

All things DAIRY

YOUR AHDB DAIRY UPDATE

AHDB



Summer 2019



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Paul Flanagan,
Sector Strategy Director – Dairy

Welcome to our summer update

The hard work we put into developing our Strategic Farm Programme is now beginning to pay off, as I attended the launch of our first Welsh Government-funded farm back in June.

Attendees heard how John and Anna Booth run their farm, and what struck me most was that, while all our Strategic Farms are different in terms of the system they operate, the market they supply or their infrastructure, there are a lot of similarities too.

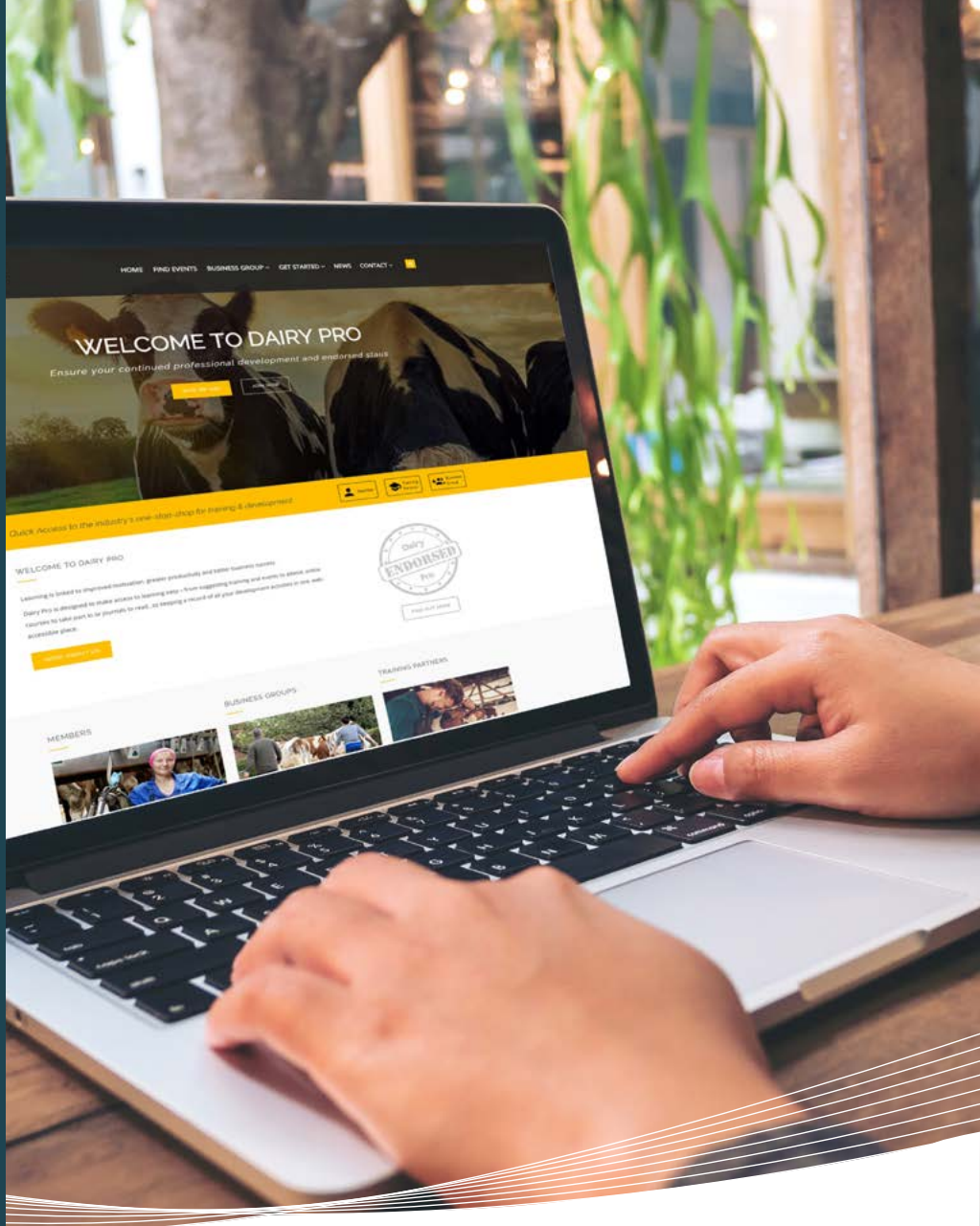
They're all open about how they run their farms, sharing both the good figures and those in need of improvement, and they're keen to hear the thoughts and experiences of other farmers.

