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GRASSROOTS

What makes a RABDF Gold Cup Winner?

Pages 2 - 5

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LIVESTOCK IMPROVEMENT

RABDF Gold Cup winners – George Brown and his Bisterne Farms team

600 cows - 200 spring calvers (1st February) and 400 autumn calvers (1st August), calving for 6 weeks.

R1's 150, R2's 150, platform 180 ha, 70 ha red clover & 200 ha river meadows in addition 60 ha maize and 20 ha fodder beet grown on arable ground.

Soils are sandy and free draining with a high water table, flooding occurs in the winter with pasture burning off in the summer.

Housing for 400 cows autumn and spring, stock are out wintered.

Production - 6282 litres / 530-560 kgMS depending on silage quality, autumns producing 30 kgMS more than the springs with an average over the herd of 1.45t concentrate/cow (including rape meal in maize silage).

Grass grown 2020 to 2023 - 9.3t DM to 13.13 t DM depending on summer rainfall, grass growth is erratic and totally dependent on rain.

The 7th of February 2024 was a big day for the Bisterne Farms team, led by George Brown. George, along with Jimmy Dunning, attended DairyTech and were announced Gold Cup Winners. Firstly congratulations to the team!

One key factor contributing to their Gold Cup success, is the team running the farms. The idea of a team being central to success is frequently discussed in the industry, yet few actually manage to fully achieve it. So Sally Pocock (National Pasture Sales Manager) & Piers Badnell (Pasture to Profit Farm Consultant) paid them a visit to learn more about the team, the business, the farming operation, and how they cultivated a strong team ethos that led to winning the Gold Cup.

The business is based around an Andersons Joint Venture Contract Farming Agreement. George supplies the management, staff, machinery and oversees all contractors, while his partner and landowner Hallam Mills supplies all the fixed infrastructure. Hallam owns 400 cows and 150 young stock while George owns all stock over-and-above this. Between them, they decide on the strategic direction of the farm with George and his team implementing it.

As we are all a sum of our experience, aims and goals; our first question was how they came to be together at Bisterne Farms.

George is from a non-farming background. He was brought up in London & Essex and completed a non-agricultural degree at university. He had an interest in animals and being outdoors, which developed into an interest in agriculture through a university dissertation on first-generation farmers. George decided he wanted to move into dairy farming after meeting with Rhys Williams and Matthew Jackson from North Wales.

To gain experience, George spent two years in New Zealand before returning home to manage dairy farms for seven years. During this period, he saved money until he was able to start at Bisterne. George's end goal is to purchase a farm by the age of 40, which is seven years away. Therefore, equity growth plays a significant role in his plans.

Hallam owns Bisterne Estate, which includes Bisterne Farms, arable land and woodland. Hallam had a career away from the estate but returned 25 years ago. At the time of his return there were three dairies on the estate which were then amalgamated into one. Hallam has a strong interest in conservation, which is a key part of the estate ethos. While the dairy business is the commercial core of the estate, it must respect and complement conservation and other interests of the estate.

The driver of the farms' success is a young, dynamic team of six full time equivalents. George works alongside

Jimmy, Adam, Oli and Charlotte full time, with two students, Rowan and Brandon making up the sixth full time equivalent.

Just spending a couple of hours with them discussing this article, it was obvious that they have a strong rapport and take great pride in their collective achievements. Their answers were insightful themselves, especially in the way they answered as a team. No one hogged the limelight, everyone contributed equally, showing mutual respect and echoing each other's sentiments.

What is remarkable about this group is the fresh perspective and enthusiasm they bring to the industry, since most of them do not come from traditional dairy farming backgrounds.

Adam originally wanted to become a gamekeeper, buying and training a working spaniel at 14. After working as a butcher while owning 20 head of beef, he eventually realised he enjoyed the beef rearing more than the butchery, and joined Bisterne in June 2023.

Oli started beating on a local shoot whilst at school, where he met people involved in farming which led to a weekend job on a dairy farm. After a year in New Zealand learning as much as he could about dairy farming, he returned to the UK and started working with George. He joined George at Bisterne two years ago.

Charlotte attended Harper Adams University and George knew her brother, Freddy who contract farms in Wales. Charlotte saw her brother's success so headed down under to Australia and worked on a dairy unit. On her return, she started working with George at Bisterne in October 2023.

