

## HOW DAIRY HAS REDUCED SOYA AND MADE EFFICIENCY IMPROVEMENTS



**Alex Cornish**  
Ruminant Feed Specialist  
07384 546 114

**Switching from all-year-round calving to an autumn block has lowered purchased feed costs at Shernick Farm from 13.5p/litre to 10.08p/litre.**

Husband-and-wife Richard and Emma Bray say the decision to change the calving pattern was driven by a desire to improve profitability and provide a better work-life balance.

*"The milk cheque never seemed to meet expectations, and we weren't particularly happy with herd performance, so improving efficiencies to gain a higher profitability was key,"* explains Richard.

Milk yield was hovering around 7,600 litres per cow annually, and milk from forage had stagnated at 2,800 litres.

Autumn block suited the farm's heavy clay soils because fresh cows in peak milk could be housed and fed a total mixed ration (TMR) to prevent poaching. It also complemented the farm's Arla milk contract, he adds.

### TRANSITIONING TO A BLOCK

Cows have gradually been transitioned to block calving rather than being sold and replaced with autumn calvers. The reason for this was threefold: first, the Brays have never bred extreme Holsteins and felt their cows were capable of being grazed harder. Second, buying cows would have been too expensive, and third, it posed disease risks.

The Bray family has historically operated an all-year-round calving system before the shift to autumn block.

Firstly, a split block was created to make two groups, and then gradually, spring calvers were bred later for two years so all cows would calve in the autumn this year. They are aiming for a tight, 12-week block and are calving in 13 weeks this season, having begun transitioning two years ago.

Last winter, the soya-free Glycogenic parlour feed was offered alongside a bespoke mineral and total mixed ration (TMR), which resulted in fantastic conception rates. Around 80% of the herd calved within the first five weeks.

*"Through this feeding approach, we have kept feed costs low but also improved the herd efficiency when considering the labour requirement for calf feeding and fresh cow management,"* says Richard.

Heifers and cows are served with sexed semen, and once they have enough in calf to produce 120 replacements, they switch to Belgian Blue or Aberdeen-Angus sweeper bulls.

It has also been a gradual shift in gear for the team, led by herdsman Chris Mart.

### IMPROVING MILK FROM FORAGE

Feed cost savings have been realised mainly through improvements in milk from forage, which has lifted 500 litres to 3,300.

This has been aided by the fact the herd can now be managed as one group, which makes grazing more straightforward, says Alex Cornish, Ruminant Feed Specialist for Harpers Feeds, who has been helping the Brays manage the move.

*"We are now dealing with a herd that is fresh or stale. This means we can feed maize during the autumn months when they have just calved and challenge later lactation cows at grass."*

Buffer feeding is now only offered during the shoulders of the season, if required, rather than through the summer.

Larger grass paddocks of 8-12 acres have been split using temporary fencing to enable better grass utilisation.

*"In July, the feed rate dropped to 0.15 with milk yield from forage averaging 15.3 litres out of a total of 22 litres,"* explains Alex.

The grazing platform expands to 200 acres, and cows are moved on 12-hour shifts after each milking.

Once cows are housed full-time in September, they are fed a TMR comprising maize silage, grass silage and the soya-free Planet Blend.

Cows are fed to yield up to 8kg per head per day in the parlour.

*"The Glycogenic range is a High Starch diet with yeast, as standard. The yeast is in the diet to help break down fibres in the silages. Due to the balance of the diet, the herd has averaged 4.5% butterfat and 3.54% protein for the last 12 months,"* explains Alex.

*"Arla awards us points for not feeding soya, which gives us a higher milk price, and it's more sustainable,"* adds Richard.

### INVESTMENT AND FUTURE

The Brays have invested in a milk trolley to make feeding calves easier, but they hope to build a new calf-rearing shed next year.

Currently, heifers are kept in individual pens and fed eight litres of Trouw Milkivit Energizer (a 23% protein skim milk powder with a higher fat content of 25% oils to mimic cow's milk) up to weaning at 8-9 weeks, alongside the 18% crude protein Top Calf Coarse Mix + BioMos.

They have started growing 110 acres of maize, which will allow them to build a rotation and regularly reseed grass fields. They also plan on installing more tracks and water troughs.

