

# All things DAIRY

YOUR AHDB DAIRY UPDATE

AHDB



Spring 2021



## Promoting dairy's reputation

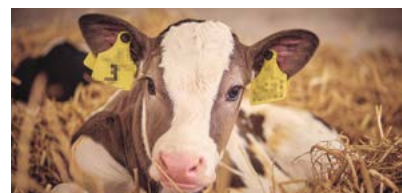
Page 3



**Lowering purchased feed costs**  
Page 4



**Halving your calving block**  
Page 5



**Breeding benefits the bottom line**  
Page 7





Paul Flanagan,  
Sector Strategy Director – Dairy

## Welcome to our spring update

Change is on the horizon. New international trading arrangements, leaving the EU, environmental concerns, changes to agriculture policy in some parts of GB and significant shifts in consumer behaviour will impact us all.

In December, we started consulting on a major change programme at AHDB, outlining our plans for the next five years.

To help you experience best practice across all systems, we will maintain our successful Strategic Farm network across Britain. As well as face-to-face events, we'll use online delivery to offer choice in how and when you can access the information.

We will roll out practical tools and services in genetics and genomics, grassland productivity and animal health and welfare to ensure our research is tailored as far as possible to individual farm situations.

Our benchmarking tool will also include environmental performance to help farmers better manage the changes ahead in farm support and improve consumer confidence in the dairy sector.

We will work with the industry to accelerate the pace of progress on endemic diseases such as lameness and mastitis. We'll also maintain support of Livestock Information to ensure a quicker, convenient and more practical way for farmers and the supply chain to record animal movement data.

We will also work with processors, retailers and the wider supply chain to protect and promote the reputation of dairy with consumers. Our 'Eat Balanced' campaign forms part of this, which you can read more about on the opposite page.

Our strategy lays out how we will improve farmer engagement, reduce bureaucracy, focus our activities to support you and reduce costs. We plan to hold a regular ballot on the future of the levy so you can express your views on the value of AHDB to your business going forward.

Read more about the proposed strategy at [ahdb.org.uk/strategy](https://ahdb.org.uk/strategy)

## Major change on the cards

**Major change is on the cards, as we launched our new five-year strategy for consultation in December.**

The proposal aims to improve levy payers' engagement and say on our priorities, including a commitment to a ballot every five years on the future of the levy.

AHDB Chair Nicholas Saphir said the strategy and change programme showed we are listening and looking to build on the 'Five Commitments' we made in the wake of the Government's Request for Views published last year.

The new strategy focuses work in three areas – Evidence and data, Farm performance and Marketing and exports. It also focuses on shaping environmental solutions on-farm and across the supply chain, to meet the challenges of sustainability and climate change.

With new farm support policies, changing consumer behaviours and new trading arrangements on departing the EU, we're committed to being well placed to deliver effectively for levy payers.

Nicholas Saphir said: "We have listened very carefully to levy payers' concerns about delivering value for money in such challenging times and ensuring our work programmes are fit for purpose and work priorities clearly agreed with levy payers.

"I see the future as a period of real opportunity for British farming and growing. Our change programme and new strategic focus will provide the basis for AHDB to work together with levy payers in shaping our collective future and making the most of what lies ahead."

Read the proposed strategy at:  
[ahdb.org.uk/strategy](https://ahdb.org.uk/strategy)

## Dairy sector strategy 2021–2026



Provide tools to  
**measure and reduce**  
environmental impact



**Focus research** on  
environment, animal  
health and genetics



Grow influence of  
**Strategic Farm network**



Improve consumer  
**attitudes to dairy**

# We Eat Balanced – promoting dairy's reputation

You may have seen our TV advert which aired across terrestrial and digital channels in the first two weeks of January.

It talked about the health benefits of milk and dairy, set across a backdrop of stunning British countryside. The advert was part of the 'We Eat Balanced' campaign, which aims to protect meat and dairy's role in a healthy balanced diet, and was seen by over 30 million households.

The £1.5 million campaign also features in major supermarkets, print advertising and social media, encouraging more British households to continue eating meat and dairy as part of a balanced diet.

The campaign is built around three key messages:

- Meat and dairy contain vitamin B12 – an essential nutrient not naturally present in a vegan diet
- Red meat and dairy from Britain is produced to world-class food and farming standards
- Red meat and dairy from Britain is among the most sustainable in the world

AHDB's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer Christine Watts said: "In Britain, we have so much to be proud of when it comes to the food we eat, how it is produced and the entire journey from farm to fork.

"Our farmers operate to some of the highest standards in the world and this campaign aims to balance the negative commentary around farming, as well as the importance of eating red meat and dairy as part of a balanced and healthy diet."

The campaign runs until the end of March and there is a range of digital assets available to help you have positive conversations with consumers about the role dairy and meat can play in a healthy, sustainable diet.