Jimmy is local to Bisterne, where his dad owned a dairy farm. After attending Agriculture College, Jimmy travelled to New Zealand to milk cows full time to see if he enjoyed it. Upon his return, he worked with an all-year calving herd and gained experience in tractor and digger driving. In 2018, Jimmy returned to Bisterne full time with his wife.

Rowan and Brandon are at Sparsholt College and work part time at Bisterne.

How does the team take responsibility and drive impressive results?

While each of them have their own specialties and responsibilities, they demonstrate flexibility and mutual support whenever it's needed.

Adam takes charge of calves from birth to 3 months, Oli looks after the herd and their health, Charlotte manages the grazing, and Jimmy handles machinery, maintenance and training. The importance of "mucking in where and when needed" was emphasised.

The group all agreed that Jimmy is great with people, "onboarding" new people into the team really well, which significantly contributes to the strong team dynamic at Bisterne Farms.

Rowan and Brandon said they enjoyed the work and working with good people in a supportive environment. The respect and support of the group is obvious even to outsiders, with a veterinary student who was on farm the day of our visit commenting on their comradery, helpfulness and their freedom to try different things.

After the background information, we asked them their perspective on what makes a successful team?

When asked about the key drivers of their team's success, they emphasised organisation and communication. Highlighting the importance of regular Monday meetings to discuss what is happening and what needs to be done when, how and by whom. They all joked about their enthusiasm for whiteboards and went on to tell us about how they work the milking rotas out and other tasks. Their ownership of this was apparent and virtually all the conversation was from the team with little input from George.

They also use Google sheets for things like the rota for the next 4-5 months, plus a calendar with all the key dates in the year. They work 5.5-day weeks with alternating weekends off. When it came to rotas, one seemed to be extremely important – the Wednesday cake rota, where everyone takes a turn to bring in cake which is scored on acceptability by the team, with a bought cake being heavily scored down.

They spoke about each having a level of responsibility and thus ownership and they were proud of this. It is patently obvious the team has a great culture, which is not merely coincidental but is established, guided and allowed to evolve.

When George was asked about the team, he said the faith in them allows him to delegate and that is crucial as he realises managing 600 cows is too much for one person. His ability to delegate hinges on having an exceptionally good team, and his management approach, in turn, inspires people to collaborate effectively - a virtuous circle of teamwork. The Gold Cup is the proof of the pudding!

The team is a young one, with an average age of 23. George likes to employ young people and train them up with a view that they will eventually move on to other opportunities in their careers. George adds "Dairy farming is quite measurable so instilling good practices to hit KPI's gives a target and direction of travel." Any problems are dealt with by "what can we do differently". People want to be heard so listening is a powerful strategy to solve any problems and move forward.

After understanding the ethos around the team and what drives them to success, we asked George why he entered the business for the Gold Cup?

His answer was "Mark Hoskins, a fellow discussion group member who entered a few years ago, and I found this very inspiring. Added to this, it gave us a greater reason to concentrate on technical detail. Also, we are doing some good stuff, so it is valuable to talk about these things in the wider industry, for example at Open Farm Sunday which we host."

Judging is a big event; how did they approach this?

George and Hallam gave a presentation on the background of the Estate and their joint venture. Then they split into two teams - Hallam, Oli, Charlotte in one team and George, Adam, Jimmy in the other - each team had two judges. They then toured the farm looking at every part of the business, good and not so good. The thinking behind this was to showcase each person in the business and how good they are. The team are used to talking to people as they all attend discussion groups and host visitors at events like Open Farm Sunday.

Each team member led on different aspects, so the judges got a good overview of self-feed, parlour, buildings, and a brief look at the platform - but as it was December there wasn't much to see. They then all met back at the young stock. George was a little concerned about showcasing a 600-cow herd with housing only for 400 in the wettest winter since records began in 1960, but as the system was sound it gave the judges the opportunity to see it tested.

During the judging, some of the conversations revolved around management and business decisions. Oli talked about getting the basics right and George's good management decisions which are supported by the team. Oli was questioned by the judges on why they don't use technology such as collars? The answer was that although technology may be right for some farms, at Bisterne, while it may enable a saving on one member of staff, that would be one less young person gaining an opportunity to come into the industry, so leaving the industry short of a trained person.

The team were all excited about the Gold Cup win. Reacting to the win, Jimmy said:

"It's nice for people to talk to you about it and recognise the effort that goes into the business by the whole team."

