

LIFETIME DAILY YIELD

We examine some key performance data and look to the top 25% of the UK herd for some pointers and inspiration to help you improve herd performance.

How do you improve your herd's average lifetime daily yield?

Long – and productive – lives

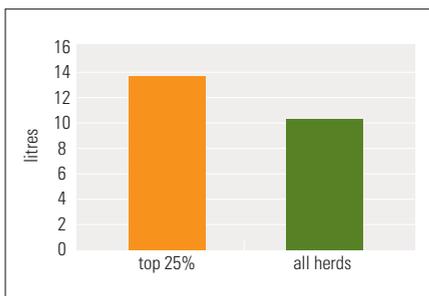


Figure 1: Average lifetime daily yields for UK herds

This is the third article in our series on dairy management benchmarks, which takes a look at lifetime daily yield (LDY).

If you're not already there, how can you take your herd a step closer to matching the top 25% and push up the amount of milk individual cows put in the tank during their lives?

text **Rachael Porter**

Longevity is one thing – lifetime daily yield is entirely another. Yes, the former certainly plays a key role in increasing the latter, as does ensuring that day-to-day management avoids fertility and disease. Both can reduce the level of milk production during a cow's lactation.

The key to maximising LDY though could be calving heifers early, at around 24 months, and producing high yields over

many lactations – the best of both worlds, so to speak. The gap between the top 25% and the rest of the UK herd on LDY is around three litres – 2.91 litres, to be exact, according to the latest NMR figures (see Figure 1). That's equivalent to more than 1,000 litres a year, or close to 10,000 litres over nine years – virtually an additional lactation.

So what are the UK's top LDY-ranking herds doing to ensure that they're

maximising milk output per cow per day of life? It seems that careful breeding, feeding and management – of calves, youngstock, dry cows and milkers – are all key to increasing and maintaining LDY. Getting heifers off to a flying start and some TLC for pre and post calvers are also vital. In fact all round attention to detail, as clichéd as it sounds, is important too. We spoke to two high LDY herds to find out more. |

Andrew Williamson, 400-cow herd with an average LDY of 16.23 litres

This herd's impressive LDY is the result of management and genetics. "The latter is thanks to my uncle, John, who ran the herd up until we bought it two years ago," says Andrew, who farms in partnership with his father Joe at Austerson Farm near Nantwich, Cheshire.

"John was – and still is – extremely particular about breeding. He looked to breed 'balanced' and long lasting cows, never jeopardising type in favour of milk. He was very forward thinking and we're reaping the rewards today."

John still helps Andrew with breeding decisions, even though he's now retired, as Andrew knows that genetics have played a key role in both pushing up yields, which are currently averaging just over 10,000 litres, and LDY. "And

I want to keep building on that." Management then makes the best of these genetics and he says that success here is all about attention to detail. "It sounds like a cliché, but it's really important. And our figures show that it really does make all the difference."

Dry cow management is one vital area where cutting corners can be costly, in terms of health, fertility and productivity.

"For the cow, it's the most stressful time. Forget the rest of the lactation is you don't get this, calving and the post calving period spot on. This is crunch time."

Dry cows are split into two groups – 'close up' and 'far off' – with the former grazed for three weeks and the latter housed and fed a TMR with added dry-

cow minerals. "We're looking for cows to maintain body condition during this phase. Whatever their score, we don't want them to lose or gain. It's all about minimising stress."

Once calved, cows and heifers stay in a 'maternity wing' for at least five days before joining the main milking herd. "Again, this allows them to recover and makes sure they're 100% before they enter the foray!"

Weekly vet visits means that all freshly calved animals are checked and they're checked again at 30 days, routinely, for any signs of metritis. "Maximising LDY means looking after the cow's health and fertility. And this helps us tackle any underlying infections that may hamper fertility and could prevent a cow from getting back in calf."

Andrew Sanders, 400-cow herd with an average LDY of 17.24 litres

Isle of Man-based Andrew and Sue Sanders also aim to calve their replacement heifers at 24 months old, but for their pedigree herd, like the Williamsons', is just one thing of many factors that contribute to an impressive LDY.

They are third in a table compiled by NMR highlighting the top-100 LDY herds and Andrew says their success is, not surprisingly, down to a combination of breeding and feeding.

"Longevity is the key and genetics is a big part of that. We know because we have some really strong cow families," says Andrew, "Four families have produced

three generations of 100-tonne cows, all milking at the same time. We have the Arabis family doing just that at the moment."

And he's milked more than 60 100-tonne cows during the past ten years.

He's looking to breed cows that look after themselves – as well as being able to fill the bulk tank.

"Good locomotion and strong feet and legs are essential. But so is the udder, as well as the somatic cell count score. And I don't want anything that's too tall or angular."

Daughters of F16, Sunny Boy, Lord Lily and Celsius are still milking in the

herd. The couple favour Dutch genetics, as well as German and US bloodlines. The herd comprises 150 VG and 84 Ex – all home bred – and 46 of which have been classified Ex several times and one cow has been classified Ex no less than eight times.

The Sanders also recognise that calving is a stressful time for the cow, so again dry-cow management is given the time it deserves. And post calving, cows are grouped and housed separately.

"They seem to perform much better when they're run away from the milking herd for a week or two. It gives them time to adjust."

*High LDY cow:
Blackstar daughter
Bonus Verona 2,
at 15 years old*

