AHDB

SPRING 2024

ALL THINGS DAIRY

YOUR AHDB DAIRY UPDATE

Industry-wide dairy export drive

Beyond borders: Bluetongue arrives in Britain

STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Let's Eat Balanced campaign showcases British dairy

Contents

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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**

WELCOME

Nic Parsons,
Head of Engagement – Dairy

Welcome to our latest magazine, where we explore the exciting and diverse work we've been doing to support dairy farmers and the wider industry.

Firstly, we're pleased to announce that the Government has agreed to increase the levy rates for farmers. This decision will help support the sector and ensure its sustainability.

Earlier in the year, our Let's Eat Balanced campaign focused on showing how delicious and nutritious British dairy is important in a healthy, balanced diet.

We also want to tell you about the work we're doing to teach young people about where their food comes from. Roz Reynolds, who leads our education efforts, will share more about this.

Additionally, Professor John Gilliland will talk about his thoughts on the future of farming after working with us for a year.

We'll explore topics like using clover in farming for better results and the innovative experiments happening at Whitewool Farm. This farm is trying to find ways to make more profit while also being good for the environment.

Plus, we'll discuss efforts to increase British dairy exports, supported by government funding, and share stories from new farms joining our Strategic Dairy Farms programme.

Lastly, we'll touch on the important and worrying issue of bluetongue, with insights from our expert, Miranda Bowden-Doyle.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of All Things Dairy. As ever, please get in touch with me or any of the dairy engagement team if you have any questions.

Nic Parsons
Head of Engagement
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Increase to AHDB levy rate approved

The new rates come into force this April and will allow us to deliver more in the areas you asked us for.

Proposals to raise our levy rates have been approved by Ministers at Defra, the Scottish government and the Welsh government.

The new rates will start in April this year and will allow us to focus on delivering additional activities that you, the levy payer, have asked us to do.

It follows a proposal by AHDB's Dairy Sector Council – along with counterparts in the Beef & Lamb, Pork, and Cereals & Oilseeds sectors – last year for a levy increase to combat a fall in our spending power, which has reduced by up to 40% over the past decade due to rising costs and inflation. The Dairy levy rate has not changed for more than 20 years.

Rises for all four sectors received industry and stakeholder backing and have now been signed off by Ministers.

For the Dairy sector this means the levy will increase by 0.02p per litre to 0.08p per litre. The average levy payment is £990 per year, so the rise would equate to an extra £330 annually or £6.35 per week.

Your levy is invested each year to seize the opportunities and tackle the challenges that cannot, and will not, be addressed by commercial organisations, individuals or governments.

- The clear message from 2022's Shape the Future process was that our priorities should be:
- Promoting the reputation of dairy and dairy farming
- Using data and evidence to underpin the industry's reputation
- Exports

Throughout 2023 we ensured those areas were the focus of our delivery, but now, with the increase in funding, we can do more to build on those successes.

For 2024/25, this will include:

- Promoting British dairy products domestically and internationally to develop new markets and increase profitability
- Extra marketing campaigns promoting the benefits of dairy produce, and a greater focus on young adults
- Increasing our education work with schools and young consumers, and proactively defending the reputation of dairy
- Highlighting the lowering environmental impact of dairy production and gaining recognition for farmers for the work they do

AHDB Chair Nicholas Saphir said:

"We are pleased Ministers have approved the proposals, which will ensure the levy continues to support the work AHDB has committed to prioritising for farmers and processors across all the sectors we serve.

"Levy payers can be assured that our commitment to helping them navigate through an unprecedented period of change for the industry is secure, and we will continue to listen to their feedback to ensure we are delivering real value for money."

Striking the right **BALANCE**

In January and February, our Let's Eat Balanced campaign showcased the exceptional taste and quality of British dairy, beef and lamb, underlining their vital role in a nutritionally balanced diet.

The campaign's messaging, encapsulated in the 'This' and 'That' theme, was simple and effective. It championed the significance of balance, urging us to pair a bit of 'This' (delicious British protein which also includes Vitamin B12) with 'That' (fruits, vegetables, whole grains) for a healthy life with less fatigue.

Adverts featuring the word 'British' and the Union Jack appeared on various communication channels. From gracing mainstream TV screens and digital channels to captivating cinema audiences, the campaign was estimated to reach 92% of UK adults – about 42 million people.

The eye-catching adverts shared screens with major cinema blockbusters showing in January like *Wonka*, the chilling Universal/Blumhouse horror *Night Swim*, Anthony Hopkins and Helena Bonham Carter's *One Life*, and Timeout UK's pick for best film of the month, *Priscilla*. On TV screens, they appeared alongside popular shows on ITV, Channel 4, Sky, Discovery, Food Network, Channel 5, E4 and so much more.

Print advertising and social media content highlighting the nutritional benefits of British dairy, beef and lamb, such as being natural sources of protein and vitamin B12, also featured in retail magazines, newspapers and online.

Also adding an extra appeal to the TV and cinema advert is the voice of renowned British comedian, actor and broadcaster Richard Ayoade.

One of the campaign's strengths was its ability to connect with people on a human level. Instead of overwhelming people with statistics and complex nutritional information, AHDB took a more relatable approach. By emphasising the personal benefits of balanced eating – improved wellbeing, sustained energy and overall health – the campaign resonated with individuals from all walks of life.

Increasing reach through collaborations

Beyond the screen, Let's Eat Balanced extended its reach through partnerships with Tasty UK, creating Balanced Bites videos to inspire younger Gen Z (18–25 year-olds) audiences with healthy and delicious recipe ideas featuring British red meat and dairy. Tasty UK attracts over 18 million Gen Z users each month to its social media channels, with 98% of its weekly users saying Tasty UK makes cooking easier. This multi-pronged approach ensured the campaign was seen across demographics and recipe ideas were adopted.

