

Working to **secure your future**

Issue 08 2022

# GRASSROOTS

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# Getting ready for the mating season is key to getting good results

Here LIC's Sally Pocock talks us through the steps we need to take.

“Take time now to review your AI practices, as Australian research suggests that at least 40% of AI technicians could gain at least a 5% lift in conception rates by improving AI practices<sup>1</sup>. This includes everything from semen storage and handling through to cow handling, timing of AI and insemination technique.

“Look at practising your AI technique on cows in heat before mating starts. This can be done without using semen by placing a sheath over the AI gun. Consider attending an AI refresher course to check your technique, especially if you haven't done one in the past two years. Contact your LIC Farm Solutions Manager in the UK to confirm when courses are available.

“Good quality facilities will ensure you have the best possible opportunity for getting your cows in calf the first time around. Are your facilities safe, accessible, comfortable and sheltered from the weather for both you and your cows?

“We recommend having two people present during insemination to help with cow handling. Ensure both your loading area and flask are ready. Next, check all your AI equipment and consumables, ensuring they are in good working order, and thoroughly cleaned. Your semen should be ordered early to help you secure the bulls you prefer. Consider using our Herd Improvement Tool as part of your bull selection and mating planning.

## Success with inseminations

“This is a three-part process involving:

- The farmer (heat detection)
- The technician (semen placement)
- The cow (cycling correctly/on heat)

“Many factors help set up a cow for strong heats and mating success once in the milking herd. Early calving cows have more time to resume cycling post-calving and those meeting body condition score targets at calving have higher three-week submission rate and 6-week pregnancy rate.

## Efficient heat detection

“High levels of heat detection efficiency lead to better conception rates. The more cows you identify on heat and successfully mate, the higher the pregnancy rate will be. Taking time to train your team really pays off.

“Two types of heat detection errors occur:

- Heats can be missed
- Heats can be falsely identified ie ‘invented’

“The missed heat is the more costly error to the farmer as it results in 21 lost days in milk next season, later-born calves and less recovery time for the cow before the following mating period commences. Cows with weak heats can be tricky to detect and heat detection aids can be a big help with finding these girls.



## AI Loading and Insemination

“The success of your AI mating season starts at your flask. Correct semen handling procedures from flask to cow are critical for good conception rates. Your cows will never get in-calf if you compromise the semen, no matter how good your heat detection or insemination skills may be.

Remember insemination is a two-stage process:

- Guiding the AI gun to the entrance of the cervix
- Gently manipulating the cervix onto the AI Gun

Executing the insemination process efficiently reaps the rewards of all your hard work in getting the cow to that point.

Invented heats are less costly with no chance of conception, wasted semen, and as mating progresses, the risk of lost pregnancies when pregnant cows are re-mated. If you are unsure, look for additional signs of heat and at past mating dates.

Either way, maintaining accurate heat detection throughout the whole mating period is important.

## Records Monitoring and Review

“Record keeping throughout this season's mating will be key to accurately assessing your mating results and your ability to identify effective strategies and potential improvements for next season.

“Accurately record all AI and natural mating details against each cow as soon as possible after mating, noting all the details on each semen straw including bull name, bull code and batch number.

“LIC is always working on how it can help farmers make small improvements day in, day out, and we are always striving to deliver improvements on farm.

<sup>1</sup> The InCalf book for dairy farmers 2017, Dairy Australia [www.dairyaustralia.com.au](http://www.dairyaustralia.com.au)

Please  
contact the  
LIC team for more  
information and  
support.



LIC Heat Patch Plus

LIC Scratch Patch



ON APPLICATION

1 MOUNTING

3-5 MOUNTINGS

OVER 5 MOUNTINGS

Indicative results dependent upon the amount of bulling activity that has occurred.

# Premating heat detection is key to achieving 6 week in-calf rate targets

The DairyNZ KPI for 6 week in calf rates is 78%. Cows in a block calving herd are in a race against time to calve, resume cycling and get back in calf again within the first six weeks of mating, to remain a profitable animal within the herd. The question is, how do we best achieve this?

On the surface, pre-mating heat checks may seem an arduous task, with added cost to your repro budget, but benefits of pre-mating heat checks far outweigh any disadvantages associated with labour and expense.

Someone once told me it was easy to tell if a cow is bulling without the need of heat detection aids. In part, this is true, however my question to that person was how do you easily tell if the animal has **not** been bulling?

This is one of the biggest advantages of pre-mating heat checks, easily highlighting animals that have not resumed cycling post-partum. Identifying these animals **after** the first 3 weeks of mating, means they are far less likely to get in calf within the first six weeks. However, identifying these animals **before** the planned start of mating means you have time to get them cycling and be served **within** the first six weeks of mating.

Now let's say it's day 10 of mating, cow number 125 comes into the dairy and a member of your staff is unsure of her heat. If her pre-mating heats are recorded, you can reference this in deciding whether to mate her or not (whether she falls within the 18-24 day cycling window). This can be particularly helpful in spring calving herds experiencing inclement weather during mating where activity within the herd is reduced. Thus ensuring cows with weaker heats are detected and reducing semen wastage on cows not in heat.

