



# The White Stuff

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COWS IN THE BATH  
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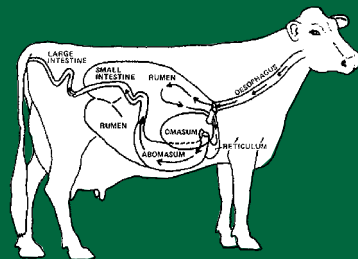
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# Viewpoint

Arthur Fearnall

## Up down under

Seeing at first hand how dairy farming operates in other countries is instructive and concentrates your mind on ways of improving matters in the UK.

Through a Nuffield Scholarship I was in Denmark last autumn and recently returned from a tour down under. The Danes, like many UK farmers, employ a high input, high output system, which the country's climate largely dictates, and they go about the business in a very professional way.

A world away, New Zealand is another country of skilled dairy farmers where in many areas there is the opportunity to keep cows at grass all year round. It means very low inputs, much less investment in farm buildings and a relaxed approach. This is not just a matter of climate. With only about five per cent of total output for the liquid market, the New Zealanders block calve and the cows are dry for two months a year. Kiwi herds, normally crossbreeds, are in good health.

The Aussies are equally laid back. In good years they also have plenty of grass through irrigation or rainfall – although terrible droughts can occur – and their farming system falls somewhere in the middle.

Comparing these countries with the UK, I am concerned that our systems are leaning too far towards high input, high output. There is certainly a price to pay in the stress to operatives and deteriorating herd health. The country has more mastitis, more lameness and more fertility problems and there is little sign of the situation improving. The number of advertisements for animal health products and homeopathic solutions show the extent of the problem. It brings extra cost into every litre of milk.

Many of the people coming down the farm drive are promoting the high input route. While we haven't taken it on our farm, the generality of producers seems to accept that this is the way to go.

We should question this approach and perhaps look to occupy the middle ground between the two systems, which some UK producers have achieved. A simple, profitable system that still delivers the required level milk supply should be our aim and I believe that with time it is attainable.

Some problems for dairy farming are experienced worldwide, such as bringing new blood into the industry. I will be more than delighted if any of my children follow in my footsteps but these days many young people are looking elsewhere for a less demanding way of earning a living and I certainly won't try to force them into dairy farming.

New Zealand is going to great lengths to replenish its farming industry with new entrants. From producers taking calves into schools to the current successful programme aimed at recruiting career-change people, they demonstrate the importance of agriculture, where the great outdoors and decent wages are attractive for many.

In Australia, there is much talk about the coming generation, known as Generation Y. They will be a questioning and more adventurous bunch who won't go into something just because their parents and grandparents did it before them. So dairy farming will have to be seen as a good proposition.

Generation Y will have the advantage of having grown up with the red tape and form-filling that plagues business these days and this familiarity seems sure to be essential in the dairy farming of the future.

Yes, our industry is changing and I'm next off to the Irish Republic to see how they fare in a similar climate to my part of England.



Arthur Fearnall is an AFMP producer director who farms at Pulford, Cheshire

# Linking the chain

**The importance of milk supply meeting demand was one of the key points Arla chief executive Tim Smith raised when he addressed the RABDF conference in Cheltenham.**

Giving his perspective on the milk market, Tim said that for buyers it was fundamental to optimise processing efficiency and match processing capacity to demand.

Buyers, therefore, needed to communicate directly and clearly with supplying farmers and improve producers' knowledge of a market in which Arla's aim is to position sales in premium non-commodity high return areas.

"By working together we can improve the alignment between milk supply and demand," he said. "We will encourage and support successful producers and it will be in their interest and ours that we continue to provide customers with supply chain solutions."

Tim gave usage figures for the 12.2 billion litres of milk going into the entire British market each year: cheese (29.4%), retailer milk (23.7%), milk powder (17.5%),

**'By working together we can improve the alignment between milk supply and demand'**

middleground (16.6%), yogurts and desserts (6.9%) and doorstep (5.9%).

Arla's annual purchase of 2.2 billion litres of milk equates to 17 per cent of total UK production, he said.

The company's annual sales, worth £1.4bn, derived from butter, spreads and cheese (30%), fresh milk and cream to supermarkets and middleground (30%), doorstep sales (25%), with the balance from commodities.

But new factors were affecting the market, including global trade and CAP reform and milk brokers becoming processors. In addition, there have been other new developments in channel switching, competition, regulatory framework, and capacity shifting closer to demand.

Tim said that processors can respond by being innovative and bringing benefits of scale and clarity of purpose.

And also by creating a more transparent, relevant and predictable pricing framework based on sales and returns from all market sectors. This is not just for milk sales, but also branded, added value milk and cream, butter, export cream and skimmed milk powder.

Expanding on the need to improve the alignment between milk supply and demand, Tim said that processors should minimise wasteful supply and purchases.

"We value the quality and composition of the raw material we need for these products. And we value the delivery of the volume to more precisely match demand."

## Big in the beef business



**Finding a market for dairy bull calves has been a headache for many farmers over the past decade as the trade collapsed through BSE and the export ban.**

But the Partnership joined forces with Southern Counties Fresh Foods (SCFF) in 1999 to develop a system which would guarantee an outlet plus a price for these unwanted animals.

Today Blade Farming, which operates the business and is sister company to SCFF, is the biggest beef farming enterprise in the UK, as it purchased the calf marketing interest of Mole Valley Farmers in the West Country just over a year ago.

This means it now has eight calf rearing units where the calves are grown on a consistent production system for 12 weeks, weighing 110kg before going on to one of the 60 finishing units.

According to managing director Richard Phelps, the scheme promises a guaranteed outlet for calves at a set price. Last year 10,500 calves went through the system, next year it will be nearer 15,000.

"Because of our size we are now negotiating competitive feed costs to our contract farmers," says Richard, who is constantly looking for ways of increasing the margin at farm level for the dairy calves.

Selling into Somerfield, the beef is lean and tender and is going down well with consumers.

AFMP farmers based in the south west who are interested in the scheme should ring Blade Farming on 01458 254575.

## IN BRIEF...

### Butterfat drop

■ To counter the seasonal dip in butterfat levels immediately after turnout, producers are being advised to concentrate on improving the feed fat profile of the milking cow ration and effective rumen buffering.

Butterfat percentage falls by around 0.3 on average after turnout but the drop can be even more significant on some farms, says ruminant nutritionist Dr Alan Reeve from C&H Nutrition.

### Devon deal

■ Robert Wiseman Dairies has acquired the Definitely Devon fresh milk business from joint owners Torridge Vale and the Co-operative Group.

The company supplies around 20 million litres a year from its dairy at Torrington, Devon.