Richard says despite the 'hectic' calving period, they have no regrets and look forward to settling into the new system.

## FARM FACTS

### SHERNICK FARM, HOLSWORTHY, DEVON.

- Milking 420 Holstein-Friesians
- Farming 600 acres
- Supplying Arla
- Calving August until November
- Yielding 8,500 litres at 4.5% butterfat and 3.54% protein
- Milking twice daily through a 50-point rotary parlour
- Grazing from March until September
- Taking four cuts of silage annually.

# FARMING THOUGHTS

**What a difference a year makes! With beef and lamb at £5 and £6.40 per kilo and milk chugging its way up into the 40ppl bracket. We need these prices to stabilise at these levels to replenish cash after the lows of the last 12 months.**

At Harpers, we are constantly looking at making cost savings and improving efficiency. We are installing two new grinders which will improve output and electricity usage. We have five more lorries on order, and we are expanding the Massey Harpers store site to accommodate larger loads to get the right discount.

We are also investing in our staff. Our current sales team meets monthly for training on all aspects of livestock husbandry and feeding.

At Harpers, we are focused on nutrition and farmers.

Housing is just around the corner, so speak to our staff for all your feeding and housing requirements.



# PLAN AHEAD BEFORE HOUSING CATTLE THIS WINTER

**With some good grass still available and outside temperatures still high, you may not want to house finishing cattle for a few more weeks.**

To prepare cattle for their finishing period you need to start to change their rumen bacteria over to the types that can digest silage and cereals. The best way to do this is to introduce some big bale haylage which is a gentle way of getting the rumen bacteria to change from grass digestion to silage digestion. If you can add some concentrate, you will improve the situation further, and there should be minimal digestive upsets when the cattle come indoors.

Meat processors, driven by the supermarkets, want farmers to recognise the role cattle genetics plays in improving growth rates and how early slaughter reduces methane. Estimated Breeding Value (EBV) for 200 and 400-day growth rates indicate how fast an animal will grow and should be considered.

Silages need to be tested now so a feed plan can be formulated for the winter. A feed plan is also a requirement of all assurance schemes.

**Speak to your Feed Specialist and let us design your winter ration to get efficient performance.**



# GRAIN AND STRAIGHTS MARKETS

**The stop, start UK cereal is done for another year, and it is expected as predicted we will produce 11 million tonnes (M/T) this year down from 13.98 M/T last year.**

The bad year of 2020 saw 9.6 M/T so we are above this. Cereal growers are reluctant sellers with a smaller crop and lower prices and large premiums are having to be paid to buy grain forward. The gap between wheat and barley has narrowed and is now around £18 per tonne compared to £28 per tonne early August. We will be a net importer of wheat this year, but we are currently at import parity and imports are already arriving. This should theoretically keep prices low however ultimately global prices will dictate.

In many countries the cost of wheat is below or around the cost of production and for the fourth year in a row global demand is greater than production reducing ending stocks, which always leads to high volatility.

Global soya production is healthy with good stocks and good crops predicted in the major soyabean growing countries. South America is predicted to produce large crops again in 2025. Soya prices in dollar terms are the lowest since 2020 and even though prospects are good it is very difficult to see how much more soya can drop.

Rape meal remains very expensive against other proteins, such as soya and the likely hood is more soya and distillers will be used this year as rape is not cost effective.

One crop that normally benefits from a wet summer is sugar beet.

This year we are likely to see another good crop in the UK, but imports are likely to be very limited.

The major competition is from Soya Hulls as they are very competitively priced.

My final thought is that Global Geopolitical risks are very high with tensions in the black sea, with only recently a Russian missile hitting a vessel carrying wheat. On the 5th of November we see the US election. The big question: who will get in?? The dollar has weakened on the back of the uncertainty and the interest rate cuts. China have increased their soya stocks to over 42 M/T, 10 M/T higher than last year in case there is a trade war with the US if Trump gets in again. Trump reduced biofuel usage last time he was in power, to keep food inflation down. We could see a very volatile 2025!