Farmers learning from each other is what underpins our programme. As we roll out the programme further to 25 farms across Britain, we'll provide a platform for even more farmers to benefit.

At the time of writing, we'll have launched our next farm in South Wales and another in planning for North Wales. And if the above sounds like you, it's not too late to put in your application.

In the next issue, I'll share the results from the second year of our consumer marketing campaign with Dairy UK and I'm pleased to say the initial signs are looking encouraging.

Are you a high-performing, forward-thinking dairy farm? Interested in joining our growing strategic dairy farm network? Register your interest today by emailing kedairyadmin@ahdb.org.uk or by calling 024 7647 8697.



Dairy Pro's new website

Technology is ever-changing and Dairy Pro has embraced some new ways to deliver its services for the benefit of its members, with the launch of its new website. As well as making it more appealing, the new website is easier to navigate, simpler for members to log in, with an improved search function on the events calendar.

So what's changed?

- Dedicated pages for individual and farm business membership types
- New 'At a glance' section shows your progress towards Dairy Pro Endorsed status and the learning pillars you've tackled
- We've introduced 'In depth' pages showing your points and activity history
- 'Submit new points' lets you log attendance at events, where you

haven't registered, as well as events or activities not on the Dairy Pro database

- Revised layout means it takes fewer clicks to get where you want
- Dairy Pro stats – how many people are in the scheme and how it's growing
- Case study section has been refreshed

And we aren't standing still – further developments this year will enable business members to self-certify in-house training events and make profiles available to third parties. We're also looking at ways in which we can help members ensure compliance with assurance scheme training and development needs.

Visit the new website at dairypro.co.uk

Contact the Dairy Pro team on dairyproenquiries@ahdb.org.uk or call 024 7647 8681.

Welsh Strategic Farm launch

Over 100 farmers attended the launch of our first Welsh Strategic Dairy Farm in Flintshire in June, hosted by John and Anna Booth. After a warm welcome by our Chairman Gwyn Jones and Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager for Wales Richard Davies, attendees were given a tour of the farm and an overview of the developments, successes and challenges at Rhual Dairy.

John and Anna studied agriculture with animal science and graduated from Harper Adams in 1997. John became an assistant farm manager on an estate and Anna became a dairy specialist for an independent dairy company but, in 2002, they moved from Dorset to Mold to start a share farming agreement with Rhual Farm Partnership.

The farm started with 250 cows each producing 7,200 litres a year before expanding the herd to 336 cows achieving an average of 8,400 litres. Over time, they aim to increase this to 9,000 litres, with an increased focus on milk from forage.

John commented, “We were really pleased to be asked to be a Strategic Dairy Farm for Wales. We are hoping it will enable us to pay more attention to key performance indicators and help us achieve our business goals through listening to other farmers and other industry professionals.

“Over the last 12 months, we have improved our transition and calf housing, along with renewables in the form of solar PV and thermal, which will, hopefully, help us improve our performance, along with cow comfort.”

About Rhual Dairy

- 336 Holstein Friesian cows
- Calving all year round
- Grazing during the summer
- All replacement heifers are home-reared
- Total area farmed is 220 hectares, mainly grass and maize, with a small area of combinable cereals.
- All the land is within an NVZ

“We are hoping it will enable us to pay more attention to key performance indicators and help us achieve our business goals”



To find out more about Strategic Farm events happening near you, visit ahdb.org.uk/events or follow us on twitter @AHDB_Dairy



Spotlight on Carpenters Farm

It's been over six months since Carpenters Farm joined our Strategic Farm Programme, so we caught up with Joe Carter to explore his journey so far.

Joe's passion for constantly improving and learning from others is reflected in his initial reasons for joining the programme. "I was interested in learning from other farms who run similar systems, as well as showcasing what we do here."

One area Joe has concentrated on is improving calf performance since they'd experienced scouring at around 5 days old due to rotavirus. Age at first calving had risen to 25 months, as calves were only reaching 63 kg at 56 days, when they should be hitting double their birth weight.