The rest of the team expressed their excitement about being recognised for the business's success and the changes experienced in recent years, transitioning from all spring calving to a split block system while leveraging opportunities provided by the Estate. They appreciated the recognition of all the hard work from the full team.

George said Hallam is very happy, as the Estate has been recognised for working well and showcasing an effective Joint Venture model around a successful dairy enterprise.

Plans for the future include immediate construction of a new slurry store and covering the existing one, followed by consolidating and fine-tuning the business for future success. "We need to be boring for a bit." George remarked.

The Bisterne Farms Gold Cup victory is a testament to the power of effective teamwork in agriculture and Piers' final words sum it up nicely "Team from beginning to end!".

Weigh stock – improve accuracy

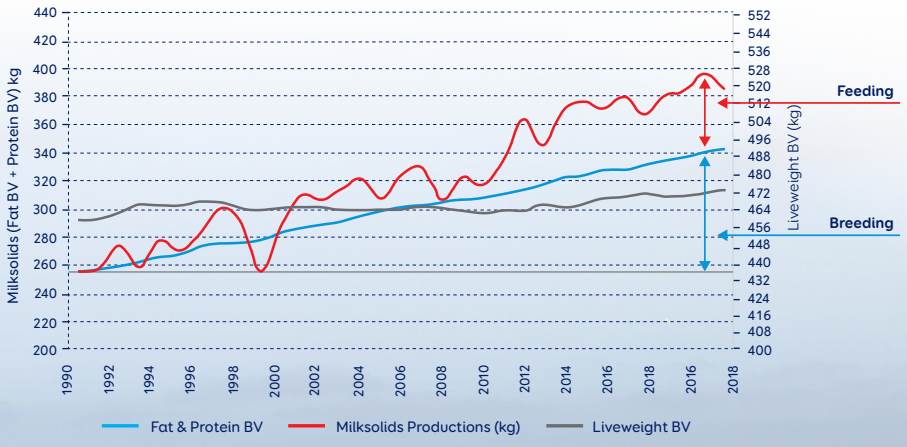
Improving production efficiency is crucial for maximising farming profitability. In fact, it constitutes more than 60% of the breeding worth (BW) value. Milk production and liveweight are the traits used to measure production efficiency, and have a 48% and 15% weighting in BW, respectively[1]. The contribution of liveweight to production efficiency is likewise recognised in the UK indexes, particularly in the SCI. In grazing systems, moderation of cow size enhances production efficiency[2].

When breeding your next generation of calves, and determining the desired weight of future cows, it's crucial to consider the sire's liveweight breeding value (BV). However, it's important to remember that the bull is only one half of the equation. The dam's liveweight contributes the other half of the expected calf liveweight and must be factored into your mating plan. The most effective approach is to ensure accurate measurement of cow liveweight.

Liveweight is not only important for breeding decisions, but also in ranking your cows based on production efficiency. Larger cows require more energy for growth, maintenance, and pregnancy, all of which translates into increased feed requirements[3].

In New Zealand, as well as in the UK and elsewhere, there has been a significant increase in on-farm costs, which is putting more pressure on profit margins than ever before. By 2023, feed costs had escalated to thirty percent of total farm working expenses. This emphasises the importance of ensuring a herd's genetics delivers the most efficient users of grass possible.

Breeding for efficiency (National Herd NZ)
Fat BV + Protein BV compared to the Liveweight BV



Source: LIC, 2023

Since 1990, overall milksolids production in NZ has increased by 50%. It is estimated that 60% of this gain can be attributed to breeding or genetics as indicated by the blue arrows. Incredibly, the LIC breeding scheme has delivered a 34% increase in the milksolids BV for only a 3% increase in liveweight breeding value over that time period.

The cost of maintenance should be a consideration in any breeding program. In practical terms, maintenance cost for 100 kg of liveweight = 298 kg DM/yr*. At 11MJ ME/kg DM feed, 100 kg heavier cows require roughly 2 more bales of feed per cow, per year for maintenance. To summarise the cost, 2 silage bales at £30 per bale is £60 per cow extra just to maintain the 100 kg of liveweight. This is a significant cost for a herd of 400 cows, equating to £24,000.

High production efficiency is not breed specific to Friesian, Friesian x Jersey cross, or Jersey. Finding that sweet spot for your individual herd and farm system is key. Using liveweights and milk recording data will be insightful as to the true elite animals on your farm. There may be highly efficient and profitable cows among your herd that you haven't yet identified or have missed serving to sexed semen in previous years.

