



#### The Harvey family

Team work is key to success when running a large dairy herd – and winning awards. As is paying close attention to all the details.



Herd size:	<b>300 cows</b>
Average yield:	<b>12,000 litres</b>
Average daily yield:	<b>36 litres</b>
Somatic cell count:	<b>100,000 cells/ml</b>

## Dumfries-based family scoops top dairy award

# Joint effort breeds herd success

It's all hands on deck for this Scottish Holstein herd. The owners doubled herd size and upgraded facilities while, at the same time, keeping a tight grip on meticulous herd management. We spoke to the Harvey family to find out more.

text **Rachael Porter**

Just 10 years after moving to their current unit at Beeswing in Dumfries – and three years after son John returned home from Kent to help run the family business – the Harvey's herd has found itself firmly on the dairy map after being crowned the AgriScot Scottish Dairy Farm of the Year.

Owned and run by mother Margaret and sons Stuart and John, it's the first accolade the herd has received and John hopes it won't be the last. "We were surprised to win. We were

entered automatically, because we met the competition criteria. And we knew we'd made the final four, because we were visited by the award judges. But finding out at the show that we'd won will go down as a day to remember," says brother Stuart.

#### Cow focus

The judges were particularly impressed by the way the team at Drum Farm, which also comprises four staff, pulls together and in the same direction. It's

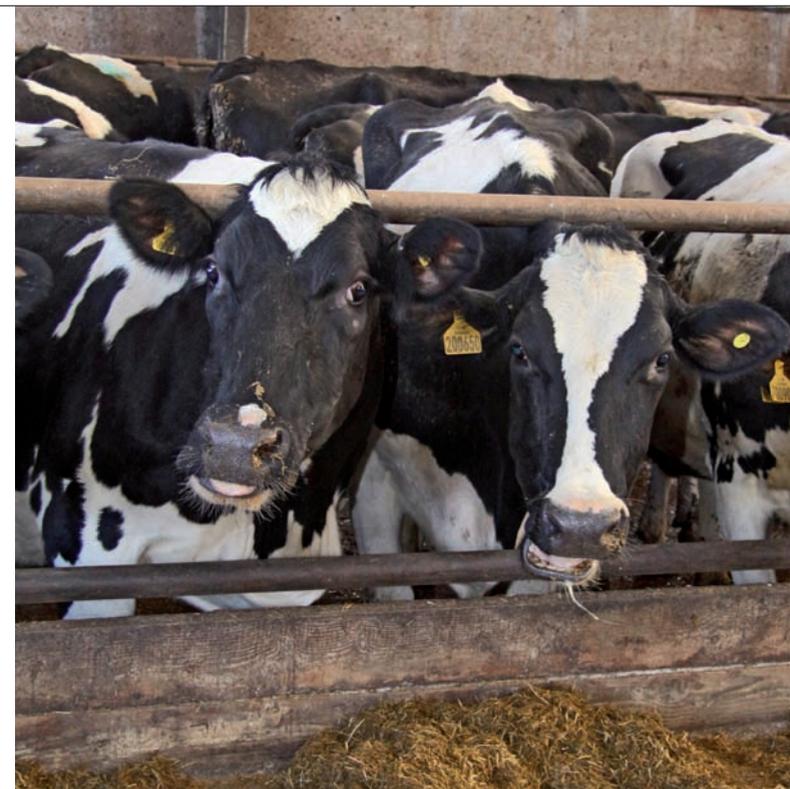
all about the cows – and that's as it should be, according to Stuart.

"If we look after the cows then they will look after us – it really is as simple as that."

He says that the herd's success is predominantly down to attention to detail, but that's no mean feat when expanding a herd and investing in new buildings and facilities. Such distractions can mean that it's easy to take your eye off the ball. But not in the Harvey family's case.

*Cow comfort: a sand-bedded cubicle shed houses the herd*





*Two groups: the herd is split into high and mid-to-low yielders*



*Tomorrow's milkers: they deserve five-star treatment*

Increasing cow numbers from around 180 three years ago to today's 300, as well as upgrading to pedigree status in 2011, takes time and effort. As does erecting a new silage pit, a one-million-gallon slurry pit and a cubicle shed to house 140 cows.

But John says providing space and facilities for herd growth was vital in order to ensure that all aspects of husbandry remained spot on.

"We have invested quite a lot in buildings and housing. We put up a new calf shed about seven years ago, which has mechanical climate control. There's just one piece of the jigsaw left and that's cubicle housing for youngstock. We'd like to upgrade an existing shed this year."

He adds that it's a priority since they now have around 300 followers on the unit. "More milkers inevitably means more calves and more heifers. And they're tomorrow's milkers – on our unit and any other that buy our surplus heifers – so they deserve some five-star treatment."

### **Vaccination programme**

The NMR-recorded herd is currently averaging around 12,000kg. Average daily yield is currently around 36 litres and the herd calves all year round.

The herd is split into two groups – high yielders and mid-to-low yielders. The former group is housed all year round and the latter go out to graze after first-

cut silage has been taken in mid May. "We milk the high group three times a day," explains Stuart, adding that the cows are fed a TMR that provides maintenance plus 36 litres, with individual cows topped up in the parlour with a 16% protein concentrate.

Feeding is very much Stuart's domain, with help from nutritionist Donald Lawson who visits at least once a month. John takes control of herd health under the guidance of vet Roddy Dunse from the Castle Douglas-based Dunmuir Vet Group.

He visits routinely every 10 days and helps John to deliver a comprehensive vaccination programme that protects the herd from BVD, IBR, Leptospirosis and husk.

"We're a closed herd, but we still take a belt-and-braces approach to health. We vaccinate our calves against Coccidiosis and pneumonia. It's vital that we get them off to the very best possible start and protect our investment."

Margaret plays a key role here, taking on much of the calf rearing as well as lending a hand at milking time. "We all muck in here as we have three people in the parlour at every milking," says John. Daily milkings start at 4.00am and the 'high' group is milked first, following by the mid-to-lows. The second milking is for the high group only and starts at 11.30am. And the final, third milking begins at 6.00pm with the mid-to-low group milked first, followed by the high.

Each milking takes around 2.5 hours through the unit's 10-year-old Dairymaster 18-stand swing-over parlour. "We have a cluster flushing system in the parlour, which saves time and labour and also helps to keep somatic cell counts and mastitis in check."

The herd's SCC stands at around 100,000 cells/ml and John says that mastitis is currently running at 18 cases per 100 cows per year.

### **Rumen size**

Breeding has also played a role in the herd's success and John says they like cows with plenty of breadth: "With good feet and udders too, of course. We don't like tall, narrow cows and don't like them too big either."

"I think that width is key as this is linked to rumen size. A large rumen means plenty of milk."

So, do they also focus on yield when selecting sires? "No, not really. We'll avoid bulls that are negative in milk, fat or protein. But we're not looking for large positives. If we get type right and feed and manage the cows well then the milk should follow."

With the herd average yield continuing to creep upwards, this strategy is working.

And if the family can also bag an award that recognises their efforts and performance then there's no doubt that they must be doing plenty of things right. |