



#### Pamela Ainslie

One of the UK's veteran producers shares her thoughts and views on dairy herd management and milk marketing, as well as her enduring passion for the Jersey breed.



Number of cows:	100
Average milk yield:	5,000kg
Butterfat and protein:	7% and 4.5%
Milk buyer:	Arla Milk Link UK

Pamela Ainslie: "I've always milked Jerseys and wouldn't milk any other breed"

## A 'diamond' lady with golden girls

It's no surprise to veteran producer and Jersey breeder Pamela Ainslie that Jerseys are a popular choice for dairy producers looking to cross or switch breed. And it seems that her traditional views on what makes a good Jersey are also back in fashion.

text **Rachael Porter**

With more than 60 years of dairying experience behind her, there's little that fazes Pamela Ainslie – she's seen most, if not all, that managing a herd and business can throw at you. And to her it's no surprise that her beloved Jersey, with its high butterfat and protein yield, is a breed that's swinging back into fashion.

"As far as I'm concerned, the Jersey has always been in fashion and deserved favour – I've always milked them and wouldn't milk any other breed," she says.

At 91, and having bred, managed and milked Jerseys all her life, her knowledge of the breed, the business of dairying and the importance of breeding good cows is not to be argued with.

She runs the 100-cow pedigree Jersey Cooden herd, with help from herdsman Dave Pilbean, at Barnhorn Manor, near Bexhill on Sea in Sussex. Her passion for the breed and dairying began just after the Second World War.

"My parents had some house cows and by the end of the war we had 25 in total – they formed the foundations of the herd we have today," she says.

Jersey cow families that are still going strong today include Silvercross, Valencia and Poppy. "Cow numbers have just grown gradually over the years. In the beginning we did buy in some cows. But we've been a closed herd for many, many years now.

"I often say to Dave that we have too many cows now – I think I've been saying

that for about a decade. But thankfully he loves the cows just as much as I do. In fact I'd go as far as to say that he's even more passionate about them than I am."

#### Simple system

Dave is quite a find – Pamela knows how hard it can be to find a good herdsman and she's had many during the past six decades. "I have to say that, present herdsman accepted, the women I've employed have always made the best herdsman. I had one who worked with me for 17 years – she was exceptional."

The herd, which calves all year round, is managed on a simple system. Cows go out to graze from the beginning of April through to the end of October. Through the winter cows are fed on a mix of grass silage and brewers' grains, with concentrates fed to yield through the unit's 12-stall abreast parlour.

For Pamela the breed is all about fat and protein. Without it – and plenty of it at that – the cow is not a true Jersey in her eyes. And that's been a view that some have come to share in recent years, a welcome swing away from the trend in the 1980s and 1990s to breed for more milk yield, rather than solids.

"I've always been strict about solids and always bred for at least 7% butterfat. Sometimes I've only got 6%, but some bulls can transmit 8%. Now that's what I call a real Jersey bull," she says.

The advent of AI is still clear in her memory. "It was an exciting time for the Jersey, as well as all the other dairy

breeds. It opened the door to the very best genetics from all over the world and it had a huge impact on the breed. But there were also some disappointments.

#### Home-bred bulls

"I've always found that, in order to avoid low butterfat and disappointment, I tend to use home-bred bulls now.

She likes a Jersey that's easy on the eye too. It's not all about production. "I do go in for a spot of showing too – yes. But it's not the same since they scrapped the milking trials at the Dairy Event. My girls really used to excel in those – that was our speciality and we were regular winners. But now, sadly, it's all based on looks rather than performance. The balance is somewhat skewed."

Dave says that the herd is currently averaging around 5,000kg at 7% fat and 4.5% protein. "The contents of the bulk tank look more like cream than milk – it's a fantastic product."

Milk is sold to Arla Milk Link UK on a Channel Island contract and Pamela, like

most dairy producers, would like to see a better price for her milk. "The best price, and most profit, I made was when I used to separate the milk solids out and sell the cream direct to suppliers in London. But that was an awful lot of work – and it was 25 years ago. I suspect I'd have to jump through so many food hygiene hoops now that I couldn't do it even if I wanted to."

Pamela is so sold on the breed, and the fact that 'proper' milk contains lots of butterfat and protein, that she says that she doesn't view some other breeds as being dairy cows. "To me, there are a lot of cows just producing white water and so many of them seem to be lame too. They're not good on their feet at all and they're not good grazers."

#### Grazing ability

"The ability to graze is key to the breed's success and certainly contributes to its high butterfat production," she adds. "It's an adaptable breed and can graze almost anywhere. I have even seen Jerseys

grazing on the side of volcanoes in Japan." Dave also likes their resilience and adaptability: "They're easy calving – it's rare for use to assist – and they have strong feet so lameness levels are low. They graze well and they last a long time in the herd.

"We've several cows here that are 15 years old and we had one cow that calved at 18 years old – Cooden Beauty. I'd like to milk a whole herd of cows like her."

It's these attributes that are attracting Holstein producers to the breed, according to Pamela. "We sell a lot of bulls to producers who want to cross breed with Jerseys. There's a strong demand at the moment."

She's seen similar trends and cycles in dairying before, with breeds, ideas and techniques moving in and out of favour. "And Jerseys – my kind of Jerseys – are on the up again. More producers are now seeing, first hand, how much easier they are to manage – not to mention the 'gold-top' quality of their milk – I think it's a demand that's set to grow." |

*Good grazers: their foraging ability and high constituent yields are just two of many attributes that make Jerseys popular all over the world*

Hands on: Pamela and her herdsman Dave work together to manage the herd

