

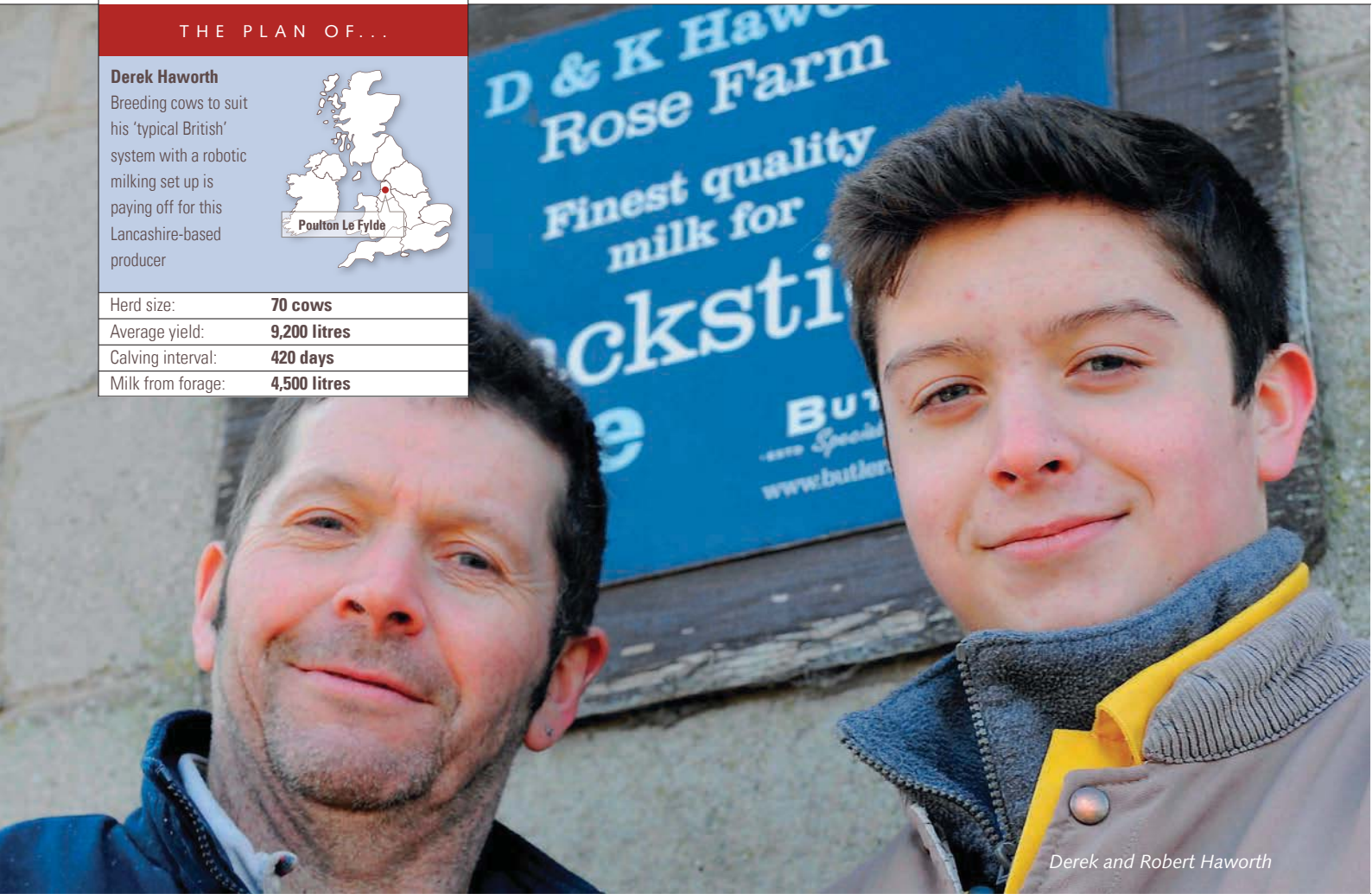
## THE PLAN OF...

**Derek Haworth**

Breeding cows to suit his 'typical British' system with a robotic milking set up is paying off for this Lancashire-based producer



Herd size:	<b>70 cows</b>
Average yield:	<b>9,200 litres</b>
Calving interval:	<b>420 days</b>
Milk from forage:	<b>4,500 litres</b>



Derek and Robert Haworth

Good grazers with capacity to produce plenty of milk from forage

# Breeding for 'British' system

Breeding robust cows with capacity for forage and good teat placement are key to success for one Lancashire-based producer.

What shaped his breeding policy and what are his future plans?

text **Rachael Porter**

**D**erek Haworth runs his herd, which is based at Poulton Le Fylde in Lancashire, on what he describes as a 'typical British' system. "In other words, I'm making as much of grazing and grassland as possible and, in this tough economic climate, I'm not sure what other way there is to try and stay viable," he says.

