

## WINNING FORMULA FOR QUALITY SILAGE

**Good nutrition is at the core of efficient milk production and a focus on silage production at Highweek Farm in North Devon has seen the business winning multiple awards and an impressive increase in herd performance.**

Mike and Caroline Hawking took on the tenancy of Highweek Farm in 2017 as third generation tenant farmers, and in 2021 had the opportunity to purchase the dairy holding. This was a milestone for the family, giving them the confidence to continue investing significantly in facilities and management practices. This has seen the performance of the business go from strength to strength and attention to detail has been recognised in the number of awards received.



### INVESTMENT

Paul Cholwill, Harpers Feeds Nutritionist, has been impressed with the efforts made at the farm, "Mike and Caroline have made improvements in every aspect of their farming business, from introducing rumination collars, improving calf housing, installing solar panels and adding fans, increasing ventilation and installing thicker mattresses, along with a few other improvements in the milking herd. Most recently, they have installed a 1.2-million-gallon concrete covered slurry store, along with a separator which takes the water out of the slurry with the separated solids providing a soft nonabrasive green bedding for cubicles."

Every investment has improved the business, but without good nutrition they would not be reaping the rewards for these changes.

Grassland management is central to the success of the nutrition of the herd. With over 50 inches of rainfall and medium loams to heavy clays, the farm lends itself to good grass growing.

Sheep are overwintered until the end of January, and cows are turned out at the end of April and strip grazed. Grass varieties are dual purpose, late heading perennial ryegrass mixtures which are reseeded if they need to be every 10 years. Fertiliser is spread in two separate applications for the 1st cut.

Around 100 acres are allocated for silage production, with 4 cuts carried out from early May to September. Mike aims to start the first week in May, depending on grass growth and weather. One aspect Mike is particularly aware of is the dry matter, so he takes full responsibility for the timing of the tedding, with the target of achieving 30% dry matter. Contractors do the majority of the work, with Mike rolling the clamp continuously, alongside the buckrake, to ensure good compaction.

The farm has two clamps: one in a covered yard and the other outside, with a total capacity of 2000 tonnes. Silage is treated with additive and covered with clingseal and an additional black plastic sheet, green nets and straw bales. "We get very little waste from this, and the silage is very consistent," adds Paul. "Mike and Ed, his son, do a fantastic job in managing the clamp, keeping the face compact and uniform."

In fact, the farm has just been announced as the 2025 Bude Grassland Silage Competition winners. "This is an incredible achievement and very deserved," says Paul. The dry matter for the 2025 first cut was 37.2%, with a protein of 16.9; 3% higher than our customer average.

### HIGHWEEK FARM

- > 230 acres
- > Maize, grass and cover crops
- > 210 Holstein cows
- > Autumn Calving
- > Yield 9,726 litres
- > 4.5% butterfat
- > 3.53 % protein



Harpers average 1st cut ME was 11.1, Mike's was 12.1, that difference of 1MJ is worth 2 litres of milk. Plus, the additional protein of 3%, means less bought in protein is needed to balance the mix.

### DIET

"The milkers are all fed the same TMR as one group consisting of 50% grass silage and 50% maize silage, a 21% protein blend, molasses and minerals. The far off dries are out in the summer months then housed, and 2-3 weeks prior to calving go on a TMR ration including 500 grams of our X-Zelit product to prevent milk fever," Paul explains. "Block calving allows us to feed the herd as one group. It's a simple system that is very effective."

Mike and Caroline intend to continue with their farm improvements. Grassland management will be at the core, together with investments that will continue to improve the care of the animals and the people who work with them. This is a modern family dairy farm that excels at efficient milk production.

## AWARDS

**2023** Runner up Bude Grassland Society Competition

**2024** Winners Cornwall Grassland Society Cup

1st Bude Grassland Society Competition

**2025** 1st Cornwall Grassland Society Competition

1st South West Regional Grassland Competition

Runner Up National British Grassland Society Competition

Winner Bude Grassland Society Cup



# INDUSTRY VIEWPOINT

**Life always has something to throw at you.**

Over recent months we have been doing milk predictions and forecasts to help overcome the drop in milk price.

Now we have the conflict in the Middle East to contend with. This war differs from the Ukraine invasion in 2022; in farming terms, fuel and fertiliser are the main issues of inflated prices.

