

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.

Please  
contact the  
LIC team for more  
information and  
support.

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



LIC Heat Patch Plus

LIC Scratch Patch



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.



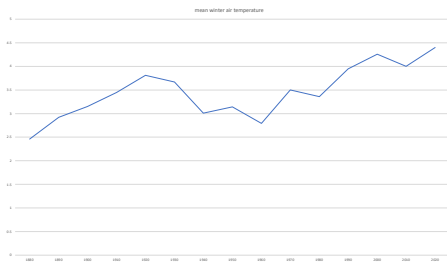
$$\begin{matrix}
 \text{Additional day in milk (days in} \\
 \text{oestrous cycle - 21 on average)} & \times & \text{Production} \\
 & & \text{(Litres or kgMS)} & \times & \text{Payout (£)}
 \end{matrix}$$

# 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 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 you place.



# Fertiliser and feed cost increases present a challenge

**The rapid rise in fertiliser prices has given Irish farmers a chance to improve their image with the general public and look to ways to reduce nitrogen use while still getting good grass growth and continuing to keep high levels of forage in dairy cow diets. That's the view of Co.Tipperary farmer James Croke.**

Farming a total of just under 300 acres at Curaugh Farm, Mullinahone, with his wife Carmel, James went to Kildalton Agricultural College in 1993, and followed up with time spent working on local farms. In 1999 he returned to education, joining the Farm Apprentice Board (FAB) to become a qualified farm manager. From there he worked as a farm manager for the following eight years until in 2008 he acquired a 15,000 gallon milk quota and started milking just 16 cows through a run-down parlour.

When he took on the farm in 2007 it was carrying 20 suckler cows and rearing beef, but his heart was in dairy and although it took him many years – and plenty of risks – to get to the 240 cows he milks today, he doesn't regret a second.

"I had to re-mortgage the house to finance my first 20 cows and held on to the sucklers to rear some heifers. I invested 1000 euro

to get the old parlour milking again, and by 2010 I had 80 cows in milk.

"We borrowed more to set up a 16-point dairy on a green field site, and by the end of that year had 100 cows. I was buying extra cows all the time and keeping as many replacements as I could. I tried to keep my borrowings low, because every penny was going back into the farm and going towards paying bills. Times were tough."

He praises his wife Carmel, who supports everything he does, and took all the risks with him. Today she manages the bookwork, registers the calves, keeps the whole operation running and even steps in if one of the staff members are ill.

By 2013 he'd built numbers up to 140 but was in a catch-22 position as he didn't have a big enough milk cheque to finance a second labour unit and didn't have enough land to expand further.

The following year, 24 acres came up to rent from a neighbouring farmer, and he grabbed the opportunity, at the same time taking on some shorter-term leases where he was able to make additional silage. The next year the same neighbour helped him again by offering him another 100 acres and enabling cow numbers to go up to the 240 they sit at today. He also managed to rent another 46-acre block some three miles away which he uses to take two cuts of silage and to rear some youngstock. All the heifers are contract reared.

"Quotas went in 2015 and for several years we faced big super levy fines. We were expanding faster than we could buy quota. Perhaps we made some bad decisions and expanded too fast, but when quotas came to an end, we were in the best position to move ahead. If we hadn't expanded, we wouldn't have been able to take on the extra ground."

Today James and Carmel, together with one full time herdsman and a part-time worker, milk 247 Friesian X Jersey cows, all spring calving, and have a great business working with a crossbred herd returning 580kgs milk solids per cow from an average weight of 550kgs.





"We aim to keep about 80 replacements each year and sell 20 maiden heifers each spring and 30 heifer calves aged between 10 days old to two weeks. Both help with cash flow and word of mouth sells them. If we've any late calving cows they get sold around Christmas time, once we've finished milking them. The fertility of the herd is good now, and we want to keep it that way."

Asked about the use of sexed semen, James admits he's a bit nervous, saying he hasn't used any yet but can see a role for it in the future. "My fertility is good now, as I said, and I don't want it to go backwards. I've got 90% of the herd in calf in the first six weeks and this is important. I may look at using some for just the first week in the future."

Looking back over the past 10 years, James says his aim was always to get the weight of milk solids to equal the weight of his cows, and now he has exceeded this by some 30kgs/cow. "I'm very happy with where we are now, and really don't want to push milk solids any further. I have a fear that I might start to affect the fertility if I do."

As 100% of his genetics come from LIC, he said that the traits he selected for were fertility, her ability to get in calf and calve easily, weight related to milk solids, good feet, a tight udder and temperament. "I like a quiet herd that are easy to handle and easy to milk."