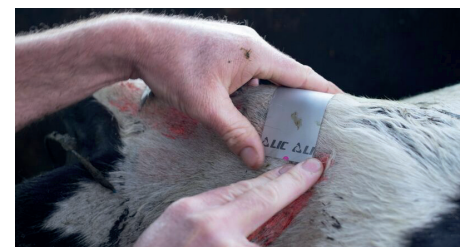
Identifying cows that have cycled more than once prior to mating is useful in selecting appropriate candidates for sexed semen, to achieve better non-return rates.

Pre-mating detection gets staff into the right headspace for mating. It's an opportunity to train new staff in heat detection and insemination and reinforces mating protocols for your team. Come mating time, your staff's heat detection will be on-point, with heats and the associated 21 days in milk less likely to be missed.

It can be as easy as painting up all the cows to identify those that don't cycle. Put early energy into getting these cows on track – particularly with any intervention – and complete it early to reap the financial rewards and focus your staff ready for mating.

## Pre-Mating best practice

Start early, at least 35 days (5 weeks) or more, prior to planned start of mating. Apply a tail paint and/or Scratch Patch/ Heat Patch Plus and observe heats. Repaint cows that have cycled with a secondary colour and note down her date seen in heat. You can use



different colours representing each week within the cycle to easily see if you are on target for 3-week submission rates. Use your on-farm software or a Whatsapp/ Messenger group to record heats. FarmWizard has the advantage of cow-side recording from multiple smartphones linked to the account, without the need for notebooks and pieces of paper that can easily be lost or misplaced.

Talk to your local Farm Solutions Manager to find out more about FarmWizard and its other benefits.

Identify the cows that have not cycled (still have the first coloured tail paint) 10 days prior to planned start of mating and implement your usual protocols for non-cycling cows, to get them mated early. If you have any concerns about not hitting submission rate targets, speak to your vet for advice and support on what you can do.



Additional day in milk (days in oestrous cycle - 21 on average)

X

Production (Litres or kgMS)

X

Payout (£)





## Diversification

### Is it the way ahead for dairy farmers?

**A lightbulb moment - noted when their dairy herd chose to eat grass that had not been sprayed with any chemical - led to a major change in direction at Park House Farm in Cumbria. And it's a change that's now reaping dividends for the Lee family who milk 140 Friesian x Jersey cows on 350 acres.**

“One of the sprayer nozzles was blocked when we sprayed the paddock to get rid of Fat Hen,” said Mark. “We had some stripes down the field where the Fat Hen remained. It was incredible to see the cows walk across 12 metres of lush grass and stop, all in a line, and choose to eat the grass with ‘weeds’. This carried on right across the 9-acre paddock and, to be honest, we just watched them open mouthed.” The cows were telling us in the clearest terms that they wanted to eat the grass that we hadn’t sprayed.”



Mark and his family at a local market

Mark and Jenny, who farm in partnership with Jenny’s parents, had already made some massive changes to the third-generation unit near Torpenhow on the Solway Plain by this point. Moving back to Jen’s home farm in 2012, they’d started with 220 Holsteins milking three times a day and going for yield, which at that point was topping 10,000 litres/head. Then came the milk price crash, which saw their return fall from around 28p/litre to 15p/litre, and soon realised it was costing them money to milk.

“We took a step back and looked at the herd as an asset. We had all the right infrastructure but the wrong cows. We decided to sell the herd and went from all-year-round production to a spring block calving flying herd as we still wanted to milk.

“We soon decided we were taking too many risks with a flying herd, once we had had a TB scare, so agreed we needed to breed our own and went to Southern Ireland where we visited some wonderful all-grass farms and saw some great grazing cattle. We selected Friesian x Jersey in-calf heifers, also buying a few cows from Cumbria, buying the best we could afford.”

This major change in direction needed a completely new mindset and enabled the family to plan a year of activity around the farming calendar. The system made a lot

of sense on paper and allowed them to work with nature rather than forcing nature to work with them.

“It was a massive change for all of us. But everyone has embraced the new system now, we all have a better quality of life, and we have structure to the year.”

One of the best pieces of advice they got, from talking to farmers and travelling around the country to other units, was not to try and breed grazing cows from their Holsteins, but to buy cows that knew their trough was the field. “Our mindset changed from feeding cows to produce milk, to one of focusing on better quality swards and using the cows to manage the growth.”

It was here that LIC came into the picture, with Pasture to Profit consultant Bess Jowsey helping the team make the transition and learn how to manage grass to get the best results and the majority of their milk from forage.

After the spraying incident with the removal of Fat Hen, Mark and Jenny both started reading more and more about organics and soil health and decided to stop spraying any chemicals or spreading any fertiliser or urea. They applied for organic certification.

“We were down about 40% in grass yield the first year and had a tough two and a half years as we had to buy in silage that also had to be organic. We started planting mixed leys and added 2kgs/acre of white clover across all the paddocks, also adding deep rooted plants such as chicory to the mix. We decided we had too many cows to milk organically so cut the herd back from 240 head to 140.”