Partnering with Tesco, Sainsbury's, Lidl, Aldi, Asda, Waitrose, Co-op and Morrisons, the campaign's stickers adorned over five million product packs and further cemented its presence in the aisles where shopping decisions are made.

Reception

The campaign's positive reception reflects a growing consumer interest in mindful eating and supporting local producers at a time when conversations around diets are heightened. So, the call to eat balanced while enjoying all the goodness of meat and dairy is perfectly timed.

Including farmers

The Let's Eat Balanced campaign highlighted the efforts of farmers and their dedication to welfare and sustainable food production. Messaging showed that farmers are united in their ambition to bring high-quality, naturally nutrient-rich produce to people and are continuously driving towards a sustainable food industry with high welfare standards at its heart. Once again, authenticity was brought to the narrative through the sharing of real-life sustainable farming practices by farmers.

Marketing materials promoting British beef, lamb and dairy including farm gate banners, recipe leaflets, posters and stickers (items free of charge and varied throughout the year) were available to farmers and can still be ordered. To get yours, visit **ahdb.org.uk/letseatbalanced**

The campaign forms part of AHDB's commitment to challenging misinformation about the role of British dairy, beef and lamb in a healthy, balanced diet.

> "From gracing mainstream TV screens and digital channels to captivating cinema audiences, the campaign was estimated to reach 92% of UK adults – about 42 million people"

LET'S EAT BALANCED
FROM AHDB

Key campaign takeaways

- The power of simplicity: A clear and concise message delivered with creativity can resonate deeply with audiences
- The importance of multi-channel engagement: Reaching consumers across various platforms maximises impact and caters to diverse preferences
- Partnerships for amplification: Collaborating with organisations unlocks new audiences and strengthens the overall message
- Focus on value, not just product: Highlighting the benefits of balanced eating, including taste, health and local sourcing, fosters a deeper connection with families and younger audiences

The Let's Eat Balanced campaign will be back in autumn to continue to champion a balanced approach to eating, and promoting the goodness of British dairy, beef and lamb in meals.

For more information about the campaign, visit **letseatbalanced.com**

Educating the **NEXT GENERATION**

Roz Reynolds, Head of Education, shares some of the exciting work we are doing at AHDB to teach young people about food production from farm to fork.

Children play a crucial role in shaping the future of the UK's food and farming industry as tomorrow's consumers. To secure the long-term sustainability of this sector, our focus is on fostering awareness among children about the origins and processes involved in food production.

Through our comprehensive education program, we are dedicated to deepening their understanding of how food is grown, reared and produced. This commitment reflects our belief in empowering the younger generation with knowledge that will contribute to a more informed and sustainable food landscape in the years to come.

School farm visits pilot

We're pleased to introduce a practical pilot project in collaboration with LEAF Education, designed to support 20 farmers in providing meaningful on-farm experiences for schoolchildren.

The initiative offers funded training to farmers who are relatively new to hosting visits, specifically in the Beef & Lamb, Cereals & Oilseeds, Dairy, and Pork sectors. Successful applicants receive fully funded training and accreditation through the Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme (CEVAS), starting in November.

Farmers in the programme will benefit from support from LEAF Education specialists and opportunities to connect with experienced host farmers. Additionally, schools will have access to funding for transportation, addressing a common obstacle to organizing on-farm visits for students.

I'm excited about this pilot project and believe it can positively impact how schoolchildren learn about food production. We are responding to the education priorities identified by levy payers, increasing opportunities for children to experience a working farm firsthand.

On-farm school conference

In November, over 150 GCSE students gained on-farm experience in the agricultural industry as part of our Farming Food for You event with LEAF Education, in collaboration with the British Nutrition Foundation.

Students enjoyed activities aligned with the curriculum, including a tour around Plumpton College's dairy farm, which features a robotic milking system, and a bakery workshop where they made their own breadsticks.

Around 15 local food producers and agri-linked businesses were also there to talk about the wider impact of farming and the scope of the industry.

It was fantastic to see so many young people experiencing a farm, many for the first time, and engaging with local food producers and farming businesses through hands-on activities.

Much of our work focuses on supporting teachers with resources, so it's been great to trial an interactive event focused on experiential learning for students themselves directly linked to the GCSE curriculum.

Director of Education and Public Engagement at LEAF Carl Edwards said: "We are delighted to have partnered with AHDB for the conference.

"It was an exciting event with the brilliant goal of educating young people about the agrifood industry, highlighting the many varied and exciting opportunities within the sector and allowing them to engage first-hand with many local businesses involved.

"We're delighted with how the conference went and are looking forward to seeing the impact following on from both pre and post-event sessions with schools."

The conference was one of a series of education pilots that we have been running over the past year to inspire the consumers of tomorrow by improving their understanding of where food comes from, as well as developing cooking skills.

Recent activities

During the first few months of the year, 100 teachers participated in the Food: A Fact of Life conference at Harper Adams, engaging in practical workshops and touring a dairy farm. As part of a pilot initiative, we've begun funding the cost of ingredients for school lessons. Addressing a gap in support, we're also launching new resources via Countryside Classroom to aid the A-level curriculum.

Looking ahead, we're gearing up to support LEAF's annual Open Farm Sunday on 9 June – a valuable chance for farmers to showcase their farms to the wider public. These efforts reflect our commitment to enhance educational resources and opportunities for both teachers and students in the agricultural domain.

