

**Matthew Bradford**

His move to TMR feeding, with minimal investment, is paying dividends in terms of improved milk production and cow health.



Number of cows:	140
Average milk yield:	8,000 litres and rising
Average yield increase:	800 litres
Feed waste reduction:	90%

More milk, improved quality and reduced feed costs – and that's just the start

Switch and save

One Somerset-based herd's experience confirms that moving to TMR feeding can deliver significant herd health and economic benefits without the need to invest in costly changes to building layouts and farm infrastructure.

text **Rachael Porter**

A move to TMR feeding was a major decision for the Bradford family, based at Bawdrip near Bridgwater, but it was also the right decision.

They have been impressed with the ease of transition since they bought a Keenan MF320 and switched to a TMR feeding system in October 2009.

"When we first talked about moving to TMR feeding, we were concerned that we would face additional capital costs linked to a required change in cow flow and feed system design and layout," explains Matthew Bradford. "But we found we could actually make the move without any other investment apart from the machine, and thanks to initial support from the company's nutritionists to make sure we got the best from the feeder, we saw rapid and sustained improvements in cow performance."

Practical problems

Matthew runs a herd of 140 autumn calving Holsteins in partnership with his parents Tony and Pam. The milking herd is run as one group and feeding is mainly through ring feeders in a central yard. Winter feeding has been based on maize and big bale grass silage in the past. Milk is sold to Cricketers on a cheese contract, which makes fat and protein content very important to the business. In the past, big bales were placed in the round feeders and maize silage placed on top along with soya. And dairy cake was fed, to yield, in the parlour.

"It was a simple system that had worked well when we fed grass only, but the introduction of maize in 2001 caused some practical problems," says Matthew. "The feed area is 100 metres from the parlour so we had to hold cows back

until each milking was finished. Even so the heifers were being bullied and missing out on maize and soya and we were also wasting quite a lot of grass silage.

"Probably the biggest problem was rumen health. Much of the herd was suffering with a degree of acidosis that reduced both yield and milk quality and also resulted in some foot problems." So, having considered numerous options, the Bradfords took the plunge and made the decision to move into diet feeding.

Cost concerns

"We were concerned that the cost of the feeder wagon would just be the tip of the iceberg and that we would have to invest in more concrete and more feeders, but working closely with Stuart Adams from Keenan means that we have been able to make the change with no extra capital while at the same time seeing substantial improvements in cow performance."

The mixer wagon came with a bale processor and was modified to allow it to feed direct into the ring feeders. Rather than just replicating the existing diet, full use is now made of the feeder to increase the value of the outside ration and reduce total feed costs.

"We are now feeding grass silage, maize and potatoes, along with a blend, minerals and straw, and it takes no longer to feed the cows than it used to," says Matthew. "We used to take maintenance plus 10 litres from the winter ration, but are now able to feed for maintenance plus 20 litres with no risk of rumen health problems. And we

Sound investment: switching to TMR feeding will pay for itself in just 18 months

have cut the amount of cake fed at milking times, which has also helped to improve rumen health."

Stuart Adams believes that in many cases producers can move to TMR feeding with few, if any, other changes to their housing and feeding set up. "In most cases it is possible to fit a diet feeder around existing facilities," he says. "The key is to make sure that the machine is suited to the farm and is then used correctly, providing a well mixed diet to promote high performance."

"During the first few weeks we worked closely with Matthew to fine tune his herd's TMR and to ensure that he and his cows were getting the most from the feeder and the ration."

The results have certainly been impressive. Yields increased by 2.5 litres

per cow per day within a week of the TMR being introduced, while butterfat has risen from 4.00% to 4.55% and protein increased by 0.2% to 3.45%.

Improved health

"Rolling yields have risen from 7,200 to 8,000 litres during the past year and they are still rising," adds Matthew. "And we have seen a marked reduction in lameness and digestive problems, as well as a lot less of the vet!"

"The consistency of the diet means that we can let cows back into the house to feed immediately after milking and have no problems with heifers being bullied."

Heifer yields and growth in the first lactation have also both improved since the introduction of the TMR diet.

"Feed costs have also been reduced with the inclusion of the blend and the reduced use of dairy cake in the parlour. And we have also reduced feed waste by 90%. Not only does this save time, but it will also help to preserve forages when stocks are low. We can also be more flexible about the ingredients we use, which will also help us control costs."

Matthew is convinced that buying the feeder wagon has been cost effective – his only regret is that he didn't make the switch to a TMR sooner. "We have increased annual output by 112,000 litres and this milk is better quality and we have lower feed costs. On this basis alone we will have paid for the feeder within 18 months, and this is excluding the value of reduced feed waste and better cow health." |