At present, Brazil and Argentina are producing strong crops, so global soya supply remains abundant. There is also a massive carryover of grain, therefore, I can't see feed prices inflating like four years ago. Oil, gas, fertiliser and freight rates are the main concerns this time. Hopefully, Mr Trump will not let this war go on for too long.

The commodities we handle at the mill are linked to global markets. We have always been firm believers of buying little and often to spread our risk, therefore we have good cover of raw materials for the summer and early autumn. You have the same situation on your farms, planning three months ahead of time if you know you are going to need it. I know it's easy for me to say that now, but when the dust finally settles, I would plan ahead on all your farm inputs.

On a more positive note, the last six GDT (global dairy trade) auctions have risen, which gives an indication that milk prices will start to firm in Q3.

We have recently presented FCN with a cheque for £3000, which will support a number of meetings for farmers and young farmers exploring shared and contract farming agreements.



**Glen Johns**  
Sales Director  
07831 725 779

# COMPARING BREEDS IN BEEF FINISHING

**We now have extensive experience in managing finishing diets for both Continental sired and Native sired beef cattle, and know that requirements and performance need careful management.**

Both types of cattle can produce excellent results; however, it is important to consider the merits of each crossbreed. To be more specific, we have looked at the requirements of British Blue cross steers and compared them with the needs of Aberdeen Angus cross steers.

You will see that we need to use a different concentrate for each system. The later maturing Blue crosses need a higher density concentrate, achieved by using maize in the diet. Premier Beef Nuts will provide the level of carcass finish required and will help express the conformation available. The Angus cross steers will finish on a lower quantity of Beef Finisher Nuts, being easier finishing and taking more from forage, these cattle need to be weighed regularly to avoid excess fat cover.

I am often asked which is the best system; my answer is whichever suits your farm best. If you are limited by acres, a more intensive system with good grading Blues can be most effective with the right buildings. If you want to graze young stock efficiently, make the most of home-produced forage and secure a premium contract, the Angus system may be for you.

Our next project is to look at the impact of crossbred dairy cows on the growth rates of their beef cross progeny. We will be monitoring the performance of some known genetics to look at the impact of the Scandinavian breeds, the Procross progeny and the other crossbreeding systems using some Jersey genetics. I will report as further figures come in, in the meantime I would urge everyone to learn more about the Beef Values of the cattle and calves you are buying. By far the most important factor is the genetics of the Beef sire, whatever breed it is.



**Bill Harper**  
Director  
07831 099 182

**FCN** | THE FARMING COMMUNITY NETWORK

THE FARMING COMMUNITY NETWORK INVITES YOU TO

**“SHARING OUR FARMING FUTURE”**

Learn about Share Farming and Contract Farming Agreements



**THURSDAY**  
**16<sup>TH</sup> APRIL**



**TRETHORNE LEISURE PARK,**  
**KENNARDS HOUSE,**  
**LAUNCESTON,**  
**PL15 8QE**



**7.30PM**

**SPEAKING:**

- MR JEREMY OATEY (Arable and Potato Farmer)
- MR BILL HARPER (Beef and Sheep Farmer)
- MR JOHN TUCKER (Dairy Farmer)
- MR TOM RATTRAY (Kivells, Farm Business Tenancies)



TO BOOK YOUR PLACE, CONTACT:  
Roland Nancekivell on 07976 016096

Diet Name	500kg Angus Steer Finishing Diet	500kg Blue Steer Finishing Diet
<b>Animal Details</b>		
Weight (kg)	500	500
Breed	Aberdeen Angus	British Blue X
Maturity rate	Medium	Late
Growth rate (kg/d)	1.20	1.50
Sex	Castrates	Castrates
<b>Feeding Plan (kg as fed/ head/d)</b>		
Grass Silage 10.5 ME	22.000	22.000
Beef Finisher Nuts W24	4.500	-
Premier Beef Nuts W24	-	5.500
As Fed intake (kg/d)	26.5	27.5
<b>Nutrients (units as stated)</b>		
ME (Mj/d)	128.1	140.4
Protein (%DM)	13.3	13.8
Starch plus Sugar (%DM)	13.9	16.9



# MAKING THE MOST OF FORAGE

**With continued pressure on milk price, making the most of your forage this year is more important than ever. A few small changes can help to increase DMI and production.**

## LEY QUALITY

For a high-quality silage, aim for an early May cutting date, with subsequent cuts at 30-35 day intervals. D-Value (nutritional quality) falls by 0.5 units per day with the onset of stem elongation and heading. Don't be tempted to sacrifice quality for quantity by delaying harvest.

