



## WEATHERING THE STORM

**I hope the recent storms, Goretti and Chandra, haven't caused too much damage for you. Looking ahead, it seems we are facing a turbulent few months.**

Sadly, but not unexpectedly, we are seeing the results of huge volumes of milk being sent for processing in the latter part of 2025, with milk price cuts happening for many.

We have seen lows like this before; however, this time there appears no requirement for the "B or C" litres, which is dramatically different to years past.

Not to dwell on this, but we need to get "our house in order". At the end of 2025, my team and I embarked on producing a milk production forecast model linked to a milk price index for our main processors in the Southwest.

This work led us to know where and when our milk was going to be produced for our clients and to what value. We had a good uptake from clients, but I would urge those who are sitting on the fence to take up our offer. It has provided our clients clarity on their individual business needs, coupled with the ability to manage cows in and out of the system and provide an early warning of times of challenge, whether too much or not enough milk to supply our "A or Core" volume.

We can't affect the milk price drops, but we can have an impact on maintaining performance and implementing changes to practice and nutrition to bring about improvements in PPL paid. If we can't send the volume we desire, then we need to major on milk quality to improve our returns.

It's well documented that Harpers fed cows produce extremely good quality milk and this all stems from Bill Harpers original vision of fixed formulations using high quality raw materials.

Over the years this vision has been complemented with tried and tested partners using the latest advances in research, Levucell and Novatan, to name but two.

In times of pressure, go with what we know works and don't be led down the wrong rabbit hole in search of a quick "buck" (get it rabbit hole! Buck!). Jokes aside we have a number of tools in the Harpers library to help in these challenging times.



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## I HAVE STARTED WITH A PLAN FOR 2026

1. Complete the Harpers Milk Production forecasting model.
2. Ascertain value of Marginal "B and C" litres.
3. Work out cost of producing the variable litre, assuming the "A or core volume" is covering all the fixed cost, additional feed, labour, sundries etc. My experience is suggesting that these litres range from 17ppl to 28ppl dependent on the system.
4. Work out breakeven costs and implement a "minimum litre threshold" for cows, this may be 12 litres however could be as high as 25 litres on higher input units.
5. Manage culling; carry no passengers that are unproductive. At the time of writing barren cows are still making good money so there is no excuse to keep them around. It's not, in any way, cost effective to fatten barren cows on a milking ration.
6. Look to either use "B or C" litre milk for beef calves, but please don't undo all the excellent work that has been done over years regarding Johnes and feed whole milk to dairy replacements.
7. Work closely with your Feed Specialist to maximise forage intakes, either silage or fresh grass. Consider on off grazing or buffer feeding depending on how the season unfolds. Continual measuring and monitoring of grass and silage stocks are paramount to make necessary savings.
8. Strategic feeding plans for pre and post pregnancies are a must to make sure we have a cow in the system for next year. It's false economy to strip her of feed when she needs it most to try to save money.

These are just a few areas where any of our Harpers team of Feeds Specialists can help you navigate these challenging times ahead. I am confident that it is going to be relatively short-lived, and we should see prices rebuild in quarter 3, so long as we all act responsibly to maintain our core production levels during the first part of the year; we should be able to minimise the impact of the upcoming price cuts.

# RAW MATERIAL UPDATE

## CEREALS

Globally wheat remains plentiful with record production at 842.17Mt. The major exporting countries, including Argentina, Australia, Canada, EU, Russia, Ukraine and US, have all produced larger crops than previously thought. With global wheat demand only at 823.91Mt, this will leave healthy stocks of wheat and a good buffer.

Looking forward, crop conditions in both Europe and the US have improved, creating potential for good wheat production again this year. Russia has seen a cold snap with temperatures getting down to a "chilly" -25°C, but with adequate snow cover, the crop will hopefully be protected.

Drone attacks continue across the ports and other infrastructure of Ukraine, although this is not very often reported in the news and often doesn't have a major impact on the market.

However, despite a larger export potential, Ukraine has exported 20% less wheat and 40% less maize this season compared to last.

The main concern is the current wheat price is at or below the cost of production and going forward may result in less plantings!

## PROTEINS

Both Brazil and Argentina are expected to produce good soya crops. Brazil 178Mt (which is a record) and Argentina, 48.5Mt. Both of these will arrive in the UK late spring/ early summer. Soya prices are now around the £300/t for the summer, so we will soon be hovering around the levels we saw in the early autumn of 2025.

Rape Meal has firmed, despite good supplies with a potential deal being done between Canada and China which would mean Canadian canola (rape meal) would be imported by China.

## FIBRES

With a smaller UK sugar beet crop and lack of imports, sugar beet remains very scarce and expensive, with prices for the summer around £250 per tonne. Soya Hulls are currently trading around £60 per tonne lower.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Fundamentally ingredients remain plentiful across the world, and it is very difficult to see any significant price movements upwards. On the other hand, with the current prices we are seeing, it is also tough to see how much more downward movement there can be.

