

HOW DAIRY ENTERPRISE IS HITTING LOW PURCHASED FEED COSTS

Lifting milk from forage and forward-buying feed is helping Devonshire dairy producers Andrew and Jennifer Sanders achieve annual purchased feed costs of sub 9p/litre.

The Sanders are milking 650 cows on the Castle Hill estate. Cows are yielding 11,500 litres at 4.07% butterfat and 3.37% protein on three-times-a-day milking with milk supplied to Arla on an Asda-aligned contract.

The dairy team is headed up by Steve Cook, feeder Tom Latham, and Andrew and Jennifer's son Ryan.

Forward buying raw materials 12 months in advance, making high-quality forage and feeding 4kg of homegrown crimped wheat have seen purchased feed costs fall.

FEEDING

Being on an Arla contract, the Sanders stopped feeding soya two years ago in favour of NovaPro, rape and beans and have gained more points during their Arla audit, which translates to a premium milk price.

Even if soya is trading at a discount, their feed adviser Richard Waters, Dairy Consultant from Harpers Feeds, says the Arla contract means 'soya is off the table', particularly when you factor in lucrative B litres that the Sanders will be supplying in the next few months.

But this also has its advantages for cow health.

"Instead of being a single protein source there are three which have different absorption rates through the rumen. More starch and protein sources give the best throughputs because they are absorbed at different speeds, so by mixing the offering, you get a longer spread."

The milking ration has been reduced from 17% protein in total to 15%.

"We haven't seen any negatives in terms of feed rate or fertility by feeding much lower protein diets. We have seen a huge benefit in terms of cow lameness," adds Richard.

At their most recent quarterly mobility scoring visit in May, only 5.4% of cows scored 2 or more.

The feed rate has been lowered from 0.45kg/litre to 0.29kg/litre by increasing milk from forage to 4,200 litres a cow.

The Sanders aim to take five cuts of silage annually and have invested in new clamps to allow maize to be stored at the dairy. Previously, it was kept at another unit with trailer loads brought back daily, but it was heating up and getting rained on, so dry matter varied, says Andrew.

This year's first cut averaged 32.8% dry matter, 15% protein and 11.5ME while last season's maize analysed 45% dry matter, 11.8ME and 35% starch.

DRY COW DIET

Changing to a single partial Dietary Cation Anion Balance (DCAB) diet throughout the dry cow period has transformed cow health.

Previously, cows were dried off and moved to the dry-cow unit and fed round bales for 2-3 weeks.

Dry cows would then transition to a 'Gordie Jones-style' DCAB diet with a high inclusion of straw for the final three weeks before calving.

But cows were losing condition.

"We weren't getting a smooth transition. When we worked out the energy fed in terms of weight gain for the new ration, it is so minimal that it narrows the gap between dry and fresh," explains Richard.

The partial DCAB diet is higher in energy than most dry-cow diets at 147 megajoules and 13% protein. It comprises of maize, grass silage, processed straw, dry cow minerals and small amounts of caustic wheat, NovaPro, rape and urea.

"There is a small amount of weight added, no more than 5-6kg, which is not enough to create any problems, and it certainly doesn't suppress appetite with cows eating 16kg DM daily," adds Richard.

Since returning to a 'simple method of feeding', the Sanders have gone from dealing with weekly displaced abomasums to none out of 389 calvings in the past five months. Furthermore, milk fevers and retained placentas are running at 1% and 0.2%, respectively.

Four of the retained placentas occurred on cows that calved with twins and the fourth one was a cow that required a caesarean.

This improvement in transition health is also translating to better fertility. The herd's pregnancy rate for the last 12 rolling months averaged 27% with 70% of cows conceiving to first service.



Richard Waters
Dairy Consultant
07467 955 130

FARM FACTS

SANDERS DAIRY, FILLEIGH, BARNSTAPLE, DEVON.

- Milking 650 cows, 720 in the herd
- Farming 1,200 acres, mix of FBT, owned and rented
- All-year-round calving
- Selling milk to Arla
- Yielding 11,500 litres at 4.07% butterfat and 3.37% protein
- Milking three-times-a-day (eight-hour splits) through a 30/60 semi rapid exit parlour.