## WEED CONTROL

A dock infestation as low as 10% is the equivalent to one trailer in every 10 being full of docks. Besides yield, docks are roughly 40% lower in feed value than ryegrass, leading to lower quality silage and higher feed costs. By implementing a strategic spray program, we can reduce the amount of recontamination and start to break the cycle of dock seed through the slurry.

## FERMENTATION & NUTRIENT PRESERVATION, WHY USE AN INOCULANT?

The use of a silage additive can help to speed up the fermentation process in the clamp, reducing aerobic spoilage and preserving dry matter, which in turn helps preserve nutrients and make fibre more digestible, improving palatability. Higher intakes = higher milk production.

## ENSILING AND CLAMPING

For all silages, good consolidation is vital to ensure stability during storage and feeding. Compaction is key: fill in thin, even layers, no more than 15 cm deep, rolling regularly. Sheet up the clamp each night, even if adding more the next day, to allow the lactic acid fermentation to begin.

**We have everything you need in stock at Massey Harpers to get your forage off to a flying start.**

- ✓ Grass Seeds
- ✓ Sprays
- ✓ Silage Additives
- ✓ Massey Harpers Silage Sheets and Cling Seal



**Imogen Ward**  
Field Sales Representative for Massey Harpers  
07384 112 468

# THE SUMMER AHEAD

**With spring around the corner, planning the season ahead for heifers is crucial to ensure bulling weights are achieved in the autumn.**

It's important to look back over last year's performance and highlight the following:

- What went well last year?
- What challenges were experienced?
- What are the aims for this coming season for the heifers, for example:
  - ✓ Improved DLWG,
  - ✓ Reduced antibiotic usage,
  - ✓ Better fertility results.

To get heifers successfully calving at two years of age, it is important to ensure that they are 60-65% of the mature cow weight before breeding and aim for 85-90% of mature cow weight at the point of calving. For example, a 650kg mature cow weight would require bulling weights of 390-420kg, and 550-585kg at calving.

Getting heifers to reach 65% of the mature weight at 15 months of age can be a struggle if they are forgotten over the summer, which is why the next few months are crucial. Heifers need to have a steady growth rate of around 0.7kg/day between weaning and breeding. This is achievable when feeding good quality silage or grazing, with an additional 2kg of concentrate a day.

A suitable diet for growing heifers would be Harpers 16% Cattle Combine Nuts to make use of the protein supplied in the grass.

Optimum covers for heifers to graze on are between 2600kg/ha – 3000kg/ha, and expecting heifers to graze covers higher than this will reduce both intakes and the digestibility of fresh grass.

Another area which significantly impacts fertility is mineral allocation to the heifers. If they are going off farm for the summer, consider the use of a mineral bolus or a lick, depending on what feed is provided to them. Failure to do this could result in deficiencies in certain trace minerals, reducing conception rates in the serving period.

Speak to your SQP/ RAMA, to ensure that the correct preventative strategy or Farm Plan is in place to prevent fly, tick and worm issues this summer. Far too often we see heifers tuned out onto fields away from the main block and as a result are over looked for worming and fly treatment protocols. Consider using long-acting worming products to cover animals for April to September and treat fly prevention early to help ensure a low fly burden to help prevent New Forest Eye and Summer Mastitis.

**Speak with your farm representative or a RAMA from our shop team that can put a plan in place for you, as each farm's worm and fly treatments are different, and every farm will have its own mineral challenges.**

