

Working to **secure your future**

Issue 12 2023

GRASSROOTS



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Jersey veal enhances profit on one family farm in Devon

By Lewis Cook

A dramatic change in farm system has led to the revival of a family business in Tiverton, Devon. Neil Weston tells us his inspirational story.

Neil's great-great-grandfather, who was a tailor in the village of Bampton, bought Kersdown Barnton for his son in 1904 and started with a few sheep and some Devon cattle.

Fast forward to the 1960's, Neil's dad, William, who was in his teens, had seven milking cows, sheep, beef, chickens and an orchard of apples from which they made cider and sold locally in Taunton.

William began his journey with seven Jersey cows, by 1984 he grew the herd to 30 Jerseys, 300 ewes and 20 pedigree Devon cows and built a six-point abreast parlour. For the next 20 years they made a living selling meat, milk and cream on a round they established themselves.

Neil's mum oversaw the retail side of this business but sadly passed away in 2000. William then needed to find staff to cover the extra labour, but financial struggles led to the decline of the business.

Meanwhile, Neil was at university in Reading and after he gained a degree in Rural Resource



Neil Weston with some of the veal calves

Management, he began working on the university farm, which was running Holsteins on an indoor system, calving all year round.

In 2004, Neil wanted to expand his knowledge and asked the university for three months leave to go to New Zealand. They agreed and he found himself working on a grazing farm in Matamata, Waikato, during their busy spring calving period.

At the time of Neil's trip, a lot of research was being done into once-a-day milking and Neil quickly realised this could be what the struggling family farm needed.

By 2011, with a £50,000 overdraft, the family decided change was needed and costs had to be cut. William took a step back in 2015, leaving Neil to manage the family farm, milking 80 Jerseys twice a day and keeping the pedigree Devons and sheep.



The cows have to be able to walk up to 1.2km per day in the hills

Neil says: "The workload became too much as dad was getting older and increasingly, I was having to do more and more on my own. I realised something had to give."

Neil decided to implement what he learned in New Zealand, milking once-a-day, spring calving, utilising the grass and removing all concentrate from the cows' diet to cut costs.

"In the first year we took a little bit of a hit but I already knew this was going to happen. After this the cows responded and after three years of milking once a day, we were better off than we had ever been financially," he says.

On the farm today they have 100 Jersey cows milked through their new parlour which was built in 2017 and calve two thirds of the herd in the first three weeks. They have a grazing platform of 88 acres (36 ha).

Neil says "We stuck to Jersey because they are best suited for once-a-day milking and as the cows have to walk up to 1.2km per day in the hills, it is important we have no problems with lameness."

The cows are yielding 3,000 litres at 5.5% fat and 4.5% protein, resulting in 300kg of milk solids which is achieved with no concentrate.

William began by buying in Jersey replacements and used beef on



The new milking parlour



Some of the Jersey herd at Kersdown Barton

the whole herd, however this meant they were not breeding their own replacements. Buying in cows came with a host of disease issues and other problems, so Neil switched to using AI with conventional Jersey semen for six weeks, then Jersey bulls for the remaining six weeks.

"We picked LIC for our Jersey genetics because not only do they have the index for once-a-day cows, but they also focus on feeding a grass diet".

However, producing their own replacements using conventional semen posed the challenge of producing Jersey bull calves. Neil did not want to euthanise the bull calves as he felt this was a waste and saw the potential value they possessed.

He wrote to River Cottage and every Michelin Star restaurant in the country to find a market for his Jersey veal. He also visited local farmers markets and made a website to help promote the product. They began supplying a restaurant chain in London which gave their product extensive exposure.

"Pre Covid, we had some of our best times in this market, we even had to buy extra veal calves to keep up with orders.

"Unfortunately, with 90% of our customers being restaurants, during

the pandemic we lost this market, and trying to get it back was unviable given the economic situation post pandemic," he says.

Their veal now goes to butchers in London, online sales and some to local restaurants.

Neil has secured the future of the family business, his determination, open-mindedness and willingness to try something new has brought the family business back from the brink.

"I wanted to make sure this farm only ever relies on one person due to labour being hard to find and expensive, but still want to maintain a profitable business. We have also invested in two barn conversions that needed attention on the farm which we rent out, to future proof the business if the day comes where I can't milk cows - I will still have an income," he says.



A look at once-a-day milking

By Claire Hunter

Once-a-day milking has long been an option for UK Dairy Farmers, but still has a relatively small following versus twice-a-day milking.

North Yorkshire farmer, Andy Hodgson milks 175 spring calving cows on a 200-acre (81 ha) grazing platform. The farm is situated in a relatively steep part of the North Yorkshire Moors National Park and can dry up fast through the summer months.