I want to weigh the whole herd. When is the best time to weigh?

While weighing can be done at any time when the cows are in milk, the ideal time is after mating. It's recommended to weigh them around 60-90 days into breeding.

How often? Do I need to weigh every cow each year?

The key is to weigh the whole contemporary group at the same time. Fully spring block = once a year. Split block = twice a year. For mature cows, obtaining their liveweights once in their lifetime is typically sufficient, if you are happy the weight is accurate. You can add more weigh events to improve accuracy, if needed. After initially weighing the whole herd, the contemporary group of newly entered cows can be weighed each year, e.g., first calving heifers.

In the catalogue, what does a bull's breeding value of 50 kg mean when selecting a bull?

This indicates that the bull's daughters are expected to have a mature liveweight of 25 kg heavier than the base reference of 500 kg.

How will this impact the LIC herd improvement tool?

Weighing your cows will reorganise animals on the herd improvement tool and provide more accurate data to make decisions.

Without accurate animal weights, breeding decisions on which cow to mate for maximum profitability are often based on the assumption that each cow weighs around 500 kg. Applying a flat 500 kg value results in some animals being underestimated, while others are currently overestimated. In New Zealand herds that have weighed their cows, there can be a difference of +/- 100 kg between recorded ancestry liveweights and actual weights. Most will fluctuate +/- 30 kg from ancestry. In the UK, due to less ancestry feeding into records, this difference may be even more significant as not every animal recorded has a sire record.

Based on data from the herd improvement tool, among herds in the UK where cows average over 440 kgMS, there's an average difference of 215 kg between the top 25% and bottom 25% within a herd. For a 400-cow herd, this represents an opportunity to have 100 cows producing an additional 215 kg of milksolids. That's 21,500 kg more milksolids out of the same number of cows. Multiply this by your farm's milk contract to see the increased revenue. This reiterates the importance of accurately assessing the liveweights of the top percentage of cows you are breeding from.

What are the benefits of obtaining liveweights?

- Facilitates more informed decision-making
- Improved data accuracy
- Reduces feed costs for maintenance
- Produces a more uniform-sized crossbred cow, a highly heritable trait at 60%
- Allows calculation of liveweight to milksolids percentage

For any questions about weighing cows or interpreting herd weight data, please contact your local LIC farm solutions consultant.

References:

1. https://www.dairynz.co.nz/animal/breeding-decisions/breeding-worth/
2. https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/spring-calving-index-sci
3. Facts and Figures for New Zealand Dairy Farmers, 2nd Edition, 2017. DairyNZ

LIC's hall of fame

Induction into LIC's prestigious Hall of Fame is the highest acknowledgement a bull can receive, celebrating the significant value he has delivered to the New Zealand industry.

A bull's influence can be measured by the number of inseminations, daughters milking in dairy herds nationwide, and sons that have sired future generations of dairy cows. They are also typically selected for LIC's Premier Sires™ team, recognised as elite bulls that have graduated through the company's sire proving scheme.

The Hall of Fame is exclusively reserved for animals whose achievements have had, and will continue to have, a profound influence on the profitability of New Zealand's dairy farmers and, consequently, the economy.

It is our pleasure to showcase two outstanding LIC Hall of Fame bulls whose exceptional impact has been felt not only in New Zealand, but across the world.

311013 Okura LT Integrity

From one of New Zealand's most esteemed Jersey studs, Okura Integrity truly showcases the power of pushing the generation interval to accelerate genetic gain, a story vividly demonstrated through his lineage. His sire, 309084 Lynbrook Terrific, born in 2008, was used as a sire of sons in 2009 with one of them being Integrity, who was born in 2010.

Much faith was shown in this young bull when he was acquired by LIC. He was first made commercially available to the country's dairy farmers in 2011. His superiority to sire high quality dairy cows, supported by genomic predictions, made him an obvious choice as a sire of sons. Across the sector no less than 34 have entered sire proving - with the first nine of these being purchased while Integrity was still a genomic sire himself.

This faith in Integrity as a sire of sons has paid off. These first nine sons now have milking daughters and we have witnessed a simply outstanding graduation rate - highlighted by the fact that six of these have made their way into a Premier Sires team to join their dad (Winston, Leopard, Floyd, Joel, Limelight and Samurai).

