

Working to secure your future

Issue 10 2022

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Challenging future for dairy farmers

AHDB's Marco Winters head of animal genetics takes a look into the future



Q What do you see as the greatest challenges facing dairy farmers in the next 12 to 24 months and do you have a positive belief in where the industry is going?

There are massive concerns on farmers' minds about the price of feed, fertiliser and fuel and additional uncertainty around milk price, environmental land management schemes and other external factors. But most of these are largely outside farmers' control and make it challenging to rein in costs of production.

As head of animal genetics for AHDB, my focus is always on how breeding can help offer solutions and I am confident that modern genetic indexes – such as those which will improve feed efficiency or reduce greenhouse gas emissions – can help in this endeavour.

Breeding will always be a long-term solution – unlike improvements to management which can yield a more instant response – but changes through breeding are cumulative and permanent, building up over generations.

I am very positive about the industry's future, and I am confident that breeding can help address some of the challenges in farming, as having the right cow to work with will help any farming business improve its long-term efficiency.

Q As a breeding company LIC's BW provides an accurate liveweight measurement per bull. You have recently been talking about the Maintenance Index being a key driver for reducing and monitoring liveweight. What's the base cow liveweight on the index currently and how much should it be reduced?

AHDB has published the Maintenance Index since 2014, and it is incorporated in all three of our selection indexes, £SCI [Spring Calving Index], £PLI [Profitable Lifetime Index], and £ACI [Autumn Calving Index].

Maintenance Index is derived from the linear type data which describes the body dimensions for stature, chest width, body depth and angularity. Research has shown these traits can predict liveweight with an accuracy of about 90 percent.

In the UK, we have to use these as proxy traits for the estimation of liveweight as we don't routinely measure cow weight in our industry.

The Maintenance Index is based on the average liveweight of cows born between the years 2014 and 2017, which is roughly equivalent to the average age of mature cows in the UK's milking herds. These base years are used as the average for all genetic traits, and that average is always expressed as zero. In other words, an animal scoring zero for any Predicted Transmitting Ability [PTA], whether

for maintenance or any other trait, is average compared with cows in that age group.

We haven't set a hard target of what liveweight needs to be, but simply put a weighting on Maintenance Index, alongside other genetic traits, in the £PLI/£SCI/£ACI. This highlights that for any given performance – Production, Lifespan Index, Fertility Index and so on – it pays to have a smaller cow, rather than a big cow. With rising feed costs, cutting the cost of maintaining the cow has become even more important.

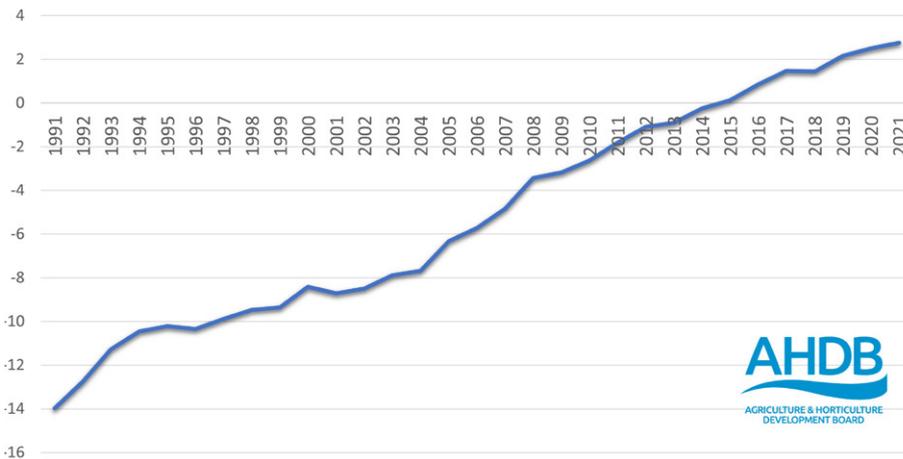
However, what we are seeing in the main dairy breeds is unfortunately an upward trend for Maintenance Index [see graph]. This is why we are actively highlighting the concern about this trend and asking farmers to consider this in their breeding strategies.

