

Kent-based producer William Hickson truly believes that the Jersey breed is best suited to his business and allows him to keep more cattle on the same acreage. CowManagement paid him a visit to find out more about his feeding and management system.



William Hickson: "The Jersey figures stack up for me"

Jersey's consume 20kg of feed per day, compared to 25kg for a typical Holstein – just one of many reasons why William Hickson favours the breed at his Kent-based unit.

Average production in 2008 for his 500-cow herd, based at Winkland Oaks Farm in Sutton, near Dover, was 7,100kg at 4.84% fat and 3.75% protein. And William is convinced that the Jersey is the breed best suited to his business.

"For me the figures stack up. We have regular visits from other dairy producers and I find it relatively simple to explain my preference for the breed.

The advantages of the Jersey here are surprisingly simple to demonstrate with a little arithmetic.

"A Jersey cow has a body weight of 450kg and produces 650kg of fat and protein each year – that's 125% its body weight. What Holstein ever comes close to this? This efficiency means that I can keep more animals on the same acreage."

Milk fever

William recognises that the Jersey breed also has disadvantages such as its susceptibility to milk fever.

"Milk fever is traditionally a big problem

for the Jersey breed and we've been working on our dry cow management – and nutrition – for several years to get on top of it," explains William.

Cows are dried off and turned out on to permanent pasture and buffer fed with coarse forage from big bale silage. "This ensures rumen fill and is their diet for the next five weeks," he adds.

At between 21 and 28 days prior to calving cows are housed in a 'maternity' pen. "And this is when we start them on

the transition ration," he adds. This ration comprises 15kg of the milking cow TMR, plus 10kg of maize silage, 1kg of Transition Cow plus LiFT – an SCA concentrate that includes the liver function 'primer' LiFT, a bypass protein Amino Green, minerals, vitamins, high vitamin E and SelTek for health, and supplies a DCAB to reduce the risk of milk fever and improve cleansings. Straw is also fed from a separate rack.

Fat mobilisation

The target in this part of the dry period is an average dry matter intake of at least 11kg and this supplies 15% protein, 118 MJ of ME and 136g calcium.

"LiFT is fed at a rate of 50g per day during the transition period – to condition the liver. And the rate is upped to 100g per day – added to concentrates that are fed through out-of-parlour feeders – for the first 120 days of lactation, again to aid liver function and help it cope with fat mobilisation in this peak period and, as a



Cows are housed all year round as William says his farm is too dry for grazing

result, to boost milk yield," says William. "We need an additional litre of milk each day to cover the cost of this product and we're certainly seeing that, if not two or three litres in some instances. Cows are reaching 40 litres in 30 days and have

never looked fitter. "And we've actually seen a further reduction in the incidence of milk fever – it's running at about 1% now. It's fantastic. And retained placentas are also very rare."

Milk fever aside, somatic cell counts can also be a problem. William says that his herd average is a little on the high side, namely because udders inclined to be generously proportioned after several calvings. "The current bulk cell count is 250,000cells/ml and that has to come down. We keep the cows in a deep litter house – this increases the risk of transmission of mastitis pathogens. Much depends on the quality of the straw in the deep litter and the weather. In August it was warm and damp – conditions that mean it's difficult to keep infection levels low. We do our best to clean out the shed once a month."

Feed consumption

Back on the plus side, William is convinced of the efficiency of Jersey cows in terms of feed consumption.

"A Jersey, if I am lucky, will eat 20kg a day, while a Holstein needs on average 25kg a day. I believe that if you have space for 500 cows then it makes good business sense to have the most efficient animals. I'm not in hot pursuit of very long lifespans and I don't mind if they have two or eight lactations. It's often the older cows that have the problems. And, if I'm honest, I think that if I had 500 cows with an average age of six years, my vet bills would simply be too high. I think an average of around three lactations is better."

Tijmen van Zessen

Jerseys make business sense

William Hickson: "The Jersey is extremely efficient at turning feed into milk"

Replacement heifers are managed and reared on a unit away from the main milking herd



The Jerseys are housed in straw yards