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Find out more about our education programme at **ahdb.org.uk/education**

UN FAO Roadmap suggests secure **future for livestock**

After a year in his role as AHDB's environment consultant, Professor John Gilliland shares his outlook for the industry.

Over the past decade, I have been concerned with the persistent calls from scientists, academia and influential alliances to radically reduce or even eliminate livestock agriculture. As a farmer, one of my most critical roles is to produce nutritiously dense and diverse food. The removal or severe limiting of livestock drastically compromises my ability to do that – not to mention the resultant impact on my soil and biodiversity.

The solution to reducing the environmental impact of our agrifood system can't be as simple as removing 'high-carbon foods' – many of which are the most nutrient-dense and bioavailable on our plates. 'Low-carbon' diets, like that recommended by the EAT Lancet Commission, are nutritionally inadequate, with the quest to decarbonise our agrifood system putting many at risk of malnutrition. Action against climate change must not be to the detriment of our diets and health.

At COP28 in Dubai, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) released its latest report, 'Achieving Zero Hunger: A Global Road Map', which finally set out balanced targets for the future of our industry. Never has such a respected and influential body acknowledged the need for increased animal-based foods to meet global nutritional needs, let alone suggest targets.

The report sets out global targets up to 2050 to accelerate climate action that can transform the agrifood system and help achieve food security and human nutrition for today and tomorrow.

The report is exhaustive, approaching the challenge holistically, addressing emissions, land use, soil health, water security and food waste. Key milestones include:

- Zero global deforestation by 2035
- Full integration of food waste into a circular bioeconomy or for fuel or feed by 2050
- 25% reduction in methane by 2030
- 1.7% annual increase in livestock productivity by 2050

Any mention of methane reduction gets most UK farmers up in arms – I get it. For an industry that has largely stable methane emissions, causing limited or arguably no additional warming in the last few decades, it feels unjust. However, whether we measure the warming impact of methane using the legally binding GWP100 or the more representative GWP*, according to its authors at Oxford University, reducing methane beyond 15% causes climate cooling. This is an effect we cannot ignore. But where the mitigation options have a cost, farmers need to be paid to undertake such options, as it benefits the whole of society.

AHDB supports the report's conclusions, foreseeing a strong opportunity for food-producing countries, like the UK, to export its high-quality, more sustainably produced animal-based products overseas. Efficiencies are at our core; AHDB analysis shows that if the world's 265 million dairy cows were as efficient as the UK's, the world would need just 85 million to produce the same amount of milk. But to put us in an even stronger position, we must keep up with the pace of change and innovation.

Greater productivity, lower carbon footprints and greater carbon removals and storage will benefit us all. However, farmers must receive due recognition and reward for these improvements and gains – many of which benefit other economic sectors – but to do this, we need data and accurate reporting.

I have been advising AHDB for coming up to a year; in that time, we have made considerable headway in working to support its levy payers with critical projects to address shortfalls in farm-level baseline data, defining net zero and net carbon, developing industry road maps and scrutinising emissions reporting.

The aim is to help levy payers know their own environmental numbers, change the narrative from gross to net carbon and enable them to make informed decisions while being duly recognised and rewarded financially within the national greenhouse gas inventory and scope 3 declaration reporting, but also within society and the wider public and policy narrative.

Supporting this, and I am delighted AHDB recognises its importance, is the addition of lead human nutritionist Kate Arthur, who works closely with me and the environment team to bring environmental sustainability and nutrition closer together. She works to demonstrate to the farming industry and her peers in the world of human health and nutrition the key role of red meat and dairy in a healthy and sustainable diet.

Farmers have long since delivered multiple public goods; it is vital that the transformation of our global agrifood system honours all of these in the quest for net-zero emissions and net-zero hunger.

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> "Any mention of methane reduction gets most UK farmers up in arms – I get it. For an industry that has largely stable methane emissions, causing limited or arguably no additional warming in the last few decades, it feels unjust"

Sowing success and harnessing the **power of clover**

With the grazing season getting underway, does clover have a key role to play on farming platforms?

These coming weeks, put your plans in place to ensure you get the most from your clover fields. The benefits of white clover tend to occur from May onwards as the swards white clover content increases, making this the perfect time to review our best practice material. Good grazing management is important for increased persistence and production of white clover in grazed swards.

Clovers play a significant role in sustainable UK production for several reasons. While feed and fertiliser prices remain high, having a dependable source of homegrown protein, such as clover in the fields, offers some protection from ever-rising input costs. Their ability to take nitrogen from the air and convert it into a form that can be used by plants reduces the need for chemical fertilisers. This not only reduces the environmental impact of farming but also reduces the cost of inputs for farmers.

White and red clovers are both widely used in UK farming systems and have unique characteristics and benefits. White clover is a perennial legume that is often included in grassland mixes to improve soil health and fertility. Its root system can help break up compacted soil and improve drainage, which can help improve the growth and yield of grasses. It is also a valuable source of protein for livestock, and including them in pasture mixes can help reduce the environmental impact of animal agriculture.

Red clover is another perennial legume that is commonly used in UK farming systems. It has a deeper root system than white clover and can help improve soil structure and reduce erosion. It is a valuable source of forage and can be used as a high-quality hay or silage crop. It can also be used as green manure, providing important nutrients and organic matter when incorporated into the soil.

Including clover in pasture seed mixes can help improve the nutritional quality of the forage available to livestock, which can lead to improved weight gain, milk production and reproductive performance. Clover can also be used to extend the grazing season as it can continue to grow and produce forage late into the season and improve the overall productivity of the pasture. Clover is particularly valuable during the mid-to-late season when grass growth starts to fall away.

