

Unique features put six herds in the line up for this year's Gold Cup

# Six high flyers go for gold

More than 500 British dairy herds qualified for this year's NMR/ RABDF Gold Cup. We're now down to six finalists. Just one will pick up the Gold Cup at the Dairy Event and Livestock Show in September.

text **Karen Wright**



## 2011 Winner

The winner will be announced at the Dairy Event, NEC, on Tuesday September 6 on the NMR stand at 4.30pm along with the winner of the Chris May Memorial Salver.

## Kevin Jones, Northop, Flintshire

Kevin and Ann Jones are the fifth generation to farm at Bryn Mawr. The 229-ha farm has been in the Tir Cynnal agri-environment scheme for five years.

With soaring inputs, the family is

*In Tir Cynnal agri-environment scheme*



investing in the future. In 2009 a new slurry store was erected costing just under £100,000 and giving five months' storage. This maximises the use of the nutrients and saves £11,500 in fertiliser. Slurry is spread by an umbilical system. A further £25,000 has been invested in 43 pv solar panels generating 10kW of electricity. And a pump brings water from a spring under the farm for storage in an old milk tanker saving £10,000 in water bills.

The next project is for thermal roof panels to heat water for washing down. This should cut electricity costs by 40%. The 260-cow Starkey Holstein herd – with 220 milkers – averages 10,308kg at



*Kevin and Ann and Kevin's father Glyn*

3.77% butterfat and 3.22% protein (2x). Milk is sold to Tomlinsons Dairies of Wrexham which pays a premium for Welsh branded milk. Cell counts are running at 168,000cells/ml with Bactoscan at 18. The herd's calving index is 416 days.

## Chris Simmons, Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucs

Feeding and fertility have been top priorities this year for Chris Simmons. So meticulous has been his attention to feeding detail that this high-production herd has doubled its milk from forage to 3,139kg in 12 months.



*Feeding is top priority*

The drive for feed efficiency has seen the Total Mixed Ration change during the past year, with an 80:20 ratio of maize to grass silage considered ideal for the winter mix. Pushing the TMR up to the cows six times daily is also considered essential for high intakes.

Herd fertility is managed with equal precision and a calving interval of 404 days is heading downwards.

Herd expansion is the focus on this unit with a new 120-cubicle shed and earth-banked slurry lagoon now under construction, with the aim of supporting a herd of 370 by the end of the year.

Average production for the Kingsfoll herd is 11,223kg at 3.84% fat and 3.29% protein (3x).



*Chris Simmons in front of new cubicle shed under construction*

All milk is now sold from the year-round calving herd on a liquid contract for premium, niche markets through Farmright. Average cell count is 172,000cells per ml.

## Miller family, Evesham, Worcestershire

In 15 years, since arriving at Greville Farm with 46 cows, the Millers have expanded. Today they are heading upwards from the 280 cows they milk.

The business on the 330ha of tenanted



*Aim is for high dry matter intakes*

land is overseen by father, Mike, with mother Shan controlling calves and accounts and brothers Steve and Paul taking on cropping and cows respectively. Sisters Katie and Amy work off the farm but both have careers in the industry.

Keen pedigree breeders and involved in embryo transfer programmes, they've had some fantastic achievements. At the top of the game is Shanael Bolton Golden VG88 2yr, who has given one of the highest two-year-old yields on record in Europe and has a Profitable Lifetime Index of £284. In her first lactation she produced 16,160kg in 305 days and entered a long-term flushing programme. Some 40 of her embryos are dispersed across Europe and North America.

But Steve and Paul keep firmly focussed on milk production efficiency and put nutrition and cow comfort top on the agenda. They aim for a dry matter intake of 23.33kg across the three production



*Left to right: Steven, Katie, Paul, Carlyn – Paul's wife – with Ava, Shan, Amy, Michael Miller*

groups with a TMR designed to provide maintenance plus 45 litres for the high yielding group. The Shanael herd has an NMR annual average production of 11,801kg at 3.70% fat and 3.15% protein (3x). Milk is sold to Cotteswold Dairy in Tewkesbury. The calving index is 423 days and cell count average is 186,000cells/ml.

