



High yields are a positive 'side effect' of good feeding and breeding

## Cream of the Jersey crop

No one was more surprised to hear that his Somerset-based herd had topped NMR's latest Annual Production Report than Ian Wadman. Here the stunned and humble producer shares the secret of his family's dairying success, as well as the factors behind their two herds' efficient and list-leading milk production.

text **Rachael Porter**

**T**wo Jersey herds, both owned and run by the Wadman family from Holton near Wincanton in Somerset, are new to the top 1% of Jersey herds in the latest NMR Annual Production Report (APR). The report ranks all recorded herds based on fat and protein production for the year ending September 2012.

Both herds are managed as one group at Elliscombe Farm. Ian's pedigree 'Elliscombe' herd, comprising 16 cows, takes top place and averaged 7,283kg of milk with 772kg of fat and protein. His family's 200-cow pedigree 'Wisteria' herd

takes second place with 6,772kg of milk and 731kg of fat and protein and a calving interval of 390 days.

Despite heading the milk production table for the breed Ian says that he and brothers Laurence and Andrew, who manage the cows with help from mother Jean and father Claude, are not chasing yield. "Taking the top slot was a huge and pleasant surprise, but it's not something that we've directly set out to do. It's just a side effect, for want of a better description, of what we strive to do – manage and feed the herd as efficiently

as possible and use the best genetics available to us," says Ian.

The herd is managed on a TMR-based system, with cows housed in a cubicle shed during the winter and grazed and buffer fed during the summer. Turn out is usually after first-cut silage has been made – around the end of May. They're re-housed in October 'when conditions start to get too wet'.

All cows are fed a TMR, comprising grass and maize silage, home-grown crimped wheat and rolled oats, molasses, and a protein blend. This provides maintenance plus 25 litres. Individual cows are topped up in the parlour with an 18% protein concentrate.

Forage quality suffered in summer 2012. Grass silage quality was compromised by the wet weather, with cuts taken later than in a typical year. "But quality wasn't as bad as that on some units, so we can't complain too much," says Ian.

Maize silage yields were also down by around 40%, which was a shocker. "But we've managed well, as our production figures show. I think our yields were





Balanced ration: feeding has increased milk constituents yield for the two herds

this should rise to 39ppl in February. So we can't complain about that."

### Sire selection

Ian's domain is breeding: "I choose all the bulls for the entire herd and we use the AltaMate programme, through NMR, to best match these bulls to individual cows," he says, adding that all heifers are run with the unit's two home-bred Jersey bulls. "As are any cows that fail to hold to first service. That said, we only use Jersey semen on the top 50% of the herd, the other half is served with Aberdeen Angus semen and that results in some excellent beef crosses."

The resulting calves are reared and finished at 24 months and provide a vital income stream for the business. "It's a good cross, producing excellent beef cattle – we sold one recently for more than £1,000 – and the sires offer easy calving too," explains Ian.

On the Jersey side, Ian prefers North American sires and avoids sires that are negative on fat and protein. "We need plenty of that – we supply Wyke Farms with milk for cheese making."

A minus score for yield is also a no no, but he's not really looking for yield. He definitely avoids any bulls that score below two for type: "Because I want to produce heifers that will last in the herd – for at least six lactations. The herd average is five or six, but we have some milkers in their tenth."

Type is important from a longevity perspective – he's looking for strongly attached udders and good teat placement. And good feet and legs too, of course. Ian likes to show his Jerseys, but says he rarely has the time nowadays. His father Claude was heavily into showing and he travelled the world, judging in countries including Denmark and South Africa. But he's retired from judging now.

### Farm shop

As if there wasn't enough to keep the family busy, the unit also has a small farm shop that sells unpasteurised milk and Jersey cream, as well as butter from Wyke Farms, eggs and potatoes.

"We bottle the milk straight from the tank and have a loyal and strong customer base, which includes local shops and pubs," says Ian, adding that the shop works on a 'trust' basis with customers

Bottle business: milk is sold 'straight from the tank' to a loyal customer base



Ian Wadman

This family business comprises two dairy herds – both topping the Jersey production rankings. And it's all down to attention to detail.



Number of cows:	<b>216 cows</b>
Herd averages:	<b>7,283kg and 6,772kg</b>
Somatic cell count:	<b>100,000 cells/ml</b>
Milk price:	<b>38ppl</b>

paying into an honestly box. "So the only labour is bottling – we're not standing in a shop all day or continually running across the farm to serve customers."

### Labour saving

Another labour saving move, and one of the most recent investments at the unit, was to install an automatic cluster washing system in the unit's Fullwood 16:16 herringbone parlour. "We wanted to save on labour – we didn't have a mastitis or cell count problem. But, as well as shaving an hour off daily milking time, the system has also resulted in a drop in somatic cell count," says Ian.

"We were running at between 150,000 cells/ml and 160,000 cells/ml, but we're now down to around 100,000 cells/ml and we've even seen it as low as 70,000 cells/ml." He says that they plumped for T H White's award-winning AirWash Plus system because it could be installed without having to replace the parlour's existing clusters. Mastitis cases have also fallen, from around 30 cases per 100 cows per year to 20 cases.

"The system does two jobs – it cleans the clusters and dips the cows' teats – and it fits our set up. It was ideal for our unit and I think we'll have recouped the cost of the £17,000 installation in just two years."

And what about the herd – where will it be in two years? "Still close to the top of the rankings, we hope. If we maintain the current level of attention to detail, and keep a close eye on breeding, feeding and day-to-day management, I think we can stay there." |



down slightly this winter, but milk constituents were up to around 6.50% butterfat and 3.95% protein. Our milk price is around 38ppl at the moment and