

All things DAIRY

YOUR AHDB DAIRY UPDATE

AHDB



Spring 2020



Mastitis turnaround yields growth

Page 3



A simple approach to farming
Page 4



Strategic dairy farm latest
Page 5



Revamp to lengthen lifespans
Page 6



Paul Flanagan,
Sector Strategy Director – Dairy

Welcome to our spring update

Sometimes it feels like the livestock industry is getting most of the spotlight on climate change. However, instead of opening the newspaper each day in fear, we should see this focus as an opportunity to set the record straight and shout about the positives of livestock farming in the UK.

From my point of view, we have three main things in our favour.

Firstly, we start from an incredibly strong point – over 99% of UK households buy dairy products.

Secondly, we know that the majority of the UK population see dairy as nutritious and want to continue to enjoy dairy products as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Our award-winning 'Department of Dairy Related Scrumptious Affairs' dairy campaign will be running again this February, March and April. Our evaluation has shown that this has reduced those in our target audience of young parents planning to switch to dairy alternatives by 11%.

Thirdly, responsible and strategic livestock farming in the UK is highly productive, generating a large amount of food for the population.

Ruminants are the only species able to transform marginal grasslands, which have few alternative uses, into food for the population. Animals also play a vital role in growing crops effectively and sustainably, as manure enriches the soil with nutrients to help them grow.

If you have a few minutes, our website provides facts and figures about the role of the UK livestock industry and the environment. We will regularly update these pages with AHDB material and with information from those companies and organisations we are collaborating with across the industry.



LIVESTOCK INFORMATION

The Livestock Information Service, the new multi-species livestock service which will replace BCMS for cattle, as well as ARAMS for sheep and EAML2 for pigs, has come a lot closer since the last edition of All Things Dairy.

AHDB and Defra have set up a new company, Livestock Information Limited (LI Ltd.), to design and implement the service. LI Ltd. will be led by programme director Simon Hall for the next two years.

One of the first actions of the new company has been to award the contracts for the software which will underpin the future service. The 'core' system will be based on software purchased from Shearwell Data Ltd. and developed by SCISYS, a specialist software development company, using Shearwell's expert knowledge of the livestock sector. Meanwhile, Equine Register Ltd. has been brought in to manage 'data integration' – effectively making sure that the service can access, manipulate and provide data to Defra to manage animal disease and carry out other statutory functions. In time, the data integration capability will enable data sharing that could underpin industry improvement and innovation.

LI Ltd. will concentrate on the core tracing system while AHDB develops the value-added services which could potentially be built from the data,

including the e-Medicines book, and Knowledge-Based Trading systems to give buyers and sellers better-quality information about animals at point of sale.

Simon Hall said: "Our objective is to create a system which will make life easier for producers, while at the same time making livestock tracing more accurate and faster. Critically, we want to create a service that industry can build on in order to take advantage of data right across the meat and livestock sectors to enable improvements in productivity and competitiveness, as well as animal health and welfare.

"The next few months will see the team developing the software into a functional service, ahead of live beta testing, which will begin late in 2020. Our design will be driven by our ongoing conversations with farmers and producers. We're talking to them directly and through the Traceability Design User Group (TDUG), which involves more than 20 trade and government bodies involved in livestock production and has guided our work for several years.

"We have been talking about the Livestock Information Service for a long time and are now looking forward to 2020 being a year of delivery, where farmers and processors will start to see the new service become a reality."

Mastitis turnaround yields growth

Identifying when the majority of mastitis infections occurred on his farm helped Austin Russell address underlying issues and realise additional benefits.

Analysing the farm records and milk-recording data using AHDB's Mastitis Pattern Analysis Tool helped him tackle higher-than-average herd cell counts and too many new cases of mastitis, as well as lifting yields by over 2,000 litres.

Following an MBA at the Royal Agricultural University, Austin returned to run his family's 220-cow dairy herd at Church Farm in Cirencester seven years ago.

In 2017, the mastitis rate was higher than Austin would have liked, with around 60 cases per 100 cows per year, with an average somatic cell count of 200,000 resulting in unsaleable milk and antibiotic costs impacting the bottom line.

Cows showing symptoms were treated with antibiotic tubes and comprehensive data recorded for each animal. However, incidences of mastitis were not falling.

Austin said: "It felt like we were just firefighting, and we weren't really seeing an improvement in the number of cases of mastitis. We were producing a lot of data but didn't have the right tools to analyse it to show where mastitis was occurring."

Two years ago, the farm undertook a health audit as part of a new milk contract, which brought the mastitis issues to the fore.

Vet James Breen worked with Austin to analyse his data, using the Mastitis Pattern Analysis Tool to identify the stage of lactation where most mastitis infections occurred and the potential cause.

The tool showed most infections were environmental and occurred predominantly during the dry period.