## Triggering early maize crop

A new ultra early forage maize variety called Revolver will offer farmers, in both favourable and less favourable areas, new options when growing the crop, says British Seed Houses.

The company says trials of the variety have consistently produced a dry matter yield of just over 15 tonnes per hectare and much

higher starch yields.

Demand for varieties like Revolver is coming from the north of England and Scotland, but also from mainstream maize areas, where cross compliance regulations are encouraging drilling for early crops.

In these circumstances, maize silage can become available for feeding earlier in the autumn.



‘Eating straw on its own is like eating cream crackers’

# Sticking with the syrup

Dry cow management is the key focus for improving herd fertility and yield, according to one Yorkshire farmer.

Pushing milk yields from 7,500 to 8,000 litres means some fine-tuning to the total herd management programme for AFMP member Alan Hill, who milks 165 Holstein cows with his two sons, Darren and Jason, at Helmersdale Farm, Crosby, near Northallerton.

Focusing on the dry cows, which are now housed throughout their eight-week period, is already showing some good results and should filter through to the whole herd.

## Splitting the group

“We seem to be having fewer cases of milk fever and fewer incidences of retained cleansing,” says Alan, who is now splitting the dry cow group into two for feeding purposes.

“It’s a first for us to treat dry cows in this way,” he says, convinced that all the cows are looking healthier. “We are feeding mainly chopped straw to the first group along with a new product, Spey Syrup, from the Scottish distillery industry.

“Spey Syrup holds the feed together and stops it blowing

away, since the farm is quite exposed to the winds from the Pennines. Because of the sweetness of the syrup it is very appealing to the animals, being highly palatable, which helps maintain intakes and keeps the rumen large.

“Eating straw on its own is like eating cream crackers,” adds Alan who likens the syrup, fed at 2kg a day per cow, to milk chocolate in its deliciousness, encouraging the cows to eat more.

“It’s half the price of the molasses we previously used and much runnier in consistency, making it more practical to use. It has also improved the consistency of the ration and boosted intakes.”

Following advice from KW Alternative Feeds nutritionist, Steve Allen, he has installed a second liquid feed container, allowing the farm to take in 29-tonne artics loads of liquid, which makes the price very competitive at around

£15 a tonne. Alan is already convinced that the new investment is already helping to boost overall performance.

When the dry cows are four weeks away from calving they go into a transition group. Here they are fed a flat ration consisting of bread, rape and soya mix, sugar beet and beans – straw being gradually replaced by maize and grass silage grown on the farm.

Extra minerals are also introduced. This ration is fed

until they calve, at which point they join the high-yielders for the first 120 days after calving. Cows giving over 30 litres a day are fed a top-up ration in the parlour.

Maintaining quality is also an important consideration for Alan, who is aiming to keep cows numbers roughly the same, but push milk yield up to 9,000 litres.

## Year-round supply

“We are able to provide a relatively consistent year-round supply of 3,000 to 3,800 litres per day. So far, milk quality has remained at 4.1 per cent butterfat and 3.4 per cent protein, with somatic cell counts running at 200,000.”

The future at Helmersdale Farm will be about making constant improvements, not only in yield, but also in fertility, which is checked fortnightly by the vet and will be a crucial part of maintaining a healthy and profitable business.

“It’s all about keeping your eye on the ball at all times,” Alan says. “That means paying attention to detail at all stages of a cow’s life.”



Keeping dry: Alan Hill, right, with sons Darren and Jason

# Huge jump for organic sales

**The demand for organic milk has continued its upward spiral, the market increasing 48 per cent in the last year alone.**

Organic milk sales had been static at about one per cent of total UK fresh milk sales prior to a media-led surge in demand and now stand at about three per cent.

According to a major report from the organic milk cooperative OMSCo in January, total UK production is now more than 300 million litres a year, up from seven million litres 10 years ago.

Arla Foods is taking an ever-increasing share. The company now has 56 per cent of total UK organic fresh milk sales, which is about six per cent of its total fresh milk throughput.

It is an important business opportunity, but one that has to be carefully managed to avoid the boom-bust scenario of the past.

Peter Walker, director of milk buying, says that the company is working with its direct suppliers and OMSCo to gradually increase

the number of organic milk producers in the supply chain.

"We will be looking for new producers – either those already converted, in the last stages of conversion or even those who have reverted to non-organic production and could fast-track their way back to organic status," says Peter.

"However, the challenge now is to grow the market prudently. When the organic milk bubble burst the last time it was because of unmanaged growth, which took no account of the market. This time we must be more aware, more responsive to market demand.

"By working closely with retailers we can be sure that growth is managed and sustainable."

Adrian Lambourne, an AFMP producer director in Oxfordshire, says that going organic now makes perfect sense through being demand-led.

Adrian, who is looking forward to starting organic supplies to Arla on April 24, believes there are now plenty of opportunities for producers who wish to enter the



**Join the club: unusual advertising at Cerne Abbas in Dorset during the previous organic boom**

organic market.

Following a six-month re-conversion programme, the farm's 110 Holstein Friesians are yielding about 8,000 litres on a diet that includes concentrates and

home-grown wheat and beans.

"Production levels are similar to what we were getting before conversion," said Adrian. "I'm expecting to maintain this as long as we continue to get the forage into the cows.

"It is important to do all the little things right. Attention to detail on mastitis has been very important. We've been meticulous in cow cleanliness and hygiene."

In the longer term, Adrian plans to increase the Friesian blood in the herd because they have better feet, udders and longevity.

## Structured approach pays off

The average dairy unit is losing milk sales worth £7,000 per 100 cows as a result of extended calving intervals, according to vet Paddy Gordon.

A significant proportion of these losses could be clawed back with minimal financial investment by taking a more structured approach to fertility management, he believes.

After leading AFMP fertility workshops under the Milk Development Council's £1,000 for 1,000 cows scheme, Paddy reveals that there is a considerable range in performance among the 50 members who have taken part so far.

"The main drain on finances is calving intervals and we have calculated that every day over the optimal 373 days results in a loss of yield of 10 litres per cow.

"While the very best herds are achieving calving intervals of 360 days the worst are on 460."

How to deal with repeat breeders tops the list of concerns. While the most common approach is to



**Calving concern: Paddy Gordon**

increase the voluntary waiting period, Paddy suggests it is more effective to shorten the waiting period from 50 to 60 days and to have all non-bullers in that heat cycle checked at the next routine vet visit.

The potential value of shortening calving intervals was shown at a '1,000 cows' seminar which Paddy held on an AFMP member's Derbyshire farm.

Paul Gidlow, of Springwood

Farm, Staunton Harald, heard that his extended interval equated to a potential £20,000 a year loss in milk sales from his 250-strong herd.