This may not apply to some herds milking a smaller stature New Zealand type crossbred, where cow size is under control and any further reduction could compromise the saleability of the bull calf into the beef market. If mature weights stand at around 450kg, it would be advisable not to breed cows any smaller.

Q Why do you see this as an important change and is this going to be a challenge for dairy producers - will they have to re-think their breeding policies?

This is important as we need to manage feed costs more carefully, and it also

Holstein cow Maintenance Index by year of birth



helps our carbon footprint, which we know is under scrutiny and needs to be reduced.

I don't believe this means farmers need to radically rethink their breeding strategies, especially if they are already using £PLI, £SCI or £ACI, all of which are balanced to address these concerns. If they believe their cows are too large and would like to focus on this trait, they can drill down into traits which make up the £PLI/£SCI/£ACI, including the Maintenance Index itself.

The most modern genetic indexes, including the EnviroCow, which was launched last year, will help them further. This index focusses solely on breeding cows for their environmental credentials. Alongside production and longevity, it also includes maintenance feed costs. For the Holstein, it additionally includes a prediction of feed efficiency [the Feed Advantage] within the index. This identifies bulls with the greatest tendency

to transmit good feed conversion on to their daughters, indicating how many kilograms of dry matter intake can be saved in each lactation, for a given amount of milk production.

Q How much liveweight data is captured into the indexes currently and how will this alter?

We base our Maintenance Index on type classification rather than cow weight, and that is based on over 60,000 new classifications each year.

It would be ideal if we had liveweight measurements alongside this information, but there is no national liveweight recording in place.

Q What can farmers do to improve this?

We encourage farmers to take part in official milk recording as this will help them to benchmark their cows and their

herd performance, and also contributes to the genetic evaluations of bulls and cows.

For farmers participating in ICAR-approved milk recording schemes, we would be keen to hear from those who have liveweight data, to see if we can build a picture.

Q What would you deem to be best practice for farmers to manage their liveweight and efficiency on farm?

Consider if your big cows really should be the dam of your future replacements and carefully look at which bulls you are using this mating season. Unless your cows are already small (ie. 450kg), avoid bulls with a high Maintenance Index.

Q How much physical difference will using a high or low Maintenance Index bull actually make?

The difference between a bull with -50kg and +50kg Maintenance Index is equivalent to 100kg liveweight in the progeny. So, choose bulls carefully!

Q Why do you think cows are getting bigger?

Historically, selection for milk production has contributed to the trend towards bigger cows as production was correlated with cow size. However, in the black and white breed, this was far more pronounced when the larger Holstein was used on the smaller British Friesian. There is far less of a correlation between size and production today.

In the present bull population, and with the wealth of different traits for which we calculate PTAs, you can easily select high production bulls that breed smaller daughters.

Furthermore, selecting bulls for Type Merit has also increased cow size, as historically stature was built into the index's formula. Today, some traits associated with size have been removed from the index - or even weighted negatively - but because of correlations between different type traits in the index, using Type Merit will continue to lead to an increase in cow size.

There's also a bit of human nature associated with this trend, with a historic tendency for producers to regard bigger cows as better. But today, most would agree that their biggest cows are their hardest to manage and more prone to injury, and many successful, commercial dairy producers are focussed on reversing this trend.



Marco Winters

Have we got it wrong?

Lead pasture to profit consultant (Sean Chubb) asks an important question here...

“ In September, LIC was fortunate to be able to take part in an open day in France that saw dairy and beef farmers come together with the goal of obtaining greater collaboration and synergy between their industries, along with improving their management decisions on farm.

The day was a huge success, being fully booked with 250 farmers in attendance. These farmers came from all over France with a few attending from other European countries. There was roughly a 50/50 split between dairy and beef farmers, who were either already farming in a pasture-based system or looking to move to this system.