At the same time, they were busy splitting the farm into 28 paddocks, putting in



4kms of farm tracks, 20 water troughs and 5kms of hard fencing, now planted with hedgerows to encourage wildlife and build animal corridors.

There were no organic contracts being offered in 2019, so the family decided they needed to develop a business opportunity of their own, choosing to set up a cheese company that has since gone from strength to strength.

"We invested heavily in buildings and equipment, and eventually got through all the red tape. It was a huge undertaking. Our plan was to supply local markets and shops. Then that winter, along came Covid and everything shut down. We started going door to door locally and selling online, just putting the word out wherever we could."

Getting through this period, while they were trying to establish a new business, was anything but easy, but today 'The Torpenhow Cheese Company' employs three cheesemakers and several other staff members.

They make a range of cheeses from cheddar through to brie, from a blue-veined cheese to a Binsey Red and Trusmadoor (similar to a white Stilton), both named after local landmarks.

The newest addition to the sales offer is a hand-churned butter. The farm is one of only three commercial butter makers in the county, an area that used to have many, and they are proud to be producing the only organic 100% pasture fed butter in Cumbria.

Plans don't stop there, as yoghurt is being developed, along with a unique way of selling fresh pasteurised milk that will reduce plastic use and encourage customers to go back to glass containers. Some cheeses are also being produced using milk from other farmers including sheep brie for James and Katherine Hadwin of Mansergh Farm at Kirby Lonsdale. "Working with other farmers to produce cheese for them to sell is a true form of farm cooperation and is a



huge positive to come from our major investment in the cheese production facility".

Last year the herd was certified as 100% pasture fed through the PFLA. A kilo of lucerne nuts were fed in the parlour, which was the only bought in feed that season. The lucerne nuts were mineralised at first as a way of protecting the cows against any perceived deficiencies. This year they are working with LMS to mineralise their water which reduces the reliance on the lucerne nut. "We were concerned that the cows would lack energy from a purely grass-fed diet, which can affect their milk protein and fertility. Fortunately, last year we saw no evidence of this so are more confident to continue with the system."

The Lee Family love the opportunity to engage with customers at local markets, explaining the full farm to fork process. It also allows them to discuss the two Harper Adams PhD trials being carried out on the Park House Herd by Olivia Bolton.

"Last year we decided to keep 16 calves on eight cows to look at the calf separation options, and monitored health and weight against a similar hand reared group. We chose cows that had high somatic cell counts as the fostering cows, as their

milk would not have gone into our cheese making process.

"The calves reared on the suckler cow system were healthier and at the end of six months weighed 100kgs more than the other group. We will watch with interest how they come through to bulling this year."

During the first trial Olivia's main focus was on the effects of the system on the calves, this year the focus switches more to the cows. Saliva samples are taken to monitor stress levels and health checks are carried out through the process.

Mark adds: "There is potential to build more value into the end product if it is produced from a calf on cow system, however there are huge challenges to this."

Throughout the process of change, the Lee family have been grateful to farmers across the country, to LIC and to local discussion groups for sharing ideas and offering help and support. "We are passionate about working with other farmers who have a similar ethos, and by engaging with the general public to explain and educate. We feel the industry has so much to be positive about."



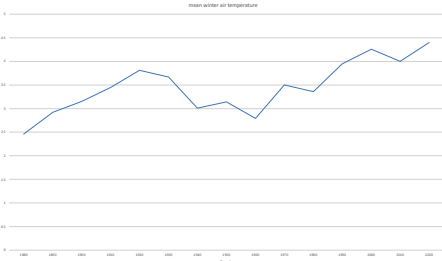


# Winter grass growth

Over the past couple of years the number of clients who have either struggled to achieve a complete rotation by balance day - or have been worried about quality of grass to turn milking cows into - has been noted by the consulting team across the country. The amount of grass growth through winter has been the main cause of this, which has led us to the question, is it time to rethink the target we have for the start of our last rotation and the closing covers?



Most autumn grazing plans are setup from historic winter growth rates which have little to no growth in December and January, as the reduction in light hours reducing the solar energy grass can capture and soil temperatures drop below 5 degrees resulting in the grass to stop growing. This dormancy is then broken in February when cows are turned out and their grazing stimulates the grass to grow. Two factors are seeing this historical narrative change, the first is that the average winter temperature has been increasing as seen in the below graph and the other factor is the use of hybrid grass which have higher growth rates in the shoulders of the season.



Having a high mean air temperature won't always translate to more grass growth as there needs to be 6 days of soil temperature at 10cm above 5 degrees for grass to start growing, so one frost a week could be all that's needed to keep grass in a dormant state. So, to see how soil temperatures are tracking through winter, regular readings have been taken at Walford College in the Midlands this winter. As the winter has been mild with few frosts, we have seen soil temperatures remain above 5 degrees well into January and as a result the grass kept growing. At the time of writing the last soil temperature reading hasn't been taken for January but it would be assumed that it has increased from the 17th January reading.

