

Large Herds Visit – Yorkshire, United Kingdom.

09 – 10 March 2020

Units and facilities visited

Monday 9th March

We visited A E Banks Dairy at Coxwold, York.

Tuesday 10th March

We visited Metcalfe Farms at Leyburn, York.

What we experienced

On the farm visits we saw excellent protocols for: –

- Transition cow management – accommodation and nutrition
- Neonatal calf management – feeding, housing and hygiene
- Milking cow management – comfort, nutrition, breeding and welfare
- Staff management – rotas, responsibilities and on-the-job training

Technology and practices not commonly used or seen on Northern Ireland farms

1. All cows were fed a transition cow diet from 3-4 weeks pre calving to at least 1 week post calving aiming to minimise incidences of full and sub clinical milk fever post calving and encourage post calving dry matter intake.
2. All colostrum was tested before feeding with that of best quality going to heifer calves. All calves were on accelerated feeding programmes being fed at least 1kg milk powder per day. Hygiene was seen as of the utmost importance with very high attention to detail with regards to cleaning between batches and minimising spread of infection between houses. The aim was to calve all heifers into the herd at 24 months or less.
3. Both herds were high yielding and largely being fed a single milking cow ration. The aim was to keep the forage to concentrate ratio the same every day irrespective of milk yield. It was felt that the higher yielding cow had a greater dry matter and energy intake.
4. Staff were seen as an integral part of both businesses with great care being taken over recruitment, training and mentoring. Many staff were appointed because of their willingness to learn rather than their prior knowledge of calf rearing or milking. The aim was to have high levels of staff retention and continual staff development.

5. Both businesses had strong working relationships with financial institutions, animal nutrition companies, veterinary practices and the local community via the Open Farm Weekend.
6. Both farms participated in a dairy discussion group, undertook financial costings and were open to discuss both physical and financial performance with other like-minded individuals.

Application to Northern Ireland

NI farm businesses should develop, agree and then set protocols for the management of:

1. Transition cows
2. Calves and young stock
3. Milking cows
4. Staff

(Targets should be set for each of these groups which are reviewed on a regular basis.)

Large scale dairy businesses should embrace the support that is available from outside organisations and seek to build strong working relationships with them.

Discussion groups can challenge and encourage dairy farmers no matter the scale of operation.

Animal welfare considerations and public scrutiny will become a bigger influence on NI dairying and farms and farmers should be proactive in developing links with the general public.

Report – Completed by Michael Verner