The day was split into two sessions, the morning saw farmers rotate around seven speaking stations offering demonstrations and technical exchanges. LIC and our French distributors were speaking on how beef straws help with herd improvement and what our beef options provide to both the dairy as well as the beef farmer. These being low birth weight and short gestation for the dairy farmer, and



carcass quality and growth rates for the beef farmers.

Following the morning session, all in attendance were provided with a proper French lunch (5 courses served over two hours with local wine), all cooked by renowned chef Gueuleton val de Loire, where the theme of the day continued with the Jersey x Angus meat supplied by one of the speakers and other produce supplied by the host farmer.

After lunch there were an additional eight speakers, consisting of farmers, farm consultants and industry representatives (for example, the largest meat processor in France). The topics up for discussion were focused on dairy beef and how to make the most out of these animals. The largest meat processor was talking about how they see dairy beef being a more marketable product, so they are actively trying to secure supply of dairy beef through providing contracts at time of conception. These contracts provide a guaranteed price for the cattle when they are killed, in the hope that this gives farmers confidence that there would be a margin for them.

The presentation that excited all the dairy farmers in attendance and what led to the title of this article, was from a farmer and a high-end butcher out of Paris (Guillaume and Maison). These two are working together to provide consistent supply of meat to a three-star Michelin restaurant in Paris, the twist is that the meat has to be 100% Jersey bred.

For 30 years the head chef at this restaurant refused to have beef on his menu as he couldn't find a breeder or



outlet that could supply him regularly with beef that met his requirements for flavour and marbling of the meat. Over this period, he looked at all the beef breeds to see if any of them could meet his standards, but none could. This was until he was introduced to Jersey meat three years ago by Maison, the flavour and marbling met his requirements, and the yellow fat offering an additional selling point as it could be differentiated from other breeds of cattle.

It took another 2 years before beef got on the menu; this was to ensure that the quality of meat from cow to cow would be consistent. This was the issue found with the other breeds that were looked at. Angus, well known as a breed for high levels of marbling, had too great a fluctuation from animal to animal to consistently meet his standards.

This fluctuation in marbling of the meat, impacted on the supply of meat from farm to restaurant. What they have found is the fluctuation in the meat from 100% Jersey cattle is very small, meaning little to no disruption through the supply chain. The cattle have to be strictly 100% Jersey, as even a 50% Jersey and 50% Angus will have too much fluctuation in meat quality to meet the standards set for the Michelin chef. This means that farmers who have



crossbred cows or have put any other breeds over Jersey cows will not be able to access this niche market.

Currently they are killing eight head a week but have the goal of lifting this up to 25 head by 2025. To meet the current killing rate, Guillaume is having to buy in Jersey cows not only from France but also sourcing them from the Netherlands. To be able to scale up this enterprise they are needing to secure further supply of Jersey cattle. Currently they have contacts in Ireland and after this open day there are more farmers in France who are wanting to supply cattle for this market. Fortunately, for farmers who have 100% Jersey cows, the butcher will take cows, bulls, steers, and heifers to

meet the order requirements from the restaurant.

While, as far as I am aware, no prices were given during their presentation on how much a farmer would get for their Jersey cattle on a €/Kg basis, it was not lost on the farmers present that Guillaume had moved away from traditional beef farming into buying Jersey cattle to finish and supply Maison to obtain greater profits.

This caused much debate and conversation after the event between farmers around their breeding decisions going forward. With milk contracts in France being similar to that of Arla (litre price with increases in payments for fat and protein above a base value), farmers

were thinking if they could obtain just as much income from milk through milking 100% Jersey cows but obtain a higher value for all of the cattle sold from the farm through supplying Guillaume and Maison, it would be worthwhile moving 100% to Jersey cows.

