

# Healthy progress made at

by **Bruce Jobson**

DAIRYCO's Carcary Monitor Farm project has focused on achieving numerous herd health targets over the past year, including increasing the herd's overall health and animal welfare status, a reduction in calving interval and age at first calving, as well as an increase in herd numbers.

The Milne family — Sandy and wife Emma, father Ian and mother Dawn — own the 370 Carcary Holstein herd at Brechin.

The family were selected as one of two Scottish DairyCo Monitor Farm hosts in 2010.

The 1,250-acre arable and dairy business operates over two neighbouring units: 600 acres at Carcary Farm and 650 acres at East Pitforthie Farm, where the dairy unit is situated.

The three-year project was funded by DairyCo, Quality Meat Services (QMS) the Scottish Government and Robert Wiseman Ltd.

The family business operates under Carcary Farms and the Milnes established a modern dairy unit at East Pitforthie in 2002.

In 2009 the family milked 342 Holsteins and set a target to maintain or slightly increase herd numbers on a yearly rolling-basis.

The first 12 months of the DairyCo Monitor Farm project resulted in an

increase in herd size to 360 milking animals.

This year, the herd has increased to 370 milking animals.

During the first two years of the project Carcary Farms focused on increasing the herd's health and welfare status and has subsequently achieved a number of target management goals, according to Sandy Milne.

"We have a large-scale modern dairy unit and have focused our staff and resources toward increasing farm management practices.

"The herd is housed and milked in modern large-span facilities and we've invested heavily in this area over the past decade.

"The business has benefited from being selected as a DairyCo Monitor Farm by having access to world-renowned experts, advisers and independent consultants.

"We've incorporated this advice into our business model.

"Carcary has also received tremendous support and advice from the DairyCo team as well as our own veterinary group and feed consultants.

"There's also been positive two-way interaction with the DairyCo Community Group of 30 local farmers. The open forum has provided interesting discussion and mutual benefits to everyone involved," he says.

Like many dairy units Carcary has placed emphasis on reducing the effects of Johnes disease, somatic cell counts, mastitis and lameness. The consequences can reduce fertility, milk yield, general herd health and wellbeing and therefore increase replacement rates.

Sandy emphasises the Carcary team have worked tirelessly with their vet Graeme Richardson to make improvements in these areas.

"We've seen a reduction in Johnes disease, and the rate of infection in younger animals is significantly lower.

"It's been a whole team effort as a result of improved hygiene measures being implemented across the board.

"Herd replacements are only bred from negative animals and this will aid our long-term objectives.

"All cows are screened for Johnes disease and are segregated into positive and negative groups.

"Attention to detail and hygiene in the negative group is of the highest standard and calves are tube-fed with colostrums from their own dam.

"The calves are then fed on milk replacer in a separate environment away from any potential source of infection," he says.

Carcary has also seen a significant reduction in somatic cell scores and incidences of clinical mastitis during the past 24 months.

DairyCo recently hosted a community group meeting with mastitis prevention expert Ian Ohnstad, and his advice has proven extremely beneficial. Cell counts have gradually been reduced from 280,000 in December 2010 to the current rolling level of 150,000.

"Clinical cases of mastitis have been reduced, as has the numbers of chronically infected animals over the past year.

"Another policy development has been reverting to an eight-week dry cow period.

"The result appears to be aiding dry-cow mastitis prevention and subsequent cure rates," says Sandy.

Calving interval has been another area of focus, although the figure should not be viewed in isolation.

The herd has continued to improve from the 2010 calving interval figure of 433 days and is currently running at 416 days.

The cows identified for culling have con-



**Above — Sandy, Fraser, Emma, Fergus and Ian Milne; below — milking facilities and cow housing.**

tinued to produce high volumes of milk and, not being in-calf, their level of lactation persistency has continued.

