

# Business Development Groups



Developing knowledge and skills  
by working together

Issue 12  
August 2020



## On-farm meetings resume from September

DAERA Minister, Edwin Poots MLA recently announced plans for a phased return of face-to-face delivery of CAFRE's Knowledge and Technology programmes, including BDGs.

While we have continued to provide our services during Covid-19 restrictions through a variety of channels including dedicated phone lines, email, video conference, social media and the farming press, it remains the case that on-site practical learning and industry engagement enhances the quality of the knowledge transfer experience.

This month has already seen one-to-one support take place on farms through our network of Advisers making visits to members, and this will be followed by the resumption of on-farm group meetings utilising a phased approach from September onwards.

Social distancing measures will be in place for every event held, with CAFRE supplying appropriate PPE for the host farmer and all attendees to use. Risk assessments and updated procedures related to Covid-19 are also in place.

**If you haven't already been contacted by your Adviser, they will be in touch soon to make arrangements for your group's planned programme of meetings over the coming months.**

### HAVE YOUR SAY?

#### Email

[kt.admin@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:kt.admin@daera-ni.gov.uk)

#### Website

[www.cafre.ac.uk](http://www.cafre.ac.uk)



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## TAKING THE ROBOTIC ROUTE

Gordon Campbell and his father Wilson have a dairy and poultry farm on the outskirts of Ballymoney. Gordon is a member of 'North Antrim Dairy Farmers' BDG facilitated by Kathryn George, CAFRE Dairying Adviser. Recently the family made the change from parlour to robots for milking the herd of 160 dairy cows.

Like many busy dairy farmers, Gordon had limited time to spend with his family. He had found that sourcing competent and reliable staff to milk through the parlour was difficult so this was the main driver for the change. Having researched and looked at a number of robotic systems, the decision was made to install three GEA R9500 robots.

Two were installed head to head in the original cubicle house and a third box in a more recent cubicle house. Labour has been saved with the collection of cows, milking process, and washing yards.

With these advantages come some challenges and one such challenge is to spread the calving pattern. When the robots were commissioned the majority of the cows were in late lactation as previously they had been an autumn/winter calving herd. There is now a focus to shift the calving pattern to having 20 cows per month calving whilst maintaining a break over the summer months. Gordon has been using Genus RMS to manage herd fertility and has used a mating programme to breed replacements from the top 50% of the herd ranked on PLI. Current fertility performance is good with a conception rate of 51% and a pregnancy rate of 35%.

Production of quality forage is a priority, with a four cut high dry matter silage system. This year first cut was made on 1 May and second cut made five weeks later in the first week of June, with a nitrogen input of 50 kg/ha and 28m<sup>3</sup> of slurry (2500gallons/acre). A third cut was taken on 9 July and fourth cut is planned for this month. Currently the herd is averaging 32.2 litres/cow on 11 kg/cow/day of concentrate and achieving 8 litres from forage at 4.07% butterfat and 3.28% protein. Milk from forage is up two litres daily per cow from this time last year.