Download your pack today at [ahdb.org.uk/WeEatBalanced](http://ahdb.org.uk/WeEatBalanced)



## Milk Your Moments delivers

Our UK-wide 'Milk Your Moments' campaign helped drive an estimated 11.2 million litres of additional liquid milk sales during the first coronavirus lockdown last year, as well as raising £100,000 for mental health charities.

Featuring across social media, websites, supermarket billboards and television advertising, the campaign contributed £6.6 million milk sales, equivalent to 11.2 million litres, to the overall uplift.

Find out more about the success of the campaign at [ahdb.org.uk/milk-your-moments](http://ahdb.org.uk/milk-your-moments)

# Milk Your Moments





# Learning never stops

**There has never been a better time to learn from other farmers through our Strategic Dairy Farm network.**

Now, with 22 farms, representing all production systems, spread out across Great Britain, there is a breadth of experience available and a farm suitable for everybody.

Despite the postponement of on-farm meetings, our online webinars were watched over 20,000 times last year. Proof, if it were needed, that farmers are always keen to learn and develop new skills.

There is something for everyone. So, whether you are working on improving your fertility, reducing instances of

mastitis or getting more milk from forage, you can learn from the experience of our strategic farmers, experts and other farmers just like you.

If you haven't managed to catch a webinar yet, you can watch them all at [ahdb.org.uk/webinars](https://ahdb.org.uk/webinars)

## Lowering purchased feed costs

**Reducing intervals between silage cuts has helped strategic dairy farmers Tony and Michael Ball improve their milk from forage and reduce feed costs.**

The brothers manage a year-round-calving herd at Coton Wood Farm, just outside Ashbourne in Derbyshire. Five years ago, they invested in an eight-strong Lely robotic milking system for a better work-life balance, improved efficiency and to reduce their dependence on staff.

Their 500-head herd averages 9,900 litres and is split into three groups, with two different feed schedules. The brothers achieve an impressive 7.3 ppl as their purchased feed cost, putting them in the top 5% of GB herds.

Their biggest gains have come from improving milk from forage. They are currently achieving 3,000 litres from forage – an impressive increase of 1,200 litres since joining the Strategic Farm programme two and a half years ago.

The high-yielders' ration is composed of one-third straights, which they try to purchase on spot. However, soya is on a 12-month contract as of last month. For the remainder, the fresh and high groups receive an M+27 ration outside and an average of 5.5 kg of compound through the robots.

Five years ago, they began cut and carry "to get more output from each hectare of grass, be less reliant on the weather and make best use of the forage, by keeping residuals low," explains Michael. Cut and carry enables them to access ground at

the other side of the road that would not be accessible for grazing cows.

The highs receive TMR first thing in the morning, shortly followed by one load of cut and carry. The split between TMR and cut and carry is 4 kg DM of grass, 8 kg DM forage and 6 kg DM premix straights.

Michael and Tony want to focus on getting the basics to as high a standard as possible, working on the principle that everything will fall in to place from there.

Their advice to anyone struggling with rising feeds costs would be to start with looking at how you can improve your milk from forage. Keep it simple and have good knowledge and understanding yourself so you can challenge your nutritionist to get the best value from their expertise.



Tony and Michael Ball, Coton Wood Farm



“ We had a 12-week calving block and hated it. Everyone was fed up by the end and beginning to lose focus and we had ‘forgotten’ cows, struggling to get back in calf ”



## Halving your calving block

**Strategic dairy farmer Dan Burdett halved his calving block to six weeks – no mean feat for an autumn-calving herd, but even trickier for an organic one averaging 6,000 litres/cow.**

With no hormonal intervention allowed, heifers can't be synchronised to front-end-load the block. Despite this, Dan and the team at Cockhaise Farm achieved 95% of cows and heifers calved within the first six weeks.

Dan looked at what other successful farmers were doing and then used their experiences to formulate a strategy for change.

This included serving earlier so that more cows in the block were eligible. It gave them an extra few days to recover from calving and start cycling again.

Staff were given refresher AI training. A new straw warmer maintains a constant temperature to thaw semen straws correctly and maximise sperm motility. Bulls had vet health checks and batches of semen straws were tested.

Dan also introduced a policy to return to serving on standing heat only, ensuring that straws were going in at the right time, and looked at improving every area of fertility.

For heat detection, observations are done four times a day for 30 minutes between 7am and 9.30pm and whenever anyone is working with stock.

Diet plays a big role. The herd is housed at the end of October, on good-quality self-feed silage, plus cake in the parlour, thus creating a rising plane of nutrition. This allows them to settle onto the winter routine at least three weeks before service.

Regular benchmarking helps create competition for those doing the AI and helps motivation. Dan feels it's important that the team know all the figures and are congratulated when they are successful.