FARMING THOUGHTS

GRAIN AND STRAIGHTS MARKETS

A new government, a new era. How are Labour going to look after the countryside? Food security was certainly not mentioned in their manifesto. One thing is for sure, supply and demand will dictate our farmgate prices.

Beef has turned the corner again and is on its way up. Lamb prices are holding well above last year and milk prices are improving slightly.

We have sampled about 50 first-cut silages, which are looking promising, but please monitor forage stocks. Many pits were empty in the spring, and forage maize yields are likely to be down 20% on the year.

The first loads of new grain have arrived at the mill, with good yields considering it was the wettest 12 months on record.

Currently, all feed prices are static, and I don't think new season grain can drop any lower.

Please try to attend one of the local shows over the next six weeks. It's important we support these events to keep countryside traditions alive.



The UK cereal harvest is currently running a week to 10 days behind schedule. We are still predicted to produce 11 million tonnes of wheat meaning we will be a net importer of wheat. Currently, UK wheat is trading at import parity.

Europe is well into their harvest, with below average yields and quality. It is predicted that Europe and Russia's wheat production will be down 15 million tonnes on last year, but this shortfall will be made up by better prospects in the US, Canada, Australia and Argentina. The US will have their highest production in seven years and will be an aggressive exporter this year, which should keep global prices lower.

Grain maize remains competitively priced trading at similar levels to wheat for the winter. With increased UK barley production, barley is trading at a £25/t discount to wheat.

Global Oilseed Rape production is going to be drastically down this year, with poor yields across Europe.

Rape meal looks very expensive against soya, and with good production of soya for the main producers – Argentina, the US and Brazil, – this should limit any upward movement in protein prices.

There is no current resolution to the EU deforestation regulation (EU DR). Products that are imported into the EU need to be fully traceable to land that was not deforested after 31st December 2020. Products that need to comply include cattle, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, rubber, soya and wood. The main issue is the traceability and segregation of products. There is currently no EU DR soya-compliant soya available in the South West, and if it were available, it would be priced at a £40/t premium. Soya is available to purchase after Christmas, but it isn't EU DR compliant. Governing bodies are trying to give some clarity on this.

If you would like to discuss any of these matters, please do not hesitate to contact us.



TIPS ON REDUCING AGE AT SLAUGHTER

The biggest single factor affecting profitability of beef cattle is the number of days taken to reach slaughter weight.

Evidence shows that as cattle get older and heavier, they are less efficient at converting feed than younger animals.

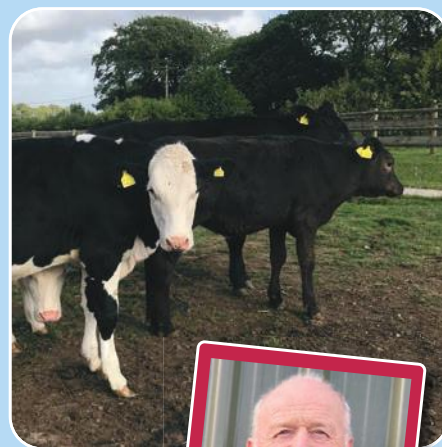
Recent results from a local farm show 62 British Blue cross Holstein steers and heifers finished at an average age of 19.8 months. They yielded an average carcass weight of 349kgs with fat classes 3+4L. Thanks to our experienced Feed Specialist Paul Cholwill, these cattle were finished on a Total Mixed Ration (TMR) diet. The cattle averaged 220 days on feed, with the steers eating 1.1 tonnes of cereal / protein mix and heifers consuming 770kgs.

The key factors involved in achieving these results are:

1. Calves bred from high-performing beef genetics
2. Calves reared to a high standard
3. Full vaccination programme to prevent pneumonia
4. Rotationally grazing 7 cattle per hectare on mixed swards during summer
5. Housed early in the first week of October
6. Feed 11ME grass silage and whole crop in complete diet.

These results demonstrate that early finishing dairy-cross-beef cattle is achievable, profitable and lowers carbon.

For more details, please contact your Feed Specialist.