Over an average lactation length of 292 days, Andy's 530kg crossbred cows produce an average of 248 kg of milk solids and 3,700 litres of milk. The herd's top performers average 323 kg of milk solids and over 4,000 litres of milk - all on 500kg of concentrate per animal. Andy has been milking them once a day from the start of calving for five years.

Andy chose to move to a once-a-day system, partly to do with lifestyle, but largely because of the layout of the farm. The farm is steep in places with a lot of land lying a long way from the parlour, and many of the fields twist and turn around woodlands on the estate. Walking the cows long distances



on sometimes steep lanes is time consuming and not great for the cows says Andy.

"I can have a life" was the short answer to what it meant for Andy with less time in the parlour. He enjoys that he is not tied to the farm 24/7.

"I was always behind with jobs, whereas now, I'm a lot more up to date, it has allowed me time to get other farm jobs completed."

Milking once a day has also influenced his staffing needs; Andy employs a casual staff member once-a-week for the 'two-person jobs', his daughter rears the calves at calving time but for the remainder, Andy operates on his own.

Andy says the main improvements from switching to once-a-day milking have been seen in cow health, which has also been a big factor in the success of the system. Andy's antibiotic use is minimal,

and he has few losses throughout the year. His vet bills are considerably lower now with 175 cows, than when they were milking twice a day on a split block pattern with 130 cows. He has not had a case of milk-fever in over three years and has little to no lameness in the herd.

Andy's herd fertility is exceptional, he breeds to AI for four weeks, then uses sweeper bulls for another four weeks. His empty rate on the cows is 7.5% - New Zealand KPIs have the top herds at less than 8% after 15 weeks, Andy is achieving that in only eight weeks of breeding.

As a result, Andy's six-week in-calf rates are good, 82.5% for the cows, and 93% for the heifers. Andy would like to bring the breeding period back to six weeks and feels it is a question of when, not if.

Somatic cell count (SCC) has been an on-going challenge however, Andy is currently at 150,000 cells/ml which is as low as it has been for a while. He believes it is a dilution problem with the reduced volume. This is a focus for Andy at the moment and has been making

Andy's farm is steep in places with a lot of land a long way from the parlour





Concentrate usage has decreased from 1.5 tonnes per cow to 500kg

headway with culling high SCC cows and using selective dry cow therapy on quarters tested high on the California milk test at dry off. So far, results this spring have been positive with no cows calving down with mastitis.

Andy says: "Looking back, if there was anything I would change, I would have done it sooner, I wouldn't have messed about with the two years doing half and half".

Andy admits that it is very hard to get solid facts and figures for once-a-day milking, with difficulties in pinpointing exactly where money will be saved, but with a drop in output, he says savings must be made somewhere.

He did a lot of work on where he was expecting his savings to come from,

and he concluded it would be split three ways- one third of it would be savings on labour, power and chemicals in the parlour. Another third was coming from lower concentrate usage and feeding. The other third is found in higher milk solids and lower vet bills, but he says this is much harder to quantify until you're doing it.

Andy says this is why he spent two years milking twice a day for the first half of the season and once in the second half, he likened it to jumping off a cliff.

He says: "The first year we went once-a-day, I just stopped looking at milk tickets, because if you sat and looked at them, you think, hang on, that's not enough milk, we can't afford to go to that, but at the end of the month, there

was always enough to pay the bills and a bit spare."

Andy believes the first year of once-a-day milking sees the biggest volume reduction, somewhere around 60%, however each consecutive year after that, production can be gained back incrementally. Through herd improvement and targeted mating decisions, Andy has gained volume back and is sitting at around 60% of his twice-a-day production. He has also reduced his concentrate usage from 1.5 tonnes per cow per lactation, to 500kg.

But did he save 40% of his costs in line with the 40% drop in production? He believes so.

"According to the tax man and my CFP, yes, I did. The once-a-day system suits me and my farm, if you are going to do it, you have to want to do it, and if you do, cost cutting is the key to making it successful.

"My final bit of advice for those who are changing to a once-a-day system is just don't look at milk tickets because it scares the living...out of you."

After speaking with James and Andy, it is clear twice-a-day milking is not exclusively the only way to make a grazing system work, 10-in-7 and once-a-day are both practical options for UK farmers that have great benefits for cow health and fertility, staffing and an enviable work/life balance that allows more time for family and friends.

Get in touch with your local Farm Solutions Consultant if you would like to know more about alternatives to milking twice a day.



Andy milks 175 spring calving cows in the North Yorkshire Moors National Park

10-in-7 post-season results

By Claire Hunter

With staff shortages, and a work/life balance becoming more important to farmers and their families, more and more UK farmers are looking at the possibility of changing milking frequencies.