Dan believes the rewards are worth the effort and, even without a full cost-benefit analysis, says benefits are tangible. He now gets a full parlour shutdown for four weeks and an eight-week dry period for the cows. This gives ample time for recovery between calving and serving and holidays for himself and his staff. All of which keeps staff keen and motivated. Farm and parlour maintenance is done during shutdown, which helps avoid breakdowns and major repairs during busy periods.

“It's a challenge to maintain a six-week block, as you can quickly get it wrong and lose the block if the first three weeks aren't right. You need to maintain that focus.”

Learn more about Dan's approach and find other Strategic Farms at [ahdb.org.uk/strategic-dairy-farms](http://ahdb.org.uk/strategic-dairy-farms)



# Regular weighing the key to optimising age at first calving

**Monthly weighing of heifers has helped Wrexham dairy farmer Richard Evans bring down the average age of calving by nine months, leading to a significant cost saving.**

By weighing the heifers monthly, Richard was able to drop the average age at first calving from 35 months to 26 months, saving £774 per heifer across his 160-cow, autumn- and winter-calving herd at Halton Farm.

In April 2019, Richard had an initial meeting with his vet Kim Holliday (Park Issa Vets) and Teaghan Tayler, AHDB's Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager. The average age at first calving was 35 months, higher than Richard would like, and together the team discussed the issue and formulated a plan to address it.

The first step was starting a regular monthly weighing programme to assess any growth pinch points and address them as they arose. The team also discussed adjusting the mating programme to ensure heifers were only mated when they reached 60% of mature weight, rather than on a timescale.

Heifers were sectioned into three groups to ensure they were only with animals of similar ages. They were then weighed monthly and the data was entered into a spreadsheet, where growth rates per

day were closely monitored for each individual animal.

A farm-specific heifer development plan was formulated. The team calculated that a growth rate of 0.7 kg per day was needed to ensure the heifers would reach their target weight, and be ready for mating, by 15 months of age. A concentrate feed plan was also formulated to ensure the heifers were fed the correct kg DM to achieve the required growth rates.

The most recent NMR data for the first half of 2020 showed the average age at first calving had dropped to 30 months, and heifers calving down this autumn will be 26 months of age on average.

Every day over the optimum first-calving age of 24 months costs the farmer an additional £2.87 per day. Dropping the average age at first calving by nine months has led to a significant cost saving of £774 per heifer for Richard.

Richard said: "Weighing monthly has helped us to keep a much closer eye on the heifers. Even though I see them in the paddock each day, bringing them through the crush monthly gives us a better chance to look over them in detail. I will always continue to weigh monthly now as it gives me peace of mind and I know I can assess any issues quickly before they impact the heifers dramatically."

Knowing the exact weight of each animal has also allowed Richard to carry out monthly treatments and vaccinations, ensuring the correct doses are given. In addition, handling the animals monthly has allowed them to get used to the routine and heifers now settle into the herd more quickly.

Teaghan says: "Knowing your heifer weights and addressing any issues as they arise is vital to producing a lifetime productive animal. Raising heifers to be the future of your herd requires careful management, with a keen eye for detail. Bringing heifers through the yards weekly helps to focus on each animal on a regular basis."

The farm is one of 500 farms selected by AHDB to take part in its HerdAdvance project, which aims to help Welsh dairy farmers lift profitability and performance by focusing on improved herd health management and disease control.

HerdAdvance is part of the five-year Dairy Improvement Programme, which is funded by the Welsh Government and the European Union. Find out more about the project at [ahdb.org.uk/herdadvance](https://ahdb.org.uk/herdadvance)





# Breeding benefits the bottom line

Genetics are the building blocks for any dairy animal's performance. Today, over 50% of production gains come from improved genetics, with benefits to the industry of around £44.5 million improvement across the UK herd in 2020.

We invest over £500,000 on genetic and genomic evaluations each year and over 95% of dairy semen sold in Britain uses our data.

Breeding consistently from only the best females in a typical 150-cow herd can add between £10,000 and £15,000 to the bottom line, so it makes sound economic sense to take your breeding seriously.

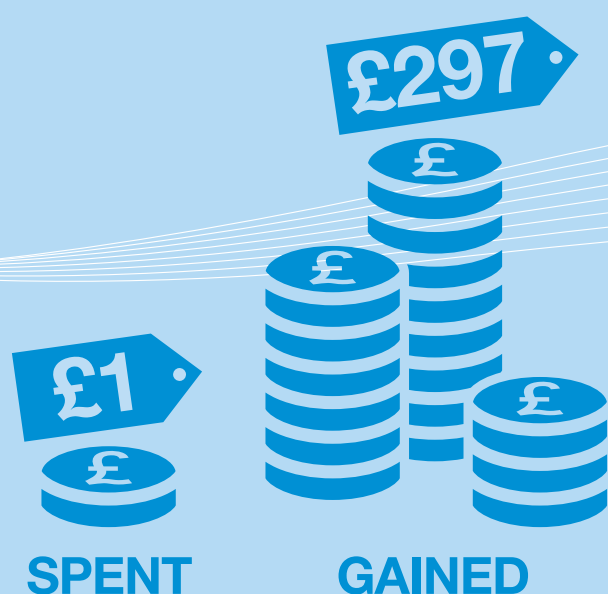
A great starting point is to use a herd genetic report, which allows you to see a snapshot of your herd's strengths and weaknesses by age or lactation and make informed decisions about their future potential.