## Christopher and Ray Gasson, Banbury, Oxon

Ray and Chris Gasson installed a new 50-point rotary milking parlour in 2003, complete with 200 cubicles, new silage clamps and a slurry store. The slurry store was extended, and now has six months storage, to allow more strategic use of the nutrients.

Plans are in place to replace the older 200 cow kennel cubicles with a new single-span building to improve the

quality of housing and ventilation, as well as cow comfort.

Day-to-day running of the 340-hectare unit is down to manager John Peck, with herdsmen Stan Peake and Ed Williams and four part-time staff. Chris, a vet in practice in Somerset, is particularly involved with herd health. The herd is vaccinated for IBR, BVD and leptospirosis. The farm is in the Wild-Care scheme and more than 20% of the farm is used to



*Left to right: John Peck, Chris Gasson, Ed Williams, Stan Peake and Ryan Hall*

*50-point rotary milking parlour at Redlands Farm*



create wildlife habitats. There are four ponds, 12ha of woodland, low-input permanent pasture and wild life strips. Active participants of the Open Farm Sunday event, the family encourage people to have access to the farm and to learn about the dairy and arable businesses.

The year-round calving herd's recorded average yield is 10,282 litres (2x) at 3.77% butterfat and 3.13% protein. Calving interval is 413 days and cell counts average 140, and the Bactoscan average is 20. Milk is sold to Dairy Crest for Waitrose.

## King Family, Dorchester, Dorset

Like many producers, achieving the best possible milk price is a key objective for Tom King who farms the 120-ha unit with his father. Calving year round and producing as much milk as possible supports this. The herd has doubled to 300 cows in the past 11 years and to keep more cows they have converted two existing silage barns into cubicle

*The herd has expanded with home bred heifers*



sheds and built a new feed yard. Also they recently extended and upgraded the existing 16:16 herringbone parlour to an 18:18 with auto ID, ADF and pedometers to aid heat detection. Milking time has been reduced without compromising the milking routine.

Feeding and day-to-day management both play a big part in herd performance. The replacement rate is only 16% and herd lifetime daily yield is an impressive 14.36kg a day, indicating that cows have good fertility and staying power. To ensure cows maintain this longevity, potential sires are screened for fitness, herd life, fertility and cell counts.

Tom's brother Charlie – a nutritionist – formulates the ration and sources feed for the TMR that is based on maize, grass and lucerne silage. This supports maintenance plus 37 litres.

Herd health is high on the agenda too. Lameness, mastitis and any metabolic



*Tom King holding cow on halter with his mother Maggie and brother Charlie (to his left) and (from left) Lewis Watson, Mike Ball and Mike Miners*

disorders are benchmarked and necessary improvements are made.

Vortex Holsteins average 11,568kg of milk at 3.9% fat and 3.03% protein (3x) with a SCC of 89,000/ml and a calving interval of 412 days. Milk is sold to Dairy Crest on a Sainsbury's Dairy Development Group (SDDG) liquid contract.

## Tim Gue, Steyning, West Sussex

Tim and Marion Gue manage the 385-strong Huddlestone pedigree herd as part of a team with four full-time staff, including two herd managers. The herd calves from August through to April and is fed a TMR all year round, formulated by Marion who is also a nutritionist.

The milking herd run in three groups: fresh cows; highs, open cows giving more than 30 litres; and lows. The low group is turned out as early

as possible in the spring but cows are always housed for a third of the day to get their TMR.

Despite being a high index herd with a PLI of £59, breeding here focuses on type with a view to increasing longevity. Recent investments include a 120-place calf house, with automatic side curtains to aid ventilation and plans are in place for a new 120-cow place cubicle building to enable bulling heifers to be on the unit. New mattresses for the cow houses



*Backrow; Tim Gue, Marisuz Serdynski, Piotr Serdynski, Sam Picot, Adam Christian; Frontrow Anthony Trigwell, Marion Gue, Neil Stokes*



*Low yielders graze over summer*

will also improve cow comfort. Tim has just renewed the farm's countryside stewardship scheme, converting to the higher level with particular emphasis on wading bird habitats on some of the farm's river-side meadows.

The average production for the Huddlestone herd is 10,655kg of milk at 3.83% butterfat and 3.15% protein (3x).

The average SCC is 153,000cells/ml and the calving interval is 406 days. Milk is sold to Tesco via Arla.