



This is the third article in a series about training and developing dairy husbandry, business and people management skills.

Simon Elliot manages a 300-cow herd in Southwell, in Nottinghamshire, in partnership with his father and with help from three full-time staff, including two herdsmen.

He says that seeing the cows looking well and happy – and productive – as well as ‘growing’ the business is what gets him out of bed in the morning.

“There’s no greater motivator than seeing progress and making sure I keep staff, and the business as a whole, up to speed.”

He’s also investing at the moment, and not just in buildings and equipment. “We’re currently getting to grips with a New Zealand style grazing system – that’s keeping us on our toes.”

Simon says his herdsmen are motivated by being given responsibility and also by being involved in the decision making processes, on a practical level, regarding the herd and its management.

“And I also think it’s important that they have good machinery and equipment to work with.”

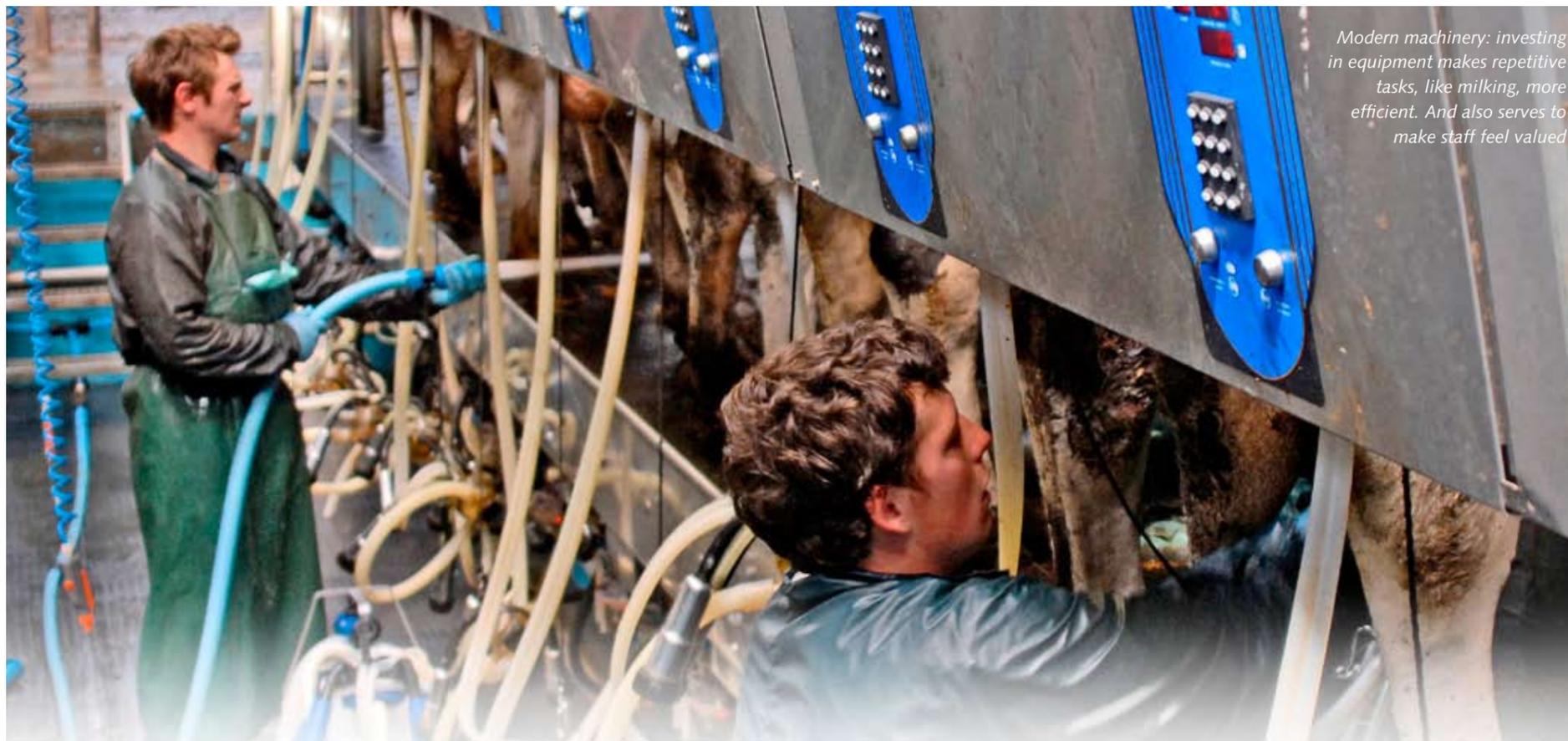
The unit’s herdsmen are involved in a herdsmen discussion group that was set up recently. Local herdsmen meet once every two months to share thoughts, ideas, problems and successes. “And they get a day off to go along to that,” adds Simon.