A meeting on the farm in early April saw 60 attendees touring the farm's calf sheds to identify good practices, as well as areas for improvement. The group helped to narrow down potential areas that will have the biggest impact, as Joe explains:

"We've looked at the hygiene of our feeders, making sure they're fully cleaned and disinfected. Sometimes, we're milking cows 12 hours after calving, potentially losing colostrum quality, so

testing this at calving could establish whether the problem lies with protocol or transition feeding.

"We did tube-feed four litres of colostrum as soon as possible after calving, but we're using a teat feeder instead to prevent any damage from tubing, and it has been so successful that we have removed tube feeding altogether.

"These changes, along with serving the heifers at a younger age, mean that our predicted age at first calving is now just under 23 months."

This focus on calf welfare was further supported by specialist advice from visiting international speaker Dr Jim Reynolds as part of his tour of several of our Strategic Dairy Farms in June.

Dr Reynolds, a professor of large animal medicine and welfare at Western University of Health Sciences in California, discussed the science behind calving, calf management and the transition phase, linking this directly with the Carter's management systems.

He also shared his passionate belief that it's important to treat animals with compassion, dignity and respect, and how welfare can be maximised by understanding and making use of natural behaviours, commenting:

"A cow's instinct is to hide her calf somewhere quiet and secluded so she can go and eat, while the calf sleeps safely. We can take advantage of this by managing the separation of cow and calf during this window to minimise stress and anxiety, improving welfare."

Fact file

- Carpenters Farm
- Location: Wiltshire
- Herd: 290 Holsteins
- Land: 134 Hectares (grass and maize)
- System: All year round (fully housed)
- Average yield: 11,000 litres

Aspirations

- Increase margin/litre
- Improve pregnancy rate to 25%
- Calve heifers by 24 months
- Improve calf performance and survival
- Continue to maintain and improve high animal welfare standards

Introducing our new AHDB board members

Joe Towers, Liz Haines and Ian Harvey were appointed to our dairy sector board in April, replacing Janette Prince, Tim Gue and David Cotton.

After university, Joe joined the family milk processing business, which sells bespoke milk to London coffee shops. He sits on the BBC Rural Affairs Committee and is an Honorary Teaching Fellow at Lancaster University Management School. He was awarded a Nuffield scholarship in 2018 to investigate reducing methane emissions in cattle.

Liz milks 330 spring-calving cows with her husband in a contract farming arrangement at the Hardwick Estate in North Shropshire. Liz is a new entrant to dairy farming, having left her previous career in Marketing to farm full-time in 2013.

Ian manages a family-run enterprise, which milks a herd of 180 Holstein Friesians and Ayrshires on 162 hectares near Launceston, Cornwall. He is currently finance director at Dairy Crest Direct, a farmer member of the NFU National Dairy Board and NFU Red Tractor dairy board representative.



Strategic farm lead appointment

Nic Parsons joined us as head of dairy development in June, with responsibility for the development and coordination of our strategic dairy farm network.

He joins from Tesco where he has been agricultural manager for dairy since 2014. Before this, he spent 14 years with Arla Foods in a range of farmer and retailer-facing roles.

Susannah Bolton, AHDB Knowledge Exchange Director, said: "Nic's appointment will be instrumental

in building upon the network of eight farms we have so far. Using levy funds, alongside funding from the Welsh Government and the Betty Lawes Foundation, we will be increasing the network to 25 farms across Great Britain, enabling more farmers to access the programme and the benefits it offers."

“We will be increasing the network to 25 farms across Great Britain, enabling more farmers to access the programme”



Gwyn Jones' board membership extended

UK Ministers have agreed to extend Gwyn Jones' second term of office on our main Board.

The six-month extension as member of the AHDB Board and chair of the Dairy Sector Board will run to the end of March 2020. The decision was made jointly by Ministers in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for Northern Ireland.

AHDB Chairman Peter Kendall said: "Gwyn's knowledge, experience and passion for the industry has been invaluable and I'm delighted his second term of office as an AHDB Board member has been extended.

"He will continue to play a central role in helping UK agriculture and horticulture evolve to meet the challenges that lie ahead in the current unprecedented political climate."

Keep in touch!

AHDB is committed to delivering world-class information through the channels most convenient for farmers and growers.

Make sure you don't miss out by checking we have the correct contact details for you.