GOOD NUTRITION KEY TO REDUCING DAYS TO SLAUGHTER

Meticulous data management, good nutrition and excellent early-life management are aiding a reduction in days to slaughter for beef finisher Ian Pinhey.

Fifth-generation farmer Ian farms 300 acres at Upcott Farm, Chulmleigh, alongside his parents, wife, Debbie, and their five children. They run a mixed enterprise supplying free-range chicken to Hook 2 Sisters and finishing 300 British Blue cross-dairy calves annually.



EARLY-LIFE MANAGEMENT

Ian says lifetime performance is determined in the calf shed.

“This is the most important shed for us. If we get this right, we tend to find they fly through.”

For this reason, a state-of-the-art calf-rearing shed was built three years ago.

Calves are all sourced from one dairy business in North West Devon and arrive in batches of 80 with 500 animals on farm at a time.

Cattle are now weighed every six weeks, with clear targets established for each stage of the production cycle to mirror the philosophy of the broiler enterprise.

Slaughter age has been lowered from 24 months to 19 months. Heifers and steers are fed the same and average 355kg deadweight at R3 and kill out of 53%.

They are EID-tagged and are fed milk powder using automatic Foster-Technik calf feeders.

On arrival, calves are given Trouw's Osmofit electrolyte straight off the lorry, and during times of stress, to ensure good feed and water intakes.

They start with six litres of milk (mixed at 135g/litre), to mimic the feeding levels on the dairy unit, but this is increased to seven litres, where it is held until 42 days when milk is gradually reduced over the next two weeks.

Currently, the Pinheys are trialing two milk powders — Trouw Milkivit Rearing (a 23% protein skim powder containing 17% oils) and Trouw Milkivit Energizer (a 23% protein skim powder with a higher fat content of 25% oils to mimic cow's milk).

Calves are weaned at 56 days once they are eating at least 2kg of Harper's Calf Performer Nuts (18% crude protein). They are then allowed 3kg post-weaning, which is provided alongside ad-lib straw.

WEANING AND GROWING PHASES

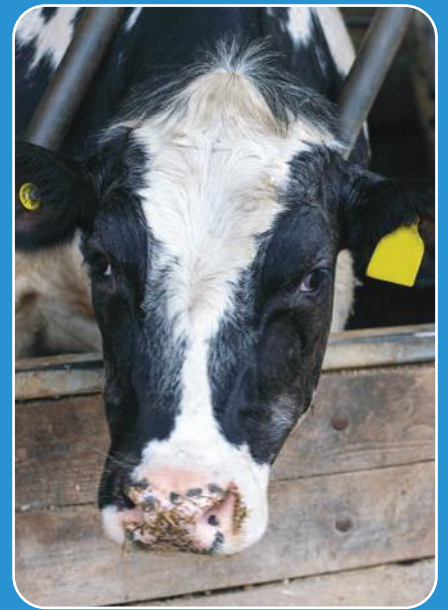
A total mixed ration (TMR) is introduced at 10 weeks to give calves 'a little taste'. This is gradually increased, and the concentrate is pulled back over the next few months until calves are on a full TMR growing ration comprising 14.2% protein by five months of age.

The Pinheys feed advisor, Jake Chisholm, Ruminant Feed Specialist for Harpers Feeds, says: **“We make sure there is always ad-lib straw provided to achieve that scratch factor. The rumen is a massive vessel – it is constantly contracting and turning, and straw is springy and opens it up to improve rumen capacity.”**

Once calves tip the scales at 200-230kg, they move to a growing shed and stay there until they reach 470kg liveweight. Then they move to the finishing shed and are fed a 13.2% protein diet.

All three rations use homegrown maize and grass silage as the main ingredients, with rapeseed, soya, barley straw, rolled wheat, and crimped home-treated cereals utilised – oats or barley.

Jake monitors forage quality as regularly as he would on dairy farms – every 4-6 weeks – so that prompt adjustments can be made to balance forages.



FINISHING PHASE

Recently, the Pinheys have been trialing feeding cattle an ad-lib feed in the form of Harpers 16% Beef Finisher Molassed Mix once they hit 500kg.