Overall, including white and red clovers in UK farming systems can help improve soil health and fertility and provide valuable forage for livestock. They are a key component of sustainable agriculture and can help reduce the environmental impact of farming while supporting more resilient and healthy food systems. However, like all crops, they need to be managed correctly. Flexibility and willingness to adapt to the conditions are important when managing grass-clover swards. Good grazing management is also important for the increased persistence and production of white clover in grazed swards.

Did you know

For every 10% increase in the amount of clover in the sward, the crude protein (CP) content of the first-cut silage increases by 1%?

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CLOVER PODCAST

Teagasc Research Officer Nicky Byrne and James Drummond on Lemmington Hill Head Farm in Northumberland share with you some of their expert tips, and real-life stories, on the establishment and management of both white and red clover swards. Join us as we delve into the science of clover cultivation, best practices for the establishment, and innovative management techniques that enhance soil health and biodiversity and contribute to a more resilient farming system.

Listen now at **ahdb.org.uk/podcasts**

> “Our aim is to have a well-rounded business that supports the environment throughout every activity we do”

One farm’s journey to reach **NET ZERO**

Whitewool Farm, one of our Strategic Dairy Farms, is experimenting to find ways to optimise inputs and achieve greater profits that go hand in hand with environmental gain.

With increasing focus on achieving net zero and accounting for carbon, dairy farmers have been encouraged to reduce their carbon footprint by milk buyers, consumers and others within the industry.

Whitewool Farm, based in Hampshire and owned by Will and Jamie Butler, is experimenting to find ways to optimise inputs and achieve greater profits that go hand in hand with environmental gain, including reducing carbon emissions across its entire farming enterprise.

The Butlers' farm is made up of a 400-cow Holstein Friesian dairy unit on an autumn block-calving system and 240 ha of combinable crops (mainly wheat). The farm also has several diversified activities such as glamping, fly fishing, corporate days, clay shooting and self-storage.

Jamie and Will leaned more towards a sustainable approach when their non-farming businesses demanded it. They then realised that, if done right, there were huge savings to be made by focusing on this area, and they are now adopting this approach across the whole farm.

Their vision is 'to be the most productive farm in the UK – naturally' by enhancing assets, optimising inputs and delivering fulfilling experiences to their customers, team and cows.

"Our aim is to have a well-rounded business that supports the environment throughout every activity we do," Will said.

Better use of slurry and manure to reduce artificial inputs

"One of the best assets we have on the farm is slurry and manure. We do everything we can to enhance the value of this from adding 'effective microbes' to ferment the slurry and enable it to retain its nutrients for longer and release them more slowly to ensuring applications of slurry are at the right rate and at the right time. With the help of Portsmouth Water, Natural England and ADAS, we have investigated water pathway management and slurry infrastructure, and we invested heavily in extra storage capacity and better umbilical-spreading equipment," said Jamie.

Jamie and Will are also looking for every opportunity to build biology on the farm, and one of the ways they are doing that is experimenting with a new method of intensively building fungi and microbes, called a Johnson–Su bioreactor. This is a very simple system that, over 12 months, builds a microbial-rich substrate that can be applied as a soil stimulant, either as a seed dressing or through a sprayer. Early experimentation has seen a noticeable difference in tillering and plant vigour in wheat.

The bioreactors are created by filling IBC containers with woodchip, muck, silage and worms to provide a rich base on which beneficial microorganisms can grow. Regular monitoring is required, and then there is a bit of a process to extract the substrate in a form that can go through a sprayer or be applied as a seed dressing.

"Not many UK farms have adopted this approach yet, but with the biological gain in the soil and the subsequent benefits that come from building soil health, I think more farms will start their own Johnson–Su bioreactor within the next few years," said Jamie.

Better work planning and workforce engagement

Whitewool Farm keep their employees involved in the bigger picture, through project planning and allowing staff to have as much autonomy over day-to-day decisions as possible. Will said, "Through helping our employees understand the reason why the farm is aiming to be more productive and work sustainably, they can also consider the overall goals in their daily decision-making. We also like to offer training and external support, to help learning and to keep our workers engaged in our farming practices."

The future of Whitewool Farm

Focusing on the future, Whitewool Farm has joined our Strategic Dairy Farm 3-year programme, to help them develop their farm further with the feedback from a steering group and from local farmers that they will be hosting during their on-farm meetings.

Will and Jamie will also continue to conduct their own trials to improve the productivity and sustainability of Whitewool Farm. For example, over the next year, supported by SFI, they are going add herbal leys and clover to their entire grazing platform to maximise the soil health benefits and optimise the feed value for the cows.

Visit: ahdb.org.uk/strategic-dairy-farms to find out more.

For further information, contact:

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Introducing our **NEW** Strategic Farms

New farms are starting their journey as Strategic Dairy Farms to tell their stories, share good practice and encourage farmer-to-farmer learning.

Our Strategic Dairy Farm programme is designed to help tell the stories of farms all over the UK, using different calving and grazing systems and facing different challenges, from drought to budget constraints. Some of the farms are on their way to becoming net zero, and some are adapting their farming practices to reduce their carbon footprint.

Ten new farms are joining the existing programme, including Whitewool Farm, and five further farms launched at the end of last year, as shown here. Keep an eye out for the remaining farms that will be launching soon.

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Dillington Farm, Knott Oak Dairy, Somerset

Knott Oak Dairy is a part of the Dillington estate, which is home to 310 crossbred, fully housed cows. The cows calve all year round and milk on a Lely robotic system. The farm is managed by Ollie Blackburn, who aims to be as sustainable and efficient as possible, growing most of their animal feed on the estate. Over the next three years, the owners are looking to continue their journey to being net zero, fine-tune their crossbreeding and improve the profitability of the farm.