James Rowntree milks 200 spring calving cows in North Yorkshire. His ultimate goal is to move to once-a-day milking

While some remain sceptical about a loss in production, there is great opportunity to gain in other areas of the business such as fertility and cow health, staffing costs and savings in energy costs.

In the summer of 2022, we checked in with James Rowntree who farms 200 spring calving cows in North Yorkshire (GrassRoots Issue 09). He was mid-way through a full season on a 10-in-7 milking regime on the way to eventually implementing a once-a-day system.

Results at the time were positive with submission rates up 5%, reduced lameness, better body condition and significant energy savings. But now the 2022 season has come to an end, what is James' final verdict?

	2021 (TAD)	2022 (10-in-7)
Production		-14%
Fat	4.40%	4.63%
Protein	3.42%	3.61%
6WIRC	high 50s	76%
Concentrate fed	750kg	500kg

The Regime	
Monday	5.30 am - 3.00pm
Tuesday	5.30am
Wednesday	5.30 am - 3.00pm
Thursday	5.30am
Friday	5.30 am - 3.00pm
Saturday	5.30am
Sunday	5.30am

1. What have been the main benefits for you going 10-in-7?

Opening up land which we have never grazed with cows before, simply because on those once-a-day milking days it has allowed us to walk them a lot further, we have access to a lot more ground, which last year was ideal because it was quite a dry summer.

2. What differences, if any, have you noticed in production?

Volume decreased by 14% over the season, fat was running at 4.4% average and went up to 4.63%. Protein averaged 3.42% and it moved up to 3.61%.

3. How has it impacted cow health and fertility?

We were moving the two blocks into the one, and it definitely allowed us to tighten that block up quicker, we actually brought the autumn calvers round rather than selling them and buying in spring. We culled anything that didn't get in calf and kept those ones that got back in calf, so we ended up with a six-week in-calf rate (6WICR) of 76% and that was our first time bringing them round to spring so I was really happy with that.

They put on weight, that was probably the only problem, our cows are quite fat anyway, so they were probably putting on too much condition. It's probably the only thing that I would have complained about, but it allowed us to work them harder, and they did get fed 500kg of concentrate the whole season so we dropped it quite substantially and made them work off grass a lot more.

4. How did you manage AI while running 10-in-7?

We just AI'd once a day, but if we had any queries about a cow we would serve them on an afternoon if it was a twice-a-day milking, but to be honest we did it just the once-a-day and didn't have a problem.

5. Have you seen any cost savings?

We had a 22% drop in electricity usage, not turning on the parlour, not cooling the milk, not washing out. We also saved on foot trimming - we had less feet to do. The cake usage was down too, we fed about 750kg previously, obviously with the increase in cake costs, this saved us a lot as well. Chemical savings, washing the parlour less - there are lots of things that you don't realise you will save money on.

6. What has been the impact on farm with less time in the shed?

Catching up on jobs that either we would have had to bring a contractor in for or we just wouldn't have had time to do.

7. What regime are you following this season and why?

We started off milking twice a day because the price of milk was so high, and the weather was so poor in March, that we couldn't get the cows back out. Once they went out we went onto fully once-a-day [which has always been the long-term plan for James], the reason for that is the milk price has come back so much and we are going to be heavily penalised on B price.

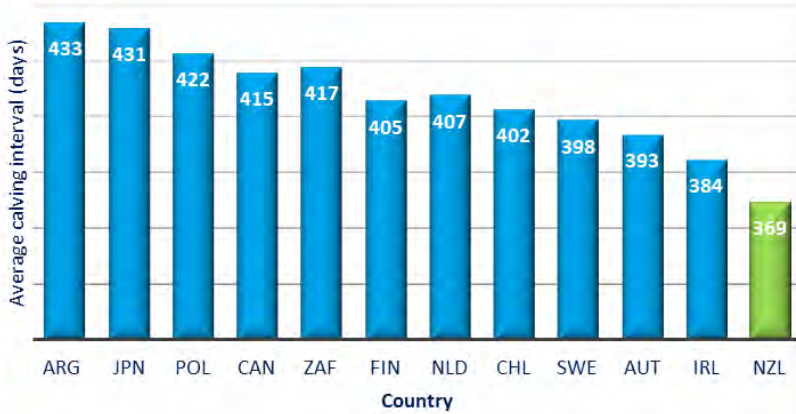
8. Why was it always on the cards to go OAD?

I think staffing is a big thing, there are a lot of farms around here so I think if we were ever looking for more staff, it would make us look more attractive for potential employees.

With us having a main road through the farm, we can access the ground on twice-a-day, but bringing them across the road for the afternoon milking was pretty bad, and you have to have two people on the road plus one bringing them in, and sometimes we didn't have that option so it's just making it safer and more accessible with milking once a day.

