



Finalist line-up for gold medal

Six herds from all corners of the British Isles compete for the 2008 Gold Cup

One herd from Northern Ireland, two from Scotland and three from England have beaten nearly 900 qualifying herds to take a place in the NMR/RABDF Gold Cup final. This year's winner will be revealed at the Dairy Event and Livestock Show, Stoneleigh, on September 17.

A week of visits took this year's three Gold Cup judges – all dairy producers – around the finalists' farms. Six units came under the scrutiny of RABDF chairman Lyndon Edwards, NMR board member Bryan Thomas and Gloucestershire-based 2005 Gold

Cup winner John Round. 'An excellent and very privileged opportunity to get an inside look into some top dairy businesses' is how John Round describes his experience as a judge. "Despite being very different, they share some key traits – a team approach to running their unit

and openness towards ideas that would help their businesses progress," says John. National recognition for John Round, as well as his team and his Elmore herd, and a real morale boost, were the highlights of being a Gold Cup finalist

and winner. "They were rewards that money couldn't buy," he adds. Looking to the 2008 competition, judges describe the finalists as exceptional in making successful businesses within the parameters of their own farms. Here's their comments.

William Baillie, Thankerton, Biggar



Judges: "This is a very good herd, relatively young and in its 11 years it has increased from 50 to 200 cows. Expansion has been controlled and William has a clear business approach and vision of where he is going with the herd."

William farms 162ha with his mother Janet and two full-time men. Expansion of the Covington Holstein herd has been mainly with selected bought-in females as well as grading up. The majority are now home-bred. The herd is averaging 10,500 litres at 3.9% fat and 3.1% protein from three-times-a-day milking. A new rapid-exit parlour in 2007 meant herd numbers could increase further and during the next five years cow numbers are likely to increase to 300 with further improvements in yield. The cows are fed a total mixed ration. Hillhead is 800ft above sea level and growing maize is not an option. Spring barley and winter wheat are grown. Alkalage has been made from the winter wheat. Milk is supplied to William's neighbour's Quothead retail milk supply business.



Henry Lewis, Bromyard, Herefordshire



Judges: "This is a fantastic example of profitable milk production from a well-organised team who are all very focussed on efficiency. And flying herd management doesn't get any better than this."

Henry Lewis' Winslow herd has expanded by 100 cows since 2004 to a total of 430 and average yield is 11,962kg at 3.83% fat and 3.13% protein, from three-times-a-day milking. A team of six are involved in running the unit. Henry doesn't chase yield, but lets cows fulfill their potential and milk well so he maximises profit – not milk output. At present 22 tonnes of nitrogen is used across the whole farm and just six tonnes of P and K. Next year this will be cut further – hopefully halved – as all the slurry will be injected to keep costs down and reduce emissions. For the past three years all replacement stock has been bought in – from herds away from TB hotspots. The entire herd is now put to Belgian Blue bulls. TB reactors have fallen significantly.



Gregor Colquhoun, Inverbervie, Kincardineshire



Judges: "The attention to detail here is superb with a cracking herd of cows managed to a high standard. Maximum advantage is made of the farm's resources in an area that isn't the easiest."

Gregor Colquhoun farms 340ha, home to the 360-cow Bervie Holstein herd, with his parents Blair and Judy. He also works as a dairy specialist for the feed company Harbro. Yields average 11,069kg of milk at 3.85% fat and 3.12% protein. The cows are housed indoors all year round and four Lely A3 robotic milkers milk 240 of the cows and the remainder, freshly calved or lame cows, go through the original parlour. The Colquhouns employ a head dairyman and three workers – the same amount of labour as when 200 cows were milked. Somatic cell counts average 90,000cells/ml with Bactoscans between five and 15. The herd has been runner-up in Wiseman's milk quality awards for several years. Heifers calve at 24 months old and the calving interval is 396 days.



Iain McLean, Bushmills, Co Antrim



Judges: "An excellent husband and wife team running a very well organised business. Every detail is covered and the farm is immaculate. An excellent herd of high yielding cows with very impressive young stock."

Iain McLean and his wife Joyce manage 105ha and 100 cows on the Antrim coast with help from Iain's father John. The herd calves from October to June and averages 10,600kg of milk at 4.23% fat and 3.10% protein. During the past nine years a new dairy unit has been built with a new parlour and cubicle housing. Four out-of-parlour feeders mean that high yielders can be individually fed, which has milk production and financial benefits at this time of increasing feed costs. Iain puts their success down to a team effort, which includes his nutritionist, advisers and vet. He looks to breed cows with large, powerful frames with good legs and feet and well-attached udders producing volumes of quality milk. A large proportion of the income at Priestland comes from the sale of surplus milkers and bulls.



Lifetime award added to Gold Cup

For the first time this year an award will be made to the herd with the highest Lifetime Daily Yield (LDY) from all 868 herds meeting the NMR/RABDF Gold Cup criteria. Herd LDY is the average of all cow LDYs in the milking herd. "This new award fully supports the

remit of the NMR/RABDF Gold Cup," says NMR's Jonathan Davies. "Many producers are breeding and managing cows for efficiency and longevity and LDY is one of the best tools for highlighting herds and cows that are achieving good results in these areas."

The RABDF Council greatly applauds this innovation.

The new award will be known as the Chris May Memorial Trophy in memory of the late Chris May who was dairy farmer and keen Gold Cup enthusiast.

Nick Cobb, Dorchester, Dorset



Judges: "This business has implemented its own blueprint for large herd management and put it into practise. It's a progressive, dynamic business and behind its success is a great team."

For the second year running the Cobb family and its 700-strong herd are finalists.

Nick Cobb oversees the management of the Chalclyffe herd, in partnership with his father David and uncle Alan.

A team of four dedicated dairy staff and general staff are all vital cogs in the wheel. Cows are milked three times a day through a 24-point rotary parlour. And they have recently appointed an apprentice large herd manager.

Split into six milking groups, the herd's average is 11,687kg of milk, 4.05% fat and 3.11% protein. Herd health is managed by the on farm team, the vet and through NMR's InterHerd.

All-year-round calving provides a level milk profile for Dairy Crest, sold on a Marks and Spencer contract. A total of 7.5 million litres were sold in 2007.

The herd is managed on a new unit with rubber-matted collecting areas, sand-bedded cubicles and specific pre- and post-calving areas – features that allow natural cow behaviour and calm cow flow.



Peter Jack, Blandford Forum, Dorset



Judges: "This is a superb herd of cows. Great value is placed on the milk contract and they farm towards this, meeting the highest criteria in milk production. The attention to detail to both herd and business management by the team is outstanding."

Completion of expansion plans and a consistent, business-like approach are just two of many reasons why Peter Jack is a finalist for the third successive year.

The 197-cow pedigree herd averages 10,976kg of milk at 4.18% fat and 3.09% protein. A commercial approach is taken to management and they concentrate on managing and feeding the cows to the best of their ability and avoid chasing yields.

As part of the 10-year strategy, building work to provide cubicle space for 215 cows was completed in September 2007. A senior herdsman and his team of five plus the herd's vet and nutritionist keep the herd on target.

The herd calves all year round to satisfy a milk contract to supply Waitrose.

Milk price and excellent labour were just two of the key deciding factors regarding the business' expansion.

The farm is registered under the Waitrose environmental scheme – one of the most comprehensive in the industry.