"Like the majority of producers we have our share of repeat breeders but felt that our conception rate of 44 per cent and calving interval of 420 days was on a par with most herds on a similar system," Paul said.

Since the workshop, he has made a number of improvements including a new race to make it faster and easier to handle calves, greater use of records to keep track of cows that have had calving problems and a new permanent footbath.

MDC research has shown that cows with digital dermatitis problems are 40 per cent less likely to get into calf.

"It is too early to see any major improvements in reproductive performance, but the workshop provided plenty of practical and cost-effective pointers on improving our calving interval," Paul added.

## 38 STEPS TO INNOVATION

■ The Milk Development Council has mapped out 38 steps towards a more innovative dairy industry.

Better collaboration between farmers, processors and retailers, and improved understanding of consumers is essential, says the report, produced in association with the Dairy Supply Chain Forum.

The main focus is on fundamental long-term projects including the development of industry partnerships, better market knowledge, creating a positive attitude to dairy, and the cutting of bureaucracy.

IN BRIEF...

Raising the benchmark

■ Dairy UK is to implement an industry excellence benchmarking scheme to improve efficiency in dairy processing plants across England.

“There are a number of processors who want to be considered for the scheme,” said Peter Dawson, Dairy UK policy director.

The three-year programme, to be funded through a £460,000 Defra grant, will encourage companies to benchmark their performance against London Business School models of world-class excellence and to participate in business improvement.

Jim Begg, Dairy UK director general, said: “We recognise the need to maintain an aggressive drive in industry efficiency in order to retain the UK dairy industry’s position in what is an increasingly global and therefore highly competitive marketplace.

“The grant will be administered under Defra’s Agricultural Development Scheme.”

Supporting the MDC

■ The Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers has welcomed plans to retain the Milk Development Council.

This follows changes to levy bodies initiated by the Government commissioned independent Rosemary Radcliffe Review.

However it believes vertical integration of the MDC and other key organisations within the dairy sector would introduce even greater advantages to the industry in terms of cutting costs and improving efficiencies.

“We are pleased that the Radcliffe Review recommends continuation of dairy farmers’ statutory levy to fund the MDC and its functions designed to improve farm business performance,” said Tim Brigstocke, chairman of the RABDF.

“We believe that the MDC is doing a good job and has made commendable progress. It is providing farmers with value for money, and it would be crazy to disrupt its current structure.”



Helping you: Lisa, Leanne and Vicky on the line

The heart of it all

Arla’s new milk buying office is open for business in Leeds after transferring from Leicester.

The move, completed on March 21, sees milk buying return to the heart of the company’s operations.

Overall responsibility belongs to Peter Walker, Arla’s director of milk buying, while Jeff Hydari, Arla’s finance and strategic planning manager, will head the new team. Most of them have been training in Leicester since late February.

Bridging the gap between the old and new departments is Ellie

Queenan, process manager at Leicester, who is staying on until the end of July.

Ellie is not being replaced directly. Her current role will be managed by a number of others in

the new team.

Jeff Hydari said: “I would like to thank the old team for their contribution to the smooth running of the Partnership over the last few years.”

Useful contacts

- **Vicky Porteus is the new AFMP coordinator and will deal with general partnership enquiries**  
Tel: 0113 382 7125
- **Lisa Nolan is the team’s new farmer payments coordinator and will deal with quality and payment enquiries**  
Tel: 0113 382 7139
- **Leanne Scott is the new milk buying administration manager**  
Tel: 0113 382 7231

Case of the bad vibrations

Somatic cell counts in David Garrett’s herd are down, butterfat is up, antibiotic use has declined sharply and his animals are calmer than they have ever been.

What has this Partnership farmer from Guys Marsh, Shaftesbury, Dorset, been doing to his cows?

He’s still feeding them the same mix of grass, silage and maize, it’s still the same Friesian bulling of 60 cows for the 50 replacement calves, it’s still the same 97 acres his grandfather bought.

No, it’s not Beethoven in the milking parlour. David has just removed the effects of geopathic stress lines on Lydford’s Farm.

“We knew that there was something not quite right, so we thought that we’d give it a go,” he said. He brought in Nigel and Ken

Clay, son and father agents with Dulwich Health, a geopathic stress specialist.

According to Ken, geopathic stress lines are caused by narrow paths of running water, about 200 to 300ft below the ground. “They cause an electromagnetic field which disturbs the earth’s natural vibrations. The distorted vibrations become abnormally high and harmful to living organisms.”

The process of removing their adverse effects at Lydford’s Farm started with dowsing to find the water, followed by the installation of a magnetic neutraliser box in an electricity supply.

The process, David found, was relatively simple and cost-effective.

“They discovered a line running from the pump house to the farmhouse. We put the neutralising

box in the pump house, which is only a few yards from the housed cows.

“The first box went in during the autumn of 2004, followed by two others, one in the dairy and one in the farmhouse, and we saw the effects almost straightaway.

“The cows used to be nervous, but there’s far less reaction to strangers now. Cell counts, which used to peak at about 400,000 to 500,000 for long periods, are now down to a month-long peak of about 300,000. At their lowest, the counts are now 136,000.

“And butterfat, always low here, has jumped from 3.50 three years ago to 4.0.”

David added: “I know there’s a lot of scepticism about something like this, and it could be coincidence, but I cannot attribute the changes to anything else at all.”



# Question: Will the new generation become dairy farmers

THE WHITE STUFF REPORTS ON A FARM WHERE THEY'RE UP FOR IT AND ONE WHERE THEY'RE NOT...

**With their farmhouse overlooking a huge area of the Midlands, it is no surprise that Tom and Catherine White take the long-term view of dairy farming.**

Sons William and Robert, both in their 20s, are now well established in the business, and milk production looks like continuing to be the main focus on their acreage of upland Derbyshire for the coming years.

Situated nearly a thousand feet up, Coneygreave Farm is the highest of all the dairy units spread around the hamlet of Shottle – an area of sloping fields, switchback lanes and drystone walls on the edge of the Peak District tourist trail.

Demonstrating how they have developed the business from scratch, Tom White produces an aerial view taken from when

they moved in 28 years ago. It shows the farmhouse and a few small outbuildings, compared with today's impressive range, which includes four cowsheds, feed and machinery stores and the new milking parlour.

#### **Million litres a year**

Then there were no milk cows; now they have 150 pedigree Holstein Friesians producing more than a million litres a year for Arla's dairies at either Ashby or Nottingham, and plan to increase numbers when they judge the time is right.

When *The White Stuff* called, Tom and Catherine said that like other producers they were feeling the chill from problems facing the dairy industry.

