

Good solid cows managed using a fine-tuned and adaptable system are just two of the secrets to the success of this year's highest ranking Holstein herd for production in NMR's Annual Report. We spoke to Paul Broad who part owns and runs this impressive herd.

No one was more surprised to make the leap from 24th to first position in this year's NMR rankings than Cornwall-based producer Paul Broad. He runs the 218-strong Maymor pedigree herd, in partnership with his wife Wendy, her parents Neville and May Morrow and Wendy's brother Irwin, at Treveale Farm at Ladock near Truro. And he puts the herd's success down to attention to detail and continuous good management. "We really haven't done anything different or exceptional during the past 12 months – just more of what we've always strived to do – feed and manage

is an increase of 65kg of fat and protein and 384kg of milk compared to the previous year.

Fine tuned

There's only one thing that Paul can attribute to the phenomenal rise in terms of the herd's average yield and that, believe it or not, is summer 2008's exceptionally poor grazing season. "The weather was very wet in July and August and I think we fed more sugar beet-based cake to help keep yields up. It certainly put an extra 0.3% on the butterfat."



Paul Broad: "We adapt management to the cows' needs"

"It's not possible to get the yields that we do without feeding a TMR for 12 months of the year."

And this TMR is also fine tuned throughout the year. It's constantly tweaked to ensure that the cows get just what they need, depending on the weather and the time of year.

"We don't have any hard and fast rules – we like to be flexible and adapt to the cows' needs. The cows come first and the yields follow."

This philosophy is the evidence that Paul and his team are not chasing yields. "Yes, it has increased during the past few years, through a combination of breeding and feeding, but that's not what we've set out to do.

"Our aim has been to breed a good balanced cow that will last for five or six lactations. And I think that by doing this we're achieving that ideal mix of production and type." Testament to that are the herd's 19 EX and 70VG classified cows.

Surplus stock

"We're looking for cows that are medium sized, have good feet and legs and udders, and have plenty of capacity so they can eat lots of forage."

And it seems that other producers are looking for that kind of cow too. Selling surplus stock is providing another welcome source of income for the business, with the family selling 50

heifers every year. "We use Holstein semen on 90% of the herd. This results in around 100 heifers a year and we sell half of them," explains Paul, adding that they recently made the top price at Holsworth market. "And there should be more to sell as our genetics and herd longevity continue to improve."

Bulls in use at the moment to breed more good young stock include Scooby Doo, Ross, Talent, Allen, Picston Shaker, Ready and Ramos.

"I like to look at daughter photos before I make a decision to use a bull," says Paul, sharing some of his selection process secrets.

He's calving in Duplex, Melody and Stormin Norman daughters at the moment, the latter possibly being some of the first in the UK.

Cows in milk are by Wade, Beneknowle Blackjack and Markwell Reckless: "A wide mixture of bulls really. I don't favour bulls from any particular country.



Ration is fine tuned throughout the year

Cows come first, yields second

Top yields are 'by product' of breeding balanced cows and consistent management

our cows and heifers as well as we possibly can," he says, still somewhat bemused by the herd's tremendous achievement. With 185 qualifying lactations, the herd averaged 851kg of fat and protein and 11,258kg of milk on twice-a-day milking in the year ending September 2008. This

Paul says that making good dry grass silage – we aim for 35% – is also key to the continued success of the herd and the business. "We always set out to make the best silage possible because we do feed the cows all year round – even when they're out at grass.



Right: Attention to detail: Wendy checks parlour hygiene
Below: Clamp management: making good silage is key to herd's success



North American, British, French – it doesn't matter. I'm looking at figures and daughters, not nationality." Paul admits that he is a breeding enthusiast. "I think it's important to have an interest in cows to want to milk them and I like to milk good looking cows.

Balanced system

"I'd rather milk 200 high yielding and good type, profitable cows than 400 lower yielding commercial ones." This is just one reason why expansion is not on the cards for the Morrow family. "If anything, if we saw an increase in milk price to 30ppl we'd keep 30 fewer cows," says Paul.

"In some respects I feel that the herd has reached a plateau – we've found the best balance for the herd and the business and we don't want to upset that.

"I think more cows or an additional milking each day would just put too much stress on the cows and on us – it's enough work to milk the cows twice a day.

"We're really of the opinion that 'if it ain't broke don't fix'. We've got balanced cows and they're managed on a balance system. So we're just going to keep on doing what we've always done, continually fine tuning and improving as we go."

Rachael Porter