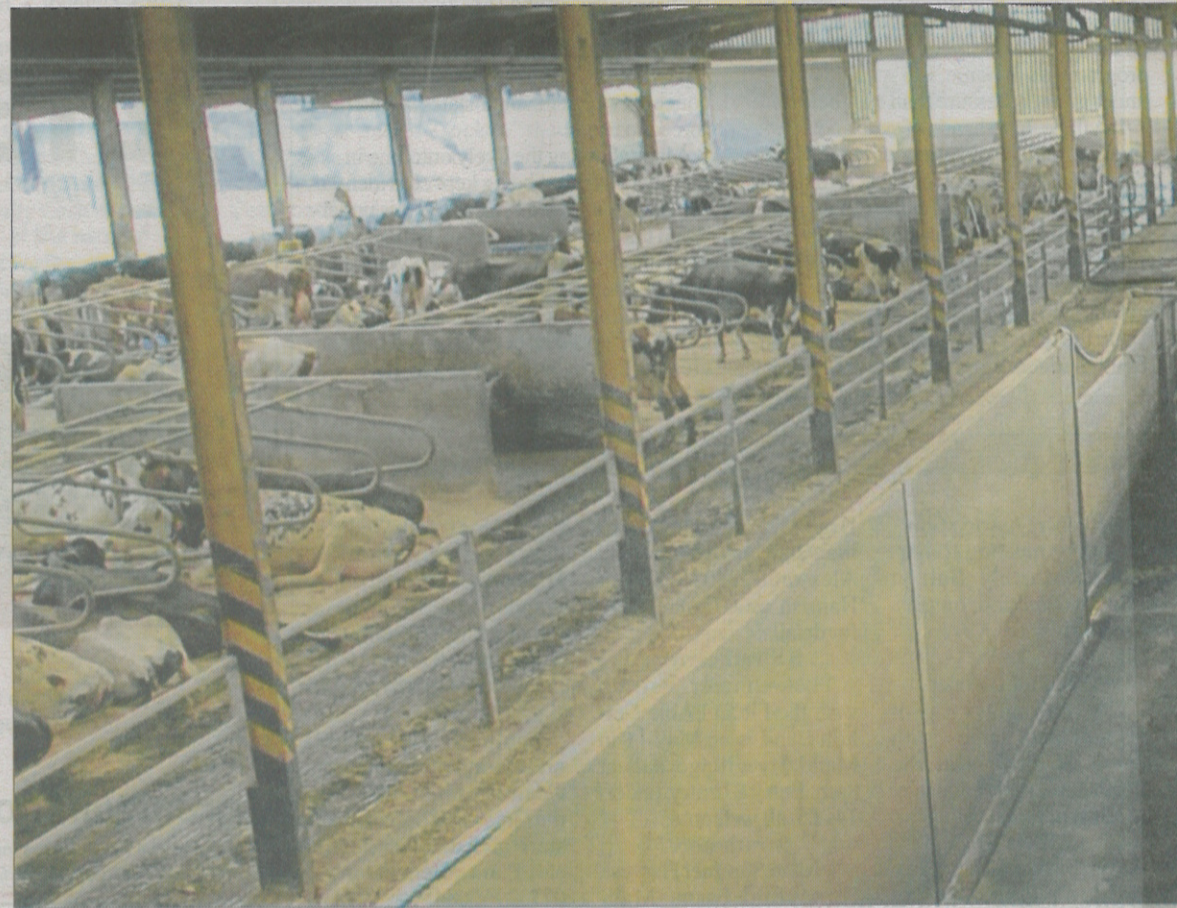
The intended cull cows have contributed to overall herd production; and moreover, this has allowed replacement animals to enter the herd and slightly increase total numbers.

However, effective measures have been implemented to allow closer monitoring of animals that Carcary has identified in order to produce the next generation of herd replacements.

The two key performance indicators (KPIs) identified as a more accurate measurement of herd fertility are 100-day and 200-day pregnancy rates.

Fertility continues to improve across the board with cows and heifers presented for diagnosis currently achieving 85% pregnancy rates, says Sandy.