"They are unlikely to go away quickly," admits Catherine. "We expect that the current situation could last for a couple of years. But we are lucky with what we have here and feel sure there will be a future for us when things settle down again."

A stable milk price would be helpful in bridging the gap, believes Tom. "It's a struggle for everyone in the industry at the moment. We have invested a lot of money in the business and need to know about our income and costs as far ahead as possible."

Tom says he is starting to wind down and is letting his sons take the strain. "It's time to give them their chance, it's the only way they will learn all the ins and outs."

The key to recently improved milk output

‘We are lucky with what we have here and feel sure there will be a future for us when things settle down again’



at Coneygreave is the Alfa-Laval 20/20 milking parlour installed last May.

“Until then we were averaging about 8,700 litres and were having to hold the cows back,” says Robert, who is responsible with his mother for milking and herd management, including insemination.

“When the jars are full, the cows tend to switch off and you don’t easily get them going again. But we soon started moving up and now we’re achieving an average of about 9,200.”

#### Easier on the knees

The parlour has a hydraulic floor and Tom says he knows of only one other farm, belonging to an AFMP member in Yorkshire, with a similar facility.

“It lifts about a foot and you can get into the ideal position for milking,” says Catherine. “The plastic floor panels are comfortable and better for you than standing on cold concrete. They have plenty of give. You don’t feel the cold and it’s better for your knees.”

William sees to feeding and scraping out as well as being the main man with the farm’s equipment, which includes a combine harvester and self-propelled forager used for contract jobs, as well as the farm’s needs. He also turns his hand to milking.

The business has one employee, Jim Mackrell, who carries out general work at Coneygreave, on land lower down the valley and on land at Ashbourne.

On these lands, the Whites run beef cattle and Texel sheep and grow crops including maize, which is an essential part of the herd’s total mixed ration, along with rolled

barley and wheat.

The cows stay in until May 8 to 12 after the first silage cut from the high sugar thick leaf grass has been taken. They work closely with a nutritionist to get the results they want from their herd.

Tom adds: “We’re very self-sufficient which you have to be if you’re going to make a success of it.

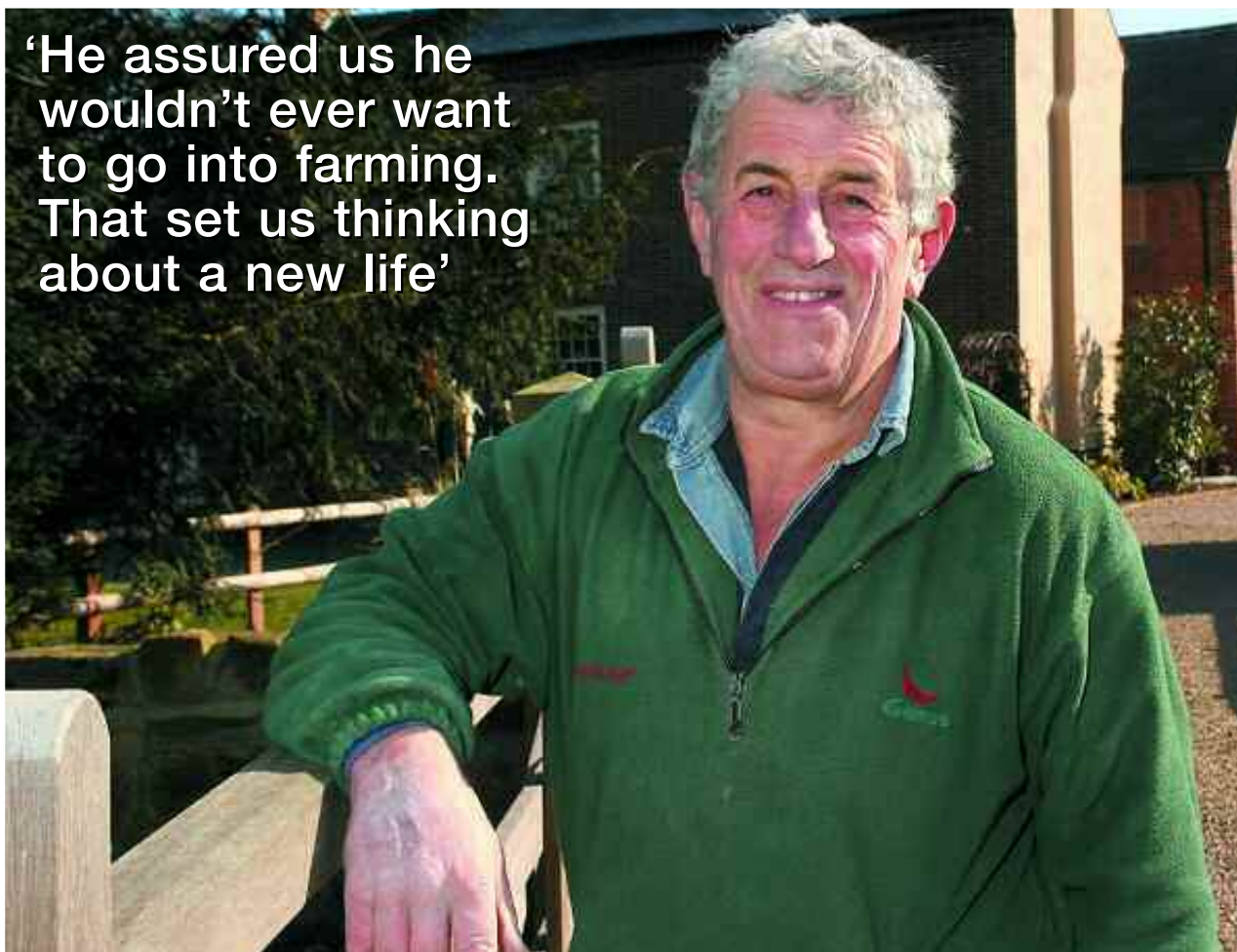
“There’s a lot to do but we never forget that you’ve got to enjoy life.”

Higher output: from the left, William, Robert and Tom White, and Jim Mackrell in one of Coneygreave’s four cowsheds. Right, Robert demonstrates milking parlour controls, and, below, Catherine White in the late winter sunshine.





‘He assured us he wouldn’t ever want to go into farming. That set us thinking about a new life’



Selling up: David Burrows

## Calling it a day

**After 40 years in dairy farming, AFMP producer David Burrows and his wife Jean have sold up, moved to a new home and are opening the next chapter of their lives.**

But, says David, 61, they were not forced out by the economics of the industry and the comparatively low milk price. They made the decision to sell 422-acre Lindridge Farm at Desford, Leicestershire, plus a 1,000-head herd, mainly because their 26-year-old son assured them he would never want to go into farming.

