



Kevin, Ann and Glyn Jones

Planning and investment for the future, with a strong focus on the present, are a winning formula for this Welsh dairying family



Herd size:	280
Unit size:	229 hectares
Average yield:	10,700kg
Calving interval:	405 days

Flintshire-based producers Kevin and Ann Jones are not ones for standing still. Moving forward is the only way and with that comes investment. There's been plenty of that at Bryn Mawr Farm for the past few years and it's standing the 280-strong pedigree herd is good stead – both now and in the future. The Starkey herd and the Jones' management style and business acumen caught the eyes of the Gold Cup judges in 2011 and they made it to the final of the prestigious competition.

*Grazing days: Kevin is looking to maximise the expanding herd's milk production from home-grown forage*



Sound investment decisions increase efficiency and 'future-proof' dairy business

## Plan today, strong tomorrow

Planning and investment to build a sustainable business for future generations is the name of the game at one Welsh dairy unit. We spoke to the 2011 NMR/RABDF Gold Cup finalists who manage the unit to find out more about their future plans.

text **Jennifer Mackenzie and Rachael Porter**

Maximising the efficiency of milk production through breeding and feeding while minimising increasingly costly inputs is the name of the game at the 229-hectare unit.

Kevin and his wife Ann took over the day-to-day running of the business from the solid foundations built by Kevin's parents, Glyn and Frances, who still have an active role in running the unit. And now their eyes are on the future for their two sons, Sam and Richard, who will be the fifth generation of the family to

farm there. The family has been farming at Bryn Mawr since 1925 and in 1966 they were among the first producers to install a herringbone parlour, which was updated in 2004 with a 28:28 herringbone in a new building.

The focus has shifted during the past decade or so to concentrate on milk production from the pedigree Starkey Holstein herd.

Kevin has selected high yielding sires to use for DIY AI, instead of a more dual-purpose type bull.



*Extra capacity: slurry lagoon aids storage and timely application*



*Cow comfort: the Starkey herd's five-star accommodation*

Feeding is based on home-grown maize and wheat and the best use made of slurry.

The herd is averaging 10,700kg at 3.94% butterfat and 3.20% protein and milk is sold to Tomlinsons Dairies, of Wrexham, which pays a premium for Welsh branded milk.

Somatic cell count is running at 172,000 cells/ml with Bactoscan at 18. The herd's calving index is 405 days.

Herd numbers have been fairly static since it was registered pedigree 10 years ago, but that's about to change.

Kevin has plans to go to 300 cows and push yields to 11,000kg. Work has been completed on the conversion of an indoor silage clamp to a dry cow cubicle shed. Soaring input costs for, among other things, electricity, feed, fertiliser and water, are a driver behind some of the business' investments.

### Additional storage

In 2009 a new slurry store was erected at a cost of just under £100,000, giving five months' storage and not only avoiding the hassle of spreading during the winter but maximising the use of the nutrients and saving a 30-tonne lorry load of fertiliser at a cost of £11,500.

All the slurry is spread by an umbilical system, reducing fuel and machinery usage as well as saving the ground.

A further £25,000 has been invested in 43pv solar panels generating 10kW of electricity.

A pump brings water from a spring under the farm for storage in an old milk tanker saving a further £10,000 in water bills, which is further supplemented by rainwater collection tanks from shed roofs.

And plans have been passed to convert redundant traditional farm buildings into three holiday lets to generate a diversified income. Building work should start on that shortly.

"My biggest cost is feed, which was highlighted through benchmarking with other members of the discussion group I belong to," says Kevin.

"This is why I started to grow our own wheat and push for more feed from home-grown forage."

Re-seeding is with high-clover five year leys as part of the rotation with the maize and wheat.

The wheat this year will be crimped with a urea-based additive producing an 18% protein feed, which will reduce reliance on costly bought-in protein.

### Three groups

Maize silage is buffer fed all year round. In the summer, all but the dry cows are out day and night but with access to the buffer feed at night.

The cows are fed in three different groups, the most recent being for freshly calved cows.

For the first two or three weeks they are loose housed and fed a proportion of the high yielders' ration plus ad-lib hay.

The cows giving plus 45 litres a day are fed to a maximum of 5kg of a 16% protein concentrate in the parlour.

The main cow diet for maintenance plus 30 litres is 0.7kg straw, 0.15kg minerals, 7kg maize silage, 11kg grass silage, 2.5kg alkagrain, 2.25kg hiprosoya and 1.5kg soya hulls.

"The specific diet for the freshly calved cows is helping to reduce displaced abomasums and it has eliminated milk fever.

"This decision was taken in consultation with our vet, who makes regular routine visits, and our Promar nutritionist," adds Kevin.

"Herd health is high on our list of priorities and maiden heifers are vaccinated for BVD, Leptospirosis and IBR before bulling.

"Cows get annual booster vaccinations. The herd has never had an incidence of

Johne's," he adds. "And we're careful with biosecurity so it stays that way."

The couple don't take any short cuts and they're always looking to improve all parameters – particularly fertility. That's why they've also invested in a heat-detection tool.

"I needed help with heat detection – it's a belt-and-braces approach really.

"Our detection rates were already good, but I was concerned that I wasn't giving it the time that it deserved.

"And things have certainly improved. Not dramatically, but it's good to know that they system is there to pick up anything that I miss," says Kevin.

Another recent purchase is a segregation gate, which works using the collars bought for the heat detection system.

"It allows me to separate the higher yielders – those giving more than 25 litres – and buffer feed them more easily. Feeding is more targeted and, therefore, more efficient."

Hoof health should also improve as a result of investing in a 'jet wash' footbath, which the couple saw at the Dairy Event. "We used to have two foot baths – one to clean and one to disinfect.

### Treatment costs

"But this one does both and uses sensors so it knows when a cow is walking through and works automatically," explains Ann.

"It's very clever and it'll soon pay for itself as lameness losses and treatment costs are falling since we installed it."

Like many other investments and developments on the unit, it should generate a decent return – either in the long or short term.

"We're in it for the long haul – we have to look at the future and we have to plan. For us it's about building a strong and sustainable dairy business that our sons, if they wish to, can help us to run in the future," adds Kevin. |