

# We've set out on path to improve our herd health

**W**e kicked off this year with a detailed review of our herd health progress and put the focus on those three common problems of mastitis, locomotion and fertility.

Mastitis incidence is analysed in detail using the 'Clover Cell Check' system offered by our vets Lambert, Leonard and May. The analysis helps us understand patterns of infection and identify causal factors. We found most fresh infections tend to be in late lactation animals and these often tie in with group changes. While it might not be possible to avoid group changes, we will in future pay closer attention to these higher risk animals.

It was also clear from the analyses that in almost every case mastitis was the result of environ-

mental bacteria, especially E coli. So we've introduced a series of measures designed to improve cow cleanliness. These include the installation of bricket boards to improve cubicle hygiene, motorised brushes to help clean cows, and we also increased the frequency of scraper runs.

In the parlour we found some unacceptable levels of teat-end damage which we put down to excessive liner slip and inappropriate vacuum levels. Our milking routine was also adjusted to ensure the lag time required for milk let down was sufficient following initial stimulation. This was achieved simply by placing mats in the parlour to denote working positions for preparation and subsequent attachment.

In the last 12 months we've also introduced E coli vaccination. As we wanted to be sure we could

## Scott Kirby

Scott Kirby is farm manager at Harper Adams University College, after being herd manager at Newcastle's Cockle Park and an SAC consultant. His latest challenge has been planning and moving the Harper dairy unit to a new green field site.



monitor its effect, we initially only vaccinated all the odd numbered cows. The result was marked as the number of clinical cases in the vaccinated group reduced by 40% compared to the non-vaccinated group. At a cost of more than £20/cow per year (and a need to re-vaccinate every three months), it is a significant undertaking but with a typical case of mastitis costing £200, then even after vaccine costs are accounted for there is a net benefit to the herd of more than £13,000. So we are now rolling out vaccination across the whole herd.

These changes have resulted in an improvement in both clinical and subclinical mastitis. Somatic cell counts have fallen over the last year from 180 to 120. The one outstanding piece of the jigsaw remains an autodip system which we have been expecting from the parlour manufacturer for a few years, but now by concentrating on improvements in other areas I wonder if such a system will be needed.

The herd has also taken part in the DairyCo 'Healthy Feet Programme'. Central to this is regular monitoring of locomotion scores both by herd staff and independently by our vets. The vet scores show a steady reduction in lameness, with the number of cows scoring 2 reducing from 24% to 18%, and scores of 3 from 11% to 0% over 12 months. Again the success is the result of a series of measures including improved hoof cleanliness, a detailed hoof care protocol, changes to the collecting yard routine to reduce the risk of injury, and finally biotin supplementation.

Further work in the next month or two to improve the surfaces in

the buildings should continue the progress. We're looking at a range of options from simple grooving through to full rubber matting with costs ranging from £2 to £35 per square metre.

Fertility is central in most dairy units. For us our most basic target is to create 25 pregnancies per month, which equates to a 410-day calving interval. Despite a number of recent research trials which tended to extend the voluntary waiting period, the herd is still achieving this target.

The key to improved fertility has been the close attention to the management of transition cows. Early targeted intervention is critical as soon as problems are detected by daily post-natal checks. Any cows which have not shown a heat by 42 days post partum receive vet intervention. One of the problems that dogged us in the first year or two of the dairy was metritis and displaced abomasums. A combination of controlling condition in late lactation and significantly reducing the energy density of dry cow diets has shown a remarkable decline in the incidence of both conditions.

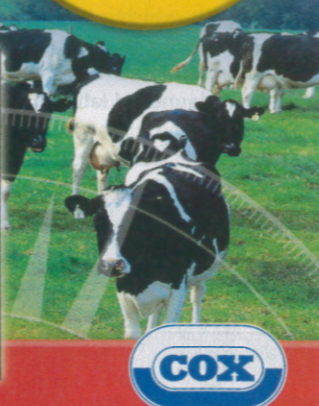
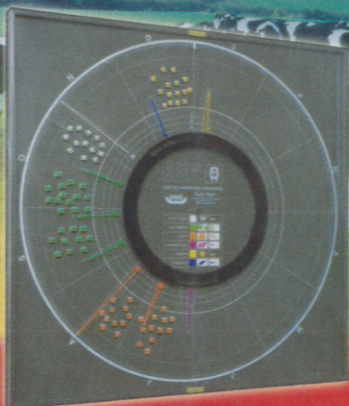
It is useful every now and then just to reflect on your successes, but the problem with that is it often highlights the next set of challenges facing you!

### Farm facts

**FARM SIZE:** 1700 acres (688ha)  
**HERD SIZE:** 400 cows  
**ROLLING MILK YIELD:** 8900 litres/cow  
**TARGET YIELD:** 9500 litres/cow  
**MILK BUYER:** Tesco (Wisemans)  
**SOIL TYPE:** Sand, clay and peat  
**RAINFALL:** 800mm/year.

SPECIAL OFFER >>>  
THE  
**BRAY**  
CALENDAR

Only  
**£199** +VAT  
FOR A LIMITED  
PERIOD!



Available online:  
[www.abbeydaledirect.co.uk](http://www.abbeydaledirect.co.uk)  
[www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk](http://www.countrywidefarmers.co.uk)  
[www.fanevalleystores.com](http://www.fanevalleystores.com)  
[www.wynnstayonline.co.uk](http://www.wynnstayonline.co.uk)

To find your nearest  
agricultural merchant  
participating in this offer,  
visit: [www.coxagri.com](http://www.coxagri.com) or  
call Cox on: 0845 600 8081

**'You can't beat the visual record!'**