Do this online by visiting:
ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch



Call us on:
024 7647 8694



Or write to us:
**AHDB CRM team,
Stoneleigh Park,
Kenilworth, Warwickshire,
CV8 2TL**

Breeding for profit

Herd manager, Wil Armitage, turned his back on high production in favour of breeding for profit.

Building his reputation as herd manager at Peter Dixon Smith's Keythorpe Lakes Farm – home of the UK's highest yielding herd in 1995 and Gold Cup winners in 1996 and 1997 – Wil Armitage's philosophy was built around increasing volumes of milk.

However, prolonged low milk prices in the 1990s prompted Wil to change his outlook and when the herd was sold upon Peter's retirement, he took the opportunity to replace them with an autumn-calving herd focused on smaller cattle, which offered ease of management and good standards of health and welfare.

Today, he manages 1,250 milking cows split into four block-calving herds – calving in either autumn or spring or in two split blocks –with breeding focused around our Spring and Autumn Calving Indexes (£SCI and £ACI).

"We opted to stick with Holsteins, which can perform really well on the autumn and spring systems, especially with the

huge amount of genetic information and the large gene pool we are able to use," he says.

"The thing I like most about using £SCI and £ACI is plugging bulls in from around the world and standardising their figures on a UK base," he says. "In the past, we have looked at bulls' country-of-origin figures and their production could look good against that foreign base.

"But indexes from countries such as Ireland or New Zealand each have their particular quirks," he says. "We found one bull that had 723 kg milk in his foreign index, making him one of the top production bulls in that country, but he only converted to 26 kg on a UK base.

With both £SCI and £ACI featuring the health, fitness and functional-type traits demanded by Wil, he says he is happy to use the indexes as a ranking tool.

"The management traits such as SCC, mastitis and fertility are much more important and, with things like TB resistance and calf survival, there are more coming through," he says. "The new Maintenance Index adds a further dimension and sometimes throws out

a bull whose daughters would cost too much to keep.

"Our ultimate goal is profitability and the health of the system," he says. "That means cow health, farm health, and staff health and happiness, as we want to be the employer of choice."

As for the cows, he says they continue to perform well, with good health and fitness, typified by mastitis that runs at only 4 cases per 100 cows a year across the two main herds. Choosing the right genetics is said to be a major factor in their performance, and health and fertility will continue to be at the forefront of his breeding choices.

"The reality is that the best cows before would still be the best cows today," he says. "They're not necessarily the highest production cows but the ones that stay in the system, produce the lifetime yields and will help future-proof our business."

“The thing I like most about using £SCI and £ACI is plugging bulls in from around the world and standardising their figures on a UK base”





Reduce costs using sexed semen

Using sexed semen in your dairy herd can help reduce rearing costs and increase the potential profit.

By selectively using sexed semen to breed replacement heifers from your best cows, you can reduce rearing costs by only rearing the heifers you need.

Steve West, AHDB Dairy Knowledge Exchange Manager, said: "The performance of sexed semen relative to conventional has improved markedly in the last few years, which makes using sexed semen a more attractive option for dairy farmers. Sexed semen has a 90% purity, which means a 90% chance of producing a heifer calf.

"In addition to using sexed semen on your best cows, inseminating the rest of your herd with high-quality beef sires will produce a calf that the beef market

requires, which will result in even greater profit."

Farmer Jack Munday runs a 250-cow autumn-calved herd and switched to using a mixture of sexed and beef semen on his herd: "Sexed semen is more expensive than conventional semen but beef semen is a bit cheaper, so, overall, we were quite surprised that it didn't cost as much as we thought.

"Our conception rates also remained at a good level, I am achieving 61% with conventional semen and 57% with sexed. Our 6-week in-calf rate is usually 71% and I am expecting somewhere close to 76% this year when we finish PD'ing.

"It is important to spend time choosing which cows are suitable. In our herd, cows must have had no instances of mastitis during the previous lactation,

Steve West
AHDB, Dairy Knowledge
Exchange Manager

must have got in-calf first time and be due to calve at the start of the calving window, and must suit our system."

Our online semen usage calculator can help you run different semen usage scenarios for your farm and pick the one that suits your situation.

Steve explains: "The calculator takes into account market value of calves, conception rates and TB losses to create a realistic illustration for different scenarios. It even takes into account bull costs for farms using natural service."