At the time, dry and calving cows were housed on deep straw, but despite their best efforts to keep this clean, the results showed it simply wasn't working.

Austin replaced the straw yard with sand cubicles, kept a small area for comfortable calving boxes, improved ventilation by taking out the ridges in the sheds, provided the dry cows with outside loafing space and improved dry cow antibiotic administration technique.

"The results were almost immediate," said Austin. "Before, virtually every other cow would show clots of mastitis within 30 days after calving, now we rarely see any clots – it's been really impressive." Cases of mastitis have also dropped to just 10 cases per 100 cows.

Austin has also seen a significant increase in his milk yield, which has risen from an average of 8,500 litres/cow to 10,500 litres/cow as transition cow management has improved.

Vet costs for sick cows and herd antibiotic usage have also dropped. Previously, they operated a blanket approach to antibiotics at drying off. However, as control of herd cell count is much improved and there are less high-cell-count cows at drying off, the move to selective dry cow therapy means Austin estimates dry cow antibiotic tube usage has fallen to just 10%.

“It felt like we were just firefighting... We were producing a lot of data but didn't have the right tools to analyse it to show where mastitis was occurring”

To find out more about QuarterPRO and access the Mastitis Pattern Analysis Tool, visit ahdb.org.uk/quarterpro



“If it works, it’s fine!”

Adopting a simple approach to farming is a passion shared by one of our latest strategic dairy farmers, Arthur Owen.

Bodysgaw Isa has been tenanted by the Owen family on the Cefn Estate in Denbighshire since 1939. First managed by his grandfather, Arthur Owen now runs the farm alongside his two sons Guto and Gwion, wife Marian and father-in-law Clwyd.

Over recent years, Arthur and his brother went through the challenging process of dividing the farm to enable future transitions and he jokes about the friendly rivalry they maintain.

“We are always there for each other if we need a hand with machinery or equipment, but we also have a bit of healthy brotherly competition between us, like who can turn the cows out first!”

Arthur prefers small cows for easier handling. The herd calves onto grass and averages 93% of cows calving within the first eight weeks of the block, with all replacements home-reared. All cows graze from early February until late November, with an average stocking density of 3.65 LU/ha across the year.

He has already developed a resilient business, stripped out costs and achieves good returns on tenants-type capital – one of AHDB’s key performance indicators for block-calving herds.

During his time as a strategic farm, Arthur hopes to streamline and fine-tune his business. Over the next three years, he is aiming to raise milk solids above 586 kg/cow by improving silage quality, upgrade his slurry storage and improve control of Johne’s and Neospora.

“It’s great to be part of the network, working to both improve our own productivity, through events on the farm, and to get feedback and learn from other farmers experiencing similar issues”

Farm facts

- Autumn block-calving herd
- 375 Friesian crossbred ‘easy-care cows’
- 6,788 litres per cow per year
- 4.53% butterfat and 3.60% protein
- 185 ha grassland
- 103 ha of grazing stock

Follow Bodysgaw Isa’s journey if you are interested in:

- Maintaining a tight autumn block
- Profitably raising milk solids
- Improving silage quality while continuing to use contractors
- Upgrading slurry storage
- Reducing instances of Neospora and Johne’s
- Fine-tuning your system to an ‘easy-care cow’ approach

Follow the progress on farm on Twitter by searching for #SDFBodysgawIsa

To meet our other Strategic Dairy Farms, visit ahdb.org.uk/farm-excellence

The Strategic Dairy Farm Network in Wales is made possible through the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020, which is funded by the Welsh Government and the European Union.

Figuring out the key to good breeding

Selecting an economic profit index appropriate to a milk production system can drive profitability in dairy herds.

At our Pembrokeshire Strategic Dairy Farm, Tyddyn yr Eglwys, the spring calving index (£SCI) for spring block-calving herds informs breeding decisions in the Friesian x Jersey herd.

The farm is owned by Kim and Bryony Petty and has been operated as a joint venture since 2013, with Dylan and Hannah Harries acting as contract farmers.

The business is expanding the size of the herd and is on course to be milking 610 cows next spring – it is a young herd with 85% of animals in their third, fourth or fifth lactation. Herd replacement rate currently averages 19%.

“We want a profitable cow and one that we like to milk at either end of the day with as few problems along the way as possible,” said Mr Harries.