Production reduced going 10-in-7 for James, however, it is clear to see the savings and gains in animal health have off-set the loss, all the while improving their labour efficiency and work/life balance. While it was always a phase of transition to once-a-day, it has worked in their favour and has highlighted the possibility of 10-in-7 being viable as a permanent milking regime.





BW Update - NZAEL enhancements launched in March 2023

Joyce Voogt, Technical Manager, LIC

March 2023 saw the introduction of enhancements to Breeding Worth (BW) by New Zealand Animal Evaluation Ltd (NZAEL). The latest changes involved Fertility and Gestation Length (GL), separating out GL from Fertility breeding value (BV) estimations to provide a more accurate estimation of 'true genetic fertility', as explained below.

GL is reported separately, having been added as the 10th trait in BW, with its own breeding and economic values (EV), allowing improved decision making around these traits on farm.

LIC has likewise incorporated the changes into its animal evaluation model which reports slightly different figures due to its inclusion of genomic information.

Why the change?

Fertility BV estimations utilise calving date information, 'Calving Season Day' (CSD), to estimate genetic fertility, and so can be influenced by the gestation length of the calf as well as by the date of conception.

Some additional natural spread is seen, with 95% of calves being born within ± 9 days of expected calving date. Because gestation length is strongly heritable it impacts the CSD figure, creating a Fertility BV advantage for shorter GL bulls, unless adjusted for.

For this reason, Gestation Length has been separated from Fertility as an interim solution in both the NZAEL and LIC models while NZAEL works towards a conception-based fertility measure in December 2023 as a permanent solution.

The change increases the accuracy of Fertility BV estimations and avoids unintentional selection toward shorter GL. It has resulted in changes in individual

bull Fertility BVs in-line with their Gestation Length BVs. Bulls with shorter GL BVs saw a decrease in Fertility BV, while those with longer GL BVs saw an increase.

The changes saw an average decrease of 1.5 fertility genomic BV (gBV) units across 2,158 LIC bulls born between 2010 and 2021. Bulls with more extreme GL BVs saw greater movement. On average, the NZ dairy cow fertility gBV dropped slightly, as the average NZ cow GL is shorter than 282 days.

Gestation length itself is important and of value to farmers, so is added as the 10th trait in Breeding Worth. The GL EV recognises the economic benefit of shorter gestation length through more days in milk. The economic contribution of GL in BW is capped at -5 days GL BV to moderate selection for GL in BW. The combined effective emphasis in BW for Fertility and GL remains at 15%, most of which is attributable to Fertility.

Breeding values should be considered in the context of the population. The NZ dairy cow population is highly fertile with the average calving interval steady at approximately 369 days over the last 20 years. Fertility BV ranking is relative to that population. Genetic trends for fertility remain positive across the breeds.

Farmers can expect to see the same calving date phenotype on farm, but trait information is now better apportioned to Fertility and GL in both NZAEL and LIC genetic evaluation models.

Phenotypic calving date differences for daughters of bulls with different Fertility BV may be hard to detect on farm, as GL BV and natural variation impact the calf's birth date and non-genetic factors exert a significant influence on conception date.

Nevertheless, targeted breeding for fertility alongside active management of the non-genetic influences can deliver significant gains to farmers in their herd's fertility and breeding outcomes.



The new enhancement of BW provides a more accurate estimation of 'true genetic fertility'



Will and Heather Hannah
with three of their five children



Succession and Success at Mountjoy Farm

By Emyr Brown

An effective succession plan and a simple business has led to the success of a family-run dairy unit in Treffgarne, Pembrokeshire.

In 1985, Will Hannah's father Tom, began with a house, 50 acres, a few sheep and nine cows. Over the next 20 years, Tom grew the farm three-fold, up to 150 acres (60.7 ha) and 150 cows. Will said it was hard for his parents as first-generation farmers and they encouraged him and his three sisters to give themselves some options other than farming.

Following university and some time travelling, Will found himself drawn back to the land. After much discussion about succession, the assets were split four ways, with Will and his sisters each taking an equal share. The sisters did not want to continue farming, so Will bought them out in the mid-2000's.

At the tender age of 21, Will took on huge debt to pay out half his sisters' shares, who have remained supportive of Will's endeavour. He began to expand the business and farm, recently completing the installation of a 54-bale Waikato Milking Systems rotary parlour. This has seen the farm size increase three-fold once again.

With help from his father and brother-in-law Mike, Will, his wife Heather and their five children now run a 630

acre (255 ha) spring calving herd of 420 cows in the rolling landscape of south-west Wales. The 540kg New Zealand Friesian herd graze against a picturesque backdrop and produce 6,000 litres at 3.7% protein and 4.5% fat and are fed 900kg of concentrate.