Access the semen usage calculator at
ahdb.org.uk/tools

New grass and clover recommendations

Eight new varieties of ryegrass, and one red and one white clover have been added to the 2019/2020 Recommended Grass and Clover Lists (RGCL).

Only grasses and clovers that have undergone at least four years of independent testing are included in the lists. Varieties are rigorously tested for factors such as total and seasonal yield, feed quality, disease and persistence before making the RGCL.

Siwan Howatson, AHDB Dairy Scientist, said: "The lists are an invaluable resource

for grassland farmers, enabling them to select varieties that will perform well in a particular system.

"When thinking about reseeding, the RGCL should be used to check that the varieties being selected are on the lists and are the best available, helping farmers make informed decisions, alongside their seed merchants, about

the ones that best meet their needs."

In addition to providing information on the varieties, the RGCL also includes a range of technical information for farmers on how they can manage their reseed and maximise the productivity of their grassland.

A copy of the 2019/20 RGCL handbook is included with this newsletter. Access an online interactive version for perennial ryegrasses at ahdb.org.uk



News updates

Dairy marketing

We're looking forward to sharing the latest results from the second year of our marketing campaign with Dairy UK to remind millennials of their love of dairy.

Last year, the campaign notched up 19 million interactions on social media, and reached 14 million people through advertising, which helped to drive an 11% drop in those considering a switch to dairy alternatives.

Follow the latest from 'The Department of Dairy Related Scrumptious Affairs' on Instagram and Facebook.

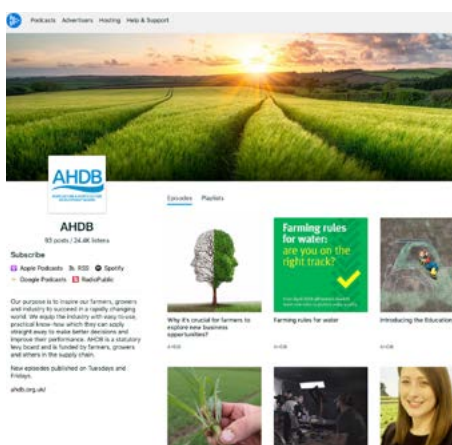


Podcasts

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 an update from the Welsh Grassland Show, breeding and genetics, and the essentials of running a successful dairy business, featuring Lloyd Holterman from Rosy Lane Holsteins.

Search for AHDB on your preferred podcast provider.



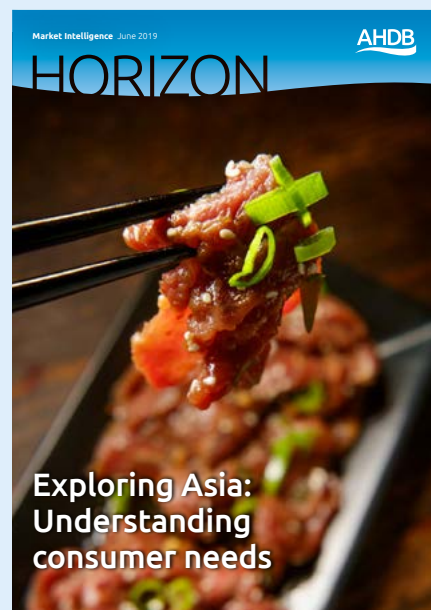
Horizon: Exports to Asia

Our latest Horizon explores consumer needs in Asia and takes an in-depth look at the Far East.

As well as regional facts, the report provides an overview of where the UK currently has market access and future sales growth forecasts. It picks out key consumer trends and highlights popular dishes and shopping habits, alongside top tips for exporting to Asia.

It also takes an in-depth look at specific cuts and dishes, popular drinks and desserts, as well as favoured frozen and snacking products – all of which provide fascinating insight into market trends and demands.

Download the report here:
ahdb.org.uk/horizon



Food service shake-up

Dairy has proved itself the cream of the crop in the foodservice sector, with sales of milk-based cuisine up 12% last year and £16 billion spent on dairy dishes.

In foodservice, 43% of dairy servings are within a 'host meal', which means they are part of the cooking or serving process – with the top four dishes: cheeseburgers, sandwiches, baguettes and pizzas, representing 30% combined.

Cheeseburgers alone clocked up 800 million servings in 2018, making them the single biggest dairy item in foodservice.

Read the full article at: ahdb.org.uk/consumer-insight



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