

**Wellwood family**

Setting performance targets – and meeting them – has contributed to the continued growth and success of this Leicestershire-based dairy business.



Herd size:	288 milkers
Average yield:	5,840 litres
Unit size:	138 hectares
Milk from forage:	5,000 litres

Focused approach allowed growth and expansion

Targets drive dairy herd performance

Performing within the top 10% is where one Leicestershire-based spring calving herd positions itself. But there's no room for complacency and targets are reviewed annually for key performance indicators, while honing the team's dairy cow management skills and making best use of the farm's resources.

text **Karen Wright**

Kieran and Gaynor Wellwood met after attending Reaseheath College, Cheshire, and launched themselves into careers in the dairy industry – in Gaynor's case, and more latterly, running motivational and entrepreneurial discussion groups on behalf of Andersons.

"We managed a dairy unit in Cornwall before getting our first 15-hectare county council holding in Devon," says Kieran, who cut his teeth on grass-based dairying while working in New Zealand for two years. "I decided then, that my aim was to have my own cows managed on a grass-based system."

Just twelve months later the couple then moved on to a 29-hectare Devon-based unit, where they doubled cow numbers to 60. A third unit with Devon county council enabled further growth in cow

numbers to 130 head. Eight years on from that and Kieran and Gaynor got their next opportunity to move up the dairying ladder by securing a 10-year FBT on a 138-hectare unit on the Saltby Estate, near Melton Mowbray.

"We'd got into a routine of looking at the potential of the business in a 10-year timeframe," says Gaynor. "We look to make any investments in the first three years and only if it's essential. With a short-term tenancy, we've always had to progress quickly."

Tighter targets

Five years into their tenancy and the cross-bred and New Zealand genetics herd of 288 cows had an NMR average, for 2015, of 5,840 litres of milk with 489kg of solids – 5,000 litres came from forage. They fed just 402kg of

	actual 2015	target 2016
cows in milk	288	301
milk yield (litres/cow)	5,840	6,000
solids (kg/cow)	489	520
milk from forage (litres/cow)	5,000	5,300
concentrates (kg/cow)	402	300

Table 1: Targets for 2016 vs 2015 production

concentrates per cow in the parlour on a flat rate. Targets are set for 2016 to increase milk from forage and reduce concentrate use (see Table 1). The aim is to produce 1kg of milk solids per kilogramme of liveweight.

With a year's work experience on a New Zealand dairy unit under his belt, as well as some hard graft at home, son Rory is taking on more of the management responsibilities, particularly grassland

Milking herd gets fresh grass twice a day





Heifers are bred and trained to rely on high forage diets

production. Gaynor is particularly keen that individual skills are put to best use in the business. Rory has taken on the technical management of the grassland and the dairy herd fertility, with both areas seeing significant improvement year on year.

Consistent quality

“We aim to produce quality grass and make sure we offer high energy grass or silage of 12ME consistently to the milking herd,” says Rory. “Cows are on a rotational grazing system and I monitor grass growth using a plate meter every week throughout the grazing season. All grassland data is utilised using the Agrinet program and we apply 200kg of bagged nitrogen throughout the season. Soil indexes are monitored to ensure all



elements are on target to optimise grass growth.”

Rory pre mows where necessary after the third rotation to maximise dry matter intakes. If there’s a surplus of grass then paddocks are taken out for silage. Annual rainfall is 585mm, however irrigation is possible from a lake that holds 30 million litres of water. “This helps to keep the grass growing and it’s particularly useful in building up an autumn feed wedge. It means we can graze until the end of November each year. The irrigation can result in an increase in dry matter of between two and three tonnes per hectare.”

Cows are on a 12-hour break, so they get fresh grass twice a day and a reasonable network of tracks means that, even on the heavy clay, cows can graze as early as February.

“We push our cows hard at grass and we aim to consistently grow high quality grass throughout the season. Utilisation is currently at 85%. Ensuring the consistency of the grass and silage means that lactation yields are maintained whilst reducing concentrate usage.”

Around 70% of the cow’s lactation requirements are met from grazed grass. The Wellwood’s are Arla members and milk is sold on a manufacturing contract, to produce Stilton cheese at Arla’s Tuxford and Tebbutt dairy.

Calving is in a 12-week block from mid-February. Heifer replacements are bred using New Zealand genetics. “We’re breeding the right type of cow for our

system. They have the ability to produce high solids milk from grass and we’ve trained them to rely on a quality forage diet,” adds Rory.

Heifers are weighed regularly from birth to calving to make sure they are maintaining a 0.8kg/day growth rate during the two-year rearing period, so they calve down at target weight. “Our heifers and cows calved down in good body condition this spring and strong signs of bulling are evident as a result of this. We start serving on May 10 and aim to achieve 80% of cows and heifers calving in the first six weeks of the block. We exceeded our target this year – 81% calved in the first six weeks.”

Maintain resilience

Looking ahead, Saltby Dairy’s short-term target is to be resilient under economic pressures and to maintain a low cost of production. All partners meet regularly to review financial performance and are all party to preparation of the annual budget. Budget monitoring is critical to ensuring that costs of production are controlled.

Gaynor is adamant that the skills on the farm have to be balanced with realistic targets and that young people with ambition are given responsibilities, as they have done with Rory. Despite the challenges currently faced by the dairy industry, both Gaynor and Kieran want to see their son realise his ambition to develop his own dairy business in future. |