In addition, they both had health concerns, although David adds: “I would have carried on if my son had wanted it. Margins are tight but farming isn’t the only industry affected. Look at how supermarkets have pushed out small shopkeepers and manufacturing industries have been pressured over the last 20 years.

“I had a triple heart by-pass five years ago - not through smoking, drinking and womanising, unfortunately, I think it was through stress; living on the edge. My son who’s also called David managed the farm in exemplary fashion while I was in hospital.

“He’s a maths teacher at Toot Hill College at Bingham, near Nottingham, and is a prop forward for Notts Moderns and the county side.

“About 12 months ago we sat in the kitchen and he said, ‘Look, Dad, I don’t want to see my parents burnt out in the next two years. I want them to be here for

the next 20’. He assured us he wouldn’t ever want to go into farming. That set us thinking about a new life.”

Having started out with 23 cows on 48 acres leased from the local authority, David ended up supplying AFMP with three million litres a year from his 430 milkers. Everything, including a separate beef unit and a farmhouse the couple had lovingly restored, was sold. Loans, mortgages and overdrafts were paid off, another renovated farmhouse with six acres was purchased and money put in the bank. They moved with their daughter in December to their new home 20 miles away at Milton, Derbyshire.

### Hard work and a bit of luck

“The main reason we’re in this position is not because of what we’ve made out of farming. It’s more because we bought farms at the right time as sitting tenants. That’s left us comfortable,” explains David. “It’s been hard work and a bit of luck.”

He recalls highs and lows of a career which began on his father’s smallholding when he left school at 16. He met Jean at Leicestershire County Show and they soon decided to go into farming together.

“We went on the county council’s list and after 18 months we were offered a place to look at. In those days, there was competition. If you had a farm of your own, you were somebody. We put in plans and a budget - I was halfway through a management course at night class. I was

given the tenancy when I was 21 which was quite young. We’d told the council we weren’t going to get married until we’d got the right farm - so it was up to them!”

Milk went in churns to Kirby and West’s dairy in Leicester and they also kept chickens, selling eggs directly to shops. After a few years they had expanded to 60 cows and some 1,500 chickens and started looking around for a bigger farm. After winning BOCM’s Young Farmer of the Year competition, they were accepted in 1971 for a private tenancy at Lindridge, then amounting to 232 acres.

They sold the hens and concentrated on dairy farming, steadily expanding production and buying parcels of adjoining land until their landlord eventually agreed to sell Lindridge itself. They bought a final piece of land to develop the dairy unit the very day before the introduction of milk quotas.

“Instead of expanding by 20 per cent we had to cut back by nine per cent. I didn’t like being beaten. Jean is gifted with animals and an excellent calf rearer so we started a beef unit,” says David who has also been influenced in his decision to sell up by suffering a couple of serious farm accidents.

He adds: “It wasn’t economics that forced us out. The milk price had no bearing on it. Maybe the fun has gone out of the job compared to years ago but maybe it’s just the fun of youth that’s disappeared. We want to enjoy our autumn years.”



# PASS THE SOAP

‘They obviously love it’ – investigating tilting troughs and a reviving cow bath in West Yorkshire

**Milk is their bread and butter but the Broadfields of Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, can turn their hand to almost anything to save money and to look after their livestock.**

At Chidswell Farm, John Broadfield, wife Melanie, business partner and first son Joe and third son Ross, milk 150 pedigree Holstein Friesians and also rear beef cattle on their 350 acres.

There's evidence all over the farm of their engineering expertise. The latest projects include a couple of custom-made tilting steel troughs holding 40 gallons and 100 gallons and a bath for downer cows.

The troughs are galvanised once they have been fabricated and welded and, time aside, production costs are relatively low compared with a ready-made product.

“We'd seen something similar at one of the shows and liked the idea, but they were too flimsy so we thought we'd make a couple ourselves,” says John. “We like to make things substantial.”

## Lease of life for downer cows

“Troughs are notorious for clogging up. Cleaning them is now much easier and faster, and the cows get a good clean supply of fresh water.”

Downer cows gain the chance of a new lease of life after being revitalised in the large cow bath.

“We tend to get downer cows when they're stressed or at calving when trapped nerves can be a common problem. If they're down a long time in one position they can't get up, circulation is affected and they can get sores. In the worst instances we have to cull them.”

A warm bath helps to mitigate the problems. John explains: “It's just an old skip that we've converted. We half fill it and pre-heat the water to about 30C with a steam cleaner. Then we use the tele-handler to lift the downer cow in.

“The cow floats and hangs there naturally until we get its circulation going. You see them with their eyes shut and they obviously love it. We've made a door for them to walk out through after their bath.

“It doesn't always work, but the bath and the troughs make it a lot easier to care for the herd.”

The Broadfields have been looking after cows for decades and are always open to new ideas. John's father, George, who is 86 and has been on the farm since 1953, has plenty of sage advice to offer.

“He came from a smaller farm across the valley where they did market gardening,” said John. “But dad started milking almost straightaway and we have built up steadily since.”

They have been Partnership members for 10 years and the Chidswell herd is a productive one, producing over a million litres a year with an average output of 8,500 litres and a current monthly average of 4.09 per cent butterfat and 3.2 per cent protein.

The cows are housed in cubicles, where they have cow mats, and milked using a 10/20 Westfalia herringbone parlour.

The herd is fed a total mixed ration. The Broadfields also make their own silage and this year will be growing 50 acres of maize for the first time for a decade.

John adds: “We get pretty low cell counts

and really try to look after the cows. Twice a week, we use the footbath to keep digital dermatitis in check, and use hydrated lime at the back end of the cubicle to kill bacteria and dry up the area. We bed up every day using a straw chopper.”

They let the herd out as soon as possible. “They're out if they can be. There's nothing finer than seeing them in the field,” John enthuses.

## Forging links

This enthusiasm for farming is extended to Agriventure, the farm worker international exchange, which has allowed the family to forge links across the world, with Ross spending a year in New Zealand when he was 18 and the Broadfields hosting young farmers from New Zealand and Australia.

Visitors have gone home impressed with their engineering and building skills, with major projects including a new bungalow. “It helps that Joe worked for three years as a steel erector and that he's a skilled welder,” adds John.

With all this going on – not to mention the farm's livery yard – you would think they would put their feet up when there's a chance.

Not on your life. John is keen on match ploughing, Ross looks forward to rugby league with Dewsbury's under-21 side, while second son Dan, who is a landscape gardener, and his BMX mates are also regular visitors.

