

# Many hands make light work

Behind-the-scenes support keeps herd's performance on track

Running a dairy herd – large or small – is multi-faceted these days and meeting production, cow health and welfare criteria can be onerous. But the load can be lightened, according to one producer, by taking advantage of support offered by his milk recording service.

Cows care is top priority for Alan Wallington's team at Abbotts Manor Dairy in Hampshire. Dairy manager for

Richard Miller (l) and Alan Wallington: "Makes sense to share information"



the past 30 years, Alan has seen many changes but the most significant has been during the past three years when the estate's herds were amalgamated. Cow numbers have increased from 180 in two herds to approaching 600 in a new facility.

Abbotts Manor Dairy is part of the 1,620-hectare mixed farming Leckford Estate owned by the John Lewis Partnership since 1928. Fruit, cereals and milk are just some of its outputs that go into products for Waitrose.

"We joined our two existing herds together and bought in two new Holstein herds. One was recorded so amalgamating these cows with our own

was relatively easy," says Alan. "The other hadn't got records and this did present a nightmare for our NMR recorder and area manager."

All the cows are now under one roof and managed in groups according to yield. Milk is sold to Dairy Crest on a Waitrose Select contract. This stipulates fairly tough hygiene and milk quality criteria so production has to be first class "It means we've got to be on top of the game all the time – but this probably goes for most dairy units these days," adds Alan.

## Software that 'talks'

An important component in herd management is the InterHerd software that Alan added when the new parlour went in – due to its ability to 'talk to' the C21 software installed with the 48-point internal rotary Westfalia parlour.

The software's functions have proved pivotal in the running of the herd. "You can't manage 600 cows with paper records and it made sense to 'share' the information from the parlour to the

end users – the team here, our vet and adviser."

NMR's technical support team set up the software system on site and included two days of training for Alan and his deputy Barry Ewens. "It's ideal too that NMR provides the support for both the office and parlour software.

"Barry and I go to regular InterHerd workshops – offered free of charge – to learn a bit more and ask some specific questions."

Back home it's not only Alan and Barry and their five staff that use the information – Alan's vet and consultant are relying increasingly on the reports that the software generates. "My consultant, Mike Bray, comes to meetings and makes the keyboard sing to get the information he needs!"

Consistency is the name of the game at Abbotts Manor Dairy. Cows calve year-round and are milked twice a day. They are managed on a summer grazing and winter housed system with a TMR fed year round to help maintain milk quality.

## Lion's share – more from the supplier...

Abbott's Manor Dairy is typical of many NMR herds," says NMR business manager Nicci Chamberlin.

"Producers are investing in recording and they are now appreciating the extra value they can get from it, like disease testing, computer training or acting on notification of any discrepancies in the figures. They've paid the lion's share of the cost and they can make this work really hard by tapping in to the NMR team in



Nicci Chamberlin: "Producers can add value by using NMR resources"

their area, the national support team or ad hoc services."

Alan keeps a watchful eye on his weekly bulk tank results to ensure consistent quality.

## Discrepancy dealing

His NMR area manager Richard Miller will also flag up any discrepancies in milk quality and yields. "I get notification of potential problem herds within my area," says Richard. "I can then contact producers or managers immediately to help sort the problem out."

If problems do arise at Leckford, Alan will normally ask Richard to initiate bulk tank tests daily through the NML lab. "Milk samples are taken daily and sent to the payment lab anyway, so there's no extra sampling required and no delay in getting results back – these normally arrive by email within 24 hours. This means we can react quickly to get back on track."

Just as important are TBC and cell count results that are currently averaging 14 and 146,000 cells/ml respectively. "The Waitrose contract is strict – we're selling 13,000 litres of milk a day so we don't want to slip into a lower payment band or incur any penalties," says Alan, who doesn't hesitate to action a bacteriology test on high cell count cows.

"We might spend £3 a day on MilkCheck

or £8 on a bacteriology kit, but that's a drop in the ocean when you consider the loss in income if we incur any penalties."

Looking ahead, Alan would like to see a yield average of 9,000kg with high health and welfare cows staying in the herd five or six lactations. All cows have been Johne's disease tested using the individual milk sample collected through milk recording. Any new heifers will also be tested before entering the herd.

"Our vet instigated the Johne's milk screening test using our milk recording samples and out of 500 cows we had just 11 with high or medium readings, which will be investigated further." The herd is also tested for IBR, BVD and Lepto every three months and mobility scoring is about to be introduced.

"I don't think our expectations from the herd are much different to any other producer," adds Alan. "Notification of discrepancies and pulling in ad hoc testing services without delay plays a big part in our management. And being able to access vital information to do with health, nutrition and production on our office PC is vital.

"Yes, we do pay for the extras in some cases but they're easily justified when you consider the benefits – and weigh these up against the potential losses."

All aspects of production must be first class to meet milk buyer criteria

Karen Wright

