

**Toby Roskilly**

Cutting feed costs and increasing dairy produce sales kept him busy in 2009. This year will see more investment and expansion.



Number of cows:	100
Breed:	Jersey
Average yield:	5,140 kg
Farm size:	100 hectares

An eye on the cows, milk processing opportunities – and the future

Growth – in a declining market

Switching from using a blend to adding straights to the herd's TMR ration was just the start of a record year for one Cornish organic producer's dairy processing business. We find out what other key ingredients are vital to its recipe for success.

text **Rachael Porter**

Record product sales and reduced feed costs helped to make 2009 a successful year for Toby and Silke Roskilly's organic dairy business.

The pair run the 100-cow Roskilly pedigree Jersey herd, with help from father Joe Roskilly, at Tregellast Barton Farm, near Helston in Cornwall, and they saw a 29% growth in sales of their organic milk, clotted cream, fudge and ice-cream.

The company's nationally famed ice-cream is available in 40 flavours and more recipes are being developed for the coming summer. "We're always working hard to move the processing and sales side of the business forward," says Toby. "But, after devoting a huge amount of effort into that side of the business, we will be re focussing this year on the dairy herd."

More milk

He's looking to increase cow numbers to around 140 this year so he can produce more milk. At the moment organic Jersey milk has to be bought in to meet processing demand. The business' herd currently averages 5,140kg of milk at 5.55% butterfat and 3.85% protein – that's around 500,000 litres per year.

"We're aiming to produce around 750,000 litres a year – a little more than we actually need. That should be more than enough for our needs and there should be a little left over, which we will sell through MilkLink."

Some milk is already sold through the buyer, during the quieter winter months

when the processing plant is operating at less than full capacity.

"We use about 20,000 litres per month during the winter and about 70,000 litres per month when production is at its peak. Our annual milk usage is around 550,000 litres, so we'll sell the surplus 200,000 litres," says Toby.

The additional milkers will be a mix of home-bred heifers and some bought in stock. A group of heifers are due to calve in the spring.

And the herd's accommodation will undergo something of a revamp. New cubicles will be installed. The exact design is yet to be decided, but Toby's keen to use cow mattresses. The whole unit will also undergo a rethink in terms of cow flow – more cows means that any bottle necks and awkward routes from sheds to parlours and out to pastures will have to be ironed out to ease management.

The Roskilly's business employs 65 people, but just four tend to the every need of the cows. Toby and his father are helped by herdsman Ian Blake and general farm hand Alan Bastion. The usual compliment of consultants and support services – including NMR – also make sure that the herd is healthy, efficient, productive and, ultimately, profitable.

The herd has been NMR milk recorded for as long as Toby can remember – probably more than 35 years. And he says it's a vital cog in the dairy herd management wheel. "We certainly couldn't process our own milk if we

didn't milk record. The hygiene tests alone are invaluable."

Mole Valley Farmers free silage sampling service, coupled with help and advice offered by the company's nutritionist Steve Chapman, have seen a highly cost effective switch from using an expensive 33% protein blend to feeding straights to the milking herd.

Increased feed efficiency is also due, in part, to the introduction of a mixer wagon. "We're able to put a more consistent ration in front of the cows and one that has the correct structure and it mixed well."

Feed costs

Silke keeps the business's finances under tight control, and part of her role is to keep a close eye on farm inputs.

"We've slashed our organic feed costs by balancing our winter forages with straights. Not always simple to do, particularly since we need to source organic feeds.

"But working with Mole Valley Farmers means that we get the feeds that we need, and in the required quantities, when we need them. And as a result we're saving in the region of 4ppl," says Toby.

The 100-hectare unit gained organic accreditation in 1998. "We've always farmed extensively, but we needed the organic accreditation to command a premium for our milk and products – without it our costs would be prohibitive."

The herd is tightly paddock grazed,



Cool customers: ice-cream brand is famous

Sweet success: fudge is another top seller

Investment: the herd will expand in 2010

using a three-week cycle, for nine months of the year – weather permitting. Turnout is typically in late February, with cows being re-housed in mid November, but wet weather means that this year the cows won't be out grazing until the end of March.

And cows are housed at night for part of the summer. "We buffer feed a variation of the winter TMR to make sure that we keep butterfat levels up.

"Butterfat production, as you can guess, is essential to the success of our business," says Toby.

As is hard work. Toby stresses that success didn't come over night for the organic herd. "It's taken us many years to get where we are."

And growing in a declining market – which the organic sector is at the moment – is no mean feat either. But Toby is modest: "We've simply jumped in to take advantage of the opportunities created by other organic producers and processors leaving the market."

Low-cost digester

Toby never takes his eye off the market and it seems that the expansion plans for the herd won't be the only thing keeping him busy in 2010.

"We will keep on growing the processing side too and pushing the business forward," he says.

New ice-cream flavours, including cheesecake and different variations of

caramel, are set to be launched in the summer.

And he's also setting up a collaboration with another business to supply Jersey Angus cross beef from the dairy herd.

Looking even further forward, to 2011, he's looking to install a low-cost anaerobic digester to generate electricity for the dairy unit and processing plant. "Ice-cream is 'energy heavy' to produce, so this will further reduce our costs of production and make good use of our waste," explains Toby.

"Yes, 2009 was a good year. But we won't be basking in our success for too long. We need to continue to work hard to make sure that we have a successful and sustainable future."

Teamwork: Cathy Mitchell (left) and Steve Chapman (far right) of Mole Valley Farmers are pictured with Joe, Toby and Silke Roskilly