Now the family is setting out on its latest project: to build a gym to keep the boys fit for their work and leisure.

# Welsh farmer digs in for new business

**John Braunton, a former Welsh farmer of the year, is taking his expertise into pastures new through a landscape gardening service, based at his Conwy Valley farm.**

The diversification project for AFMP member John began in 2002 and he now employs two staff plus part-time help.

As with farming, he has already

won accolades, the main one being a recommendation from the Llandudno Homebase, which serves a large area of North Wales.

"It's important that people can rely on you and trust you," John says. "We do a lot of work with Welsh slate on special features, flagging and fountains. We also do drystone walls, rockeries, shrub shaping and low maintenance gardens.

**Part of the landscape:  
John and staff on another job**

"We're getting well known now for our work, especially getting properties ready for sale. The tidiness of our work and our manners bring lots of recommendations."

John uses an imaginative approach to both landscaping and farming and is a former winner of the Clean River Cup for his work on a self-emptying, gravity-fed slurry lagoon at the farm in the early 1990s.

With his son Tim, he milks 75 Holstein Friesians on the sloping 180 acres of Bodnant Uchaf Farm near the village of Eglwysbach and the National Trust's famous Bodnant Gardens.



'It's important that people can rely on you and trust you'

## CHEAP DIESEL TANKS NOT UP TO SCRATCH

Bunded diesel tanks that do not meet National Dairy Farm Assured Scheme and Environment Agency standards are being offered to unsuspecting producers at lower prices than approved versions.

Diesel tanks must have protective second skins around the main tank that can hold 110 per cent of the inner tank's capacity and the hose into and out of the tank must also be protected.

But tanks without the proper bunded hose are currently available through wholesalers.

David Clayton, AFMP farm assurance manager for the Midlands and East Anglia, said: "We've had several farmers who have bought new, plastic 1,000-gallon tanks that are not completely bunded. These mis-sold tanks have the protective double skin, but not for the hose."

Derek Kennedy, NDFAS executive officer, said: "Hoses are usually run within the main tank bund to

protect them, but we have heard of some tanks being sold with the hoses outside that bund.

"We don't think the sale of these incorrect tanks is widespread, but it's also clearly not a one-off. Producers who want more information would be best to contact their local Environment Agency office."

Environment Agency rules stipulate that flexible pipes should be fitted with an automatic closure valve and should be locked within the bund when not in use. Bunding, however, is not necessary for tanks from pre-1991.

"An older storage tank might not look as good as a new one, but as long as it's safe there's no reason to buy another," said David Clayton.

"Farmers should be applauded for looking to buy new tanks to replace ones they feel might be unfit, but replacement tanks should be the correct ones."

## IN BRIEF...

### Friesian rise

■ Sales of British Friesian semen continue to rise, with registrations at Holstein UK up 15 per cent on the previous year.

"We are not surprised," said David Armett, British Friesian Breeders Club secretary. "We are experiencing conditions similar to the 1950s through to the 1980s.

"With a low milk price and the need for low-cost systems for many farmers, it is timely to examine the attributes of this breed."

### Keeping the grass down

■ Cows are playing a key role in the Malvern Hills Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Along with sheep, they are helping to stop the invasion of scrub towards the summits and therefore improving prospects for butterflies and other insects.

The Malverns are traditionally open grasslands with cattle and sheep grazing, but the long-term decline in stock levels is causing concern.

Environmentalists particularly welcome the return of cows because, being big animals, they speed up the regeneration process.

### Liz Hurley goes organic



■ Actress Liz Hurley is to gain a 'milk moustache' after becoming the latest high profile recruit to the American Dairy Council's 'Got Milk?' advertising campaign.

And her support for dairy farming looks like being more than skin deep. The actress (pictured) owns a 400-acre farm in Gloucestershire and says she plans to bring in a dairy herd as soon as her land gains organic status.

# Poles apart?

Poland is by far the biggest dairy producer among our new EU partners.

*The White Stuff* finds out what it's like over there from Richard Porter who has been running a large scale dairy and arable operation for the last 10 years.

**Contrary to rural myth, there are no plans to build a pipeline to the UK for cheap Polish milk.**

If there are plans, Richard Porter, who has a 30-year lease on a 4,900-hectare mixed dairy and arable farm in north-west Poland, wants to know about it.

"I think the idea that there is an abundance of cheap, subsidised milk and milk products flowing into the UK and the rest of Europe is a myth," Richard says. "All of our milk goes into the local co-operative for cheese and UHT production. There was talk of a scheme to supply Germany, but nothing has come of it. Poland doesn't export that much milk and people don't drink so much fresh milk. They're only just beginning to get fridges and washing machines."

US government research says: "Over half of all farming households in Poland produce only for their own needs with little, if any, commercial sales."

But while there may be no milk pipeline, government figures do show that Poland remains a net exporter of dairy products.

Richard, who has an arable and pig operation at Basingstoke plus non-farming interests in haulage, recycling and storage, is a tenant with the Polish government after seeing a business opportunity and taking over an ex-communal farm at £15 a hectare in 1996. It was originally one of the main farms of a 'kombinant'.

"Foreigners can own up to 500 acres of

land if they've been there for seven years or more, but with land as cheap to rent as it is, it is hardly worthwhile buying it," he says.

The rented farm, known as PolFarm, leans to the arable side, which is running at a loss at the moment, unlike dairy, which is making a small profit mainly because of the cheap labour costs.

Richard travels to Poland once a month, flying to Berlin and then driving three hours across the border to Swidwin. It is part of Prussian and German-occupied Pomerania that was ceded to Poland after the Second World War.

## Language problem

Language is a problem as few people speak English although the situation should improve in the future because it is becoming a more popular choice in schools.

He has about 40 staff with one Polish manager, Marcik, who is also a director of the company. On the dairy side, he employs 10 women at £2,000 a year each to milk and clean out the herd, dealing with about 50 cows each. Tractor drivers are on about £2,500 a year.

Another obvious difference is the climate. "We're snow-covered for long periods and we have around a 100 days of below freezing weather although the summers are hotter and drier than in England," said Richard.



Richard in the office



Cows are kept inside all year round



The grain stores

About 52 per cent of the total surface area of Poland is farmland. The average size of Poland's two million private farms is eight hectares with farms larger than 15 hectares accounting for only nine per cent of the total.

These statistics put PolFarm into context – it is large by Polish standards, but not that unusual in the area where Richard farms. The largest of these generally flat fields, interspersed with woodland, is 225 hectares, and there are a lot at 80 to 120 hectares.

Language, climate, terrain – Poland is a different country and the milking operation reflects the difference.

At the moment, the 500 cattle are kept in all year round, tied up in old-style cow houses, but the practice will change this year when they will be let out to exercise to improve herd health.

