue virus emerge in Great Britain, Senior Animal Health and Welfare Scientist, Amey Brassington examines its impact on livestock, particularly cattle and sheep, and highlights the clinical signs to watch for.



Bluetongue virus is a notifiable disease affecting cattle, sheep and other ruminants, which is transmitted by biting midges. It does not affect people or food safety, and meat and milk from infected animals are safe to eat and drink.

We look at the challenges of controlling the virus, the importance of accurate information and the current lack of a vaccine for BTV-3 in the UK. We also offer guidance on what to do if you suspect an infection and the resources and support available to farmers.

There are numerous strains of BTV. The first cases of the BTV-3 strain of the virus were identified in Great Britain in November 2023 through the annual surveillance programme. There is now evidence of some local transmission of BTV-3, currently circulating in Norfolk and Suffolk.

Different species show varied clinical signs, but cattle show fewer clinical signs than sheep. The greatest impact for dairy cattle is significantly reduced milk yield.

Control of bluetongue virus

BTV is most commonly spread by infected adult midges biting a susceptible animal. The time of year, temperature, wind direction and proximity and density of neighbouring farms all affect spread. The midge season is usually March to September, but some will survive throughout the year.

Control of midges is difficult. While it is unlikely that the risk of bluetongue disease can be completely removed on any individual farm, steps can be taken to reduce the risk. Movement controls and restrictions for susceptible livestock in high-risk areas can minimise the risk of infected animals without clinical signs moving the disease between holdings. Free, voluntary testing is available from Defra for animals moving from high-risk counties.

Contingency plans for disease outbreaks on farm and for if and when they might be in a disease-control zone should include details of where animals are normally slaughtered, checking that the abattoir is designated.

We are advising farmers to 'act' on BTV-3 by being aware of how bluetongue is transmitted as a vector-borne disease, while providing caution against misinformation and promoting evidence-based tactics on farm:

1. **Awareness** of how BTV-3 is transmitted as a vector-borne disease.
2. **Caution** against any misinformation, but instead view the latest facts.
3. **Tactics** on farm to help with midge control must be evidence-based.



Can I vaccinate my animals against BTV-3?

There is currently no vaccine authorised for use in the UK for BTV-3.

Vaccines available for other strains of BTV do not offer cross-protection. Therefore, vaccinating your animals against BTV-8 will not protect them from BTV-3.

What do I do if I suspect one of my animals has BTV?

BTV is a notifiable disease, so if you suspect an animal is infected, you are legally obliged to report this. Failure to do so is an offence.

In England, you must report it to APHA on 0300 020 0301. In Wales, contact 0300 303 8268. In Scotland, contact your local Field Services Office.

Please consult your private vet should your animals require treatment. Bluetongue disease can cause severe suffering; treatment with non-steroidals and other medications might be necessary.

CLINICAL SIGNS OF BLUETONGUE:

- Nasal discharge
- Crusting around the nostrils and muzzle
- Redness and swelling of the mouth, eyes, nose and skin above the hoof
- Swelling of the teats
- Fatigue
- Abortions
- Small, weak or deformed calves dying within a few days of birth
- Reduced milk yield

For further information, contact:

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FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

For more frequently asked questions, visit ahdb.org.uk/bluetongue

Find out if your holding is within a TCZ and apply for movement licences: gov.uk/guidance/bluetongue

If you are concerned about the personal or business impact of BTV, you can call the Farming Community Network on **0300 011 1999**

or the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution on **0800 188 4444**.

You can call AHDB's bluetongue hotline on **024 7771 0386**.

NEWS & UPDATES

STAY CONNECTED WITH AHDB

Website





Our website is your go-to resource for the latest news, research, guidance and market information. Make it your first stop for everything you need to know. Visit ahdb.org.uk

Emails

With our new Preference Centre, you can easily update your contact details and choose the types of communications you want to receive. Stay informed on news, events, webinars, market insights, disease alerts and more. Visit preferencecentre.ahdb.org.uk

Social media

For real-time updates delivered directly to your news feed, be sure to follow us on social media:

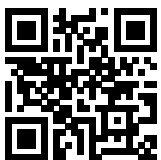
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Events and shows

Join us at meetings across Great Britain hosted by our Engagement team, where you can learn about a variety of topics. We also exhibit at popular dairy shows throughout the year, offering you the opportunity to connect with our team in person. See what's happening near you: ahdb.org.uk/events