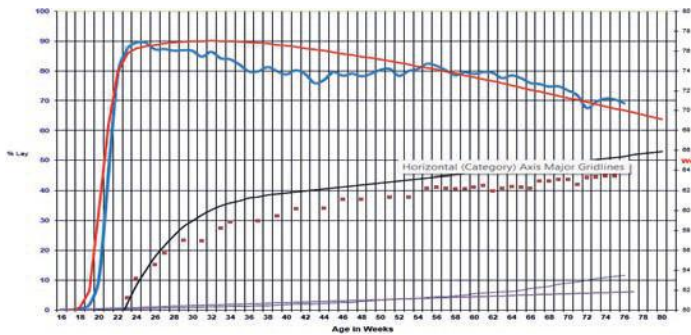


**Alex Cornish**  
Ruminant Feed Specialist  
07384 546 114

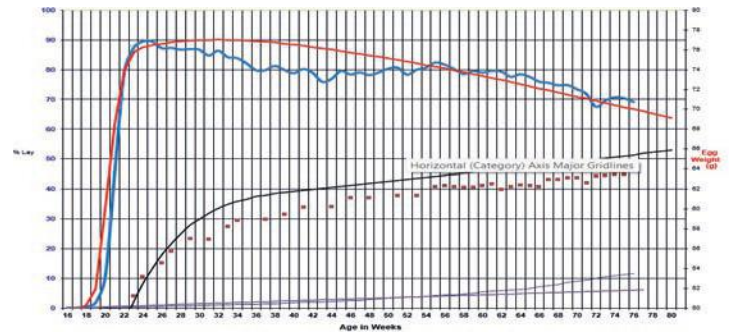


# APPROVED STONEGATE SUPPLIER GETS OFF TO A FLYING START!

House 1 Olives HDA % HDA Standard



House 2 Burford Brown HDA HDA Standard



**Harpers Feeds have got off to a strong start supplying various Stonegate poultry producers throughout the South West, with early results demonstrating clear performance benefits on farm.**

Richard Mills, who farms near Buckland Brewer in Devon, swapped dairy farming for poultry production with his first flock housed in 2004. This was followed by further investment, with additional mobile units introduced in 2006 and 2009 as the enterprise expanded. Today, he has 9,000 laying hens and supplies Stonegate with eggs from 6,000 Burford Browns and 3,000 Olive layers.

Harpers started feeding two houses back in October and has seen the Olive flock's lay % (hen day average) increase by 4% over the following three weeks, bringing it back up above standard for the breed. With the flock now surpassing 70 weeks and depletion in sight, figures suggest an overall margin of £27 per bird over cost of feed and pullets.

The Burford Browns continued to lay well from week 52 and now at 70 weeks with a 74.9% hen day average - 11% above breed standard. Proving that changing feed mid flock supported the laying production, and with only a 4.5% mortality rate, which is 6% lower than breed standard.

In addition, the new flock of Burford Browns, which are 24 weeks in lay, are achieving 94% HDA, so off to a great start in their production. Compared directly to House 2, they have peaked 3.3% higher hen day average. No two flocks are the same, but this shows that the laying hens at this poultry unit are enjoying Harpers layers meal. The formulations for Stonegate are provided by Premier Nutrition so aligned with other feed suppliers, so a real emphasis is placed on data analysis, costings, bird performance and egg weights. With the recent investment in two new Tietjen grinders at the Holsworthy site, Harpers Feeds and Massey Feeds can now cover the majority of the UK for all your layer feed requirements.

What is particularly notable from this unit is how the system continues to deliver as flocks progress beyond peak production. Maintaining performance, egg quality and control of egg size later into lay is often where margins can be protected or lost, and these results suggest that careful ration management is helping to sustain that balance.

With increasing pressure on producers to optimise output while managing input costs, this type of performance becomes even more significant. It highlights the value of closely monitored feeding strategies that not only support early production, but continue to deliver right through to depletion.

For more information on Harpers Feeds and Massey Feeds layer feeding programmes, speak to your local representative.



**SEE US AT**

**BRITISH Pig & Poultry FAIR** STAND 6-233

**13-14 MAY 2026, NEC Birmingham**

Bringing people, products and ideas together

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
16th April	FCN - Sharing our Farming Future	Trethorne Leisure Park, PL15 8QE - <b>Book your place with Roland Nancekivell</b>
4th May	Early Bank Holiday	Bank Holiday
13th – 14th May	Pig & Poultry Fair	The NEC, North Ave, Marston Green, Birmingham, B40 INT
21st – 23rd May	Devon County Show	Westpoint, Exeter, EX5 1DJ
25th May	Spring Bank Holiday	Bank Holiday



**Harpers Feeds**  
 Waldon Way, Holsworthy Industrial Estate, Holsworthy, Devon EX22 6ER  
**01409 254 300** | [harpers@harpersfeeds.co.uk](mailto:harpers@harpersfeeds.co.uk) | [www.harpersfeeds.co.uk](http://www.harpersfeeds.co.uk)