Unusually, calving starts on the 20th of March, allowing them to calve outside. The calves are out on grass as early as two weeks old. Will says the calves are

much healthier and it has helped them to reduce Johne's and other diseases.

This also allows them to graze late in the season as they are less reliant on early spring grass when it can be wet. The cows are housed at night around bonfire weekend, and last season remained grazing through the day until the 18th of December.

Will says there is less pressure on the cows at calving time as there is more grass and they regain condition after calving quite easily. Will aims to cut silage by the beginning of May and he usually gets good quality 11 ME silage which he feeds in autumn, or through dry summers.

The farm grows 11 tonnes of dry matter per hectare per year and has reduced the Nitrogen usage by more than half



The family has recently completed the installation of a 54-bale Waikato rotary parlour

cows' production peaks around mid-June, which is outside of the seasonal penalties - another benefit of calving later than most.

One of the biggest challenges facing Will is bovine tuberculosis (TB) and he says they spend approximately half of the time under restrictions. The farm's milk contract lies with Arla so they must rear calves up to 56 days, this combined with TB issues make it difficult to sell calves and the family finds themselves rearing many calves.

"Being able to get rid of calves under TB restrictions is nigh on impossible," he says.

To overcome this challenge, Will has been looking for ways to increase calf value and has entered into a Wagyu scheme. They will take the calves regardless of TB status, as they go to approved rearing units (ARUs) in Gloucestershire. This has been a huge benefit to Will and last year he used 120 straws of Wagyu - about 24% of his total semen requirement, this year it will increase to 40%.



Will Hannah with his LIC Farm Solutions Consultant, Emyr Brown

In order to comply with the requirements of the Wagyu scheme, bull calves must reach a minimum weight of 46kg, and heifers must be at least 44kg by three weeks old, with a pound bonus or penalty per kilo over or under these targets. The calves are collected at 2-4 weeks old and Will gets an agreed price on average of £180 per calf.



Looking to increase calf value, the family has entered into Paragon's Wagyu scheme

"If it wasn't for this scheme, I wouldn't be pushing sexed semen as hard as I am, this is too good an opportunity that I feel like I've got to take the risk with the sexed and go for it."

"I love the Wagyus, I really get on with them. They are a very vigorous calf and take little to get going on the feeder. I also like how easy they are on the cow, we've calved 100 or so Wagyus, and I've never touched one calving."

Will's short-term goals are to increase cow numbers to a 1:1 stocking rate on the platform, consolidate debt, and improve buildings and infrastructure.

The long-term goal is to pay down as much on the debt as they can to give their kids a head start in farming or other ventures.

"Thoughts are currently sitting with a second unit if any of the kids are keen, they can use the current unit to fund and support the second. Succession is high on the radar for us, but we haven't figured out how to do it yet.

"Share milkers could also be a possible option for us in the future, it

would be nice to gear the business to allow us more free time once the kids are older for us to go to New Zealand," he adds.

Will maintains a simple system which has allowed them to create a successful business without running themselves ragged.

"We veer away from diversifying almost, keep it quite pure...there's too much going on in home life anyway!"

With five young children and 420 cows, there is plenty to keep them busy, but despite there only being 2.5 full time labour units and two part-timers/milkers, Will still manages to maintain a balance between work and family.

Will's father was very forward-thinking putting in place a clear and fair succession plan, which is something that is often not talked about early enough in other businesses.

He says: "I wouldn't have got where I am without doing it, because it's such a kickstart when you owe a lot of money early on, you really drive."

Succession is very important to Will and his family, and they are keen to establish a similarly equal and fair plan in place for the next generation.



Calving starts mid-March allowing them to calve the cows outside



A change for the future

By Jordan Carnall

Lower Barton Farm is an estate owned dairy farm located in picturesque Staffordshire countryside. The farm was first tenanted by Frank Brown in 1957 who ran the business until 1995 and handed over the responsibility to his son James Brown, who holds the current tenancy.

James took charge of the unit running a successful all-year-round, housed system milking high yielding Holsteins and over the years made investments in housing and installing a 50-point rotary parlour.

James had a keen interest in American style Holsteins, which lead him down the path to trialling American style Jerseys to introduce more solids to the herd.

By this point James had decided that due to high input costs of production and seeing how profitable a low-cost grass-based system could be, the farm needed to move in a new direction to be an economically resilient business model.

To embark on this change, James - through a mutual contact - was put in touch with Hyw and Kirsty James. After spending a number of years in and around the dairy industry, Hyw and Kirsty are both well versed with the operation of a dairy farm. Having spent time working on dairy farms in Ashburton, New Zealand, they experienced first-hand what the LIC cow was capable of, and this drove them to pursue their ideal cow.