Date of reading	Soil temperature at 10cm
6/12/21	8.3
13/12/21	7.7
23/12/21	6
10/1/22	5.1
17/1/22	3.8

With a shorter period when growth stops, the management of the autumn and closing covers is critical for carrying quality grass through the winter or carrying the correct covers for your calving spread. Even if we see grass growth continue throughout winters in the future this will not see much movement forward as the sunshine hours will be the limiting factor. So, what are the potential management changes that are needed if this level of winter growth continues?

For spring block farmers who are targeting grazing to the end of November or into December, this could mean they should start the last rotation at a later date say the 15 to 20 October instead of the 10th. This will result in the speeding up of the final round and potentially closing at a slightly lower cover than you do now, but still achieving the desired opening cover. Is out wintering some cows on grass and bales like in the North Island of New Zealand the most cost-effective option? The farmers that have heavy





soils and are winter wet, this could mean grazing your R1 heifers through winter to maintain covers and quality.

For autumn farmers do we need to target a second balance/magic day in the autumn just before we house the cows? Dropping the average farm cover down to say 1900KgDM by the end of October if there is going to be 400KgDM of growth through November, December and January, allowing for the turn out in early February with an average cover 2300KgDM. If the soil conditions allow, can we turn out earlier? If we were to start our spring rotation in the middle of January, with a flat wedge from a fast closing round, could we achieve close to 50% grazed by the end of February without running to a feed shortage towards the end of the first round.

The biggest question I see is what we should do with silage paddocks? Especially the silage paddocks that are on off lying land, as it's easy to incorporate silage paddocks into the grazing rotation if they're on the edge of the milking platform. If weather dictates the last cut is being taken in September, and the first cut is taken in April, are we going to start seeing the quality of first cut reduce and regrowth slow from having covers that are too high? The obvious solution is

going to be grazing these paddocks with one class of stock or another in October or November, which is easier said than done in some cases as this could mean the need to move stock between multiple blocks.

The use of the nitrogen and slurry in the back end of the season is the other tool we have to control the level of growth in the autumn and winter. This could mean reducing the amount of nitrogen applications in the autumn to allow for slurry stores to be emptied going into the winter without boosting growth above what is needed.

While the trend is showing an upward trend in winter temperatures, this is just one aspect that impacts on the growth rates, so reviewing the level of grass growth through the winter is needed to see whether adjustment is needed, as the shoulder periods are the most expensive for producing milk while grazing. If the warmer winters allows us to change our management slightly that results in the reduction of the amount of concentrates or silage used through this timeframe, we will be lowering the cost of production and building a more resilient business at the same time.



## WALFORD Open days in 2022

Join us at the monitor  
farm open days this year  
at Walford College



The first open day is on **April 13**  
where we will be covering the  
following topics

- Reviewing the mating performance
- The grazing plan to reduce impact of high fertiliser prices
- The long term plan around growing maize



The second open day will be  
on **October 26** where it will be  
covering the following topics

- Review of financial performance of the last financial year
- Breeding plan for the year
- Final topic still to be decided

If you are wanting to attend one or both of these open days please email Sean Chubb on [schubb@liceurope.com](mailto:schubb@liceurope.com) to register your place.



## Proof points keep dairy farmers on the front foot

In his role at NMR the Managing Director, Andy Warne, can see that milk recorded herds, particularly those embracing routine health and genetic tests as part of their service, have a wealth of accurate management data that is future-proofing their businesses.

“Consumers increasingly want to know they’re getting a proven top-quality product, produced from healthy animals in a sustainable way - whether its pork, beef, milk or eggs”



Andy joined NMR 18 years ago from the logistics industry and has built up a keen eye on what makes a good or bad dairy herd from the perspective of someone who has not been brought up in the dairy industry.

"UK dairy farmers supply a top-quality nutritious food product and in an increasingly sustainable way," says Andy. "But it is vital they have 'proof points' to support their product and to promote milk and dairy products in a favourable light," he adds.

"The industry will continue to have hand grenades thrown at it and the argument for switching to what are perceived as healthier and more sustainable alternatives will continue. Producers without the records and the evidence to keep ahead of these anti-dairy debates will be on the back foot.

"Consumers increasingly want to know they're getting a proven top-quality product, produced from healthy animals in a sustainable way – whether its pork, beef, milk or eggs," he adds.

Accurate data from the simple cow milk sample on key areas like milk quality and disease control provide the food chain and farm assurance schemes with the information they will require going forward. "And they are valuable proof points of excellence. We want to give customers every reason they need to buy dairy."

## Bottom line

But, just as important, lessons learned from NMR trends show that production, fertility, health and sustainability go hand-in-hand. "Those herds with accurate milk records can set targets and make plans to increase solids, promote better fertility and achieve greater cow longevity," he adds.

This is illustrated in the latest key performance indicator report for the year ending August 2021, which surveys 500 NMR-recorded randomly-selected herds and is published annually by the University of Reading.

Average somatic cell count has dropped from 210,000 cells/ml in 2010 to the current 173,000 cells/ml and the best 25% of herds well ahead with 136,000 cells/ml.

Pregnancy rates now average 16%, up from 9% 12 years ago, and lifetime milk per cow per day, which provides an instant snapshot of herd efficiency, has improved from 10.5kg/day of milk to 13.1 kg/day in 12 years, with the top 25% producing 15.2 kg/day of milk.

