

**Brian Yates**

A continued focus on attention to detail and improving efficiency is the game plan of 'silver' winning herd, with its sights set on winning 'gold' in the future.



Herd size:	<b>227</b>
Average yield:	<b>11,707kg</b>
Somatic cell count:	<b>108,000 cells/ml</b>
Feed efficiency:	<b>1.63 litres/kg</b>

Attention to detail paved the way to Brian Yates', and his Castle Douglas-based team's, success in this year's NMR/RABDF Gold Cup competition. His 227-cow pedigree Logan herd, was runner-up and the recipient of the NMR Silver Salver when the winners were announced in July at the Livestock Show, in Birmingham.

Closely monitoring performance and an eye for detail are key to success

# Silver winner with 'gold' standards

Always striving to improve herd performance, the runner up in this year's NMR/RABDF Gold Cup competition now has his sights on lifting the coveted trophy. We spoke to him to find out more about his plans for the next 12 months.

text **Rachael Porter**

This is the second time that Brian has entered the herd, which is based at East Logan and managed with help from his wife Sheila, son Michael and daughter Anna, as well as herdsman Trevor Hough and general farm worker Leslie Craik, into the prestigious competition. The herd also qualified to enter in 2014.

"We were absolutely delighted when they called out our name," says Brian. "It was the first time we'd made the final line up – we made it into the top 20 in 2014. So we were over the moon to be runners up." He says that competition success has been a huge moral boost for the dairy





staff: "It's spurred us all on and now we want to win it. So we're continuing to work hard to improve efficiency – we're not going to do anything differently, but just do it better."

Lifting the NMR Silver Salver has also raised the profile of the herd. "We were quite well known locally, but we're now hearing from and speaking to people from right across the UK. More contacts with a wealth of dairy knowledge to share with us have to be a good thing for both our herd and our business," adds Brian.

### Feed efficiency

His herd is housed all year round and fed a TMR. Average production, for the year ending September 2014, was 11,707kg at 3.97% butterfat and 3.13% protein, with 108,000 cells/ml.

Impressive yields are fuelled by the Yates' use of the Keenan Pace system, which Brian says produces a consistent ration and also allows him to benchmark the performance of his herd. "It is monitored on a daily basis and changes can be implemented on farm and, if required, remotely," he explains. Feed conversion efficiency stands at 1.63 litres per kilogramme of feed – the Scottish average stands at 1.34.

The herd calves all year round and its

fertility figures are also eye catching. The in-calf rate 100 days post calving stands at an impressive 65%, with just 3.6% of cows not in calf by 200 days. "We monitor activity levels, using pedometers and technology in our Westfalia parlour, to help us identify heats efficiently and we also have regular vet visits to pre-empt fertility problems and deal with any that we do get extremely quickly."

Keeping a close watch on performance and an eye for detail aside, cow health is also key to the herd's success and there has been recent investment in cow housing to improve both efficiency and welfare. A ventilation system has helped to create a clean and dry environment and cubicles are bedded with dry sawdust and Hydramix lime, which is less abrasive than hydrated lime.

### Little tweaks

"It's the little tweaks, here and there, that make the difference. There's rarely one thing that good health or fertility hinges on," he says, adding that he is a great believer in the fact that things can always be improved.

The mastitis rate for the herd stands at just 10 cases per 100 cows, but he would like to see it lowered. "The cell count has been below 100,000 cells/ml

for the past 10 months and, again, we've worked hard at it."

The herd is milked three times a day using a comprehensive routine that comprises dry wiping, stripping out and using a post-dip teat barrier. "We only switched to the Udder Gold barrier dip relatively recently. And we're also using triangular-shaped liners in the parlour. Both have helped to improve teat-end condition and, therefore, udder health."

He's also passionate about breeding. Brian and son Michael enjoy showing their cattle and have had considerable success in the show ring, lifting championship trophies during the past few years "Our cows are proof that you can breed cows with show type and functionality. We're looking for lifetime yields of at least 50,000kg of milk across five lactations and cows that live long and productive lives in a cubicle-based dairy system."

The Yates family is now entering a period of consolidation, after investing in new facilities and a biomass boiler during the past three years. "We want to produce milk as efficiently as we can and maintain output while, at the same time, protecting the environment. And another on-going objective is to keep challenging ourselves to further improve efficiency." |



*'Silver' set up: the next 12 months will see Brian and his family pushing for even greater efficiency and a second chance to win gold*