He began moving away from pure-bred Ayrshire in the early 1990s and, in 2002, following the foot-and-mouth disease crisis, a large proportion of the pedigree

Ayrshire herd was sold to a breeder who had lost his herd in the cull. "I did keep about 33 head of young stock. My father decided to retire and I started again with these and some bought-in black-and-white heifers. It was a case of restocking and I was looking for a little more milk yield and a slightly bigger version of the Ayrshire cow – more body capacity rather than stature. So some Holstein bloodlines were the answer." These cattle laid the foundations of today's herd, which remains a mixture

of the two bloodlines. This is, in part, due to Derek's interest in Dutch red-and-white Holstein genetics. "These really caught my eye because they offered what I was looking for – more milk and capacity, but not extreme unlike the North American Holsteins that were all the rage in the 1990s.

### **Insight: genetic foundations**

"They are great cattle, but too fragile for my forage based system. I knew that I needed something a little more robust and genetics that could maximise milk from forage. That's very much what my system was – and still is – about. I needed to breed cows and heifers to suit my 'British' system."

So that means health, longevity and fertility – as opposed to yield. "I do want a decent milk yield, but I'm not aiming too high," he says, adding that 'decent'

at the moment is 9,018 litres, at 4.50% butterfat and 3.46% protein, for the Ayrshire crosses and 9,200 litres, at 4.26% butterfat and 3.43% protein, for the Holstein crosses.

Decent is perhaps a little modest – these yields are impressive. And even more impressive is that just shy of 4,500 litres of those average yields comes from forage.

“My mantra is that profit is sanity and yield is vanity. So I’m really not chasing yield. I’m chasing yield from forage – which is the cheapest feed available.

“For that I need genetics – in other words cows with capacity to eat plenty of forage and the ability to go out and graze. Good yield, with high components, is a happy side effect of that.”

### Plan: teat placement

His herd calves all year round, to provide a level milk supply for his buyer, and a recent development is that it is now milked through a robot – a single DeLaval unit was installed in 2009 – and this has meant tweaking his herd’s breeding policy and sire selection parameters slightly.

“I’m still looking for plenty of capacity

and functional type. But better teat placement and good udder attachment are more important now too.

“As is ‘agility’ – I want cows and heifers with good mobility now that the onus is on them to get up and go to the robot to be milked.”

Since his system is still very much grass based – a mixture of grazing and ‘cut and carry’ – his cows also needs good feet and legs. The cow house, which also contains the robotic milking system, has a pasture gate so the cows can go out to graze – just as they would after milking through a more conventional set up.

### Improve: future plans

He plans to continue to build on the ‘power and strength’ in his herd, much of which comes from the CRVAvoncroft sires he’s used during the past two decades.

The younger proportion of the herd comprise a number of Topspeed Kodak and Delta Fidelity daughters and they’re milking well through the robot and proving to be the kind of ‘trouble free’ cows that he likes to breed and manage. Derek uses CRV’s Sirematch program to

avoid inbreeding: “I don’t profess to be a whiz when it comes to selecting bulls. I’m not as switched on as my father was when it comes to pedigree lines. So this program points me in the right direction and makes sure I avoid any costly mistakes.”

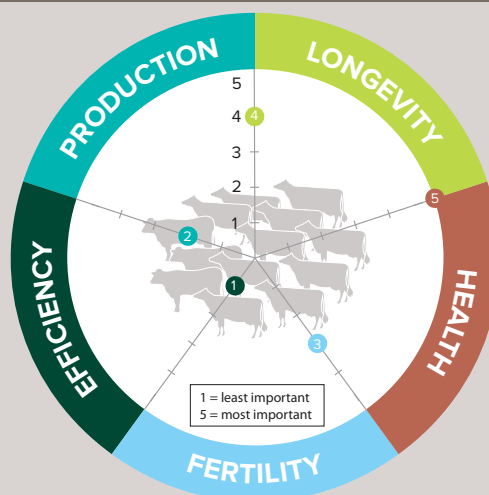
He’s has Windstar, Fidelity and Fantasy in his AI flask at the moment and also has daughters on the ground by these sires. “And already I’m pleased with what ‘ve seen. They’re great looking calves,” says Derek.

He manages the herd with help from his wife Kirsty and his 16-year-old son Robert, who is also keen on the genetics side of the dairy business. “We look at the sire catalogues together. It’s important that he’s involved because, if he wants to come home to help run the herd after he’s been to college, he’ll be milking the descendants of the heifers we breed today.

“We also consult with Alan Mason, from CRVAvoncroft. Three heads are even better than two. And between us I know we’re going to select the best sires for use on our cows and heifers and that our herd will continue to go from strength to strength.” |



### THE PLAN IN ACTION



### What traits are key to suit the management of the Haworth family’s herd?

#### 5 Health

Robust, trouble-free cattle ensure that they can easily move between the robot and grazing during the summer and time is not wasted treating sick cows.

- Sires with good feet and legs, and udders
- Good health scores

#### 4 Longevity

Power and strength are the key drivers for herd health, efficiency and longevity. Good feet and legs and udders ensure that cows last for several lactations.

- Sires with functional type
- Sires with good udder health and conformation

#### 3 Fertility

This is vital to ensure that cows and heifers get back in calf easily, maintaining the herd’s calving pattern and making the most of summer grazing

- Easy calving sires
- Sires offering good fertility and not too much milk