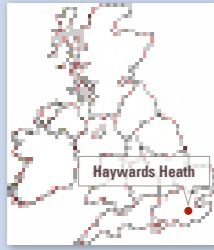


**James Goodwin**

Maximising LDYs in a large herd requires attention to detail and consistency. Having a good team of staff is also absolutely essential.



Number of cows:	<b>650</b>
Average yield:	<b>10,390 litres</b>
LDY:	<b>17.3 litres</b>
Cows per man:	<b>65</b>



*Strong team: James and William Goodwin (centre) with their skilled and dedicated staff*



*Maximising intakes: feed is pushed up to the barrier several times a day*



*Life's a beach: sand beds ensure that cows are clean and comfortable*



*Foot trimming: regular pedicures ensure that lameness doesn't limit LDYs*



*Top tip: only the best quality feeds are used to create the 650-cow herd's TMR*



*Milking time: a 32-point rotary takes the strain out of milking – and managing – a large herd*

Attention to detail and consistency are key to a long and 'milky' life

# The sky's the limit

We spoke to one of the producers who took centre stage this year's Large Herd Seminar, organised by Lillico Atlee and the Evidence Based Veterinary Consultancy, to find out more about how he manages his cows – and staff – to maximise LDYs.

text **Rachael Porter**

Striving to maximise lifetime dairy yields in a large dairy herd is no mean feat. So it was a hushed crowd who listened with a degree of awe to a group of 500-cow plus herd producers when they shared their secrets of success. One of the hand-picked group – selected from NMR's top performing lifetime dairy yields (LDY) herds – was West Sussex-based producer James Goodwin. He runs a 650-cow herd, with his brother William, at Hill House Farm, near Haywards Heath. Average yield is running at 10,390 litres of milk at 3.93% butterfat and 3.2% protein, and LDY is 17.3 litres and rising. And his secret to a high LDY? "Well, there's no silver bullet obviously. But there are lots of things that we do that contribute to maximising LDY and most, if not all, would be applicable to every dairy unit – not just those with large herds."

## Underlying philosophy

"What was interesting about meeting some other high LDY herd producers at the conference was learning that we share the same underlying philosophy."

James says that regardless of herd size, the key to maximising LDY is attention to detail and continually honing and improving dairy management and husbandry techniques to increase longevity and improve milk production. So protocols are the order of the day. They've been put in place – and are followed to the letter – on the unit for everything from tubing through to calving a cow.

"It's all about consistency, whether we're talking about feeding the herd and presenting them with a consistent ration or we're talking about heat detection and AI.

"That's something you can do whether you've 50 cows or 500 cows, but it's essential for larger herds that are managed by more than one man. It ensures that everyone is doing everything the same. No one is cutting corners. If one person milks or six people milk – we know that everyone is milking the cows with the same routine.

"It's important that we're all working in the same way to avoid variations that could affect herd performance."

James says that one of the biggest stumbling blocks when trying to provide that 'consistency' for the herd is finding and retaining good staff. He says the business has a 'dream team', which includes vet Ben Brearley, at the moment: "And long may that last! Having skilled and reliable staff is vital on a large unit and our ratio is 65 cows per man. Any more than that and corners start to be cut and you run into problems. We should know – we tried running at a high ratio and saw an increase in mastitis and fertility problems. Skimping on labour just isn't worth it."

## Maternity units

James experienced this eight years ago when the herd numbered about 600. "We tried to get too big too soon, so we dropped back to 500 cows and focused on getting staffing levels and the buildings right before pushing cow numbers back up again." Buildings are also important – for cow health and welfare and for ease of management. Sand is his bedding of

*Grand designs: buildings that help to maximise health and welfare are vital when managing a large herd*



choice in the new yards and cubicles. Mattresses and sawdust are still used in the other houses because the slurry handling system would be damaged by sand. "If and when we have the money to invest, we'd like to upgrade the system and change completely to sand."

James likes it because the cows like it. "Our six individual calving boxes are bedded with sand and, in my view, the cows re-cooperate far quicker," he says. Sand, staff, improved cow comfort – these all contribute to the herd's LDY. "We also start as we mean to go on. Freshly calved cows get plenty of TLC, both pre and post calving. "We try to keep stress levels – on the cows and the staff – as low as possible, so the calving pens are literally next door to the yard where we keep the up-close cows and heifers.

And each box is fully equipped with everything you need to ensure that calvings run smoothly – from soap and hot water through to calving ropes. There's no traipsing across the farm to find what you need at 3.00am. Each box

is like a mini maternity unit," explains James.

Fresh calvers also get a propylene glycol drink – a much-needed energy boost after all their efforts. And they're given time to recover before joining the rest of the milking herd and watched with a careful eye for mastitis and endometritis. "We're aware that the critical time for these diseases is the first 30 days after calving."

## Continuous monitoring

Just as there's no single answer to maximising LDY, there's also no limit to how high it can go – the sky's the limit. "It's all about continuous monitoring and pushing the staff, management, husbandry, cow health and welfare, fertility and, ultimately, yields in the right direction. And there's always something we can do to improve things. "Consistency doesn't just happen – we have to work at it. And that has to be across all areas – feeding, calving, transitional cow management, heat detection, and AI. That's a lot of different

balls to keep in the air at the same time."

Reviewing procedure is important. "We have to look closely at what we've done to see if we can improve."

James says that NMR's InterHerd is also useful here as it also produces 'real time' information and data, presented in a user friendly format, about how the herd is performing 'now'.

"We find it particularly useful for keeping a close eye on fresh milkers. We can monitor them during the first 30 days for signs of health or nutritional problems. The program is another pair of eyes on the herd, again invaluable when managing a large number of cows."

With this program, as well as a strong team of staff and continued attention to detail, James says that an LDY of 18kg per cow is within the herd's reach by the end of 2010. The average LDY for NMR herds is 11.1kg/day. "And we could see ours climb even further in 2011. If management continues to be consistent, then I don't see why not." |