After discussing the idea with James, they started to change the farm's traditional housed all-year-round calving Holstein herd, to a block calving grazing herd.



Some of the youngstock at Lower Barton Farm

He says: "I believe times are changing, and I want to ensure the farm moves in the right direction to secure its future."

With Hyw and Kirsty at the helm, and James very much on board. They started by purchasing LIC straws from four crossbred bulls that closely met their ideal cow requirements.

"Our ideal cow has high fertility, high solids and longevity. Our biggest issue with the Holsteins was lameness, which

we have managed with preventative trimming and that made a difference. We also wanted to bring cows with increased longevity to the herd to help improve the 2.5 lactation average of the Holsteins," he says.

Over the following months the farm purchased LIC-bred animals to introduce to the herd.

"We purchased two LIC-bred cows from Market Drayton and 20 LIC-bred cows from Exeter. Not long after we noticed an improvement in fat and protein content in the milk."

They had also started to develop the surrounding arable land into an 198 acre (80 ha) ring fenced grazing platform. Concrete sleepers were used for much of the high traffic areas, along with Astro Turf courtesy of Stoke City FC. Fresh swards were sown to ensure the most palatable grass for the cows to enjoy, some of which had never been on grass.

Initially, the farm moved from an all-year-round unit to an autumn and spring



Hyw and Kirsty say the calves they have bred from LIC dams are easier to rear

“ I believe times are changing, and I want to ensure the farm moves in the right direction to secure its future ”



The cows are bred using LIC KiwiCross® Sires that closely meet the requirements for their ideal cow

block, but later the decision was made to move the farm to an autumn block unit.

James says: “The driving factor for this was primarily workload and to try and achieve a good work/life balance.”

Hyw and Kirsty on their experiences.

“The whole process has been good; it has been a lot of work and we have tried to do as much ourselves as possible. It’s nice to get to a point where the infrastructure is 90% complete, we have around 200m left to track and a handful of water troughs to install.

“The calves we have had from LIC dams look fantastic, they are easier to rear, and we are really looking forward to them joining the herd. The KiwiCross® bulls we have used on the Holsteins have really helped to reduce the size effectively, we are starting to see the uniformity among the herd.”

Reflecting on the process, Hyw and Kirsty both agree if money was no object, the thing they would have done differently was to buy the herd they wanted and sell the herd they have. They say this would have sped the process up and made life a lot easier.

With things definitely moving in the right direction, when discussing plans for the future. Hyw and Kirsty agree that the future is to have the farm settled into an autumn block system, with a herd of their ideal cows and good staff to enable them to have some well-earned time off.

With the herd developing into one they all envisaged from the beginning, the infrastructure almost complete and the transition to an autumn calving herd well under way, it is looking like a very exciting year ahead.

Shows and events



Royal Cornwall Show 8th to 10th June 2023

About 120,000 visitors attended this year’s Royal Cornwall Show which took place in Wadebridge at the beginning of June.

It was so nice to welcome so many existing customers and new customers alike to the stand we shared with Cogent.

We had excellent entry numbers for our competition to win £2,000 worth of LIC semen and be put into a draw at the end of the year to win a trip to New Zealand. The winner was Rachel and Richard Risdon.

Open Farm Sunday 11th June 2023

We attended Open Farm Sunday at Bisterne Farms, Bournemouth, it was great to see so many members of the public in attendance, in total 1,800 people visited. Across the country 250 farmers opened their gates, and in total over 150,000 people visited their local farm.



Upcoming Events

JULY
24-27

Royal Welsh Show 24th to 27th July 2023

We will also be attending the Royal Welsh Show this year, again sharing a stand in our usual spot with our partner Cogent. We invite you to join us for refreshments on your way around the showground.

We will also be running our competition to win £2,000 of LIC semen with an extra chance to win a trip to New Zealand* so call in and enter.



Royal Welsh 2022

We will also be attending...

- UK Dairy Day (13th September),
- The South West Dairy Show (4th October) and
- Agriscot (22nd November)

We look forward to seeing you there!

*Terms and conditions apply

First time in the UK for Kiwi Technician McKenzie

Each year it is customary for a group of New Zealand LIC trained AI technicians to travel to the UK for the breeding season, made possible by the fact it is autumn in New Zealand when the UK is heading into the spring.

This year LIC UK welcomed 11 Kiwi technicians back on to UK shores – not quite up to the pre-covid numbers of 18, but still, their appearance has been appreciated by farmers from Scotland to Wales and Cornwall to Cheshire.

23-year-old McKenzie Watson is one of this year's cohort and has spent her time inseminating cows on the Lley Peninsula – the west coast of North Wales.