Improvements to data analysis have reduced the number of recordings required to three per year and more farmers are now eligible to receive a genetic breakdown for their herd.

Signing up also gives you access to our Inbreeding Checker, which calculates the inbreeding level of any proposed mating and any cost implications. You can also compare your animals with breed averages by whole herd or lactation group.

Data from new individual cows, progeny and relatives is updated at every bull proof run in April, August and December. And with rapid progress at each release, there's never been a better time to review your breeding programme.

Discover how genetics can help develop your herd at [ahdb.org.uk/dairy-breeding-genetics](https://ahdb.org.uk/dairy-breeding-genetics)



“UK dairy farmers gain £297 improvement in their herd for every £1 of levy spent on genetics”

## Keep calm and keep moo-ving

If you or your team get frustrated when cows won't move up a race, have had close calls with a cow lashing out or are irritated when tasks take too long when handling cattle, then our series of webinars is for you.

We have already heard from Temple Grandin, globally respected animal behaviourist from the University of Colorado who changed the way the US handled cattle, and Neil Chesterton, a New Zealand vet who consults on cow flow and low-stress handling of milking herds. You can watch the webinar with Temple Grandin on our YouTube channel.

The third and final webinar in the series is on 2 March at 7pm with Dutch vet and co-founder of Cow Signals, Joep Driessen. Known as 'the cow whisperer' because of his ability to listen to cows and understand their body language, he will give you a better understanding of cow behaviour, as well as advice on how to improve your cattle-handling skills to save you time, reduce stress on both people and animals and make your farm a safer place to work.



Book your place at [ahdb.org.uk/events](https://ahdb.org.uk/events)

# News updates

## Looking over the boundary fence

Research by Andersons on behalf of AHDB showed that comparing yourself with others was a key trait of the top performing farms.

We recently launched a new KPI Express tool to help you review your performance figures and speed up the comparison against industry benchmarks.

Set-up only takes a few minutes and requires a few, readily available figures to see how you perform against the top 5%, 25% and average farms, to easily identify areas for improvement.

The tool provides useful links to relevant resources and case studies with guidance and suggestions to address any development areas.

Get started with the KPI Express tool at [kpiexpress.ahdb.org.uk](http://kpiexpress.ahdb.org.uk)



## Medicine hub launched

The Medicine hub was released in January 2021. An easy-to-use web-based platform, the Medicine hub allows users and authorised third parties to securely record and store their antibiotic usage data online.

It builds on the successful adoption of the AHDB electronic medicine book across the pork sector, which has achieved a 60% reduction in the use of antibiotics across 94% of finished pigs.

The Medicine hub has been developed to support the ruminant industry to identify and track usage across the dairy, beef and sheep sectors and demonstrate responsible antibiotic usage. Ruminant sectors can then work towards their targets for antibiotic use that have been set in collaboration with RUMA.

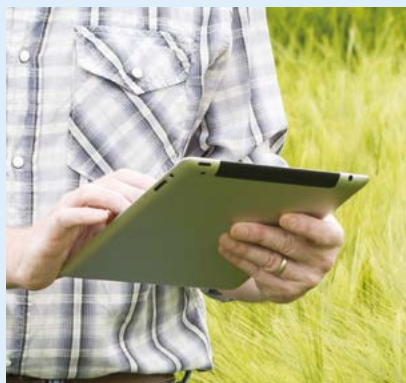


Find out more about the release of the platform at [ahdb.org.uk/medicine-hub](http://ahdb.org.uk/medicine-hub)

## 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](http://ahdb.org.uk/market-intelligence)



## Keeping in touch

If you would like to receive updates from us, such as the latest research, market intelligence, disease alerts, invitations to events and news on consumer marketing campaigns which could help your business to become more competitive and sustainable, please sign up on our website.

Sign up or update your details at: [ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch](http://ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch)

## Missed an event?

If you missed any of our recent webinars on reducing your carbon footprint, mastitis, new Strategic Dairy Farm launches and more, don't worry as we've recorded them all on our dairy events archive page.

Catch up on previous events at [ahdb.org.uk/dairy-events-archive](http://ahdb.org.uk/dairy-events-archive)



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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](http://ahdb.org.uk)

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