The last group finished on TMR ate 1t/ cereal/animal while at the unit, whereas to date the group fed ad-lib cereal has eaten 750kg of cereal. The results will dictate what they feed finished cattle moving forward.

Overall, cattle are achieving 1.1kg daily liveweight gain from arrival until finishing, with mortality running at 3.5% in total. But the Pinheys want to reduce mortality to >2% and push the pedal further by increasing DLWG so they can lower slaughter age to 18 months in the not-too-distant future.

FARM FACTS

- Farming 300 acres, owned
- Growing 70 acres of wheat, 56 acres of oats for crimping, 40 acres of maize, 20 acres of Triticale for thatching and the remainder grass
- 38,000 free-range broilers averaging 5 crops per year supplying Hook 2 Sisters
- 300-310 British Blue heifers and steers finished annually
- Cattle sold to Dunbia, Hatherleigh.



ADVICE ON PREPARING FOR AUTUMN CALVING

Attention to detail at drying off, during the dry period and around calving will help prepare the autumn calving cow for her subsequent lactation and minimise potential health problems.

Fluke and wormer treatment requirements should be considered alongside vaccinations and a good fly-repellent plan. These can be included in a year-to-year review. It is time well spent developing management protocols. Dry cow feed plans should be discussed with your feed advisor. Mineral requirements may vary depending on the forage available to feed in a dry cow ration.

The inclusion of a calcium binder such as X-Zelit has been used to great effect on many farms where milk fever has been a problem. Clinical and sub-clinical milk fever has shown to be the precursor to most other health and fertility problems that occur in the cow's next lactation.

Have you got a plan for the preparation of calving pens? If possible, individual pens should be equipped to allow cows to be easily restrained, if needed. They should also be draught free and have good lighting. It is important calving pens are cleaned out regularly. Ideally this should include washing, disinfecting and resting them before reuse. A variety of pen hygiene products are available to help cut down the risk of infection at this vulnerable time for the cow and calf.

A well-thought-out management protocol for the care of the cow and the newborn calf is essential, especially where there may be different personnel involved. Immediately following calving, the calf's navel should be disinfected with iodine. The cow should have access to water and palatable feed. Some farms may use a recovery drink for the cows after calving. Feed intakes should be monitored to ensure the cow recovers quickly after giving birth.

The calf should receive colostrum within two hours of birth (at least 10% of bodyweight) and 4-6 litres in the first 6 hours. Do you test your cows' colostrum? A brix refractometer is a simple device to test that the colostrum the calf receives is good quality. Poor-quality colostrum leads to the calf having a poor immune system from birth that cannot be recovered. This can lead to problems such as scour and pneumonia. Poor-quality colostrum can be boosted or replaced with a good-quality colostrum powder. It might be a good idea to have this available on farm to ensure that every calf gets the best start possible.

What milk replacer are you going to feed to those valuable dairy replacements or beef calves? There are a lot of milk replacers on the market, but not all are good! Consider the growth rates you want to achieve and speak to your feed advisor about how to do this. Harpers Feed Specialists will be happy to help you make plans for calving, and Massey Harpers can supply you with all the products you need to ensure things go as smoothly as possible.



OFFER

BUY 1 PALLET OF HARPERS MILK POWDER

AND GET A WYDALE MINI PELLET FEEDER FREE



**Full pallet milk powders only.
Multiple orders apply.
Offer ends 2nd October.**

T&C: Offers applies to Calfridge, Milkivit and Energizer milk powders.

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
North Devon Show	Wednesday 7th August	Umberleigh, Devon, EX37 9DX
Okehampton Show	Thursday 8th August	Okehampton, EX20 1SW
Exford Show	Wednesday 14th August	Rooksmean, TA24 7PP
Dunster Show	Friday 16th August	Dunster, TA24 6NY
Holsworthy Show	Thursday 22nd August	Killatree, Holsworthy, EX22 6LP
Kingsbridge Show	Saturday 7th September	Borough Farm, TQ9 7QP
Charity Tractor Run	Sunday 8th September	Bradworthy village Hall, 10am. £10 per ticket. Proceeds to Breast Cancer. Book your place with Glen Johns.