So, going back to the title, have we got it wrong? Is it time for block calving farmers in the UK and Ireland to start looking for niche markets like this? The large meat processors are set up in essence to feed the world; they want large animals, as this maximises the amount of meat per cutting hours. The problem here is that 1, they are fighting other processors to supply supermarkets and chain restaurants, so they are in a downward pulling market for pricing of their products, and 2, this makes it harder for grazing based progeny to obtain the top grades as they are generally smaller so reduces the amount of meat processed per cutting hour, which gets these animals downgraded.

When you combine the story of grass-fed cattle with distinct marbling and fat colour from cattle that have Jersey in the breeding, there is a very unique story and value proposition. With eight 3 star Michelin restaurants in the UK at the beginning of 2022, it's possible to replicate what is being done in France.

But surely there are other opportunities out there for farmers to increase the value of the cattle they are selling from their farms without having to increase their size or change their breeding to achieve this?

For the grazing-based community to take advantage of the potential niche markets out there, a lot of work is going to need to be undertaken, and some farmers are already making good progress.

Farmers that are working on niche markets are doing it for themselves, not for the betterment of the dairy beef sector or the grazing sector. So, are you happy feeding the masses or do you want to feed the richest 10%?





High stocking rates with impressive mating figures on this farm

"I'm passionate about dairy cows and grass," says farm manager Breiffni Daly, who looks after 1500 cows and 1000 youngstock on the Sansaw Estate at Sheepcotes, Hadnall on the outskirts of Shrewsbury.



Working closely with LIC he's had a great year with impressive mating figures for both cows and heifers

and puts most of his success down to using top New Zealand AI technicians, quality semen and identifying bulling heats efficiently.

"I can still do better," he says. "I always strive to do the best, so while I am happy with these results, I know I can set more stringent goals and reach them."

The Sheepcotes farm is a total of 800ha and carries a high stocking rate of a total of 2500 animals and 40 bulls. There's a 500ha milking platform and a 300ha support block used for rearing the youngstock and for cutting silage.

Almost all the farm is down to grass, with approximately 40ha of fodder beet for winter grazing, up to 25ha on the support block and 15ha on the grazing platform.

Fodder beet is used to graze the dry cows over the winter, and to add to the ration of the 750 cows overwintered each year.

"We invested in a new cubicle building for 800 cows a couple of years back, so the herd is split into two with those



animals housed and the remainder overwintered."

In his first year of running Sansaw Estate, some 1100 heifers were imported from Ireland also UK and wales/Scotland united nations we put together to grow the herd. Since then, apart from one year when a different semen supplier was used (and resulted in bigger animals than Breiffni likes) he has stuck with LIC for all the herd's genetics.



"My ideal cow is one that weighs about 500kgs and has a mixture of New Zealand Friesian Irish Friesian and Jersey," he says. "Because of the layout of the farm they need to walk between 4 and 4.5kms a day from the parlour to the fields and back, so a smaller animal is vital."



His aim is to get liveweight and milk solids production the same, or even better, so with a 500kgs cow is looking for 500kgs milk solids. At the moment his solids' yield is around 440kgs with a protein level of 3.8 and fat of 5. "There's room for improvement here," he admits.

The grazing platform is all paddock-based and with a total of some 160 paddocks, each approximately 6ha each, there's always plenty of fencing to be done. The paddocks are grazed with either 12 or 36 hour breaks depending on covers and while the farm takes two to three big cuts of silage for the clamps each May and June, a further 3000 large round bales are made for the outwintered herd and youngstock.

A brand new 70 bale Waikato rotary was installed in 2012 and with more currently tenanted land coming back in hand in the near future, there are already more plans for future investment that could include a satellite unit on the edge of the existing land area.

"I'd like to get up to 1800 milkers," he says, "but that will only be possible with more land. So we'll wait and see."

Fertility is top of the traits Breiffni seeks when looking at the genetics of his herd. Asked to quantify that, he says he would select 60% for fertility and 40% for yield. Overall yield is around 5000 litres/cow and as he's on an Arla 360 liquid contract, he's currently getting a return of 63p/litre, one of the best prices on offer at the moment.