The report sets targets, as achieved by the top 25% of herds in the 500-herd sample, for each parameter. These

are used by vets and advisers and will contribute to the efficiency and profitability of dairy businesses.

"The data provides the catalyst for these significant improvements in key parameters that will future proof dairy businesses. And more developments in milk recording and disease testing services will continue to drive these improvements," says Andy.

For example, routine Johne's disease screening using a milk sample is gaining momentum as more producers engage in a management control plan that is now mandatory as part of the Red Tractor assurance scheme.

NMR's HerdWise service is now the 'go-to' Johne's screening service for UK dairy herds. In most cases the individual-cow milk sample collected for milk recording is used to carry out the test. Testing milk samples to pick up infections has played an important role

in the good progress made in Johne's disease control in UK herds.

**"It will also be important that farmers look to reduce antibiotic use," adds Andy. "Using accurate cow cell counts to identify individual cow's dry-cow-therapy requirements is playing a significant part in the drive to reduce antibiotic use in our dairy herds."**

And the next major development is Genocells, which uses technology to monitor individual-cow somatic cell counts using a single bulk milk sample. NMR is currently trialling the service in a pilot project with First Milk.



## Retailer appeal

As producers engage with more technology on farm and progressive recording organisations offer new and relevant recording services, retailers are likely to embrace added information on their milk supply.

Some, including Tesco and Sainsbury's, cite official milk recording as one of their key requirements on direct supply pools of herds in their quest for sustainable and reliable milk supply.

"And their advisers are fully engaged with the value of milk recording to benchmark herd performance and manage these herds as they progress to increasingly sustainable production," he adds.

**"The old adage that you 'can't manage what you can't measure' applies as much on farm as in these retailer provenance schemes."**





## A day in the life of... Piers Badnell

**Born to a non-farming family, Pasture to Profit consultant Piers Badnell knew what he wanted to do before he could even read - taking his inspiration from a Ladybird book on farming.**

"It may seem strange now, but that's honestly how it started, my interest in farming. For as long as I can remember I wanted to farm and be out on the land, and from the age of 10 I started helping out on a local dairy unit, stopping there every day on my way home from school. At the time the owners had about 15 cows in milk, but later moved out of dairy and ran a multi suckler unit.

**"With my best friend Finn, there was nothing we enjoyed more than being around the cows and then walking the hedgerows to see what was what. When we were older, we carried air rifles and used to see what we could sneak up on. I didn't think of following any other career path, I just wanted to farm."**

At age 14 Piers paid a visit to Berkshire College of Agriculture and they plotted his path, telling him what he needed to do to take up a full-time role. He stayed at school to do his 'O' and 'A' levels and went on to Harper Adams in Shropshire to do a degree. Before that he had a pre-college year on a dairy and arable farm.

"At the end of this, there was a whole world out there to explore so I decided to travel. I spent seven years lambing, milking and doing harvest work to save up to travel in South America, Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand, and working on a friends farm in Portugal for a spell.

"When I decided it was time to get a full-time job I came across a bit of an issue, as although I had a pretty impressive CV by then, I was being met with comments such as 'we can see you're a bit of a

drifter and probably about to go off travelling again'."

Piers decided to study a post graduate Diploma in Farm Management at Seale Hayne and, on the back of that, became assistant farm estate manager in Lincolnshire. Over the course of the next five years the business was radically changed, and Piers says this gave him a great grounding in people and change management which has kept him in good stead.



There followed a spell as manager of five dairy units in Somerset milking between 1100 and 1200 cows before he took the role of farm manager at Hartpury College. The College was installing a new parlour and running a very intensive dairy system - a far cry from where he is today.

He moved on to become a senior extension officer with what then was the Milk Development Council, and today has morphed into AHDB, and spent 13 years working on soil, grass and forage-based systems. "This really

changed the way I looked at farming and started me down the route of promoting grass-based livestock systems. I was mixing with a lot of people with the same mindset and could see the value. The role gave me great training and I learnt a lot about facilitation."

After this, and yet another restructure within the business, Piers felt it was time to find a role where he could pursue his interest in grass and forage-based systems.

"In 2015 I had the opportunity to join LIC and I've been there ever since, looking after the same area, Southern England. I remember vividly that I joined just after England hosted the Rugby World Cup and while we were out at the group stages, starting work for a Kiwi company as an English rugby fan was quite a challenge at the time!

"My previous jobs had equipped me well for my Pasture to Profit role. I've always seen farming as a bit of a jigsaw, with all the parts constantly moving and farmers trying to complete the puzzle. That's one of the things I enjoy the most... the challenge.

"Today I find I spend about 10% of my time working with other companies, and on internal issues, then the rest of the time advising local farmers and running discussion groups."

Looking back at the years he spent travelling, he admits he often wishes he was back 'sleeping under the stars' in West or East Africa. "I loved the culture, waking up with the sunrise, meeting so many different people with no-one telling me where I had to be. It was a very different way to live, timeless, I used to leave my watch at home. Yes, if I didn't have to work, this would be very appealing however convincing my wife Amanda might be tricky."