This in itself will bring problems. One of the distinguishing marks of this part of Poland is few hedges or fences so Richard is creating new enclosed paddocks. He also has to guard the farm quite closely, especially when harvesting and machinery is in the fields.

Cows will also require a guard if they are out.

PolFarm is yielding about 6,000 litres per cow and making 1.3ppl profit on a milk price of 17-18ppl which has applied since he started business in Poland.

"This is for milk in the higher band of cleanliness with protein and fat levels very similar to the UK, but the price soon drops to 12ppl if the cleanliness isn't up to scratch," he says.

Poland's accession to the EU in June 2004

has helped with the farm's financial performance boosted by the Polish equivalent of the single farm payment of £75 per hectare.

Looking back over the last 10 years, Richard says: "We inherited a lot of old cows and still have quite a lot of foot trouble and lameness.

"I would like to invest more on the milking side, but it seems risky. I can see the same thing happening in Poland that has happened in Britain where milk prices have dropped."

On the arable side, investment in farm equipment tops a million, including nine tractors, five combines, three six-metre drills, two 14-furrow ploughs and six trailers.

"We paid for that in the first three years when grain had been £100 a tonne and the pickings were a lot richer than they are now. But I've hardly taken anything out of the business.

#### Tight cash flow

"Our cash flow continues to be tight, although we're extended a line of credit from suppliers for things like fertiliser. Grain is down to £50-60 a tonne now.

"Fuel, spray and fertiliser costs are continuing to rise as are labour costs which are moving up quite rapidly.

"We're farming 'western-wise' but we're not getting western yields.

"For anyone thinking of setting up here, the grass is certainly not greener and the farming situation is certainly not as rosy as people might reckon it to be."



Harvest time



Richard has invested over £1m in machinery



## Badge of honour

When the Essex Scottish Regiment left Kent for the 1944 D-Day landings the Canadian soldiers also left behind a unique monument: a massive concrete replica of their regimental cap badge and two smaller plaques.

The memorials stayed on at what is now Laurence Goddard's South Barham Farm for 60 years, until they again came to the attention of the regiment.

Partnership farmer Laurence, who inherited the farm from his farmer-soldier father, helped the regiment to send the artefacts to Canada.

And now Laurence – pictured here at a repatriation ceremony on his farm last summer – has been invited to Canada later this year as a regimental guest to the opening of a new armoury in Windsor, Ontario.

There the old giant-size badge and plaques are being incorporated into a unique monument to stand at the armoury's entrance.

"It's a bit strange to think that the original badge that was on the farm for all those years will be part of this memorial, but I think that it's the right place for it," said Laurence.

## Cull costs

The Milk Development Council has developed a new way of helping farmers calculate the net profit and cost of finishing cull cows to go into the food chain.

The web-based calculator follows the end of the Over Thirty Month Scheme.

Cattle over 30 months can now be sold into the food chain, either as dead weight or live weight.

"Farmers will be able to calculate the additional return required to generate a profit for the extra feeding, housing, and labour input," says Brian Lindsay, head of MDC's farm management programme.

"It will help them work out whether it's worthwhile to invest in fattening cows from a business perspective, or whether it will detract from their core business of producing milk."

# AFMP's only female district chairman Valerie Parker talks about her busy life...

## Just the job

**Valerie Parker is district chairman for AFMP at Bridgwater – the only woman in the Partnership to hold such a post. She milks 180 pedigree Holstein cows with her husband Norman and son Ian at Hancox Farm, Stoke St Gregory, near Taunton, on the Somerset plains.**

As the market for bull calves was pulled, together with the collapse of the cull cow trade a few years ago due to BSE, Valerie decided after 31 years of working on the farm to go out and earn a wage with the bank instead.

"I replaced the bull calf enterprise," she says.

Today she is assistant manager for Barclays in Taunton and works three days a week after recently being promoted to the position, having resumed banking as a cashier five years ago in the Bridgwater branch.

### Surviving in a fashion

"Of course we could survive in a fashion on the farm as we were, but since BSE meant losing our beef markets, income from the milking cows took a tumble."

Bull calves were selling for around £180 each some 10 years ago, Valerie explains, whereas today you would struggle to give them away.

And it was this that prompted Valerie to return to the bank where she had worked before she married.

"I wanted more than just to survive," she says. "I wanted the holidays and to be able to buy nice things. Seeing margins getting tighter in the industry meant I wasn't prepared to sit back and do nothing."

Valerie admits that working at the bank away

from the farm is quite refreshing. She also points out that working with clients in other industries means similar parallels can be drawn, which she describes as a great relief.

"It can be very depressing just listening to the plight of dairy farmers. You can feel quite isolated, so to listen to others talk about their businesses can be quite consoling."

"Fortunately Ian is crazy about the cows and that is always a good sign. He really enjoys working with the herd and being pedigree makes it all that more interesting."

Valerie's district chairman's role eats into much of her time. "Fortunately," she says, "the bank is supportive. I'm flexible with them and they are with me."

"I'm in a position to be able to see both sides of the argument and can appreciate the position of both Arla and the producers in the current milk market."

One thing she has given up though is her role as chairman of the parish council though her son is now maintaining the family link.

### Updated parlour

Back on the farm, the cows are milked through a recently updated 24:24 herringbone parlour. They are yielding 9,200 litres at 4.07 per cent butterfat and 3.39 per cent protein, with cell counts running at 124 and a bactoscan of 32. This information is sent to Ian by text message which is a great service, says Val, because it means action can be taken straightaway rather than waiting until the end of the week if there is a problem.

The future will hopefully continue to be about milking cows at Hancox Farm and Valerie believes that the industry needs to have a milk price that is sustainable to allow people to invest properly in their businesses.



Money talk: Valerie with a client at the bank

# Guardians of the flow

**A new £25m, two-year Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) initiative, launched recently by Defra, is the latest stage in an EU-led process helping farmers to reduce agricultural river pollution.**

This is paving the way for the first round of EU environmental measures that have to be in place by 2009 and the first set of targets that have to be achieved by 2015. These will look to reduce the effects of agricultural pollution that tends to come from fertilisers, pesticides and sediments in rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters.

There are 40 priority CSF areas affected by the initiative, and while there is nothing in the regulations stating that farmers have to participate, the Partnership is supporting the move.

Linda Clow, AFMP technical support manager, said that members would be affected by moves to prevent pollution of waterways. "We've highlighted that they should be aware of what is happening."

Two AFMP members from Norfolk are at the forefront of the initiative.

Philip Gill farms in Coston Fen in the upper reaches of the River Yare. He has a site of special scientific interest and historic woodland on the farm, which is situated in a nitrate vulnerable zone.