Good communication

Steven Meikle has been the herdsman at Richard Adam’s Felixstowe-based 130-cow dairy unit for the past 13 years: “And I can honestly say that it’s a pleasure to work here. Richard’s a great boss,” says Steven.

Taking time off to spend with his family is important to Steven. “And because Richard is a family man himself he understands that. I can take time off when I need to and on a regular basis. That’s a great motivator – it makes me feel valued.”

As does being consulted when decisions about the herd need to be made and being listened to. If Steven has an idea or view then he can share it. “We



Modern machinery: investing in equipment makes repetitive tasks, like milking, more efficient. And also serves to make staff feel valued

There are so many things that keep herdsman happy, motivated and productive. And you may be surprised that money isn’t necessarily the main one. We spoke to some top dairy managers and herdsmen to find out what fires their passion for the job.

have a good working relationship. The communication between us is excellent and Richard is very approachable and open to new ideas,” adds Steven.

The business is moving forward too and there has been considerable investment in cow housing, facilities and equipment in recent years.

“We’ve a new parlour and new cubicles – it’s a great set up and makes for easier milking and management,” says Steven. “We even have a littering machine that

makes bedding up the cubicles a much less back breaking and time consuming job.

“And that allows me to spend more time on other more skilled tasks and to concentrate on the cows.”

True job satisfaction for Steven is in doing his job well and being able to stand back and look at healthy, happy and productive cows. “They’re averaging 36 litres per day at the moment – we’ve never achieved that before. Our

consultant congratulated me, as did Richard. And he also thanked me – just as he always does – for a job well done.

“It doesn’t cost anything and it’s a simple thing to do, but it means a lot.”

Job satisfaction

Penrith-based herdsman Jonney Graham is also motivated by the satisfaction he derives from seeing his herd at its best. He’s charged with looking after Steven and Claire Bland’s 250-cow herd, which supplies milk to make the couple’s famous Abbott Lodge Jersey ice-cream.

“I’ve been here for eight years and for me the biggest motivator is being able to admire the fruits of my labour. It’s great to nurture the young calves and then see them grow into strong heifers that then go on to calve and milk well within the herd. That’s what it’s all about for me.”

Being appreciated also gets Jonney out of the bed in the morning – he says he gets plenty of praise for his efforts. And he enjoys his job. “Every day is different and there’s always something to do – I’m never bored.

“And the machinery and equipment that we have here is modern and in good working order, which prevents some of the day-to-day jobs from become a chore and makes life a little easier. And it also makes me feel appreciated – by investing in equipment to help me do my job, the Blands make me feel valued.”

Free rein

Dan Webster has been managing Michael Oakley’s Shrewsbury-base 420-cow herd for the past eight years – ever since the unit was restocked after the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease outbreak.

“And I do it because I enjoy it – it’s not the kind of job you do for any other overriding reason,” he says.

Michael works on the unit on an LKL contract – he was originally with Dairy Force before it was taken over by the company.

“Part of the contract is that Bactoscan and SCCs are kept below a certain level and there is a reward system in place to meet these targets, but I’m not really motivated by money.

“Doing a job well and the satisfaction of seeing cows milking well and getting back in calf – that’s what gets me out of bed in the morning.”

Dan also feels that he has a vested interest in the dairy herd and business and Michael makes sure that he’s involved in any decision making.

“In some ways we’re very like minded and that helps. We share the same ideas and are open to suggestions,” explains Dan.

One example of this was the decision to go down the cross breeding route with the herd, which required a fundamental and somewhat radical change to the way the herd was managed and run.

Dan says that training also provides him with direction and a sense of focus. “I’ve taken AI refresher and foot trimming courses and the local vet practice runs short courses too. If I want to go along then I can – and often do.”

As well as the latest training, the equipment, machinery and facilities are also important, according to Dan. “If I have the tools and the means to get on with a job as quickly and efficiently as possible then that’s also motivating and makes me feel valued.”

Cow numbers at the unit increased recently and auto ID and shedding gates were installed to help Dan and the team cope with the increased herd size. “And life is so much easier. Some mornings I have upwards of 30 cows to AI and I know that they’ll be waiting for me after milking – there’s no need to go through and sort them. It saves a lot of time, hassle and stress for both me and the cows.”

He says that he’d almost go as far as to say that working at the unit is ‘fun’: “It’s certainly very enjoyable. It has to be – why else would I want to get out of bed at 4.30am every morning?”

Rachael Porter

Vox pop provides insight in to what truly motivates staff

Motivational speakers