

Who will be on the podium at the dairy industry 'Olympics'?

# Six in final heat for Gold Cup

While crowds of proud British fans flocked to London 2012 venues an equally proud team of judges marvelled at the strength and depth of six British dairy herds, who have fought off 450 other qualifying herds, to make it to the final of this year's NMR/RABDF Gold Cup.

text **Karen Wright**

"These are six very worthy finalists," says RABDF Chairman David Cotton, who visited all the units with this year's other judges Bryan Thomas, ex-director, NMR, and 2009 Gold Cup winner Geoff Spence. "They are all family businesses of different sizes but with an ambition to grow and develop for the next generation. They all keep meticulous records

that they use to help direct the business and value their relationships with staff, understanding the importance of working as a team." Renewable energy is being taken up on most of the farms along with other methods of reducing their carbon footprint. "Different breeds – we had one Ayrshire herd this year – and management systems, from housed all year to summer



grazing and both pedigree and purely commercial herds, demonstrate how progressive producers develop their businesses to make the best use of their resources and balance this with meeting market demands for milk or for milk and genetics. "Selecting a winner is a difficult challenge for the judging panel." All will be revealed on September 4!

## Gilmour Lawrie, Monkton, Ayrshire

In just 12 years, Gilmour Lawrie has established a high-genetic blended-pedigree Ayrshire herd and is now making further investments for the future at Sandyford Farm.

Gilmour took on the farm after the 2001 foot-and-mouth epidemic. Today half the 240 Brierside cows are red and white with the remainder pure Ayrshire. Now farming with his son

Kevin, and in partnership with his brother Jim, there are plans to increase numbers to 300 cows along with forage and cereal cropping of the 445 hectares.

To accommodate this expansion, cow housing is being extended with a new building providing 50 more cubicles and housing a new rapid-exit milking parlour with heat detectors and other management aids to help improve herd fertility. "Our current calving index is 418 days and we're aiming for 400 days," says Gilmour.

Of the herd, 52% have had four or more lactations with a number reaching nine lactations. While more heifers will be retained to increase cow numbers, some surplus heifers have been sold recently.

Average production is 9,359kg of milk at 4% fat and 3.37% protein on three-times-a-day milking. Cell count is 121,000 cells/ml and milk is sold at a premium to First Milk on a Nestle contract, which goes to make chocolate crumb to coat Kit-Kat biscuits.

Kevin and Gilmour Lawrie with Brierside heifers



## Tim and Marion Gue, Steyning, West Sussex

The Huddlestone pedigree herd has increased in size to 400 milking cows and is run by Tim and Marion Gue with four full-time staff, including two herd managers who share day-to-day management. One focuses on health management, including mastitis, and calving. The other is charged with foot trimming and record keeping. Fertility is a vital area of herd management and benefits from having both their eyes on the

ball – they share responsibility here. "We're not chasing yields, despite the increase and the high figures," explains Tim. "And we've altered our breeding policy from increasing indices to focus more on better fertility and longevity alongside sound conformation and production." While yields have increased by 250kg during the past 12 months, calving interval is predicted to fall by seven days to 400 days. "Everything has improved



Tim Gue

Back row: Tim Gue, Marisuz Serdynski, Piotr Serdynski, Sam Picot, Adam Christian. Front row: Anthony Trigwell, Marion Gue, Neil Stokes



across the board – we're fine tuning. And fewer empty days are contributing to increased milk yield," says Tim. Recent investments include building a house on the farm for one of the dairy managers. And a new cow house has also been built, which has space for 120 cubicles. But, for the moment, Tim thinks he's going to use it as a straw-bedded yard. Average production stands at 11,058kg of milk at 3.82% butterfat and 3.12% protein on three-times-a-day milking. Average cell count is 117,000 cells/ml and milk is sold to Tesco via Arla.