Other traits include good feet and legs and he plans to look at udder health and teat alignment more in the future.

As the herd is spring calving, breeding starts in the last week of April, the last Monday, with the heifers, and in the first week of May, again on a Monday, with the cows.

This year he had 1400 cows eligible for mating and carried out a total of 2037 inseminations between May 2 and June 12. His three-week submission rate

was 92% against his target of 90%. His non-return rate was 65%, 5% below the industry target of 70% at six weeks.

Aged pregnancy diagnosis is by far the best tool for identifying in-calf and empty cows and the PD scanning results showed 75% of the cows at six weeks scanned in calf, and 87% of the heifers.

"With the cows our average insemination rate was just under 1.5 straws per cow," he says. "While I believe the industry average is nearer 2, I would like to get this below 1.2 in the future. We want to be the best - that's what we're always striving to be."

"We use AI for the first six weeks and then the bulls will go in. I don't concentrate too much on the six-week calving rate, I just want pregnancies."

All cows are scanned in September and usually about 180, a bit over 10%,

will end up being separated out as cull cows and fed up to go to market in the first week of November. "We should do better here and keep these numbers below 10%, I'd rather be closer to 6%."

Of the 387 heifers, 361 were submitted with a total of 384 inseminations. The three-week submission rate was 97%, but always aiming higher, Breiffni says he wants this to increase to 100%.

He buys 1000 straws of sexed semen each year and uses this on all the heifers and 550 on the cows. "I think we've still got quite a lot to learn here and we are improving our results every year. Cow selection is key."

This year he used 5 LIC bulls: Seifion Cardi, Trapeze, Hard Copy, Safari and Professional and used the short gestation Hereford bulls from Shrimptons Hill.

There's a heavy reliance on grass at Sansaw Estates, and to an extent that, and forward buying through a buying group, is helping them to face the ever-increasing costs of fertiliser and feed.

"We do watch the markets and try to buy carefully," he says. "We are looking at reducing fertiliser use, usually around 180kgs/ha across the farm. This year, we made more silage early on and, we went up to 190kgs/ha this year but next year would aim to be around 150kgs/ha."

"We're moving towards this by stitching in clover and I must admit to doing a little experimenting in this area. It didn't work so well last autumn, but we have gone a bit earlier this year and at the moment it looks better."



What does Breiffni like the most about his job?

"As I said at the beginning, I'm passionate about grass and cows. We have a team of 13 here and have great team spirit. There's so much more we can achieve, we are all excited about the future."



The size of the prize

New LIC research reveals a staggering variation in milk production and efficiency between the 'top-quartile' and 'bottom-quartile' of cows.

As part of LIC's commitment to faster genetic gain, its science team recently investigated the full spectrum of MINDA herds in search of the 'best cows', which included whether a clear correlation existed between breeding worth (BW) and production efficiency.

The research re-affirmed high BW cows were more efficient milk producers than low BW cows, and that long-term users of LIC genetics continued to achieve faster rates of genetic gain than other farmers.

Close to 1 million cows, from current MINDA and Herd Tested herds aged between 4 -8 years-old, were grouped by breed and split into quartiles based on BW rank: The average (per-cow) milk production, liveweight, and fertility breeding value (BV) from each quartile was calculated.

Results showed a staggering variation in milk production and efficiency between the 'top-quartile' and 'bottom-quartile' of the cows, at an average of 65kg of milksolids, per cow, per season.

The top quartile, high-BW, cows also had a lower liveweight BV, and a better fertility BV, compared to their lower BW herd mates.

David Chin, LIC chief executive said the data showed the progress farmers have made since turning their focus to improving cow quality on their farms.

And there was plenty of opportunity that was still there for the taking, Chin said.

"This data shows that high-producing, climate-friendly cows aren't just a hope for the future. They exist in the national herd today.