KEEP IN TOUCH

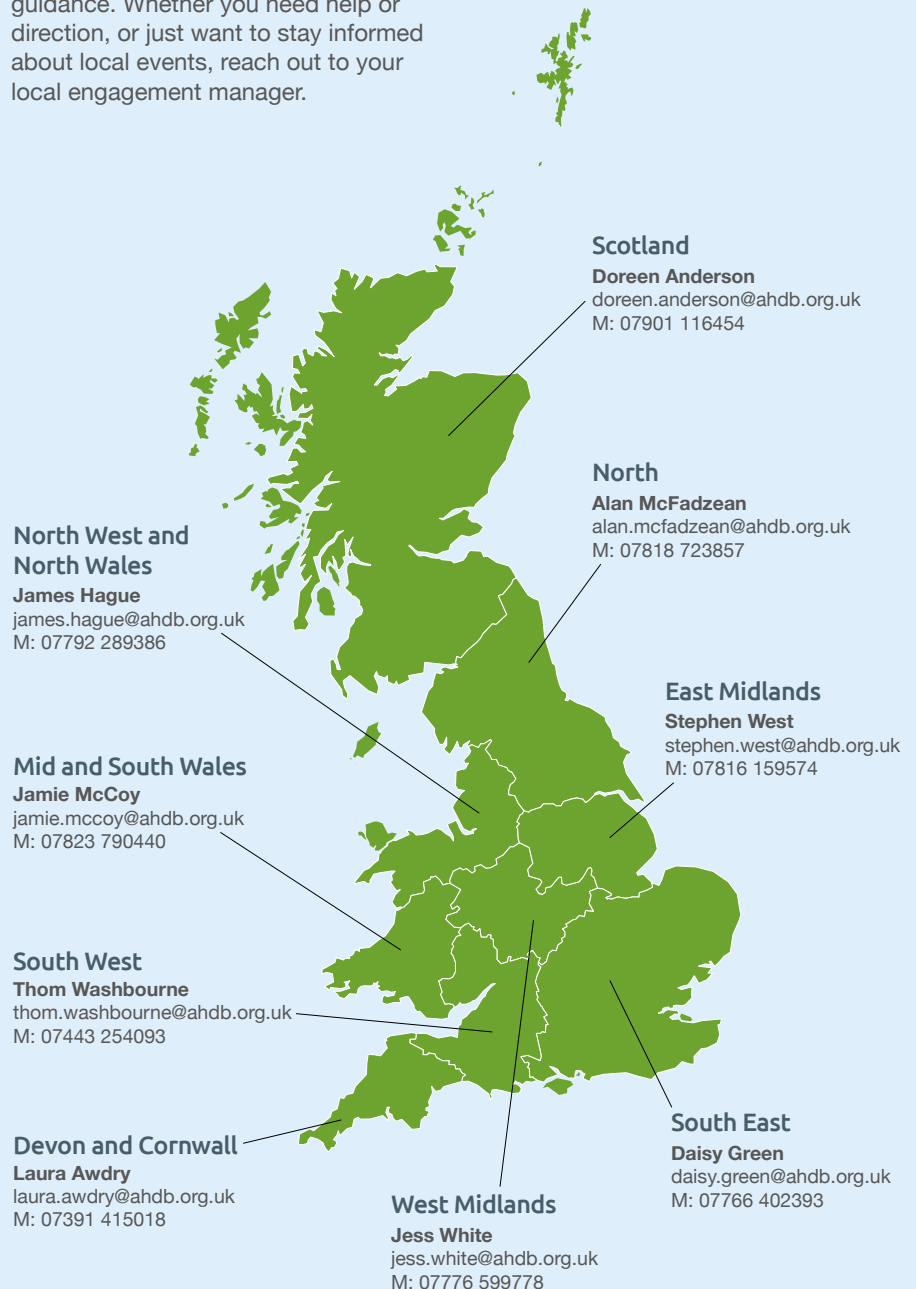
Scan the QR code to sign up to receive the latest information from AHDB, update your preferences and receive important updates or visit preferencecentre.ahdb.org.uk



AHDB DAIRY ENGAGEMENT TEAM BY REGION

Our field-based Engagement team is your first point of contact for support and enquiries, providing you with direct access to technical expertise and guidance. Whether you need help or direction, or just want to stay informed about local events, reach out to your local engagement manager.

For contact details of our specialist teams, including market information, research and genetics, visit ahdb.org.uk/meet-the-team-dairy



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