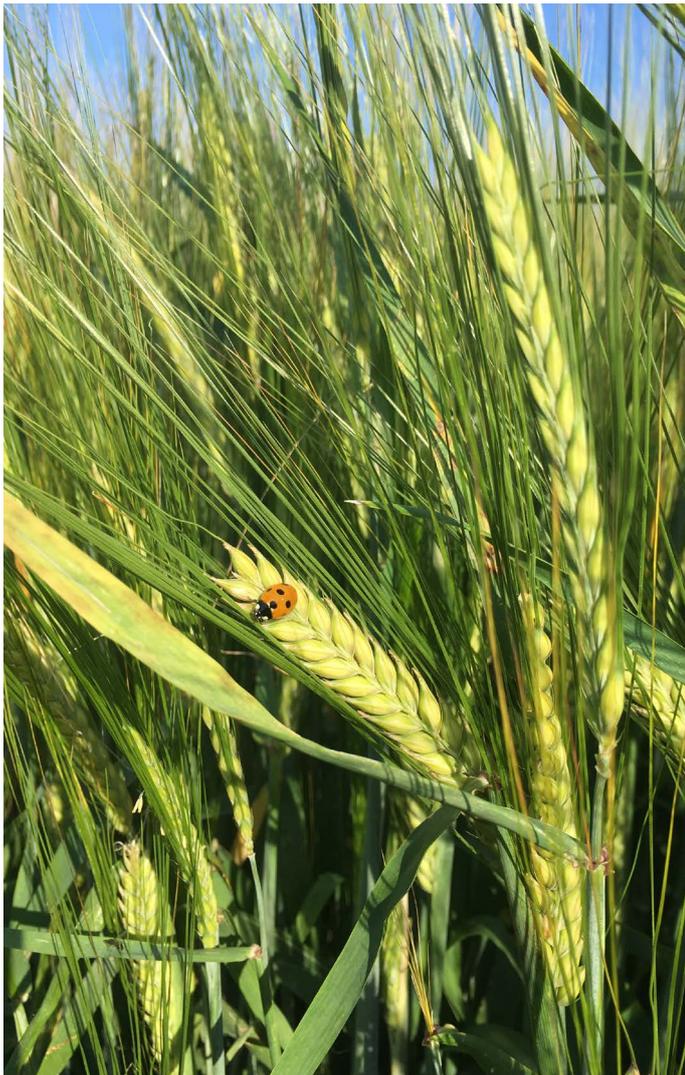
The Campbell family will continue to concentrate on achieving a calving pattern to maximise efficient robot usage, and producing quality forage to enhance milk from forage. Gordon is pleased with the robotic milking system as it has contributed to a better quality of life for his family.



Family time on the Wilson farm

## ARABLE CROPS AT CAFRE

The combinable forage and potato crop enterprises at CAFRE seek to demonstrate efficient and profitable production systems. Crops are grown in accordance with Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) Integrated Farm Management practices. This means we grow our crops in a way which makes best use of beneficial natural processes and then combine these with modern technology to minimise environmental impacts, while conserving and enhancing environmental benefits.



We grow maize as a forage crop for our dairy enterprise and it was planted, earlier than normal, on 14 April into good ground conditions. The crop has done well and the earlier planting seems to have paid off this year, as later planted crops appear to have been affected by the early summer drought. The crop is standing at about eight feet tall and looks very promising.

Our combinable crops have had a mixed season to date. Winter oats, which had been direct drilled, suffered badly from the very wet autumn and two fields had to be drilled again in the spring. Winter wheat looked poor during the winter months, but has recovered well and we would expect a good average yield from that crop. Winter barley has done well and although we have had some issues controlling weeds during the drought, the crop is ready to harvest and that will be completed as soon as weather permits.

Spring crops have had a good season, the two fields of re-drilled spring oats look very strong. A field of spring barley planted on light land has been slightly restricted due to the drought, but still looks reasonable. The potatoes are maturing well and our drills of Manhattan should be burned off in the coming days.

We will be posting a more detailed video update of the arable enterprises on [CAFRE TV](#) very soon so keep an eye out for it.



## ENVIRONMENTAL BDGS GET UP AND RUNNING

September will see the Scheme's new Environmental BDG members, who joined the Scheme in 2020, get together and meet for the first time.

Members will learn from one another on a wide range of different environmental topics. During the programme CAFRE will support your environmental interests whether it be calculating your farm greenhouse gas emissions, managing nutrients around your farm, creating habitats or managing the ones you already have.

We are looking forward to getting out on the road to meet the members of these new groups, and hope that you are too.

## BODY CONDITIONING SCORING OF EWES

At this time of year it is important for sheep farmers to start thinking of next year's lambs. Body condition scoring of ewes is a useful management tool for sheep farmers that can help assess the health of ewes, and increase the productivity of a flock.



A more productive flock should lead to increase in flock profit. Ensuring ewes are at the right condition score at tugging time will lead to improved fertility, which in turn leads to more lambs and a tighter lambing period in the spring. The target score for ewes will depend on farm type (hill or lowland), breed and the time of year.

In [this video](#), Gareth Beacom, CAFRE Beef and Sheep Adviser, Fermanagh shows how to check a ewe's body condition score and explains the benefits for farmers.

## COVID-19 LATEST INFORMATION

The DAERA website is updated frequently to keep you up to date with any developments which could impact or affect you. Find out the [latest information](#).

Safeguarding your health is crucial and you should follow all guidelines to stay safe and protect your family, friends and work colleagues. Advice is also available on the [Public Health Agency](#) website.

## MISSED OUR PREVIOUS ISSUES? CATCH UP HERE

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