## Matthew Rowe, Liskeard, Cornwall

Matthew Rowe milks 360 cows in partnership with his parents at Tredinnick Farms. The 228-hectare farm adjoins Bodmin Moor, making pasture management somewhat challenging. They paddock graze and get about 2,500 litres from forage, but feel

there's scope to increase this further. "In 2011 we built a new shed for 150 cows to improve welfare and create space to expand," says Matthew. "We're aiming to increase to 400 cows by Christmas, and have invested quite a lot in breeding replacements. We also want to increase yields by 500kg to



Matthew Rowe

The team at St Treddinick



1,000kg through better health and longevity." The cows calve all year round and are now run in groups comprising dry cows, heifers and older cows. "It's made a huge difference. The heifers are not being bullied by the older cows so they are a lot more content. They're milking better and their feet are better. We really want to look after them because they are the future of the herd." The Holstein herd averages between 3.2 and four lactations. Milk yield averages 8,956kg at 4.13% fat and 3.22% protein on twice a day milking with a cell count of 189,000 cells/ml. The calving interval is 410 days.

## Miller Family, Evesham, Worcestershire

Mike and Shan Miller and sons Paul and Steven run the 320-cow Shanael herd on a 336-hectare tenanted unit. In 2011, as runner-up in the Gold Cup, they won the NMR Silver Salver.

During the past 12 months they have increased herd size and taken on more land. And they have also stepped up fertility and health management, monitoring individual cows and trends through InterHerd.

"We have facilities for 350 cows in the milking herd and by the end of the year we should hopefully be fully stocked. It makes sense to maximise the use of our buildings and parlour," says Paul.

The Millers are purchasing animals from quality pedigree herds. "We look at type and production carefully and only buy BVD and IBR vaccinated stock from Johne's-free herds then stick to strict protocols on the farm."

Management is overseen by Mike, with Shan looking after the calves and accounts and Steve and Paul taking on cropping and cows respectively.

Average yield is 12,199kg of milk, at 3.6% fat and 3.08% protein on three times-a-day milking. Calving interval now stands at 410 days and average cell count is 176,000 cells/ml. Milk is sold to Cotteswold Dairy in Tewkesbury on a liquid contract.



*The Miller family from left to right: Steven, Katie (sister), Paul, Carlyn (Paul's wife) with Ava, Shan, Amy (sister), Michael Miller*

## Neil and Michael Christensen, Pilton, Somerset



*Neil and Michael Christensen*

Neil Christensen, his father Finn and his brother Michael milk 517

Holstein cows at Steanbow Farms. With 200 hectares of pasture taken up by the famous Glastonbury Festival each summer, the family made a drastic change to the farm strategy about five years ago – and haven't looked back. They opted to house the cows all year round and changed the dry cow ration to combat high potassium levels in the grass. The cows are split into five groups, with the dry cows now fed on maize silage and straw. "If we feed just 2kg of grass we get problems with milk fever and cystic ovaries," says Neil. "The soil indices would suit arable, but they are very challenging for the dairy.

"Looking back, given the current performance and profitability, it was certainly the right decision," he adds. "The cows and staff are much more settled and the unit is working really well now. Our focus from here will be on getting more milk from forage and being more efficient by doing everything a little bit better."

Herd averages are 10,521kg of milk at 3.78% fat and 3.13% protein on three-times-a-day milking. Cell counts average 104,000 cells/ml with a calving interval of 387 days. Milk is sold on a Dairy Crest Sainsbury's contract.

## David and Harry Hodgson, Burgh by Sands, Carlisle

The Hodgson's 145-cow Wormanby Holstein herd is bred for longevity which means that, as well as milk sales, they have up to 40 newly calved heifers for sale annually along with breeding bulls. This amounts to a third of the business' gross income.

David and his father Harry manage the 122-hectare unit with some relief help. A new cubicle house for 105 cows allows year-round housing of the majority of the milking herd.

"We are reaping the benefits of the new housing all the time. Yields have increased by 500kg a cow and we have

only had six cases of mastitis within the past 12 months since we started using the building," says David.

The Hodgsons don't under-estimate the importance of breeding the right type of cow.

"Then, if you feed her correctly, the milk will follow. We aim for cows to achieve 50,000kg within five lactations."

Average milk production is 10,761kg at 3.76% fat and 3.12% protein on twice-a-day milking. The current cell count is 128,000/ml and the calving interval is 425 days. Milk is sold to Arla on a liquid contract.



*David and Harry Hodgson*