

LDY tells the full story

Lifetime Daily Yield is more than milk – it reflects health, welfare and longevity

More focus on 'fitness' in bull selection and various retailer initiatives are encouraging producers to focus on health, welfare and longevity. Lifetime Daily Yield (LDY) figures will show that these traits are moving in the right direction.

Gloucestershire producer John Round is keen on longevity for a number of reasons – he wants a fit and healthy herd to be proud of, and he wants staying power so rearing costs are spread as thinly as possible and he reaps the benefit of higher yields in more mature cows. He's working hard to achieve this – the average age of the herd is 3.7 lactations and the replacement rate is around 23%. At the same time, yields are among the top in the country.

NMR/RABDF Gold Cup winner in 2005, John runs 280 Holsteins with a 11,500kg average 305-day yield. While primarily commercial, many of the pedigree Roundelm cows produce more than 50 tonnes of milk in their lifetime on twice-a-day milking and housed all year on a 35% grass and 65% maize silage based TMR.

"I'm very keen that we can show our milk is produced by a healthy and fit herd – public perception is very important and we need to be transparent," says John.

He believes that he has a moral duty to look after his cows to the best of his ability. And it's quite obvious that this is happening. Delving into his herd's LDYs tells a story. The data – published on each cow's NMR lactation certificate and soon to be a stand-alone report on the web-based Herd Companion system – divides total milk produced by the number of days alive. Multiplying this by the current milk price produces her daily earnings.



Vet Paul Cunliffe (left) with John Round: Lifetime Daily Yields are a good starting point

Aside from the finances, cows calving at well over two years old or with extended calving intervals will generally score badly relative to herd mates, even though their milk yields might be above average. And those cows lasting just a few lactations will also score poorly.

"Ideally, we look to calve cows at around two years old. If she does calve around two and then milks well and gets back in calf her lifetime yield will start to look good and should improve – if she keeps fit and healthy – into subsequent lactations."

Herd variation

Table 1 shows LDYs for a few cows from the Roundelm herd. Variation within the herd is inevitable and a comparison of cows – benchmarking those in the same lactation – is part of herd management. The new Herd Companion report

cow number	LDY (kg/day)	lact. no.	age at first calving (days)	no. SCC > 200,000/ml
246	15.66	2	882	1
48	19.13	2	799	6
61	23.59	6	832	9
158	29.7	6	741	1
251	27.77	4	735	1
185	27.17	4	784	9
203	28.2	9	783	0

breeders, lame cows or high cell count animals. Poor breeders soon show up when we look at their annual milk production or LDYs."

Like any of the data though, careful interpretation is needed. "There are always exceptions," adds John. "We have a cow that never gets in calf before 100 days, regardless of feed and management. But she's given nearly 100 tonnes of milk in four lactations and has a lifetime yield of 27.89kg a day." He also highlights Sunny Boy daughter 203 (see Table 1) who optimises the system. A regular breeder, she has a consistently low cell count despite producing above the herd average. "It's interesting to flick through the LDY report and see how her daughters are shaping up," adds John.

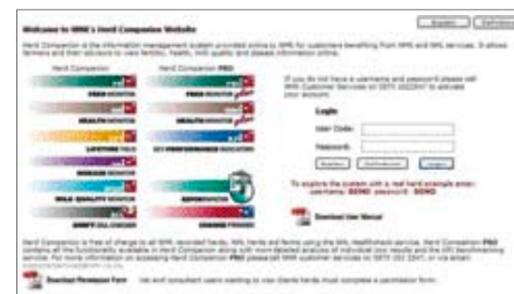
Old-fashioned stockmanship

Paul believes that management plays a key role in the factors contributing to lifetime production. "Often poor herds are in a poor environment and staff turnover is high. There's no substitute for good old-fashioned stockmanship."

Compare this with John's herd where his Gold Cup team – himself, Geoff and Martin – are still dedicated to their roles. "It's proactive herd management. I rarely see a case of lameness and cell counts hover around 180,000/ml," adds Paul.

That said, John says there is scope for improvements and emphasises the need to get cows back in calf as soon as possible. "Keeping on top of herd fertility is always a challenge in a high yielding herd. But I would like to see lifetime yields move upwards. Herd health and fertility has to be tip top – there's no room for any slack."

Karen Wright



Herd Companion screen shot: Lifetime Daily Yields readily available