The main unknown is how global geopolitics will influence our markets throughout 2026, which is a rapidly changing factor.



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# INHERITANCE TAX RELIEF AND MARKET REALITIES

**You could almost hear the collective sigh of relief when the government changed its mind-again-on inheritance tax rules. The new plan of £2.5M IHT relief for both spouses allows most farmers in our area a chance to move forward without the threat of a significant IHT bill hanging over them.**

There are, as always, some situations that are still going to be difficult, and the battle is not yet over, but at least we have seen most of the risk of individuals taking drastic action to avoid IHT removed. My thanks again to the intrepid band of 30 Cornishmen who travelled to Westminster and had strong discussions with Labour MPs. I also met with the key figure in this debate, Alistair Carmichael, MP of Orkney and chair of the EFRA Committee. He read the situation very clearly and having encouraged labour MPs to abstain in a finance bill vote, he then went on to give the Prime Minister 5 minutes of hell at the Liaison Committee meeting.

This ultimately made the difference, alongside the threat of a back bench rebellion. The Prime Minister backed down and moved to the £2.5M per spouse position. We will keep fighting for a better long-term position and a route for exceptional circumstances, so it was worth all the effort.

## BEEF MARKET

The market for finished beef is in a very interesting position. The meat processors are being told by their supermarket customers that there is consumer resistance to today's prices and they want beef prices to be more competitive, but the other factors are encouraging a stand on situation with regards to price; with supply being tight, lamb price rising, cow beef in great demand for export and butchers supporting livestock markets well. The test will come if the abattoirs have to decide whether to reduce demand by dropping the number of slaughter days or continue with full throughput which will support the price.

Have you weighed your finishing cattle since Christmas? Knowing their daily liveweight gain is important to understand how the ration is working.

If you change forages going from first cut to second cut, please let us know and we can adjust the ration accordingly.

The ratio between the price of beef and the cost of feed is still at an all-time high and anything you can do to maximise growth rates will be profitable.



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# IMPRESSIVE CALF PERFORMANCE ACHIEVED WITH NEW PLATINUM50 50% SKIM MILK POWDER

**During the autumn of 2025, I carried out a controlled calf trial using Massey Harpers Calpride new Platinum50 50% skim milk powder on a pen of six ProCROSS heifer replacement calves.**

The trial delivered strong and consistent performance, with calves achieving an average daily liveweight gain (DLWG) of 1.04 kg from birth to weaning. Growth remained steady across the group, supporting our aim of developing a milk powder capable of delivering reliable results under practical on-farm conditions.

Rearing healthy, well-grown calves consistently remains a challenge for dairy producers, particularly in the face of falling milk prices, variable temperatures, a huge milk powder market, and increasing pressure to achieve strong early-life performance. We recognise that milk replacers must support not only growth, but also consistency, digestibility, and ease of use within everyday calf-rearing systems.

## TRIAL DESIGN AND FEEDING PROTOCOL

The trial took place during the autumn calving period of 2025 with the Pomeroy family at Wedfield Farm, Putford. The ProCROSS heifer replacement calves were managed as a single group under consistent housing and husbandry conditions, including straw bedding, ad-lib access to fresh water, Harpers 18% Calf Rearing Nuts, and barley straw in a rack. Management remained consistent throughout the trial to minimise external variables.

Colostrum management during the first 48 hours was first priority. Calves received four litres of colostrum within two hours of birth, measuring above 26 on the Brix scale, with supplementary colostrum used where required. A second feed of high-quality transition milk is provided approximately 12 hours later, before calves move directly onto Massey Harpers Calpride Platinum50 milk powder.

Platinum50 is fed at eight litres per calf per day via split feeds, delivering approximately 1.2 kg of powder per calf per day. Calves reach eight litres by day four and remain on this feeding level until the end of week seven, followed by a structured three-week weaning period where milk volumes stepped down gradually to support a smooth transition onto solid feed.

## GROWTH PERFORMANCE

The group achieved an average DLWG of 1.04 kg, with minimal variation between calves. Growth remained steady from introduction at day two through weaning and beyond, indicating stable performance during a critical stage of development.

Milk and concentrate intakes were well maintained throughout the feeding period, supporting uniform growth and smooth progression through weaning. The consistency of performance observed suggests that Platinum50 provides a reliable nutritional platform capable of supporting early-life growth targets within a practical calf-rearing system, whilst remaining cost effective.

## CALF HEALTH, WELFARE, AND WEANING

Calf health and general wellbeing remained positive throughout the trial. The calves displayed good appetite and vitality, with consistent feeding across the group. Dung consistency was stable throughout the feeding period, indicating good digestive tolerance and effective utilisation of the milk powder.