Caulston Farm, Devon

Managed by Adam Atkinson and his wife Holly, Caulston Farm is located on the coast, organically milking 700 KiwiCross cows on a 48/96 parlour. They are calving on a spring block system and grazing as much as possible, including forage crops and herbal leys. The farm is prone to drought, which has meant that they had to adapt their farming practices to maximise yields from forage.

Moorhouse Hall Farm, Cumbria

John, Kate and Chris Bailey were originally tenant farmers based in Lancashire, until a year ago, when they purchased Moorhouse Hall farm in Cumbria. They milk 100 pedigree Holstein cows on a 20/20 herringbone, calving all year round and grazing as much as possible. Chris works part-time as a vet and has a big interest in maximising cow genetics to improve herd performance.

Rough Grounds Farm, Derbyshire

First-generation farmers Graham and Justine Worsey are tenant farmers at Rough Grounds Farm, milking a mixed herd of 260 Jersey, Shorthorn, Friesian and cross-bred cows, on a herringbone parlour. They calve in a split block, calving more in spring than autumn. The farm follows a grass-based system, experimenting with herbal leys and forage crops.

Lydney Park Farms, Gloucestershire

Managed by Gavin Green and Keith Davis, Lydney Park is made up of 850 Jersey X cows milking on a 32-point rotary. Originally milking a fully housed, three-times-a-day milking herd of Holsteins, they have adapted their farming practices to suit their cows. The farm follows a spring block-calving system, calving within 10 weeks. The cows graze as much as they can, from calving in February, through to mid-November.

Visit: ahdb.org.uk/strategic-dairy-farms to find out more

INDUSTRY-WIDE dairy export drive

A drive to help boost British dairy exports following an additional £1m investment from the Government will take shape this year, with AHDB very much at the forefront.

International trade remains of paramount importance to the dairy sector, and we are anticipating some promising developments for our exporters in 2024.

Working collaboratively with industry and government, a drive to help boost British dairy exports following an additional £1m investment from the Government will take shape this year, with AHDB very much at the forefront of delivering these services.

Export development remains one of the cornerstones of our work to help our dairy exporters thrive and grow. Working in partnership with the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), we'll play a key role in delivering the Dairy Export Programme to promote British dairy products in international markets over the next two-and-a-half years.

The Dairy Export Programme is the result of the £1m committed by the Prime Minister at the Farm to Fork Summit in May 2023 to boost UK dairy exports, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It is part of wider measures to support the agrifood industry and will run until the end of March 2026.

The programme was agreed following consultations with the industry-led Dairy Export Taskforce, which convenes UK dairy businesses and industry bodies such as AHDB, NFU, Dairy UK, DBT and Defra. We will play the lead role in delivering the programme with input from the Dairy Export Taskforce and governance from the DBT.

The UK-wide programme aims to help businesses grasp exciting new opportunities around the world and drive dairy export growth. The additional £1m earmarked by the Government for UK dairy exports will support our dairy export development, and we are in the process of finalising the strategy around specific activity. It will, however, include the creation of three in-market, dairy-specific, commercially focused roles in the USA, the Middle East and Asia, which were part funded by the Government to support our ambitions for dairy exports in these markets.

The programme is designed to unlock new opportunities for our dairy exports in growth markets around the world. It will include a global event, showcasing the UK's world-class dairy products and bringing buyers from around the world to the UK to meet and do business with our exporters. It will also include educational work to help UK producers build export capability and market insight, as well as raising awareness of our world-class dairy products on the global stage.

This activity will build on our long-established export work to support levy payers which last year included a major presence at the world's key international trade shows. In October, Kevin Hollinrake MP, Minister for Enterprise, Markets and Small Business at the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), joined us and 14 dairy exporters at Anuga in Cologne, underlining our joint commitment to grow our reputation as a producer of quality, safe and wholesome food.

We also hosted five dairy exporters at the Food and Hospitality Show China (FHC) to meet existing customers and potential new ones from the key Chinese market. It was the first time post-pandemic that the AHDB Dairy Export team had returned to China, and it was immensely successful. There is enormous potential in China and the wider Asia region for our exporters to fulfil consumer demand for high-quality British dairy produce. FHC China allowed us to raise further awareness of what we have to offer in these markets and put our exporters in direct contact with buyers.

To reiterate, one of AHDB's key strategic objectives is export development, working with industry and government, to cultivate further opportunities for our dairy sector. The Dairy Export Programme further illustrates our shared commitment to developing activity that delivers tangible results for our levy payers. It will help build on our existing work and we are looking forward to helping our exporters continue to thrive in 2024 and beyond.

For more information about our work supporting dairy exports, visit ahdb.org.uk/exports/dairy

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Disease prevention starts with genetic selection

The HealthyCow index was added to the dairy producer's genetic toolbox almost three years ago. New evidence shows that those using it are seeing significant reductions in mastitis and lameness, improved fertility and longer lifespans.