McKenzie arrived on the 26th of April and will work through the whole mating period, she is expected to depart on 20th July.

This is McKenzie's fourth season working as a highly skilled technician for LIC and she says she thrives in the pressurised environment the role creates.

Originally from Canterbury on New Zealand's South Island, for the last two years McKenzie has been living on the North Island where her partner Josh has taken on a contract milking agreement.

With dreams of becoming a flight attendant after studying travel and

tourism at school, inseminating cows is a far cry from flying around the world, but McKenzie says she couldn't imagine not working with animals now.

Having started work with LIC in 2019, McKenzie was encouraged to enter the role by the AI Technician who inseminated on the farm McKenzie was working on.

"I was helping to load AI guns for the Technician on our farm, her assistant pulled out, so I had to step up, and that is how I started. From there I applied for training and started my apprenticeship with LIC," she says.

Training to become an LIC AI Technician is tough, with extreme focus placed on hitting target non-return rates (NRR).

For the first six weeks of the apprenticeship, no new Technician is allowed to serve more than 30% of the cows in any one

herd, this protects the interests of the farmers and helps to spread the risk.

"The training is very strict, when I did my two-week course there were five groups of nine trainees and only four of us passed."

"We started for the first couple of days learning using an artificial cow, then we were given a certain number of cows to inseminate and the examiner gave us a percentage success rate. The training is mostly hands-on, but there is a little theory work too."

McKenzie says the insemination runs can be very full on in New Zealand during peak mating season, and she has 7,000 cows on her books which means she could be serving hundreds of cows each day. LIC works on 1.3 services per cow, so a round of 7,000 would require about 9,000 inseminations.

McKenzie says: "You could have 60-80 cows to inseminate on a single farm, and



McKenzie Watson



In New Zealand McKenzie carries out up to 9,000 inseminations per year

some carry out synchronisations of up to 250 cows, in that case you have to get someone to help you.

"It was a really challenging role at first, but I actually really enjoy it, I am quite results-driven and thrive under pressure. It is especially cool when I get to see the calves I produced coming through as heifers to be served."

In New Zealand's off-season McKenzie helps with calf rearing on

the farm where Josh contract milks, she also works in a racehorse stud as a stud groom which involves carrying out general daily duties, mucking out and looking after the horses, moving off for breeding, helping with scanning and handling the weanlings.

Travelling to the UK was McKenzie's first time leaving New Zealand apart from a visit to Rarotonga, one of the Cook Islands.

"Being given the opportunity to come to the UK to do something I thoroughly enjoy was something I couldn't say no to. You always see things on social media about other countries and the different methods of farming - it has been really cool to come over and see it for myself."

"One of the major differences between the UK and New Zealand is the attitude towards heifers. In New Zealand farmers don't often put a lot into their heifers as they are not considered their best cows, whereas here everyone puts a lot of money into heifers."

"The farmers have been really open and welcoming which has been really nice considering I don't speak Welsh, I thought that was going to be something I would struggle with."

"I would definitely recommend the experience to others, I think if I came back again it would be nice to see a different area, it has been a really cool experience and I have enjoyed it, but I think it would be nice to see a different part of the UK or Ireland next time, somewhere where people do things differently again."



McKenzie has been covering a round on the Llyn Peninsula, Wales

Aled with some of the finishing cattle



People, Pasture and Partnerships delivering profit for Beef Farmers of the Year

By Ifan Owen

New Zealand Beef sires are proving to deliver the right animal for the Evans Brothers' low-cost dairy beef enterprise.

Seven years ago, Aled Evans and his brother Iwan had the opportunity to return to manage the family farm where they started by transforming a ranch consisting of three separate blocks totalling 550 acres (222.5 hectares) into a grass based, low-cost system.

Aled says: "The geographical spread of the farm was well suited for a dairy beef calf system. It's a good system to have a go at, carrying a high stocking rate making the most of the grass."

The farm had previously been managed as a bit of a ranch, Aled explained. They started by getting the land GPS mapped.

The three blocks range from 400 ft (121.9m) up to 600 ft (182.9m) above sea level, not far from the Preseli hills.

The Evans' originally started by sourcing calves from all-year-round calving herds, mainly for cash flow purposes, and selected from farms in the area that followed a strict criteria of good management practices when it came to colostrum, hygiene, and herd health.

Four years ago, Aled came across Llaeth Bodffynnon Enterprise through the grassland network he was part of and secured a supply of dairy beef calves from the 450-cow spring block calving herd.

"We knew we were aiming for the block calving herds to secure our supply of calves and, after speaking to Gwydion at Llaeth Bodffynnon, I was impressed how open minded they were as a business

and that's very important to us, as well as loyalty."