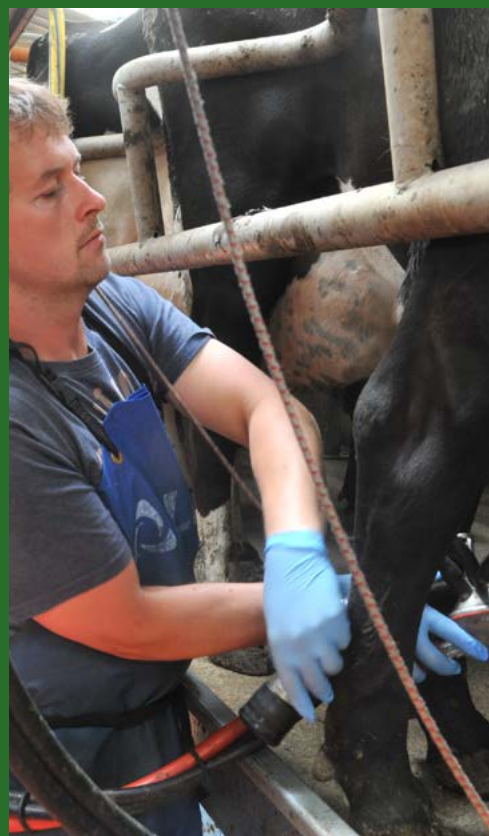
For the last three years, the herd has been bred to a Jersey to reduce cow size while retaining high milk solids. Cow weight

currently averages 483 kg, but with maiden heifers now averaging 430 kg in their first lactation, the predicted mature cow weight is 470 kg.

The business is using sexed semen to reduce the number of dairy bull calves born; the remainder of the herd is bred to Aberdeen Angus beef sires.

Breeding decisions within the herd are important and by utilising the £SCI – one of three genetic indexes which measure an animal's ability to pass its genes on to the next generation – it is easier to match bulls to the system at Tyddyn yr Eglwys.

Bringing superior genetics into the herd makes a significant difference to profitability. In spring-calving herds, the difference between good and bad genetics is as much as £186 per cow per year – for a 200-cow herd, that can be worth £20,000 a year.



Help us build a stronger dairy sector

We're looking for dairy farmers to join our Strategic Dairy Farm network.

Are you interested in:

- Accessing support and guidance from industry experts to help make your farm more profitable and efficient
- Learning from other farmers at events on your farm
- Giving something back to the industry by sharing your experience with others

We're looking for someone who is:

- A top performer operating either a tight block- (autumn or spring) or AYR-calving system
- Open to sharing key performance indicators and benchmark figures

Email your expression of interest to kedairyadmin@ahdb.org.uk or call 02476 478792.



Revamp to lengthen lifespans

Our genetic index which predicts dairy cattle lifespan has been revamped to make it more accurate and indicate longevity in additional days rather than lactations.

The change will help identify bulls whose offspring should live more healthy, productive and longer lives in their herds.

Previously expressed in lactations, which meant very little difference between the best and worst animals, the index's scale has now been increased to approximately -305 to +305 days, enabling producers to make more precise decisions.

Marco Winters, AHDB head of animal genetics, said: "The new figures give producers a more meaningful prediction of the extra lifetime expected from a bull's daughters and make a greater distinction between individual bulls."

Lifespan reflects many contributory factors, ranging from fertility and somatic cell counts to leg, feet and udder conformation. The index has a strong correlation with an animal's average daily lifetime yield, which is a key contributor to its lifetime profitability.



Marco Winters
Head of Animal Genetics, AHDB Dairy

“The new figures give producers a more meaningful prediction of the extra lifetime expected from a bull's daughters and make a greater distinction between individual bulls”

Lifespan index Q&A

Why is lifespan so important?

The average number of days at which payback occurs is a staggering 530 after first calving. The lifespan index can help producers improve their herd's survival rates by hundreds of days.

How does the new scale work?

The new scale runs from around -305 days to +305 days, with positive figures being desirable. Daughters of a +305 lifespan index bull are predicted to live, on average, 305 days longer than daughters of a sire whose index is zero.

How are lifespan indexes calculated?

The index is calculated from actual daughter survival or calculated from the animal's own genotype or from predictive traits such as type traits and somatic cell count index.

Aren't many animals culled for low production rather than survivability?

The index predicts involuntary rather than voluntary culling and is a measure of daughters' ability to survive rather than of their failure to produce milk.



New tools for better breeding decisions

Two new online tools will help farmers choose bulls that better match their requirements and improve the accuracy of semen order volumes.

Our Breeding Trait Selector is designed to help farmers to think about their own specific breeding requirements. It recommends the traits to focus on based upon their answers to a few simple questions, such as calving patterns, contract and breeding strategy, alongside any areas for improvement, e.g. yield, health, fertility.

Our Semen Calculator uses details about the number of breeding females, conception rates and the split of conventional, sexed or beef semen to work out the number of straws needed to meet a herd's requirements.

"The tools should be used alongside our existing herd genetic report and bull selector, so you breed the traits into your herd that are best for your own situation and long-term goals," added Marco Winters.

Access the tools at ahdb.org.uk/breedingblocks

Restoring balance to misleading media

The Food Advisory Board (FAB) has been created to help provide balance and knowledge to unfair and misleading media headlines.