Discover more about our HealthyCow genetic index at ahdb.org.uk/dairy-breeding-and-genetics

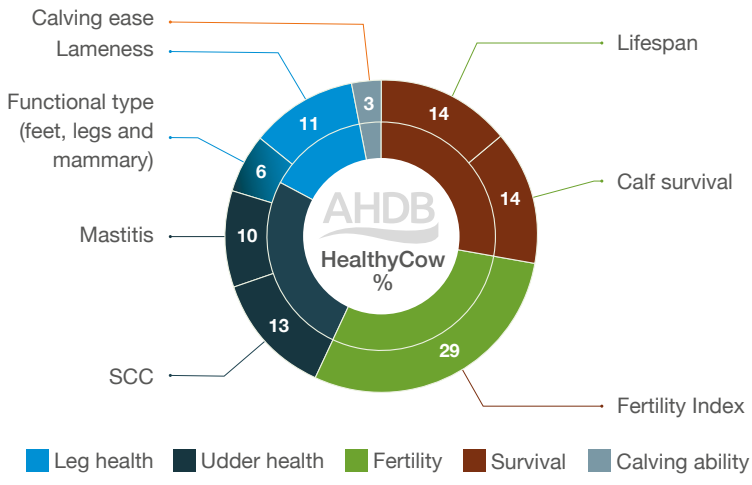

Figure 1. The breakdown of individual trait weightings in the HealthyCow Index

Disease prevention is by far the most effective approach to maintaining herd health and the best place to start is before conception. Getting the genetics right has a profound impact on the ease of managing health, but it comes with the bonus of improving cow welfare, cutting carbon footprint, saving labour and costs and boosting a herd's bottom line.

It's for this reason that we introduced HealthyCow (HC) in 2021, which was the first time UK farmers had a single genetic figure to represent overall health. This provided an at-a-glance indicator of which bulls were predicted to transmit the best overall health to their daughters.

HC does this by pulling a range of different health or health-related traits into one figure. These include the three major causes of culling – mastitis, lameness and fertility – alongside others, including calf survival, calving ease and lifespan.

Two years after its introduction, we analysed the actual phenotype (or performance) of the national dairy herd, in terms of mastitis, lameness and fertility, and related this to their sires' HC index.

Mastitis

Some strong trends have emerged through this assessment, not least in mastitis. When the top 25% (Quartile 1) HC bulls were compared with the bottom 25% (Quartile 4) bulls, there was as much as a doubling in their daughters' mastitis incidence. Third calvers with the best (Q1) sires had a 12.2% incidence, compared with 24.9% in daughters of Q4 bulls. A similar relationship is shown through all age groups.

Lameness

Lameness shows a similar pattern, again demonstrated well in third-lactation cows. Daughters of Q1 sires were recorded with an 11.4% incidence of lameness compared with those by Q4 bulls recording 15.4%. This becomes more pronounced through the age range, with fifth calver daughters of Q1 bulls at 13.3% compared with 19.2% for the same age group sired by the lowest quartile sires.

Fertility

For fertility, the trend is in the same direction, seen clearly through the calving interval of the best and worst HC sires' daughters. In every age group, the difference between Q1 and Q4 daughters is 11 or 12 days, demonstrated, for example, in third calvers which come through at 391 days for those sired by Q1 bulls compared with 403 days for daughters of Q4 bulls.

Lifespan

With better genetics – for mastitis, lameness and fertility – come longer lifespans, and daughters of Q1 bulls were found to live, on average, an extra half lactation longer than those by Q4 HC bulls.

It's worth producers remembering that these benefits come pretty much free of charge. And while they may not represent a substantial difference in fertility or disease incidence in one animal, the improvements are massive if they exist across a whole herd.

And as with all genetic gain, it always comes as a permanent benefit and will pass down the generations to accumulate more.

Cattle that come with an inbuilt resistance to disease can have a substantial impact on ease of management, labour requirement and the use of antibiotics, among a wealth of knock-on benefits. These range from reduced milk waste and carbon footprint to improved cow welfare, consumer perception and, of course, the bottom line.

Using HealthyCow

So, how should HC be used alongside other parameters?

£PLI should remain the priority for selection on a typical, year-round calving UK farm, with the comparable seasonal indexes usually preferred for spring or autumn block-calving herds.

Once bulls are shortlisted on the relevant profitability index, HC is a good option for secondary selection and will indicate which will breed the most health and fertility into their daughters.

However, the formulae for HC and £PLI include many of the same traits, which means that by breeding for £PLI, improvements are already being made in the health and fertility traits.

HC should generally be a secondary consideration, although the exception should be when a herd has a specific problem which needs to be addressed, in which case, that particular index – say fertility or cell count – may be a better secondary choice.

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Cheshire farm embraces digital transformation

Responding to ever-changing market pressure and striving for efficiency, Guy Ford's Manley Old Hall between Kelsall and Frodsham in Cheshire is almost unrecognisable from how it looked 10 years ago.

The Ford family has farmed Manley Old Hall for 100 years, and Guy is the fourth generation to be involved. The 600 acres are split over two blocks, half of which is owned and half of which is rented.

"We have light, sandy soil which is great at growing grass at the front and back end of the seasons," says Guy. "With this in mind, and with an eye on input costs, unpredictable milk prices and cow robustness, we completely changed herd breeding and management."

Bringing in Jersey genetics to gradually take over from the higher-yielding Holsteins and shifting to spring block calving has transformed the now 300-cow herd.

"We are after a 500 kg cow with good fertility, longevity and feet/legs," Guy explains. "We put down cow tracks with our own sandstone and astroturf, and it's greatly helped with cutting lameness."

The herd is out year-round, and the light ground is resilient to poaching. Dry cows remain outside on bales and grass on the underperforming paddocks, coming in a week before they are due to calve, and once calved, everyone is straight outside again.

"We aim for two silage cuts, which are clamped and make around 1,000 haylage bales to feed out over the winter. It's a simple, low-resource system in terms of man hours, with good feed efficiency and the cows yield an average of 5,500 L.

"We sell to Yew Tree in Skelmersdale where the milk is dried, so constituents are important, and our milk quality averages 3.92% CP and 4.87% fat," he adds.