"If we're going to meet our sector's goals, we must sharpen our focus on only breeding these highly efficient cows that sit at the top, and not create replacements that sit at the bottom. We've got the tools and the data to show further improvements in production efficiency are well within reach for every dairy farmer – and some herds are already doing it."

Long-term users of LIC genetics are breeding these better cows, faster

The research also took a closer look at the rates of genetic gain that long-term users of LIC genetics were achieving.

To calculate the 'rate of genetic gain', the difference in gBW between one year of replacements versus the following year was compared.

Between 2017 - 2021, LIC 'long-term users' (herds with more than 80% progeny sired by an LIC bull over the last 10 years), had achieved almost double the rate of genetic gain per year compared to herds with less than 20% progeny sired by an LIC bull (19 gBW vs. 10 gBW).

Chin said the findings confirmed the kind of gains that could be made with a strong focus on herd improvement and consistent use of high-BW bull teams.

"It's really encouraging to see that farmers that have predominantly been using LIC bulls are achieving markedly higher rates of genetic gain in their herds. The bigger jumps in BW between each year of replacements, the faster you're moving towards milking more emissions efficient cows."

Alongside farmers' herd management decisions, genomics has been the key contributor to the increased rate of genetic gain, Chin said.

"It's no coincidence that the increased utilisation of genomics in our breeding programme and increased farmer



The cow quartile data

Close to 1 million cows, from current MINDA and Herd Tested herds aged between 4 -8 years-old, for the 2020/21 season, were grouped by breed and split into quartiles based on BW rank: The average (per-cow) milk production, liveweight, and fertility breeding value (BV) from each quartile was calculated. Results showed a staggering variation in milk production and efficiency between the 'top-quartile' and 'bottom-quartile' of the cows.

Holstein Friesian					
BW Quartile	Animal Count	Average gBW	Average KGMS	Average LWGT gBV	Average FERT gBV
Q1	51,375	163	518	37	0.8
Q2	51,375	102	486	37	-0.2
Q3	51,375	60	467	37	-1
Q4	51,375	-0.8	445	38.6	-2.1

Jersey					
BW Quartile	Animal Count	Average gBW	Average KGMS	Average LWGT gBV	Average FERT gBV
Q1	18,988	252	431	-50A	2.9
Q2	18,988	202	404	-50.9	2.2
Q3	18,988	166	387	-51.2	1.5
Q4	18,988	87	382	-51.7	0.1

KiwiCross					
BW Quartile	Animal Count	Average gBW	Average KGMS	Average LWGT gBV	Average FERT gBV
Q1	146,050	208	505	-4.1	1.3
Q2	146,050	152	478	0.7	0.5
Q3	146,050	110	464	5.2	-0.2
Q4	146,048	47	442	10.7	-1.2

Weighted Averages across the three breeds					
BW Quartile	Animal Count	Average gBW	Average KGMS	Average LWGT gBV	Average FERT gBV
Q1	216,413	201	502	2	1
Q2	216,413	145	473	5	0
Q3	216,413	103	458	8	0
Q4	216,411	39	437	12	-1

Source: LIC, 2022

uptake for young, genomically selected sires has gone hand in hand with higher rates of genetic gain in farmers' herds.

"By drawing on information from a bull's DNA, we're able to more-accurately identify high genetic merit sires at a young age and make these elite genetics available to farmers to breed from as early as possible."