In the past year he has used FR6007 (Lynbrook Kartel), FR6799 (Glen Koru Proclaimer), JE6805 (Waltons Inferno), ZSP (Priests Sierra) and FR4985 (Woodwards Spot-On).

His aim is for the cows to be out 300 days a year, with the first ones going out after calving when the weather is right - this year the first ones went out on 4th February. At that point they were out during the day and in at night, then moved to being out 24 hours a day from 28th February. "We do remain flexible if

the weather changes, but from February we definitely aim for three hours a day grazing."

All cow breeding is done with AI, James doesn't keep any bulls, and at the start of the season he uses an AI technician, then after the first three weeks, he takes over. He aims to finish by the end of the first week of July and uses tail paint and his own observations to know when to serve. The heifers, which are contract reared, do run with a Jersey bull later in the season.

The cows have an eight-week dry period and the heifers 10 weeks. They all get scanned in September and while he was a little disappointed with his empty rate last year (12%) he aims for a single figure result (8-9%).

With a heavy reliance on silage, he aims to cut 130 acres in May, closing up the silage ground on April 1. He takes a total of two cuts, the second coming in mid-July, and bales any surplus grazing grass to feed to the milkers if there's a deficit in the summer or at the end of the year.

Feed costs are a challenge at the moment, with costs for his 16% dairy cake spiralling to 350 euro/tonne. "Not only have the costs risen, by some 90euro/tonne, but availability has become an issue too. I'm feeding 2kgs or 3kgs in the parlour and won't go above that figure. I won't buy yield, and what I spent last year is my budget for this year. I can't justify

spending more."

With fertiliser he's also facing a big challenge but feels this may help to meet environmental and consumer demands.

"There's no escaping the fact that farmers are not the most favourite people at the moment. I feel we all have a responsibility to improve our image. We're not doing the industry any good unless we do that."

In the past he's applied half a bag of urea at the end of January or February. This year he's changed and used a contractor to apply 2500 gallons/slurry/acre over 80 acres with a dribble bar and plans to spread more slurry when he can towards the end of the year.

"I don't know whether this will work, my budget will allow me to apply 1 unit of nitrogen for each day the cows are out... to 16 units for 16 days or 20 units for 20 days. At the same time, we're adding clover to the leys and will see whether this new approach grows as much grass. We're also on the last 30 acres to be reseeded this year and will then start replacing the older leys year by year. Most have been ryegrass but we are adding 2kgs/acre of clover now to help with the nitrogen needs.

**"This way I also feel I'm ticking the environmental box."**

### Farm facts

2022 statistics	Farm
Herd size	247 crossbred cows
Milking platform	180 acres plus 113 acres rented
KgMS/cow	580kgs
Average cow weight	550kgs
Fat/Protein	4.66/3.78
Concentrates/cow	1 tonne
Mating length	10-11 weeks
Empty rate	12% (aims for 8-9%)
6-week calving rate	91%



# 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. There'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.



## 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 a 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





Hardcopy - Half Sister

## 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



## 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



## Ulmarra TT Gallivant

Bred from a commercial herd in Taranaki, with an extremely strong pedigree of Murrur, Excell & Maunga, on top of a sire line bred from Malcom Ellis' Hillstar Trudy line. With his dam averaging 6.8% fat, grand-dam averaging 6.4% and great-grand dam averaging 6%, there's a track record of high fat in his pedigree.

Include his excellent fertility and longevity with added capacity and udders. Gallivant is going to be hard to ignore, especially with a sexed option available.

- Breed Split – J16
- Proven
- High gBW @ 405
- Fat 6.1%
- Protein 4.4%
- Easy Calving
- Available Conventional and Sexed
- A2A2



## Glenui Degree Hoss ET

Hoss is a bull who's been around for four years now, but is improving and improving with every evaluation. Over the last few runs his milk has risen from -600 to currently -400. This would indicate his offspring are persisting better in late lactation and improving as they go into their second and third lactations.

With a fat percentage of 6% and 32kg of fat, this bull is up there with Gallivant for fat.

Hoss' TOP's are excellent, with udders that will last numerous lactations as indicated by his dam. Hoss' dam is currently in her 9th lactation, averaging 513kg solids at 6.6% fat and 4.7% protein. This is the type of cow premier sires are bred from.

- Breed Split – J16
- Proven
- High gBW @ 362
- Fat 6%
- Protein 4.4%
- Easy Calving
- Available Conventional and Sexed
- A2A2

# 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 Ffrithlom, 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."



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