For Integrity to lead a team and to then go on to sire such an extreme group of sons, is certainly the pinnacle in any bull's career!

What makes his selection to the Hall of Fame even more illustrious is that for most bulls, the honour is received posthumously as the quality of a bull's offspring and its peak influence on the dairy industry is often reached after the bull is no longer with us. To be inducted at the time in 2019 while still being selected to a Premier Sires team was a testament to his longevity.

Currently Integrity has just under 39,000 milk recorded daughters to his credit and even today, Integrity stills ranks on New Zealand's ranking of active sires (RAS) list at place 25 in the Jerseys. This is simply outstanding for a bull born 14 years ago.

Integrity daughter. Dam of another bull sold in the UK - 318009 Tironui Superman ET.

Further daughters can also be found around the globe in most of our major export markets including: ARGENTINA, AUSTRALIA, BRAZIL, CHILE, ECUADOR, IRELAND, SOUTH AFRICA, UK, URUGUAY, USA, with almost 70,000 straws sold in UK and Ireland.

His legacy continues with several sons also being marketed in the UK including Labyrinth, Samurai, Floyd and Limelight.

Integrity's impact on this industry has, and will be, vast. As such there is no doubt that this bull, Okura Integrity, has rightfully earned his place as the 57th member of the LIC Hall of Fame.

About Okura LT Integrity

- Born on Luke and Lyna Beehre's Hukerenui farm in the far north of New Zealand
- Debuted in the Premier Sires team in 2011
- Over 250,000 inseminations
- Just under 39,000 daughters
- 6 sons and 28 grandsons graduated to Premier Sires

511011 Priests Sierra

This bull, cow family and breeder have set a new standard in the industry.

Sierra was bred by the first ever breeder to have multiple Hall of Fame bulls, in addition to this he will be the only bull to date to stem from the same cow family as another Hall of Fame bull.

In 2006 we worked closely with the breeder, Rowan Priest through the GeneRate programme. This reproductive technology saw the very best cows in the industry undergo extensive in vitro production (IVP).

One of the fantastic outcomes resulting from embryo technology is the ability to generate many offspring and by a number of sire combinations. In this case, it was the mating of Ingrams Ramrod that would result in Priests Solaris being born in 2007, who would then go on to be inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2018.

It was this exact same mating that resulted in a full sister to Solaris. His sister was not only a fantastic production cow for the breeder but, as it turned out, she would go on to produce Priests Sierra.

Take such an exceptional cow family as mentioned, combine it with another Hall of Fame legend in the form of Fairmont Mint-Edition, and you can see how something special was going to happen resulting in the birth of Sierra.

Based on early genomic data, Sierra joined the Premier Sires team in 2011 as a yearling bull. Once he had daughters' milk recorded, this confirmed his superiority, and he quickly established his credentials at the top of the team and would go on to become a leading light in subsequent Premier Sires teams.

Over his impressive eight seasons as part of the Premier Sires team and as an individually nominated bull, he has amassed an outstanding lifetime domestic tally of over 800,000 inseminations.

In fact, his eight years in Premier Sires teams has only been equalled by one other - Okura LT Integrity. Today Sierra has over 118,000 milk recorded daughters to his credit in New Zealand, and two of his sons are being marketed in the UK including Premonition and Barnstormer.

And he is also making many friends around the globe. His impact can be seen across 12 other countries, with 120,000 straws having been sold in the UK and Ireland alone making this bull an extremely worthy candidate of obtaining the 59th place in the LIC Hall of Fame.

About Priests Sierra

- Born on Rowan Priests farm in the Waikato region of New Zealand
- Debuted in the Premier Sires team in 2011
- Over 800,000 inseminations
- Over 118,000 daughters
- 8 sons graduated to Premier Sires

Sierra daughter

SANSAW FARM CASE STUDY

Beef Impact success on spring block grazing herd

Traditionally, the impact of non-replacement or surplus calves has not been a key performance indicator (KPI) in pasture-based dairy farming. This is because the key focus of a profitable grazing farm is largely ensuring the right type of cow for the farm system. Particularly in spring block calving systems, this often requires a smaller, Jersey cross animal that can produce it's liveweight in milk solids from a grazed grass diet. However, the surplus calf is now becoming one of the KPI's a farmer must consider based on the cost to rear and maximise the return for these animals.