Now he sees every day as a new challenge and enjoys turning up on farm and having to deal with a wide range of



different scenarios. He loves problem solving and, while he has regular and some 'one-off' customers, he also runs nine discussion groups and encourages people to go back to basics, to the fundamentals, looking to see what changes he can suggest to make each system work.

**"I've learnt over the years not to let the job get stressful and not to take on too much. I enjoy my job, and want to do it well, but I make sure I boss the job rather than letting the job boss me. I rarely work at the weekends, and I turn my phone off at 6pm."**

Piers says he was a 'late starter' when it came to getting married, waiting until he met Amanda and tying the knot 20 years ago when he was 37. He met her when he was farm manager at Hartpury, and she was an equine lecturer, also doing some research work and competing with two horses.

After time away from equine pursuits, they decided to invest in another horse last year and Denzil, named after one of the characters in their favourite comedy programme, Only Fools and Horses, is going to be aimed at spring dressage competitions. Piers finds himself as the groom at the weekends, and says he thoroughly enjoys supporting her. "We've done quite a few riding holidays in the past, including ridden safaris in Africa."



In addition, he played Rugby until he was 40, quietly supporting Gloucester although he lives near Exeter, and does some beating on shoots in the season and is a far better beater than shot.

"I find I spend a lot of time in my car, driving around the countryside, so always have a pair of binoculars with me in case I spot something I want to stop and watch. When you drive the same routes you get to know where you might spot red or roe deer or foxes, for example, and I love watching hares. It's also great to see crops growing and developing, and just seeing the countryside changing with every season."

When he has time he also follows the Devon and Somerset Staghounds, and says he still looks forward to every day, making the most of each and every one, learning something new all the time.



# Pasture to Profit Dairy Sales lift off



**The first of six planned sales that will concentrate on offering a new market for grazing cows and heifers got underway in early February, and all involved were happy with the first auction.**

The first of six planned sales that will concentrate on offering a new market for grazing cows and heifers got underway in early February, and all involved were happy with the first auction.

"It's a good start," says Jason Brown, auctioneer for Barbers Auctions who held the event, in partnership with Gwilym Richards and supported by LIC, at Market Drayton in early February.

"We got some good sales and it's started an important conversation. With the changing climate and farmers looking at moving to a more grass-based system for a lot of reasons, moving forwards I feel we will attract a lot of interest.

"The good cattle sold well and with bulling heifers reaching over £950 a head, our buyers and sellers can see that these sales offer them a good opportunity. We had some good interest on the internet as well from those not able to attend in person."

The concept was one developed by LIC's regional manager Ian Foster, who also expressed his satisfaction with the first sale. "We've already had some interest in running a similar sale in the South West, and can see this is a concept that will develop further as we go through the year. Further sales are due to be held in March, April, September, October and November.

One of the first sellers was Gerallt Jones who is a tenant dairy farmer at Ffrithlwm, Maenan, Conwy. He's in the process of taking up a new tenancy on a larger unit near Shrewsbury, and had some crossbred served heifers, in calf to a Stabiliser bull, and due in March, in the sale.

His Conway farm is a 120-acre all grass unit where he has been the tenant for the past four years, and is keeping his youngstock from his dairy cows until the tenancy ends next January.

"I wanted a bigger farm, I was limited on numbers in north Wales, and was lucky to hear about the contract farming opportunity at Shotton Farm, Harmer Hill near Shrewsbury.

"There are 270 cows there, all Holsteins and milking all year round. I'm moving to an autumn block herd with them and using pure Jersey semen to move towards a crossbred herd with higher solids, hoping to keep the higher yields that the Holsteins offer."

Gerallt started using Jersey semen in December and will stop serving in March. As only some 250 of the 600 acres can be grazed – the farm is split with a main road the cows cannot cross – he has to produce milk from silage for a large part of the year, so thought he would be best to go for autumn calving. If all the farm could be grazed, he would have gone for spring calving.







"I've always gone for crossbreds, and I'm really determined to get as much milk from grass as I can, whether that's grazed grass or silage. Holsteins are not known as good grazers, and I'm hoping that injecting some good Jersey blood will make the resultant heifers and cows better users of forage and that the milk solids will increase."

He's on a solids contract with Arla, so is keen to push up both fat and protein percentages, currently standing at 4.45% fat and 3.25% protein. His aim is to use the Jersey blood to increase these to 5% fat and 4% protein.

"Solids and fertility are the two main traits that I'm selecting for, while hoping to keep the Holstein yield, currently at 9000 litres."

He plans to sell the remaining 10 summer calving cows and 60 yearlings still in Conway before the winter and to use the return as cash flow for his new farming operation.

Two of Gerallt's heifers sold for £700 and £660 apiece to Richard and Rachel Moss who have a dairy herd at Spring Farm, Enson Lane, Yarlet in Staffordshire. They've been running this county council smallholding for the past two years, and with just 85 acres as a grazing platform, runs 100 cows and 50 youngstock.