# TIPS FOR CREEP FEEDING LAMBS

**Lamb prices have been above last year's levels for the whole of 2024, with the average deadweight price currently around 650p/kg. At the peak of the market this year, prices were over 900p/kg – 150p/kg more than last year.**

Therefore, weighing up the options of creep-feeding the remaining lambs from this year's crop and putting a plan in place to creep-feed next year's crop of lambs must be considered.

Creep feed adds to the cost of production, but for farmers chasing higher lamb prices returned by the early market, the economics of concentrate feeding can stack up.

Lambs can vary greatly with breed and genetics, but as a rule, lambs should grow at 200g daily liveweight gain per kilogram of creep fed (equating to a conversion rate of 5:1).

Getting hungry mouths off farm quickly saves grass for other stock and gives ewes a better chance and more time to recover before tugging.

Creep should be introduced when lambs are two to three weeks old. By the time twins are three weeks old, they need to be taking in their own feed, on top of the ewe's milk, if they are to continue to grow fast.

The feed conversion rate (FCR) in young lambs is about 3.5:1 – for every 3.5kg of creep eaten, the lamb will gain 1kg. Young lambs have an efficient FCR – post-weaning, this drops to 7:1 and keeps falling.

A benchmark daily growth rate for twin lambs in lowland flocks up to eight weeks old is 300-400g/day on a good-quality creep pellet, such as Lamb Start 2 Finish Pellets.

If possible, site feeders somewhere sheltered where there is hard standing. If you can move them to avoid areas getting muddy it will lower disease risk. However, this can be difficult in practice because feeders are heavy when full and you do not want to let them become empty.

Creep feeding can increase the risk of coccidiosis because you are bringing lambs together in a concentrated area.

If you haven't fed creep before, this is something to keep an eye on. The risk of coccidiosis can be minimised with good management. For example, making sure lambs are run in tight age groups and avoiding repeated, sequential use of nursery paddocks.

For more information and advice on lamb nutrition, speak to your Feed Specialist.



**Matt Dymond**  
Ruminant Feed  
Specialist  
07880 406 212

## TOP TIPS FOR SEASONAL TURKEY PRODUCTION

**Optimising your turkey feeding programme and understanding the role of nutrition is important to provide the very best table bird at Christmas.**

Turkeys have different nutritional requirements at each life stage, so feed specifications should be matched to the specific needs and challenges. Bio-Mos has been incorporated into all diets to improve gut health and immune function.

### DAY ONE TO THREE WEEKS

Feed Harpers Turkey Starter crumbs.

These are formulated to be highly palatable and encourage good intakes. The inclusion of Avatec 15% also helps prevent coccidiosis.



### FOUR WEEKS TO EIGHT WEEKS

Transition to Harpers Turkey Rearer Pellets, which provide specific energy and protein levels to support lean tissue growth and skeleton development.

### EIGHT WEEKS TO 16 WEEKS

Growth rate will start to slow, and a higher percentage of the weight gain will be allocated to muscle. Feed Harpers Turkey Grower Pellets to provide the optimum energy-to-protein ratio to maintain growth.

### 17 WEEKS UNTIL SLAUGHTER (FINISHING PHASE)

Introduce Harpers Turkey finisher pellets.

These promote elevated levels of intramuscular and subcutaneous fat. This diet does not contain Avatec 15% so can be fed up until slaughter.

For more information, speak to your Feed Specialist or call 01409 254 300.



**Myles Jones**  
Ruminant and Game  
Feed Specialist  
07817 161 681

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT MAIZE ADDITIVE

**The sun gods have graced us again with a small period of dry weather. Many have ventured out to the fields to see how this season's maize crop is looking.**

Reports are mixed, with some bird and weather damage. But overall, things are looking good. The LG pre-harvest day is fast approaching on Friday 11th October at Massey Harpers Country Store, so if you are after any pre harvest information and help, please bring some stalks along with a completed crop form. Please contact your feed specialist for a form.

A promising crop can turn into a bad crop if it is not correctly handled. Working with Lallemand Animal Nutrition and their Magniva range of additives has given many Harpers customers peace of mind. With two additives to choose, please give your Feed Specialist a call to help guide you to the right one.



**Jake Chisholm**  
Feed Specialist  
07823 344 222

# ADVICE FOR PREVENTING ACIDOSIS IN BEEF CATTLE

Recently, the team was lucky to meet Bruno Martin, Lallemand Animal Nutrition Ruminant Technical Support Manager.