Therefore, selecting a beef product becomes very important, choosing a proven sire that will produce a valuable calf from a cow meeting all the necessary beef metrics. At the same time this sire needs to be easy calving, short gestation and the calves need to have identifiable markings. With the observed success of sexed semen across the country and the increase of dairy beef calves on the market, buyers have become selective about the quality of the calf. The temptation can be to increase the liveweight of the herd to align with the beef buyer's needs. However, the result of a heavier cow can undermine feed efficiency which is an important KPI of a grazing system. This can also lead to a greater environmental impact ultimately, jeopardising the profitability and sustainability of your system.

If carried out properly, the use of sexed dairy and the right beef semen can create a great model that improves genetic merit, generates saleable dairy beef progeny and helps address some of the costs associated with the surplus calf.

Sansaw Dairies calve down 1500 animals over 11 weeks, at least 50% of these animals will be beef. Finding a consistent buyer for over 700 dairy beef calves born within 11 weeks from 480 kg jersey cross cows has been a challenge that manager, Breiffni Daly has been trying to overcome.

His desire was to increase the marketability and value of their beef crop, without changing their cow type. Heavy development by genetics companies across the world into beef sires suitable for dairy cows has seen a focus on shortening gestation and improving calving ease. This gave Breiffni some confidence in introducing British Blue genetics through Cogent Triple Impact EMI.

50 straws were trialled on animals selected for maturity and slightly larger size, and after seeing positive results, scaled up to 400 the following season, resulting in 160-170 British Blue calves born at the time of our visit, with more on the way.

"I was scared to try it, but I would absolutely recommend it now"

Cogent Triple Impact EMI is a mix of the top EMI British Blue bulls in the Cogent Beef Impact lineup. The sires that go into these mixes are selected for short gestation, low birth weight and ease of calving.

Breiffni told us that he initially had some apprehension using British Blues, but after increasing the usage across the herd, he was pleasantly surprised by the ease of calving they have experienced from the product. At the time of the visit, only one animal had been lightly assisted in calving a British Blue cross calf.

"I can't actually believe how easy calving they are. I've had harder calving Herefords"

This season, the British Blue calves have been easily sold off farm through private sales, a testament to the calf quality, their growth and to his team who devoted their time and attention to the calves. He achieved better prices at the point-of-sale over his usual native breed sires.

At just a few weeks old, the calves displayed desirable characteristics such as well-framed bodies, visible muscle development, and distinctive blue roan colouring. Feedback from the calf rearing team was overwhelmingly positive, emphasising the calves' robustness and ease of management.

"What I like about them is they're well put together but compact at birth, then they just fly, filling out within 2-3 weeks"

Breiffni was sure to use the product in the correct manner. One of the key traits in the British Blue high EMI sires is their shorter gestation, some of the sires on offer have gestation lengths as short as 278 days, but no more than 283 days which brings them more in line with dairy gestation. So using in the first 3-4 weeks will protect days in milk and post calving recovery time.

They will continue to use native breed beef later in the mating period, but for now, using Cogent Triple Impact EMI in the early weeks of mating has worked for them and have been able to go some way toward alleviating the challenges associated with finding markets and a good price for large numbers of beef calves born from cows of grazing genetics.

The successful integration of British Blue genetics to the herd represents a paradigm shift for the farm, enhancing productivity, profitability and animal welfare without deviating from breeding for efficiency.

By prioritising traits like calving ease and growth potential, Cogent Triple Impact EMI paves the way for future advancements in breeding management practices.

The case study highlights the importance of controlled experimentation, adaption and continuous improvement in agriculture, showcasing how a willingness to embrace change in the right places can lead to better outcomes.

Successful calf rearing system at Sansaw Dairies

A focus on basics

Sansaw Dairies has achieved notable success in calf rearing through a steadfast commitment to animal husbandry fundamentals. Under the management of Breiffni Daly since 2019, the dairy's approach prioritises hygiene, colostrum quality and meticulous care from birth, resulting in robust and healthy calves well-prepared for their roles in the herd.

Sansaw calves down 1500 cows and heifers over ten weeks, resulting in approximately 630 heifer replacement calves per year. Around 84% of all calves are born within the first six weeks, peaking at 45-50 calves a day. Managing such high numbers of calves requires a strategic approach with clear protocols to ensure the viability of each calf. To handle this intensive period, Breiffni expands his full-time team of 14 to 24 members, ensuring everyone understands not just the what and how, but also the why behind each procedure.

