

Top team (from left to right): Martin Hornby, Richard Butler and Richard Stonehouse

Scheme helps to develop vital dairying skills and management confidence

Support for dairy wannabes

In the second article in our series on training and development, we feature a producer and former Dairy Management Academy student. He tells us how he benefited from the two-year scheme and why he considers it a must for any young dairy enthusiast.

text **Rachael Porter**

At just 31 years old, Richard Butler is exactly where he wants to be – at least for the foreseeable future. He’s a unit manager on a 350-cow organic unit, near Bideford in North Devon, and says that job satisfaction is at an all-time high for both him and the two full-time staff that help him to run the spring-calving New Zealand-style system.

So much responsibility and, indeed, success as such a young age is testament to Richard’s determination to ‘get his foot in the door’ in his mid 20s and to work hard to develop both his herd and business management skills and experience. His achievement is all the more remarkable because he’s not, strictly, from a farming background. His grandparents and uncle were dairy producers, but not his parents.

“And I didn’t study agriculture either – I left school and went into boat building for a while,” he says. “Then I went to Australia, and then subsequently New Zealand, and that’s where I caught the dairying bug.”

Within three months of taking a job

on a 1,200-cow Kiwi unit, at Reporoa, he decided that he wanted a career in dairying. “After just six months I was assistant herd manager and I really enjoyed the responsibility and the satisfaction of ‘a job well done’ – and being rewarded for it.”

By this time Richard had also met his future wife, Karen, and for a while the couple toyed with the idea of staying in

Management skills: Richard measures grass cover regularly at the Bideford-based unit



New Zealand. "I was offered sponsorship to stay out there. And there are so many opportunities for young would-be producers to get on the dairying ladder, including share-farming schemes, which are more limited in the UK. It's possible to own a herd and, eventually, your own farm in New Zealand. That's much more difficult to do in the UK."

But they decided to come back to the UK and 'give it a shot' here first. And that's when he first heard about the Dairy Management Academy – a joint venture between LKL Services, Promar International and Genus. "Not only would it help me to develop some skills that I hadn't picked up in New Zealand, but I also liked the idea of having LKL supporting me – its backing – while I looked for a position on a good dairy unit in the UK. I didn't know anyone in the industry in the UK and sometimes it's very much a case of 'who' you know as well as 'what' you know."

Training scheme

With the company's help, he lined up a job on a Shropshire-based unit and also began the two-year training scheme. "Within three months he'd been promoted to assistant herdsman and he stayed there for another three months, before taking a position on a unit that was just a stones throw from where he grew up near Bournemouth.

"My wife and I wanted to be closer to family and the 550-cow herd was also run using a spring-calving New Zealand-style system. I was familiar with this set up and it's also the way I prefer to manage cows."

Again, within six months, Richard was promoted to herd manager, under dairy manager Clyde Jones. "All the time I continued with the DMA too, which not only focused on practical aspects of herd management, such as fertility, AI, foot trimming and nutrition, but also looks at the paperwork and red tape involved when running a business. It's all encompassing and ranges across all types of dairy systems too," explains Richard.

"That was important for me as I've always worked on more extensive, spring-calving units. As was meeting other UK producers – be they fellow students also participating in the DMA or their wider circle of dairying peers.

"I really loved working there. I liked the way things were managed and I was able to make changes to improve things. But then I saw a position in Bideford, close to an area where I could pursue my other

Dairy Management Academy

LKL Services, in partnership with Promar and Genus, launched the Dairy Management Academy in 2009 in response to dairy clients' concerns about where the next generation of herd managers was going to come from.

Its remit is to take bright, young, British people, working on dairy units, and to turn them into the managers

of the future. The scheme has been such a success that there are now two intakes a year. Running at 60-head a year, student numbers are now four times what they were in 2009.

➔ To find out more about the DMA, contact Henry Hare at henry.hare@lkl-services.co.uk or call 07531 335294 or Ian Lindsay at ian.lindsay@lkl-services.co.uk or call 07802596869.



passion of surfing, and I decided to put in an application."

Richard stresses that without the going through the DMA he would have lacked the confidence to go for the job of farm manager.

"I was confident when it came to things like cow husbandry and grazing management, but the DMA gave me the additional skills I needed to have for a more senior role, such as staff management."

Strong support

He also chose to stay on an LKL Services contract. "I did have the option to go self employed or to be employed direct by the Bideford-based business. But, again, staying with LKL gives me a support network to fall back on. I know I can call them, or Promar or Genus, at anytime for help or advice. It's worked very well for me so far, so why would I change it?"

So, where does Richard see himself in five years? "I can see myself staying here for a while. It's a great unit with

a good team of people, including head herdsman Martin Hornby and assistant herdsman Richard Stonehouse. And there's certainly enough of a challenge here to keep me motivated. I get a lot of job satisfaction.

"I have a young family now too, so it's good to be settled. And lifestyle is also important. We've worked extremely long days for the past couple of months, with no time off, to get plans and protocols into place so that I can step back a little for a while – Karen is expecting our second baby in July. And you never know I may even get some time to go surfing. That was, after all, one of the reasons why we moved here.

"We certainly have no plans to go back to New Zealand – why would we when we have achieved so much more in the UK than we ever hoped we would. It seems that there are more opportunities here than we originally thought, particularly now there are schemes, like the DMA, to help young people to get a firm foothold on the dairying ladder." |