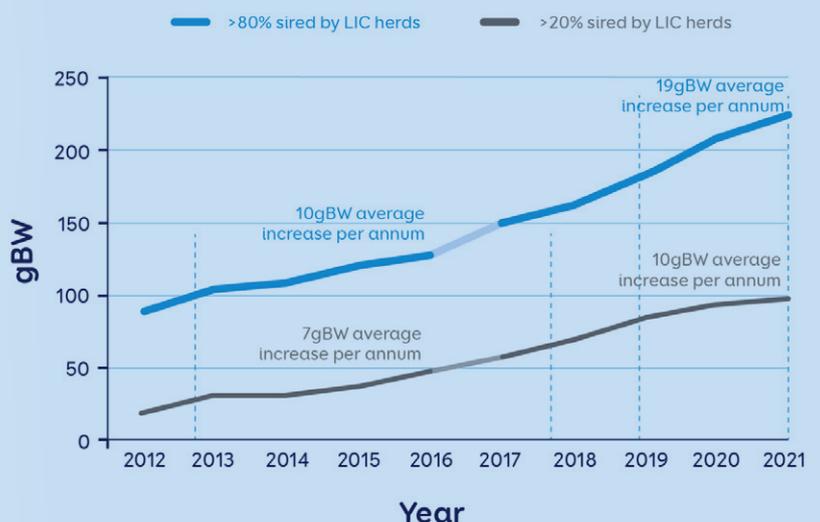
If the industry's average rate of genetic gain increased to match herds that are long-term users of LIC genetics, it would go a long way to minimise any decline in national milk production with a declining cow population.

"There are a number of factors influencing a farm's productivity and environmental efficiency, but the contribution made by genetic gain cannot be underestimated," Chin said.

"Our data shows there are already herds in New Zealand that are achieving substantial gains in genetic merit which are delivering noticeable value to these farms in the form of increased production efficiency and improved environmental efficiency.

"The genetics and technology to help farmers breed better cows, faster is here now and we're proud of the role we play in helping farmers achieve just that."

Rates of Genetic Gain



The genetic gain data

- To calculate the 'rate of genetic gain', the difference in genomic Breeding Worth between one year of replacements versus the following year was compared.
- Average rate of genetic gain for herds with more than 80% of their progeny sired by LIC bulls over the last 10 years (2,900 herds) 2012-2016 - 10 gBW per annum 2017-2021 - 19 gBW per annum
- Average rate of genetic gain for herds with less than 20% of their progeny sired by LIC bulls over the last 10 years (474 herds) 2012-2016 - 7 gBW per annum 2017-2021 - 10 gBW per annum



LIC working with farmers on the Isle of Man

It was with great delight in early August that I was finally able to set sail to the Isle of Man to meet my farmers in person. I started my role with LIC in the height of lockdown which presented its own challenges, but now that lockdown is behind us, getting to the island was a priority.

“ The island is 572 square kilometres of rolling green pastures and upland with spectacular rugged coastlines. I struck gold with the weather and looking across the Irish sea from the island’s capital Douglas, Barrow-in-Furness was in high definition. From the north coast of the Island, I could see the south coast of Scotland, Ireland then came into view from the western coast. Looking from the south, Anglesey was also visible.

The Island is well known for the TT Motorbike races which, to the delight of the Island and the rest of the world, were held again this year. I travelled the TT track and can understand the appeal to motorbike riders and cyclists alike. The island has six main routes, intermediate roads branch off these and twist their way through the farmland to create a rabbit warren of roads that criss-cross the island.

The island boasts a thriving agricultural community of 381 farms covering over 100,000 acres of farmland, sheltered by 5000 km of hedgerows and employing nearly 800 fulltime workers. Nearly 8000 acres grows cereals, pulses and vegetables. There are 13,500 free-range

hens, 204 goats, 127,000 sheep and over 28,000 head of cattle. All these diverse farms make a £75,000,000 agri-food contribution to the Manx economy.

Some 15% of the cattle population is in milking dairy herds across 30 dairy farms, most of which supply the Isle of Man Creamery on a split block profile. The creamery promotes high animal welfare standards, and all dairy cows must be at grass for 200 days of the year and their farmers must enrol in the Red Tractor scheme. The Creamery collects 26 million litres of milk per annum, six and a half of which supply the 86,000 people on the island with fresh milk. They operate a door-step service for milk, cream, butter, buttermilk and cheese. The Creamery has a successful cheese market with products sold locally and exported internationally to countries such as the US and United Arab Emirates.



