



DAIRYLINK IRELAND



Grass-based, high-output system in Down



This paddock was reseeded last year with a 50-50 mix made up of the diploid Abermagic and the tetraploid Abergain.



Banbridge farmer Robert Bryson hosted the Dairylink Ireland group last week. Peter McCann reports

Participants from both phases of the Dairylink Ireland programme visited Robert Bryson's farm near Banbridge, Co Down, last week.

"This herd is run as a grass-based, high-output system. It isn't necessarily a high-input system because I am focused on the margin and not milk yield," Robert said in his introductory remarks.

The herd is made up of 200 Holstein cows and all replacement heifers are reared on the farm. All Holstein bull calves and beef-sired calves are sold within a few weeks, TB status permitting.

The farm is made up of free-draining soils and it is located in a relatively low-rainfall area, with around 750mm of rain falling annually.

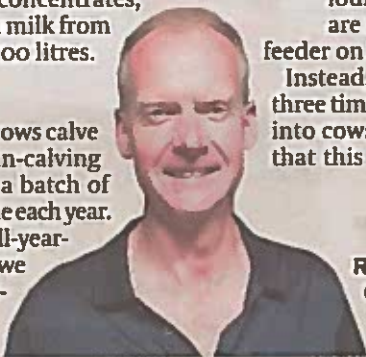
Cows got out to grass by day on 1 March this year and they were out by night from 27 March. The only time they had to be rehoused was during a very wet night in mid-May. Cows are able to stay out at grass well into October most years.

The current rolling average milk yield for the herd is 9,500 litres at 3.96% butterfat and 3.42% protein. This production came from 2.8t of concentrates, which equates to a milk from forage value of 3,200 litres.

Autumn system

The main bulk of cows calve in a block autumn-calving system, although a batch of 60 cows calve in June each year.

"We used to be all-year-round calving, but we found it too time-consuming and labour-intensive.



Robert Bryson is part of CAFRE's new technology demonstration farm project.

We initially planned to temporarily move the winter cows to June, but we quite liked calving cows in June, so we kept the group there," Robert explained.

"The main benefit is that a good number of cows are out of the way and settled in lactation by the time the main calving season starts in the autumn," he added.

Calving stops in July and Robert uses the opportunity to go on holidays and take time away from the farm with his family. The autumn group start calving in mid-August and the first autumn calvers have now been dried off.

At present, cows are yielding 30 litres from 6kg of concentrates on average, which equates to maintenance plus 16.7 litres from grazed grass.

The whole herd runs as one group and cows are fed to yield through in parlour feeders. The highest-yielding cows in the herd are currently producing 50 litres and are being fed 17kg in the parlour.

During the winter, out-of-parlour feeders in the cubicle shed are also used, but there is no diet feeder on the farm.

Instead, blocks of silage are set out three times a week and silage is pushed into cows when required. Robert said that this allows the morning routine

to be finished up much quicker than if he was filling a diet feeder each day, particularly at the weekends.

Pre-mowing

Grass covers are currently being pre-mowed in front of cows and this will continue until the start of August.

The aim is to put the mower into total covers of around 3,200kg DM/ha. He has the mower set to take covers to 2,300kg DM/ha and then cows graze down a bit further after that.

Robert aims for a post-grazing cover of around 1,900kg DM/ha at this time of year, although early in the grazing season the target is to leave close to 1,500kg DM/ha in paddocks.

In most years, there is usually a dry spell at some point which puts pressure on grass growth. Robert can walk cows to 180 acres from the parlour, so his first

response when grass is tight is to graze silage ground.

"Buffer-feeding silage is the last thing I want to do because it hits grass intakes immediately. As well as that, in a dry summer, I don't want to eat into silage stocks because it could be all needed for the winter. I have fed soya hulls as a buffer feed a few times and the cows seemed to like it," Robert said.

The entire farm is soil-sampled every two years and Robert makes sure that any issues with soil fertility are addressed through lime and fertiliser applications. He also reseeds regularly, with 18 acres sprayed off for reseeding at present.

"There is no point growing all this feed if you don't use it. You need to get milk from forage.

"We aim to get 19 litres from forage in May, around 17 litres in mid-season and 13 litres in September," Robert said.

Fertility drives milk output

There is strong focus on fertility on the Bryson farm as Robert points out that it is essential for efficient milk production.

"Our calving index is 385 days. If it was over 400 days, then there would be too many stale cows. They would be giving 20 litres when they should really be calved down again and producing 50 litres," he said.

Some cows are still producing sig-

nificant yields by the time they are due for drying off, but Robert doesn't see it as an issue.

"I have to crash some cows at drying off. I have one cow that is giving 35 litres and she has been put on 2kg of meal. Her yield hasn't taken a hit yet but it will.

"After drying off, some cows have a big bag for a day or two but are fine after that," he said.



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Current week grass and milk production statistics from participating farms

| Farmer | Location | Growth rate (kg DM/ha/day) | Average farm cover (kg DM/ha) | % of herd milking | Days in milk | Average concentrate | | Milk from forage (l/cow/day) | Fat % | Protein % | Milk solids (kg/cow/day) |
|------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------|-----------|--------------------------|
| | | | | | | fed (kg/cow/day) | Milk yield (l/cow/day) | | | | |
| S Wallace | Seaforde, Co Down | 82 | 1144 | 100 | 240 | 2.70 | 21.50 | 15.50 | 3.95 | 3.36 | 1.62 |
| J King | Ballymena, Co Antrim | | | 88 | 234 | 5.10 | 25.30 | 13.90 | 3.92 | 3.37 | 1.90 |
| J Oliver | Limavady, Co Derry | | | 100 | 190 | 4.00 | 24.00 | 15.10 | 4.18 | 3.44 | 1.88 |
| R Marshall | Omagh, Co Tyrone | | | 97 | 260 | 4.00 | 22.00 | 13.10 | 4.22 | 3.39 | 1.72 |
| F Goodman | Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan | 45 | 662 | 100 | 127 | 4.00 | 26.70 | 17.80 | 3.68 | 3.08 | 1.86 |
| J Martin | Dromintee, Co Armagh | | | 85 | 200 | 10.00 | 30.50 | 8.30 | 4.18 | 3.21 | 2.32 |

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