The importance of early care

The early stages of a heifer's life are crucial, determining her long-term health and productivity. At Sansaw, this preparation begins immediately after birth. Calves are born in a straw yard that is monitored around the clock, day and night. Post birth, calves are swiftly weighed, tagged, navels dipped and fed colostrum. Detailed records are kept, noting the calf's identification, dam number, birth time, weight, breed, sex, and calving difficulties, colostrum quantity and quality, and the feeder's initials.

Colostrum management

Breiffni emphasises the importance of colostrum, ensuring each calf receives 10% of its body weight in Johne's-free colostrum with a minimum Brix reading of 22. This early nutrition is crucial for calves' health and immunity. He says the first few hours are the key for a mob of thriving calves, "I always say to my team here, you're making your colleagues lives easier in the calf yards if you do the basics right in the calving yard", underscoring the importance of proper initial care.

Calf rearing process

Calves are transported daily to the rearing units. Heifers go to Heaston Farm, while beef bull and Johne's calves are taken to Hope Farm. Initially, calves spend 24 hours in 'baby training pens' to ensure they are healthy and suckling well before being moved into larger pens. They are fed 2 litres of milk powder twice a day for the first 5 weeks, with access to water, barley straw, and pellets from day one. This early diet supports rumen development, crucial for their transition to grazing.

At five weeks, milk feeding increases to three litres, twice a day. Weekly weighing begins at six weeks, aiming for a weaning weight of 85-90kg at 8-9 weeks. After weaning, calves spend an additional two weeks indoors, before transitioning to grass. They strip graze throughout the summer, with older R2's following to allow the youngsters the best quality grass available, maintaining residuals and quality for the next round.

Transition and integration

Post-summer, calves are out-wintered on fodder beet and mated at 15 months. They spend their second winter in a cubicle shed to become accustomed to cubicle housing before calving into the herd.

This attention to detail and structured management results in an impressive heifer calving pattern with 64% calving by end of week three and 87% by week six, optimising their chances of re-breeding.

Sansaw Dairies demonstrates that focusing on fundamental animal husbandry practices can significantly enhance calf rearing outcomes. By maintaining high standards of hygiene, nutrition and care, they ensure their heifers are well placed to become productive members of the herd. This methodical approach, tailored to their specific circumstances and infrastructure, offers valuable insight for other dairy operations

UK farmer tour - November 2024

We are excited to announce that this November we will be holding our first farmer tour of New Zealand (NZ).

This will be a trip not to be missed as it includes a fantastic schedule that will provide insights and learnings from different areas including a visit to one of NZ's most well-known academic institutions in the field of agriculture - Massey University.

There are also visits planned to see large scale farming operations, breeder farms and other farming enterprises including Owl Farm in Cambridge.

This farm operation serves as a joint venture between St Peter's School Cambridge and Lincoln University. Owl Farm's purpose is to provide knowledge and understanding of dairy farming to local farmers, students and the wider community.

We will have the privilege of being hosted by our partners, Livestock Improvement Corporation (LIC) who play an integral part in the NZ dairy industry. A visit to their premises is also on the agenda, and it will be great to understand their role as an agri-tech and herd improvement co-operative.

The tour runs from the 25th - 29th during springtime in NZ, so attendees will have the opportunity to experience the environment on farm during one of the most productive periods of the season.

Members from our Cogent team will also accompany the tour group including Craig Watson and Lewis Cook.

The tour runs from the 25th - 29th November 2024

JOIN US ON A STUDY TOUR TRIP TO NEW ZEALAND

We are delighted to offer a weeklong study tour in New Zealand hosted by LIC, starting the 25th November 2024.

The intensive study tour will offer an insight into a range of systems and LIC facilities to learn new things that could help improve your dairy farming business here in the UK.

Starting in the Waikato region, the home of LIC, we'll have numerous farm visits, including Owl Farm in Cambridge. Moving southward on the North Island, our journey ends in the Manawatu, where we'll visit Massey University. Along the way, we'll pause at Maire stud farm and the Whitelock family farm along the Manawatu River, offering a glimpse of new technologies in farming. We'll also receive updates on initiatives such as the research into New Zealand's methane emissions, highlighting the positive impacts of research and development on the industry.

If you would like to know more or to register please contact **lewis.cook@cogentuk.com**.

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