Bruno has been using sensors to collect data on rumen activity and health and linking these parameters with on-farm visible signs and data from the abattoir to better explain the role of rumen-specific live yeast Levucell SC in beef diets.

Bruno explained his thinking by looking at beef signals and revealing how his findings influenced health, performance and efficiency.

Starting with **calf rearing in the beef unit whilst feeding milk powder**, the signals to look for include:

- A full stomach
- Bright eyes, alert ears and shiny coats
- Clean noses and rear ends and a dry, clean belly.

Moving onto the rearing unit, the signals to assess are:

- Clean, light, dry and airy, but draught-free sheds at calf level.
- Well-bedded areas (enough straw to cover legs when calf lies down)
- Clean, easily available starter concentrate
- Clean, easily available fresh water
- Clean forage of your choice (preferably straw).

Signals to look for inside **the rearing and finishing sheds include:**

- Light, airy, dry and as clean as possible buildings
- Enough space for all animals to be comfortable and exert normal behaviours
- Adequate trough space, depending on whether they are fed ad-lib or measured feeds
- Clean, fresh water, with adequate flow to keep troughs full and replenished. Aiming for 16-22 litres/minute.
- Access to rock salt to improve saliva production and buffer the rumen, aiding water and feed intakes.

## YEAST

A common problem with feeding beef stock high starch rations can be acidosis, which affects performance. To reduce the risk of acidosis, rations need to be formulated with a balance of fibres and starch. Including a rumen specific yeast is an advantage.

Levucell yeast works by scavenging oxygen in the rumen, supporting rumen papillae health, and increasing nutrient absorption. Research\* shows Levucell gives better growth rates and feed conversion. That is why we include Levucell Yeast as standard in our cattle rations.

Speak to your Harpers Feed Specialist for more information.

# START BUFFER FEEDING TO SUPPORT MILK YIELD AND COW HEALTH

**With the weather on the turn, it is important to start buffer feeding to maintain both milk yield and body condition.**

With recent grass dry matter (DM) tests analysing at 12%, this means we are asking cows to eat over 100kg of fresh grass to just hit DM requirements. Therefore, getting forages tested and having a plan for the coming weeks are crucial.

Grazing has become more challenging, with wetter conditions hindering grass DM intakes. Buffer feeding will ensure cows are able to hit the DM requirements they need. Grasses have become lush, and due to this, butterfats could be suppressed. With your forages tested, we can ensure the correct protein and energy levels can be targeted in the overall trough diet to support butterfats and increase energy availability. Starch sources such as wheat or maize are crucial as an energy source. So is microbial protein energy to balance the large supply of protein nitrogen from grazed grass.

Without buffer-feeding, cows could lose body condition, which may affect fertility further down the line. We often see that cows don't milk well until Christmas, due to being challenged too much in the autumn and not supported enough. Instead, they spend the first two months putting on body condition before putting extra milk in the tank.

As well as balancing the protein and energy requirement that the cows need, it is also vital to ensure that mineral requirements are being met. Speak to your nutritionist and see if a bespoke mineral should be considered. Bespoke minerals don't mean more expense; it means tailoring requirements to the farm's individual needs, taking into account mineral availability and the ration on farm.



**Keith Callender**  
Feed Specialist  
07880 406 213



**Richard Waters**  
Harpers Dairy Consultant  
07467 955 130



\*Lallemand Animal Nutrition data trials, Scotland 2019

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

We look forward to seeing you at events throughout the rest of the year. Make sure to pop in and see us.

Event	Date	Location
Maize Clinic Day	Friday 11th October	Massey Harpers, EX226FU
Liskeard Primestock Show	Saturday 2nd November	Cattle Market, Liskeard, PL14 4BA
AgriFest	Wednesday 6th November	Westpoint, Exeter, EX5 1DJ
Helston Fatstock Exhibition	Saturday 9th November	Franchis Farm, Helston, TR13 OLT
South Molton VS Exmouth Rugby Game	Saturday 16th November	South Molton RFC, EX36 3LH
Massey Harpers Open Day	Wednesday 4th December	Massey Harpers EX22 6FU