"One of the main challenges with this type of system is finding the correct people to partner with, and the person is as important to us as the type of cow".

Two hundred calves were brought down from Gwydion in the first year, with lorry loads of up to 80 calves travelling down weekly during the busiest time of calving. The system aims to have all the calves bought in within a nine-week age block.

Once weaned, calves go out to grass and are rotationally grazed with daily liveweight gains (DLWG) ranging from 1.3 to 1.5kg/day. The grazing is set up as 24-hour cells, aiming to have 40,000kg of liveweight (LW) on half a hectare (1.2 acres). This is increased to 60-70,000kg as the season progresses.

This allows pre-grazing covers to be at 3,000kg/dry matter (DM) per ha. The business is currently growing 13 tonnes of DM/ha over the growing season and utilising 85%. The grazing season typically kicks off in February with on/off grazing to start. Turnout during the day was 30th January this year with the cows remaining out until November.

Most of the cattle are then housed but the system makes use of some deferred grazing and kale when needed. In the last three to four years, diverse leys have been included on the grazing platforms



Once weaned, the calves are rotationally grazed

to build resilience, with 25% of the block being put down to diverse leys to support mid-season feed availability.

Aled started by experimenting with plantain and chicory only, but has tweaked to include timothy, ryegrass and red and white clover mix.

Finishing

Aled and the team start to draw out the finishing cattle in October. All of the bigger framed steers are pulled out and housed on a red clover silage and barley diet for around 60 days with a target liveweight of 600kg. The first group of cattle are finished at 19 months old with a target kill out of 50%.

The business is aiming to kill most of the cattle at 300kg dead weight, with the majority grading O+ for conformation with a fat class of 3 or 4L with all cattle being on the same principal diet right through the finishing period from October to March.

Growing cattle will be gaining 0.7-0.8kg/day just on silage and in the past, blend and cake were included in the ration but this led to challenges particularly with starlings that took 30% of the DLWG over the winter.

Aled says: "We are watching cow mature size and looking to have the supplying dairy herd sitting in the region of 520-550kg average liveweight."

The Stabiliser, as well as the native breeds, Angus and Hereford used by Gwydion, provide the Evans' with the perfect beef animals for the market.

He says: "Our Honest Burgers contract came along entirely through luck and offers a premium over other markets. He says: "We were lucky that Honest



Aled and Iwan source their beef calves from Gwydion's 450-strong spring block calving herd

Burgers were looking at a regenerative supply chain, and our grass-based system fitted nicely into their supply chain aspirations."

"This contract came off the back of building a network within the livestock grazing systems that demonstrated farming practices that fit in under a forage based, regenerative rearing system focusing on breed of animal, grassland management, artificial fertiliser and pesticide usage."

The farm has provided carcasses direct to butchers in the past, and the family created a beef box company called Rest Butchery which has been very successful and now supplies beef boxes to Cardiff, London and as far as Scotland.

"It is great to be able to talk directly to the customer, the grass-based system is a good story that they want to hear about, before having an enjoyable experience when they taste the product," he says.

Breed

"Blues were bringing premium prices in the live market as calves, but not so much for the finishing system," says Aled.

Both British Blue and Limousin-sired calves were reared in the early years but were more dependent on inputs such as concentrates to finish. Whereas the

Hereford and native type of cattle finish more naturally.

Although the British Blues were hitting R grades, the Honest Burgers contract does not want the British Blue type of animal due to the quality of meat.

Aled says: "The Hereford seems to be ticking all the boxes for us, as well as other native breeds."

The Shrimpton's Hill Hereford is the only Hereford being used at Llaeth Bodffynon, which seems to be delivering the right progeny for the system.

"Named sire would bring a small premium through Dunbia but that isn't the focus for us," he adds.

The future

The future is looking bright for native beef breeds as Aled and the team are proving to operate a profitable business.

Personal progression of the team is something that ranks highly on Aled's priority list as full-time employees. Llifon has replicated this beef calf enterprise at his home farm and has a contract set up for a R1 and R2 system. Now on his second season, this season will be half his stock and half of Aled's. Next year he will be in a position to have 100% his own stock.

One of the Key Performance Indicators for Aled's business is work/life balance. Aled emphasised how important it is to take family time and therefore they don't want to grow the business for the sake of growing.

"We have based our labour on a 50-hour working week with every other weekend off and we are flexible as to when Llifon gets time off during a week where he has worked on a weekend as we all need to take time off to follow other interests" he says.

The Evans' are now looking to secure the supply of finished animals across the whole year, and both the spring and autumn calving block herds will be a key player in achieving this target of 500 finished cattle per year, averaging 450kg dead weight/ha across the whole farm.

Gwydion with some of his milking herd



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