



Mehmet Dogan

Turkish producer Mehmet Dogan has plans to further expand his dairy unit and set up other enterprises.



Herd size:	1,000 milkers
Average yield:	9,000 litres
Unit size:	200 hectares
Employees:	50

Scale – and tackling heat stress – are key to success

Full of eastern promise

One of Turkey's largest dairy producers is realising a respectable 5.6ppl for his milk and has big plans to expand herd size and set up other farm enterprises in the near future.

text **Chris McCullough**

Turkish producer Mehmet Dogan milks 1,000 cows – an extremely large and unusual herd size in a country that is home to 6.5 million milkers, spread across 1.5 million units. His herd is one of the 20 largest herds in the country. And he has plans to increase cow numbers further, as well as set up a number of new projects on his unit, which is based in the Izmir district in the west of the country. A massive farm restructuring programme has been going on in Turkey since the 1980s but more recently, in 2010, the Turkish Agricultural Bank offered long-term loans with zero interest rates for dairy producers in order to support that sector.

With that incentive, several large-scale units have emerged, as well as a number of dairy processing businesses. The majority are based in the west of the country, which comprises the large urban areas of Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara.

Water wells

Mehmet began milking at Titar Dairy Farm, a 200-hectare unit, in 2011. As well as the Holstein milkers, the herd also comprises 500 dry cows, 1,000 heifer replacements and 500 bulls that are fattened for beef.

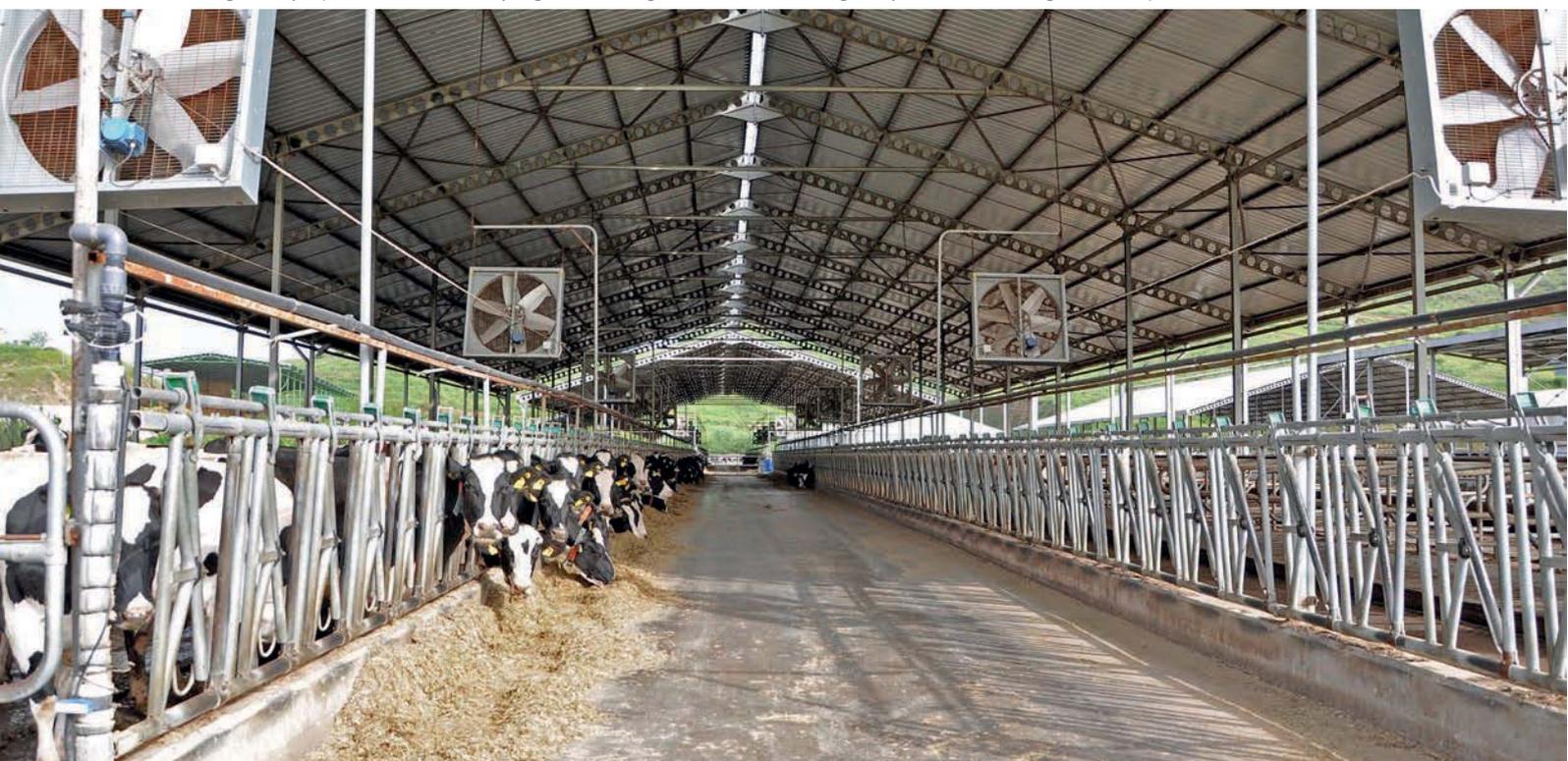
Cows are milked three times a day, with 48 cows being milked at a time through