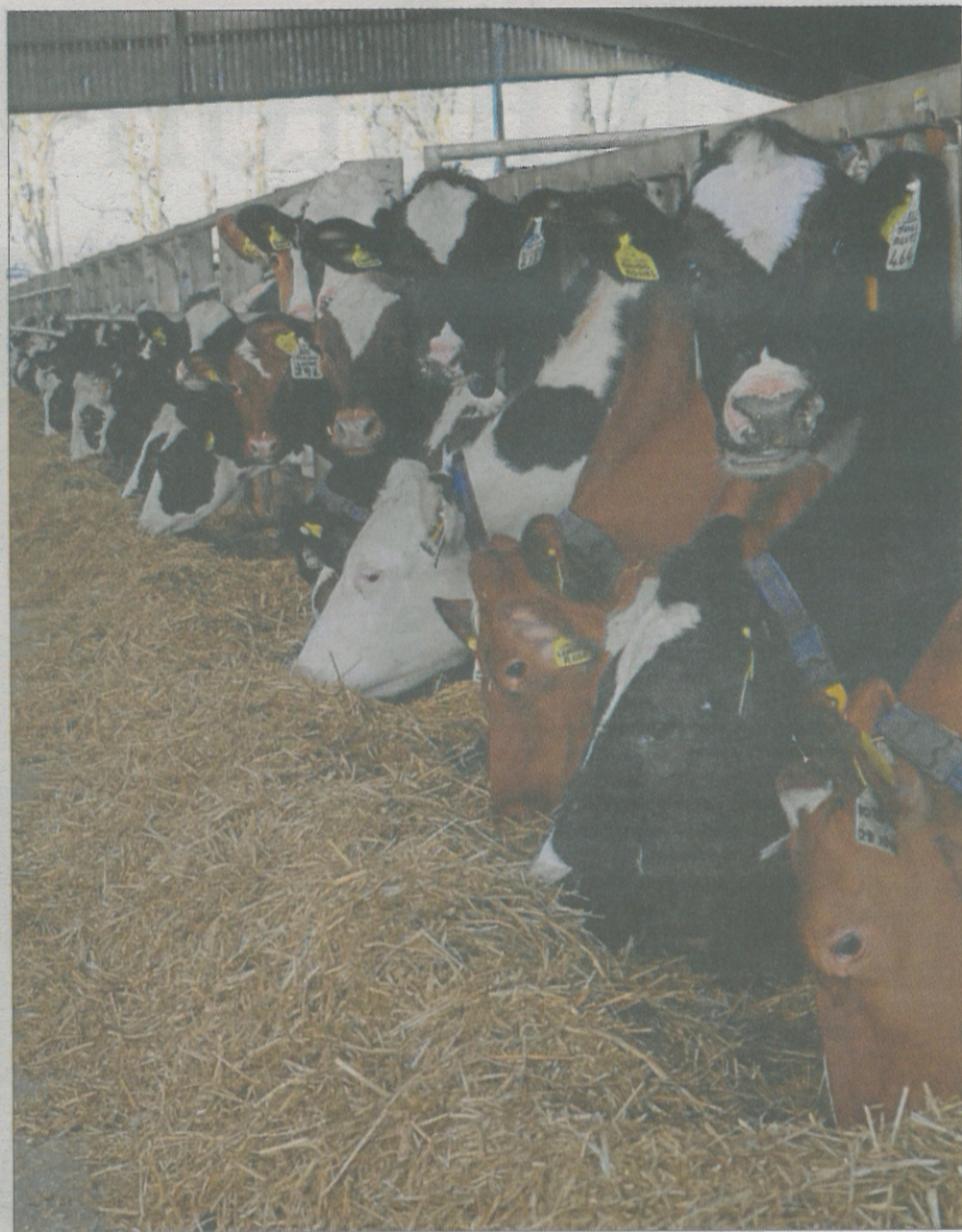
"We're focusing on the high health animals being retained within the herd and will continue along those lines. That's our main priority, and overall calving interval will remain open to some fluctuation.



**Above — vet Graeme Richardson; below — Sophie Kinnear.**



# dairy farm



**Carcary heifers feeding.**

“However, we have reduced the figure by 17 days and that’s a positive trend,” he comments.

Age at first-calving has also been reduced and heifers are now entering the herd near the target level of 24 months.

The previous average age at first-calving was 26.8 months.

A concerted effort to have heifers enter the herd earlier has helped reduce feed and bedding costs as well as labour and housing requirements.

Entry into the milking herd has allowed

animals to help pay for their rearing costs 60 days earlier.

Feet and leg concerns have been reduced and this has helped to improve conception-rates as well as help reduce herd calving interval and replacement rate. Cows are coming forward to oestrus-cycle earlier, are more active, and therefore easier to observe for heat-detection purposes.

A professional foot-trimmer has also been contracted to help aid herd manager Dave McGregor speed up the foot-trimming process.

Sandy’s wife, Emma, is a veterinary nurse and has recently been trained in mobility scoring.

Since December, the herd has been scored every six weeks, and this development is another step in helping aid animal welfare and overall cow comfort.

The herd is milked through a 32/32 parlour and does not receive concentrate feeding during milking.

Carcary has recently implemented a thrice-daily milking routine across the whole herd.

Previously only high-yielding animals received the third milking, but earlier this month additional milking staff were employed to cover these duties.

Cows are fed a total mixed ration (TMR) on a daily basis.

East Coast Viners formulate the ration and consider that the possibility of increasing the amount of forage in the diet may further help reduce feed costs during 2012.

High yielding groups above 25 litres per day are currently receiving maintenance plus 40 litres; groups below 25 litres are receiving maintenance plus 33 litres.

At the suggestion of an outside source, the herd saw a change in the diet, which resulted in an initial scouring concern, but the ration mix was reverted within 10 days.

Milk yield and compositional quality declined, but yields and quality are back on track with the herd averaging 35.7kg per day at 3.75% fat and somatic cell counts now reduced to 130,000.

“The Monitor Farm project has allowed local farmers within the Community Group to benefit from our experiences as well as link into DairyCo expertise. We’re now pushing forward into the third year of the project and aim to further develop our herd health and genetics. We’re using sexed-semen on maiden heifers and our breeding programme will focus on providing top quality replacements,” states Sandy.

The Carcary project has achieved numerous targets over the past two years, according to DairyCo extension officer Sophie Kinnear.

“I’d like to thank the Milne family and everyone involved in the project for their input over the past 24 months.

“A full report on the progress of the project will be available to the Carcary Community Group in due course,” she said.

Anyone interested in the work of the Monitor Farm projects should contact DairyCo extension officers Heather Wildman on 07876 706 391 or Sophie Kinnear on 07717 500877.