It's a high stocking rate, although there is a little additional grazing for the calves and heifers, but Richard's ambition is to increase numbers to 150 in milk, concentrating on building up a herd of approx. 100 pure bred Jerseys and 50 crossbreds.

"The land is drying up well so we are looking to turning out earlier than normal," he says. "This gives us the flexibility to buy a few more animals in, and the two heifers I picked are just the

job for what I'm looking for. They've already settled in well and are very similar in stature to the rest of my herd."

Prior to moving to Spring Farm, Richard was herd manager for a unit running 600 Holsteins being milked three times a day. "This is quite a change but it's working well," he says. "These are hardier and smaller animals and they'll last longer in the herd, cutting down my replacement costs."

"We're planning to gradually increase numbers, and in order to get more litres, thought we would bring in some crossbreds to put more milk in the tank. We've used mainly sexed semen and

been very happy with the results, and have also used some Holstein straws to again add more volume."

At the moment his cows are averaging 5.8% fat and 4% protein, and on a solids contract with Yew Tree, he can see a future opportunity to increase here too.

Any beef calves get sold at around four weeks of age to a neighbouring farmer and he is happy to take them all. We're very ambitious with great determination to move forwards into the future, and sales such as these do give farmers looking for grazing animals another opportunity to source some good cattle."





# How do we get you the best possible bulls from New Zealand?

**Well, like all good things worth waiting for it takes time... and timing is everything.**

It's a nine-month process to get the best possible bulls selected and onto our EU stud then collecting against the targets set.

First, we need to review what each European market requires to meet their farmer needs. Armed with this, each June we start to screen all the eligible bulls in the system along with the new graduates who have daughters calving in August/September. These new graduates were used as yearlings in our Sire Proving Scheme three years earlier. The scheme will start identifying those rising to the top through the early milk recording information along with information gathered by those farmers around: milking speed, adaptability to milking, temperament and their overall opinion of each animal.

Some bulls are excluded at this point due to a number of reasons:

- They have been vaccinated for IBR
- They have developed health issues
- Their daughters aren't out-performing their cohorts
- Their semen is of poor quality

The list of prospect bulls remains relatively unchanged until September when phenotypic data starts feeding into their proofs. This is where we see the biggest re-ranking and some previously unfavourable bulls come back into the mix and, vice versa, some drop away.

At this point the NZ market will also be watching the proofs closely and they have the same focus as us in getting the best available to farmers as soon as possible. So, instead of waiting a year they'll pick the cream of the new graduates to use immediately on the national herd. This can mean several of our preselected bulls become unavailable to collect until a little later in our collection process.

In early October we revisit the entire list of bulls available with a focus on those that are available to start collections in November, our first intake. We continue to watch the changing proofs as more daughter performance information feeds into the system. We then select an intake of two teams of bulls to collect in December. Often at this point we'll find bulls that have risen later on as more daughter information feeds through.

Intake 1 and 2 bulls are collected for their sexed and conventional targets, and these are reached prior to intake 3 bulls taking centre stage on 20/01.

Meanwhile, in December, we're analysing all the high use NZ spring bulls for those that will add the most to our European farmers, this includes the new graduates that were fast tracked into the NZ breeding plan. These guys need to go through all the same quarantine processes as the other bulls, so are

only available from 20/01 onwards for collections. They're our intake 3 bulls.

We follow these with a team of equally as good intake 4 bulls that we already hold some stock of to get us started with our earlier starting farmers in market.

Targets for all these bulls are assessed weekly based on farmer interest, and pre orders with rostering changes made where possible.

Exports to the EU/UK have to undergo a very controlled protocol to ensure both quality and disease status are kept to the very highest levels possible, and this also takes time. It can be 50 to 68 days from the date of collection until the straws are available in market. To achieve this year-on-year without disruption is a feat that requires meticulous planning and attention to detail, along with a little bit of lady luck.

Last spring was a good example when lady luck decided to desert us and, despite all our checks and braces, we ended up a bit late for some. We've invested heavily in the process and expansion of sexed collections to further minimise the reliance on that little bit of luck.

As long as all goes to plan, you'll see some bulls like these guys below here for you this year. And, when you look at this quality, I'm sure you will agree the effort we put in on your behalf is well worth it.



## Thornwood Degree Trigger

Thornwood Trigger from the outstanding Trudy line of the Hillstar herd, this bull has very few faults. Bred from a highly efficient Manzello daughter, Trigger has a massive combined solids of 10.4%, on top of this he has excellent capacity of 0.69 which is easy to see from his pedigree. If farmers are looking to improve udders, Trigger is the perfect bull to improve udder ligament with a udder support of 0.84 and udder overall of 1.19.

- Breed Split - Jersey - J16
- Proven
- 1209 NZ Daughters
- Fat 6%
- AHDB Dec21 Top 20 Bulls Fat % Ranked 16th @ 0.65
- Protein 4.4%
- Easy Calving
- Available Conventional and Sexed
- A2A2





## Baldrick Trixster-ET

If it's production, efficiency and capacity you're looking for, this San Ray Beamer son is the bull for you. Trixster comes in with a massive 95kg overall from average liveweight of 566kg. Mainly coming from his body depth, with a capacity of 0.7, which is huge for a high Friesian percent crossbred. Even with this massive production Trixster still has excellent fertility of 1.7%.