Calving starts on 1 February and lasts for 10 weeks, with Guy planning for a replacement rate of 20%. Mastitis rates are low – with only 11 cases in 2023 – something he puts down to the cows being out all year; the main reason for culling is fertility. The herd is all AI'd to LIC KiwiCross bulls for the first five weeks, then AI'd to Belgian Blue for two weeks before going in with the Angus sweepers.

"Knowing where we are against targets, what, if any, health issues there are and tracking fertility is crucial to ensure we stay on track and identify if anything is going awry," Guy states. "We adopted the Herdwatch system pretty much as soon as it came on the market six or so years ago, and it proved to be really helpful.

"Initially, we used Herdwatch for medical records, and having everything

centralised and clearly visible to everyone in the team kickstarted our digital transformation; the system proved to be convenient to use and made us more efficient. It soon became apparent that, with other family members involved in calf rearing, for example, using Herdwatch more broadly would be logical. The fact that anyone can update in real time helps us keep on top of things. We register calves when they are born, record AI and services, we weigh calves and record that and, via Herdwatch, we have shared our antibiotic usage data with Medicine Hub."

Typically, the vet visits around breeding, transition and calving, and Guy is rightly proud of the low levels of health issues in the herd.

"We take the calves once born to give them colostrum – which will have been tested to ensure its quality – warmed in a water bath to the right temperature. Since doing this, we can more easily monitor their feed intakes," Guy adds. "They are housed in groups of three from a week to 10 days of age and then larger groups of 18 till weaning. We always ensure plenty of clean, fresh water, cake and roughage in the form of barley straw to help with rumen development."

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Images © Guy Ford

MEDICINE HUB

Medicine Hub collates and centralises UK antibiotic use for the dairy, beef and sheep sectors, and it is managed and hosted by AHDB. It provides evidence and insight to demonstrate low and responsible antibiotic use nationally, in the battle against antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Medicine Hub data will help defend the reputation of the industry and retain the trust of customers and consumers at home and in export markets.

Find out more and sign up at ahdb.org.uk/medicine-hub

Beyond borders: **Bluetongue arrives in Britain**

Following the detection of the first cases in England in November, Miranda Bowden-Doyle, AHDB Animal Health and Welfare Scientist, highlights what you need to know about the disease.

Bluetongue virus (BTV) is transmitted by biting midges, and it affects all ruminants (e.g. sheep, cattle, goats and deer) and camelids (e.g. llamas and alpacas). Following the outbreak of bluetongue virus serotype 3 (BTV-3) in Europe last autumn, the first cases in England were detected in November through the BTV surveillance testing. Those cases were likely caused by infected midges being blown across from mainland Europe.

Cases continued to rise at the start of 2024, but with the cold weather, the risk of onward transmission by midges was reduced. It is difficult to predict how the disease will prog ress through 2024 as the temperature increases, but we are working closely as an industry to be able to identify any changes.

The disease is controlled by restricting the movement of animals and, if appropriate, culling infected animals.

There is no evidence that BTV is currently circulating in midges in Great Britain; therefore, it is not classified as an outbreak. With low numbers of animals affected, culling was a sensible approach to minimise the risk of onward transmission. That will be less appropriate if the virus becomes more widespread since it will be circulating in midges.

Different animal species show varied clinical signs, but generally, sheep show more acute signs with cattle showing more chronic signs. There are numerous strains of BTV, and the strain which has been recently detected in England is BTV-3.

With spring calving well underway, BTV and other viruses such as Schmallenberg and BVD can cause abortions and birth defects, as can toxins and mineral deficiencies, so it is important to look out for these. As BTV is on the list of potential causes, any instance of abortion or deformed, small or weak calves should be discussed with your vet and reported as a suspect case as outlined below if appropriate.

What are the clinical signs of BTV?

Clinical signs in cattle include:

- Crusting around the nostrils and muzzle
- Redness of the mouth, eyes, nose and skin above the hoof
- Nasal discharge
- Reddening and erosions of the teats
- Abortions
- Small, weak or deformed calves or calves dying within a few days of birth

Cattle do not often show clear signs of the disease, so you should also look for signs of fatigue and reduced productivity, including reduced milk yield.

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 03000 200 301. In Wales, contact 0300 303 8268. In Scotland, contact your local Field Services Office.

How is BTV spread?

BTV is usually spread by infected adult midges biting a susceptible animal. Infected midges can spread locally and more widely in certain temperature and wind conditions.

However, the disease can also be spread by the movement of infected animals, so the movement of animals from BTV-affected areas needs to be controlled.

The time of year, temperature, wind direction, and proximity and density of neighbouring farms all affect spread. The midge season is usually March–September, but some will survive throughout the year.

How can I protect my animals and prevent them from being infected?

Controlling midges is difficult, and while things can be done to reduce their spread, you are unlikely to eliminate the risk on your farm.

Midges often accompany animals when they move, so the main preventative measure is to put movement controls and restrictions in place for susceptible animals in affected areas. This reduces the opportunity for vectors to be transported between holdings.

Midges breed in damp soils with high organic content, such as muckheaps. Keeping these away from your cattle and their housing may reduce the biting frequency and, therefore, transmission.

Unless you are specifically directed to do so, you do not need to house your cattle.

Synthetic pyrethroid (e.g. deltamethrin)-based insecticidal pour-on products are approved in the UK for use on cattle and sheep against some biting flies and lice. In the laboratory, deltamethrin is effective against midges, but this has not been proven outside the laboratory, and there is no proven impact on BTV transmission. Care should be taken with the widespread use of insecticides on animals in the environment as they will kill other important insects.

Can I vaccinate my animals against BTV-3?

No. There is currently no vaccine authorised in the UK or EU for BTV-3.