Made up of a range of experts in nutrition, health, medicine, environment and agriculture, FAB has expanded the previous Meat Advisory Panel by extending the expertise to allow FAB to provide comment across a range of topics and for all food groups.

With an increased number of mixed, confusing and unproven messages about food in the media, FAB's role is to provide independent, objective and evidence-

based arguments on a wide variety of food groups in order to restore balance on matters relating to health, nutrition and environment.

In addition to its work to combat negative press, members also work to provide positive media stories, based on scientific evidence, in addition to supporting advocacy programmes to policymakers.

Welcomed by many, this balanced-plate messaging encourages consumers to eat what they want in moderation, choose from a wide selection of foods and, most importantly, to enjoy their food.



Consumer marketing enters third year



Following the success of the previous two years, we're delighted to announce that our 'Department of Dairy Related Scrumptious Affairs' campaign will be back later this month.

The advertising will run between February and April and feature videos on social media and on-demand TV, along with billboards with a proximity to supermarkets to target shoppers close to their point of purchase.

The campaign – which launched in 2017 – aims to remind people of their love of dairy, focusing on taste, enjoyment and the moments that make life better.

Targeting 20- to 35-year-old parents, the promotional activity uses humour to share moments that make life better.

“People are really enjoying the tongue-in-cheek humour from the campaign, so the next phase builds upon that success and introduces new ways in which dairy can be enjoyed, on iconic poster sites and social media activity,” said Rebecca Miah, AHDB head of dairy and crops marketing.

Year two results

- 11% more young parents are certain to buy dairy products
- An 8% fall in the number of people cutting their dairy consumption now or in the future

- An 11% reduction in intentions to consume plant-based substitutes
- The adverts were seen by 23.8 million people on social media, 7.1 million on catch-up TV, 8.1 million in the cinema and 13.5 million on billboards

Award winners

Our campaign scooped the International Milk Promotion Group Yves Boutonnat Trophy at the World Dairy Summit last September.

It was chosen from a shortlist of three contenders, including the French and Swiss, as the best advertising campaign.

Stu Baker, AHDB senior marketing manager, said: “The campaign is really shifting attitudes towards dairy at home and it's an added bonus to be recognised as the crème de la crème on the world stage.”



News updates



The Grassland & Muck event returns in May 2020, with two days of the very latest machinery, thinking and ideas to help farmers make the most of their grass, manures and soils. Taking place at Ragley Estate on 20–21 May, the event is the leading demonstration event in the UK, showcasing everything from the latest grass varieties to 170 acres of grass and muck machinery demonstrations. A host of experts will be on hand with free advice in the new grazing feature, in the forum tent and at the manure and nutrient management centre.

To find out more, visit grasslandevent.co.uk

Technical resources

If you're looking for the latest guidance on a range of technical dairy farming topics, make sure you visit the 'Knowledge Library' on our website.



There's a wealth of information and guides on everything from hoof care to housing and soils to slurry.

Visit ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library

Podcasts

You can now learn about new developments, the latest research and hear case studies from other farmers through the AHDB podcast.

Episodes are released each week, with at least one new topic from each sector every month. Recent podcasts for dairy include a discussion with two farmers who are part of our Strategic Dairy Farm network, an update from our lead dairy analyst on liquid-milk market dynamics, and how to get the most from on-farm breeding decisions.

Market intelligence

Our market intelligence team provides farmers, growers and food businesses with world-leading intelligence and insight to inform decisions. Whether it is the latest prices or shifting consumer trends, detailed insight on the big issues or the future outlook for supply or demand for agricultural commodities, our team of experts can help provide the information you need.

Find out more at ahdb.org.uk/market-intelligence



Keep up-to-date with the latest from AHDB Dairy

All Things Dairy

Monthly email newsletter on AHDB Dairy activities and services.

Dairy Market Snapshot

Monthly update on the latest trends and data in the dairy markets.

Dairy Market Weekly

Independent and impartial weekly market information with analysis to assist in making informed business decisions.

Forage for Knowledge

Our seasonal weekly newsletter sharing latest grass research and analysis from our Forage for Knowledge contributor farms.

Sign up or update your details at: ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch

Produced for you by:

AHDB Dairy
Stoneleigh Park
Kenilworth
Warwickshire
CV8 2TL

T 024 7669 2051
E comms@ahdb.org.uk
W ahdb.org.uk
T @AHDB_Dairy

If you no longer wish to receive this information, please email us on comms@ahdb.org.uk

While the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board seeks to ensure that the information contained within this document is accurate at the time of printing, no warranty is given in respect thereof and, to the maximum extent permitted by law, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board accepts no liability for loss, damage or injury howsoever caused (including that caused by negligence) or suffered directly or indirectly in relation to information and opinions contained in or omitted from this document.

© Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board 2020. All rights reserved.

AHDB