Weather conditions during the calving season were more variable than the previous year, with fluctuations in temperature contributing to increased medicine usage and a higher level of respiratory challenge across the wider calf group. Despite this seasonal pressure, calves within the trial maintained good milk and concentrate intakes, with feeding routines remaining consistent.

Calves entered the trial with an average birthweight of 42.2kg and progressed steadily through the milk-feeding and weaning phases. By weaning, calves were all above 100kg and had reached approximately 291.5% of their birthweight, reflecting strong early-life growth and effective nutritional support.

At the start of weaning, concentrate intake averaged approximately 0.5 kg per head per day. This was not a concern, as calves were still receiving a full milk allowance. As milk volumes were reduced gradually on a week-by-week basis, concentrate intake increased accordingly, supporting a smooth transition onto solid feed without setbacks in performance or health. By two weeks post-weaning, concentrate intakes exceeded 4kg per head per day—contradicting a common theory—that if you feed too much milk, they won't get onto solid feed easily, or quickly enough.

## CONCLUSION

Our controlled calf trial demonstrated that Massey Harpers Calpride Platinum50 50% skim milk powder can deliver strong and consistent performance in a practical on-farm setting, economically. Average daily liveweight gains of 1.04 kg, alongside steady intakes and positive health observations, support its suitability for rearing replacement heifers and strong beef calves.

Based on the outcomes observed, Platinum50 will continue to be used and evaluated within the wider calf-rearing system of our customer base, providing confidence that it offers a reliable option for producers seeking consistent early-life performance from a 50% skim milk powder.

**For more information, please contact your Harpers Feeds Specialist**



## PALLET COLLECTION SERVICE

Do you have spare wooden pallets on farm? We're happy to collect them as part of your regular delivery schedule. We accept pallets in a variety of sizes, as long as they're in good, reusable condition.

To arrange a collection, simply speak with your Feed Specialist or let your delivery driver know during their next visit.

# INDUSTRY VIEWPOINT

**Thank you to all those who attended our recent sheep meetings; over 300 of you! What a great response to our speakers. Carolyn from Elanco gave everyone food for thought when it came to wormers and flukicides.**

As the days start to draw out, now is a good time to ensure seed and fertiliser orders are in place, to help avoid delays on farm.

In the dairy sector, this year will be more important than ever to make quality silage so that we can challenge cows to produce milk from grazed grass and forage.

In the beef and sheep sector, prices remain firm, but we still need to challenge ourselves on the number of days animals are on farm. Every day on farm is a cost, so improving finishing efficiency for cattle and lambs remains key.

Feed prices will remain stable with cereals looking exceptionally good value. With all the uncertainty in the world, I would recommend taking cover for the rest of 2026.

Our new shed and yard on the back site of the store is now up and running. This has enabled us to move more products into the back yard to give more parking at the front. The new site will also help us to increase our core agri range and increase our builders and drainage offering. We are also stocking Calar Gas bottles and a larger range of lick buckets with the introduction of Crystalyx.

We look forward to welcoming you to the new store layout!



# TIME TO CONSIDER MAIZE VARIETIES

**Given the milk prices we are experiencing, and any potential futures drops, it's more important than ever to make the most of home-grown forages.**

At Harpers Feeds we only supply maize seed from Limagrain. They have a proven portfolio of maize and grass seeds developed under the 'LGAN' brand (Limagrain animal nutrition). These varieties have been specifically bred with rumen performance in mind. They have very high levels of digestible fibre, giving them more litres of milk, or KG of beef per KG consumed.



The two main varieties we are supplying this year are Ambition and Skipper. If you are ploughing up a permanent pasture, we have Foxtrot variety available with the wireworm treatment "Force". Stocks are limited due to low seed production across Europe last year, so please give us a call to discuss your requirements for the coming growing season and allow us to help you make the most of every acre of forage crops.

## HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT DIVERSIFYING INTO POULTRY AND LAYERS?

**Producers across the Southwest are currently enjoying prolonged periods of sustainable egg prices, and this looks to continue for the foreseeable future.**

Costs vary depending on site, breed, shed design and new or secondhand equipment, but based on a mobile shed of 3,000 birds, setup costs average £50 per bird with a return profit of £25 per bird per flock (margin over feed and pullet cost). As a result, you could see a return on investment within 2-3 years.

Interested? We'll be hosting a meeting March/April time, so keep an eye out for further details.



## 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
Wed 4th February	DairyTech	Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, CV8 2LZ 8am-5.30pm
Wed 11th February	Westcountry Farm and Machinery Show	Westpoint, Exeter, EX5 1DJ
Sat 14th February	Okehampton Rugby Game - To book, call 01409 254 300	Okehampton Rugby Club, EX20 1LN KO:2.30pm
Sat 7th March	South Molton Rugby Game - To book, call 01409 254 300	South Molton RFC, EX36 3LH