I was lucky enough to spend some time with a representative from the creamery and they told me that they collect quality milk from their suppliers but are always looking for more milk solids to feed their growing dairy product market.

Farming on the island is not without challenges and additional costs. Feed costs per tonne shipped to the island can cost upwards of £50.00 more per tonne than on the mainland and finding a market for dairy bull calves and dairy beef calves can be a test for some.





Dairy farmers must diversify and employ practices on farm such as using sexed semen for replacements. Some farmers are trialling the use of Wagyu to provide a value enhanced beef product. Most dairy farmers grow some of their own crops and retain dairy bull calves and dairy beef calves themselves to supply Isle of Man meats with high quality beef.

Isle of Man Meats has been in operation since 1934 and is supplied by nearly all the island's sheep, beef and dairy farmers. This can create further challenges when the processors are at full capacity and cannot take stock. Farmers must then consider shipping them to the mainland for sales. This is at vast cost, so it's imperative that dairy farmers on the island retain their animals in the herd for as long as possible.

Increasing fertility, reducing empty rates and carry overs, and reducing reliance on concentrates are very

important to maintain a profitable system. Reducing involuntary culling opens the door to voluntary culling of poorer performing animals, leaving behind higher genetic merit animals that are efficient converters of grass to milk solids. Implementing pre-mating practices to improve fertility and utilizing milk recording data to ensure the right animals are being bred for replacements are big steps toward achieving this. Exploiting the benefits of hybrid vigour by cross breeding is also something worth considering, this can boost milk solids and provide a hardy, efficient cow that will get its head down and graze, even in the shoulders of the season where inclement weather can stifle grazing appetite. Breeding a smaller animal that requires less energy intake to survive can reduce the amount of concentrate fed, which leads to direct cost saving on less imported feed.

One of LIC's most important values is to enable farmers to create profitable systems by offering solutions to these and many more challenges that can hamper productivity and profitability. I'm proud to be part of the solutions provided to farmers that have experienced these same situations and have supported our farmers in reaching their goals to create profitable, efficient systems.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time on the beautiful Isle of Man. The people are friendly and welcoming and I'm looking forward to heading over again soon. I had a busy few days and a delightful time at the Royal Manx Agricultural show. If I missed calling in to you, please get in touch as I would love to reach out to all dairy farmers on the island and provide what assistance I can in helping you achieve your business goals.



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Off-farm Day with LIC and Partners...

Claire Hunter runs through the activity for the day.

On October 4 LIC held the first in a series of Off-Farm days in conjunction with its partners Gallagher, Herdlync and NMR at Southdyke Farm, Cumbria. The subject for the day was how the Tweedies have effectively improved their business and are on the way to achieving their farm targets by utilising data recorded on farm.

The Tweedies are firm believers in the importance of understanding the effects liveweight has on profit. This created a great discussion about the value of weighing cows and using LIC's Herd Improvement Tool.

We held a competition to estimate the liveweight and production figures for two of Southdyke's cows. The liveweight range for the estimations varied by as much as 208Kgs for the Friesian animal and as much as 248Kgs for the Jersey animal, which highlighted just how difficult it is to estimate the liveweight of an animal simply by looking at it.

Gallagher weighed the animals in question in a demo of their wireless

weigh scales and Cumbrian farmer Keith Forster came the closest for both cows (600Kgs and 485Kgs respectively) and won a goodie hamper from local business Cranstons.

The day was attended by 18 people from several businesses, alongside Mollie from Herdlync who told us about the advantages the new-look Herdlync (formerly Farm Wizard) could have in cow side farm management. The North of England team from NMR, Alison and Helen, talked us through the advantages of milk recording and what NMR can offer farmers to help to manage their herd health.

Many thanks to James, Margaret, Gordon and their team for hosting us, these events would not be possible without the generosity of farmers like the Tweedies and the hard work their team put in to get ready for the day.



Keep an eye on our Facebook page for details of future open days.



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