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

Webinars

We held a series of webinars in partnership with colleagues from the RHW including the British Cattle Veterinary Association, National Beef Association, National Sheep Association, NFU, LAA, BMPA, AIMS and Sheep Veterinary Society. Visit RHW's website to catch up on the recordings.

For further information, contact:

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INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Visit the Ruminant Health & Welfare bluetongue hub: **ruminanthw.org.uk/bluetongue-virus**

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 03000 111 999 or the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution on 0800 188 4444.

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

NEWS & UPDATES

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NEW CEO REPLACES TIM RYCROFT

Graham Wilkinson has joined as our new chief executive officer, bringing a wealth of experience and a proven track record of success from his time at Arla Foods as Global Vice President of Agriculture.

During his extensive time at Arla working in both global and UK roles, he has successfully supported over 8,500 cooperative farm owners and managed the delivery of innovative commercial milk concepts on farm.

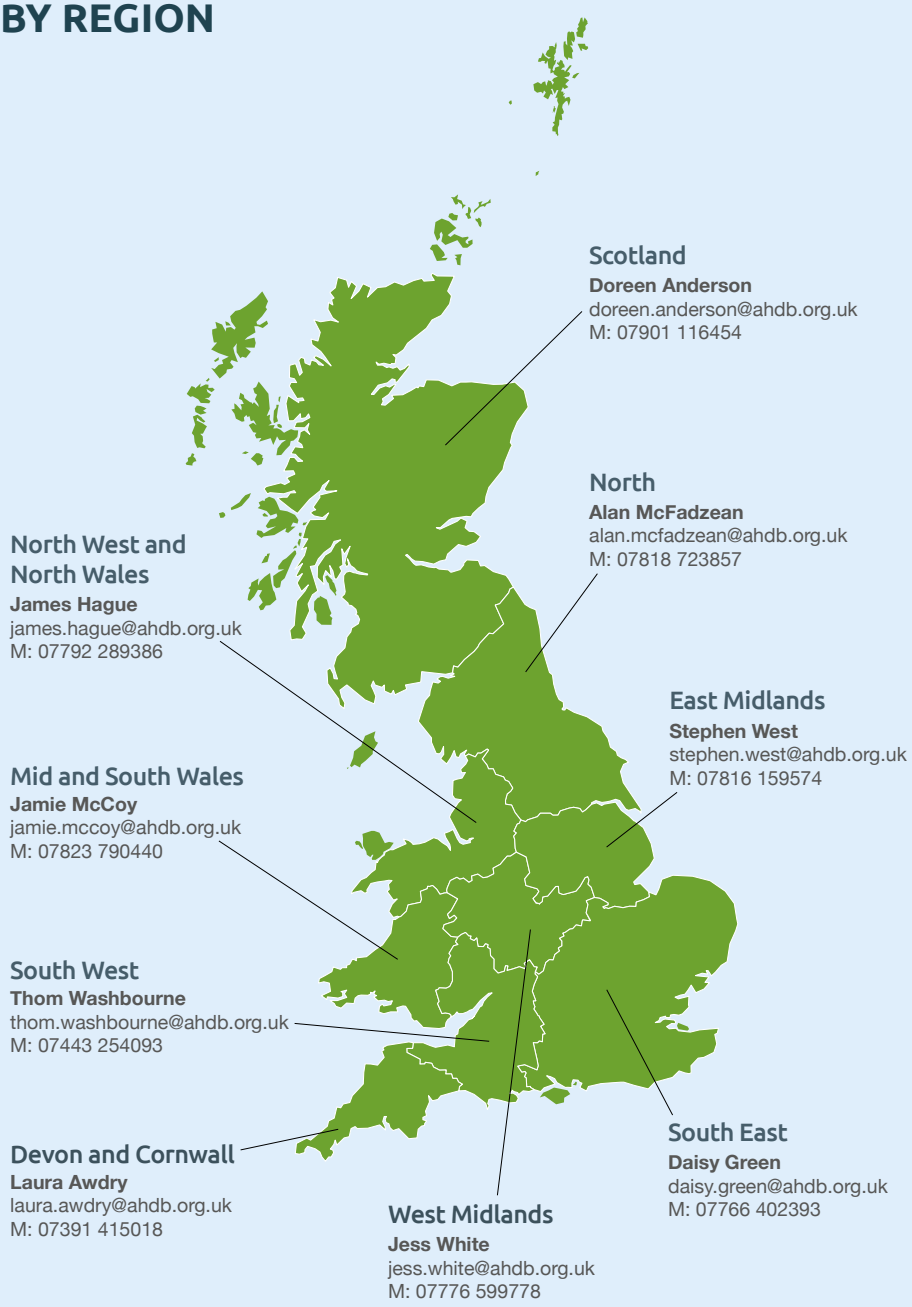
Having worked throughout the supply chain for his whole career, agriculture has always been part of Graham's life, working with his grandparents and parents on the family farm in the north east of England. He is a passionate leader and a strong advocate of British food and farming.

FOLLOW US ON INSTAGRAM

Exciting news – we've just started sharing on Instagram! Follow us to see what we're up to every day, meet our team, and find out how you can be part of what we're doing. Get ready for a behind-the-scenes look at our work and discover more about the people and projects at AHBD.

instagram.com/ahdb_dairy

AHDB DAIRY ENGAGEMENT TEAM BY REGION



MEET THE TEAM

Our field-based engagement team are your first point of contact for support and enquiries, helping put technical expertise and guidance directly into your hands.

If you want to understand how we can help, need pointing in the right direction or want to know what's happening in your area, get in touch with your local engagement manager, as shown on the map.

Contact details for our specialist teams, such as market information, research and genetics, can be found at **ahdb.org.uk/meet-the-team-dairy**