- Breed Split - KiwiCross - F13J3
- Proven
- High milk volume
- Short Gestation - 8.9 days
- Available Conventional and Sexed
- A1A2



## Diggs Hardcopy

If you're looking for an F10 to maintain liveweight but increase your percentages Hardcopy is the bull for you. A Sovereign son bred from an outcross maternal line, Hardcopy will be an outcross for many herds who haven't used Solaris. With a massive 11% solids and a fertility of 8.2% Hardcopy is a bull hard to ignore. On top of this he's also easy calving for heifers.

- Breed Split - KiwiCross - F10J6
- Proven
- Fat 5.7%
- Protein 4.3%
- High Fertility
- Easy Calving
- Short Gestation - 7.5 days
- Available Conventional and Sexed
- A2A2



## Deans Professional

The perfect bull for heifers. An easy calving outcross. Professional is a son of the Jersey bull Besiege who never made it onto these shores. It's hard to find fault in Professional, with a fertility of 4.1 & BCS of 0.28, Professional will truly breed long lasting cows. Also, the unique thing about Professional is that being a J9 he has a positive liveweight of 8, so you won't drop much size.

- Breed Split - KiwiCross - F7J9
- Proven
- High gBW @ 354
- Fat 5.4%
- Protein 4%
- Easy Calving
- Available Conventional and Sexed
- A2A2



## Dowson Honenui-ET

If it's percentages you're looking for, Honenui is the bull for you, coming in with a massive 6% fat and 4.6% protein. Along with his excellent udder support and a capacity of 0.54 these will be stylish type cows that last forever with a fertility of 4.0.

- Breed Split - KiwiCross - F7J9
- Genomic
- Fat 6.1%
- Protein 4.6%
- Easy Calving
- Available Conventional and Sexed
- A2A2



## Snowline Benji

One of the first genomic bulls we've brought in. Benji is a truly outstanding F12. With massive solids of 78kg, a liveweight of 528kg and a capacity of 0.38 Benji daughters will be extremely efficient, which is unique for an F12 bull. Tie in his fertility of 3.0 & BCS of 0.2, and you'll see his cows should last in herds for many lactations.

- Breed Split - KiwiCross - F12J4
- High gBW @ 423
- Fat 5.8%
- Protein 4.3%
- Available Conventional and Sexed
- A1A2



# Pop these dates in your diary

# Look at fertiliser options

APRIL  
13

OCT  
26

Join us at our monitor farm open days this year at Walford college. The first open day is on **April 13**, the second on **October 26**. To attend one or both of these open days please email Sean Chubb on [schubb@liceurope.com](mailto:schubb@liceurope.com) to register you place.

On **April 13** we'll be reviewing the autumn mating performance, going over our grazing plan for the season to reduce the impacts of high fertiliser prices and discuss the long term plan around growing maize.

## AI training opportunity

Back by popular demand... register now to attend one of our popular AI refresher training courses. Use these days to refresh your AI skills using our lifelike Henryetta training model which gives you an interactive, hands-on experience.

The day covers semen handling, liquid nitrogen safety and bovine anatomy. Lunch is provided and you will take away some free samples and information booklets. The cost is just £125 per person or £200 for two from the same farm attending the same course.

## DATES IN THE NORTH

MARCH  
28

APRIL  
6

**March 28 Carlisle and Scotland** (venues for all dates to be confirmed) and **April 6 North Wales**. Please get in touch with Claire Hunter at [chunter@liceurope.com](mailto:chunter@liceurope.com) or call her on **07966 090848**.

## DATES IN THE SOUTH

MARCH  
31

APRIL  
1

**March 31 Wiltshire and April 1 Devon and Cornwall**. Contact Lewis Cook at [lcook@liceurope.com](mailto:lcook@liceurope.com) or call him on **07787 408824**. More venues will be added depending on interest.

## Dairy-Tech is fast approaching

Hall 2A  
P22

Come and meet the LIC team on the NZTE (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise) stand in Hall 2A on stand number P22. With input prices on the rise, knowing how to accurately allocate grass and having a cow that can efficiently convert grass into milk is going to help you remain profitable. Come and see how we can help and enter a free competition to win a goodie bag full of useful products.

Lead Pasture to Profit consultant Sean Chubb is encouraging people to look at slurry as an asset not a waste product as N costs continue to rise, 30,000L of slurry will have around 30KgN in it.

Speaking to Welsh farmers on a Farming Connect webinar he stressed that making surplus silage was not cost-effective. Instead, monitor grass growth in individual paddocks and cut the applications of N on paddocks with high weed, or less vigorous grass, focus on the paddocks that will utilise the N more efficiently. Applying N to make surplus silage isn't cost effective, grow what you need for your system and risk mitigation needs.

"Achieving the correct residuals and entry covers will improve quality and maximise the growth potential of the grass before nitrogen is applied, target residuals of 1500 and entry covers under 3200 for diploid dominate swards. Mowing silage paddocks at 28 days will also speed up regrowth," he says.



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