the DeLaval 24:24 herringbone parlour. Herd average yield is around 9,000 litres at 4.2% butterfat and 3.4% protein.

Key to producing so much milk in a hot climate is water and there are four wells, each one is 95 metres deep, that supply the unit.

The herd is bred using Holstein semen from the US and Canada: "We feel that the sires from these countries are best suited to meet our breeding needs," says Mehmet, adding that cows are bred predominantly for increased milk yield. "But fertility is also an important trait that we select for. Just 70% of the herd get back in calf at the moment and we're working hard to try to improve this with

Cow housing: fans play a vital role in keeping the milking herd cool in soaring temperatures and high humidity



a mixture of breeding and management. “Staff training in AI is continuous and we’re also spending more time watching the cows, to spot them bulling, so we can inseminate at the optimal time.” Cows are housed all year round in 1,000 cantilever cubicles, fitted with rubber-topped mattresses. No additional bedding materials is used: “I don’t see the need as the cubicles are cleaned twice a day,” says Mehmet.

Heat stress

With temperature averaging 26°C, and high humidity, there is a need, however, to tackle heat stress. Cows are cooled with huge fans that are fitted throughout the house and they have access to a showering system. This is placed along the passageways close to the feed fence. The sprinklers, which run in 15-minute cycles, are programmed to switch on at 11am each day and turn off at 9pm.

A total of 50 staff work at the unit, including two vets and two vet technicians, a nutritionist and a breeding specialist. There are also other team members who specialising in calf-rearing and security.

“We have to have security staff to keep unwanted individuals out of the premises,” says Mehmet, diplomatically. “There’s a lot of investment here and that attracts thieves. The security staff also have dairy husbandry skills and keep an eye on cows and young stock throughout the night and they report any problems to the farm manager the following morning.”

Cow rations, which are formulated on a weekly basis and mixed daily, comprise oat grass, straw, maize silage, and clover silage. The TMR also contains soya, sunflower meal, barley bran, and maize gluten. A total of 30 tonnes of feed is required for all the cattle on the unit each day.

Government subsidies

Milk is sold to the Tire Milk Co-operative for the equivalent of 28ppl. “Our cost of production is 22.4ppl, leaving a margin per litre of 5.6ppl,” says Mehmet. “And we also get a subsidy of about 0.02ppl from the Turkish government.

He explains that the government also pays producers around 50 Turkish Lira (£12.50) per cow per year to assist with modernisation – they want Turkish units to meet EU standards – and 200 Turkish Lira (£50) per cow per year to help improve herd health, by using vaccinations and other veterinary interventions.



Above: a self-propelled machine mixes and feeds the herd's TMR

Right: concrete silos store ingredients for the herd's ration

Bottom right: cows are milked through the unit's 24:24 herringbone parlour

Mehmet is currently in discussion with other investors and he has plans to expand and improve further. “Our herd is running well, but I am aware that we need to keep an eye on input costs. So I’m looking to buy another 50 hectares of local land.

“I want to produce more home-grown feed and start a beef cattle unit here, with a slaughterhouse. My target is to process 20,000 head of beef cattle per year from Uruguay and Australia. I also want to start a breeding goat and sheep enterprise, as well as an organic egg production unit with 5,000 hens.

“The Turkish government supports us well, but I think need to improve at a faster and greater rate in order to meet EU standards in the future,” he adds. |



Turkish dairy industry facts

- Turkey is the ninth largest dairy producer in world, producing close to 17 million tonnes per year. That’s more than the UK, which is in tenth place.
- Turkish liquid milk consumption is low, so the majority of production is exported as UHT and skim milk powder.
- Average herd size is just four cows, but there are also 35,000 ‘modern’ units with more than 50 cows.