William Brigham farms in the catchment area of the River Wensum, which is one of four CSF pilot projects that have been running nationally.

Philip Gill says he will have to address problems of run-off and soil erosion, along with nutrient leaching. It will mean changing farm management systems to reduce pollution from nitrates.

"We'll have to look at drilling in spring rather than winter. We'll probably have six to 12-metre grass headlands in fields bordering the river and also have to look at things like eaves troughing on the farm to take away the run-off from buildings."

Soil being flushed off the land can be a problem, particularly upstream from the

farm, and the situation is made worse because the river is no longer dredged.

William Brigham farms 700 acres, at Lyng Easthaugh, about 300 acres of which is subject to run-off and directly impacts on the movement of soil sediment into the Wensum, a 50-mile chalk stream.

With the stream being a site of special scientific interest and an EU area of special conservation, the pilot scheme's CSF officer, Dougal McNeill, has visited the farm for an open meeting.

William said the new environmental measures would mean tweaking land management and that if there was a serious problem they could be asked to stop immediately the farming practice causing it.

"In certain areas, we'll have to look at how we cultivate our maize, planting it across the slope and not leaving it as stubble after it's been harvested until the spring.

"A public footpath and bridleway runs through the land, and water flows down that pretty hard carrying silt with it. We'll have to do something to stop that problem.



## Stopping soil erosion

"One possible solution is more grass. Grass is good at stopping the soil erosion. It cuts down the amount of land at risk and stops the soil from going into the river."

How farmers are affected will depend very much on where they farm and what they farm. The Wensum's problem is soil erosion, but for others it's nitrates or pesticides.

Problems also vary between arable and livestock and between areas, explains William.

"Out-wintering livestock will have to be looked at. Fields will have to be chosen carefully and the feeder will not have to be left in the same place all the time to prevent a quagmire.

"We're fortunate that we've just got a new livestock barn so we can bring them in."

While Philip and William have been in the environmental vanguard, change is not going to be instantaneous.

"It's a gradual thing with long-term cooperation and the changing of habits," says William.

But as new measures come in, farmers like Philip and William will also be able to draw on the resources of a new national network of advisers set up to inform and help all affected farmers on a one-to-one basis, and through a series of workshops and farm demonstrations.

Working on the water: Philip Gill and, inset above right, William Brigham

'Grass is good at stopping the soil erosion. It cuts down the amount of land at risk and stops the soil from going into the river'

# VET TALK

Make sure your calves have a good start. **Michael Head** of Shepton Veterinary Group outlines the steps you can take...

Our future is the calves that we rear as replacements.

Attention to detail and good husbandry should begin as soon as the calf is born. It will pay dividends with calves attaining good growth rates and being less susceptible to disease.

Calves should be given six pints of colostrum in the first six hours of life, while remembering that quality is as important as quantity.

As a vet who regularly conducts visits about poor calf health, I take blood samples from calves to check levels of protective antibodies that they should receive from their first milk.

I am surprised that about 50 per cent of calves have poor antibody status even on farms that consider their management of calves to be excellent. The relationship between calves with poor results and good results is dramatic. It is the calf with very poor results that will have joint and navel problems and the calf with a good result that suffers no ill effects.

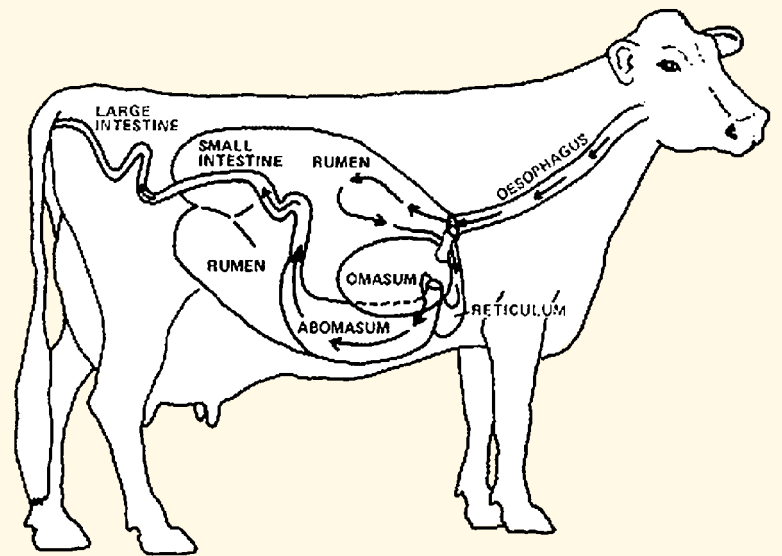
I recommend that all colostrum is tested for quality. This is done by measuring its specific gravity with a colostrometer. Only colostrum that is of good quality should be fed and stored. Producers who are measuring colostrum quality are seeing benefits in improved calf health, and at about £10 a colostrometer it is pretty cheap.

## No bacteria

When the calf is born, the rumen contains no bacterial population and this needs to be developed. Management practice dictates the success of rumen development and the subsequent ease of weaning and future growth.

The stimulus for bacterial and calf growth is dry feed intake. The future adult rumen bacterial population is essentially established two weeks after the start of dry feed consumption. To be able to develop, these bacteria need water, so we must allow calves to have access to clean, fresh drinking water from an early age.

It is a simple fact that there is a relationship between the amount of fresh water a calf drinks and the amount of dry food that they



The best start: colostrum is given to a young calf

eat. It cannot be assumed that milk or milk replacer will provide enough water as it bypasses the rumen to the reticulum.

When calves are fed milk, hay and creep from shortly after birth, normal rumen contractions can be measured from as early as three weeks of age to check development.

The absorptive capacity of the rumen develops in response to dry feed such as starter. And this can be made available as early as three days old.

## Calf scours

There is increasing interest and positive feedback from producers in the use of colloids in the treatment of calf scours, where the intestine fails to absorb fluid and/or secretion.

Colloids are alternatives to oral electrolytes where milk is not withheld. The major source of energy, the lactose in the milk, is also not lost.

It is the withdrawal of milk in calf scours that results in a lack of growth caused by loss of papillae in the rumen.

Finally, producers are becoming aware of the importance of a good and prolonged sucking on the teat. Teats should allow sucking to produce copious quantities of saliva. This has a buffering affect on the acidic abomasum.

In a calf scour outbreak I investigated, this was the only management adjustment with a resultant reduction in the number of calves scouring.

## Calf checklist

- Six pints of good quality colostrum
- Fresh drinking water to stimulate dry feed intake and therefore rumen growth
- Prolonged teat sucking for healthy development



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