



The best possible feed and the best possible price

# Consistency – across all areas

Feeding high quality rations – to young stock, dry and lactating cows – throughout the year is key to maximising health, fertility and productivity for one Lancashire-based producer. We spoke to him and his nutritionist to find out more

text **Emily Ball**

**G**ood quality feed, whatever the stage of life or lactation, is key to cow health and fertility, as well as putting milk in the tank. So says Lancashire-based producer Andrew Norris. He milks 415 cows, with an average yield of just under 10,000 litres, in partnership with his brother John and parents, Peter and Jackie, at Priory Farm, Hornby. “Every cow in the herd has to pay for herself

and the best way to ensure that this happens is to give them the best possible nutrition.”

## **Reduce stress**

There are two groups of milking cows on the farm that are both housed, with plenty of space, in one well-ventilated shed. “Once calved, cows move into the group that has space available,” explains



*Richard Colley: “We work together to get the best possible feed solutions”*

Andrew. “Heifers sometimes move in as a group if they calve close together, but the policy is to reduce stress by never moving animals between groups within a lactation. It’s all about providing cows with a consistent environment.”

So cows in the same group are at very different stages of the lactation. The diet is formulated to provide maintenance plus 30 litres and cows are fed a ForFarmers’ dairy compound in the parlour to individual yield. “The aim has always been to provide the best possible nutrition to the cows at the best possible value. The milking cows’ base diet hasn’t changed in two and a half years. If we need to tweak the diet we adjust the formulation of the blend,” says Andrew.

*Balanced ration: top quality feed is key, whatever the stage of lactation, for the cows at Priory Farm*



He works closely with his consultant, John Long, in this area. "We walk around the cows, assessing condition and rumination behaviour, dung consistency and looking at milk production, fat and protein. We know that if milk protein drops below 3.2% then we will begin to have issues with fertility. So we keep a close eye on that."

### **Nutritional value**

Cows are fed a blend that contains wheat distillers' and RapePlus. This feed goes through a unique treatment process to protect and enhance its nutritional value, resulting in an increase in the DUP (by-pass protein) content.

"The treatment protects the protein from rumen degradation and results in a product with a 70% increase in DUP content," explains ForFarmers' Richard Colley. He adds that Andrew's blend provides a DUP of 95g/kg: "And at a really good value, because of the inclusion of the RapePlus."

"The high DUP is crucial for our high yielding cows and their requirement for high quality bypass protein," adds Andrew. "It's the quality protein that helps drive the milk production, as well as helping to safeguard health and fertility."



*Peter, Jackie, Andrew and John Norris*

Quality forages also play a key part in the consistency of the diet. First- and second-cut silages are ensiled together and although third cut is put in a separate clamp, one grab is added at each feed.

The Norris' also grow 16 hectares of oats and 12 hectares of wheat, both for wholecrop. And this is fed evenly throughout the year.

"This means that we don't have changes in forage quality as we move from first to second cut, for example," says Andrew.

"The only forage we feed differently is the 16 hectares of maize, which is clamped separately and then fed out from mid-summer onwards."

Caustic wheat, which ForFarmers supplies, has replaced bread in the cows' diet. "The cows milk well off it and I think it provides a better feed for the rumen. It stores very well too." Since using the caustic wheat, butterfats, which had been at around 3.7%, have consistently sat at about 4%.

Close-up dry cows receive 2kg of ForFarmers' specialist TRANSLAC rolls; 1kg of TMR 20 blend; 2kg of straw, cut short enough to prevent sorting; and wholecrop and grass silage. The TRANSLAC rolls have been added because Andrew was keen to keep protein levels up and supply key vitamins and trace elements in the dry cow feed, because the herd has had

problems with retained cleansings. "That transition period is so crucial because it sets up the success of the whole lactation," he says.

"On average the dry cows we have outside in the summer produce 700kg less milk in their first lactation than those who are fed indoors during the dry period. We've also seen an improvement with fertility – calving index has fallen from 420 days in 2011 to 392 days."

### **Weighed regularly**

Heifers are calved at 22 months old. Calves are weighed regularly and there is a plan in place for any that have fallen behind. Calves also have access to ForFarmers' young stock VITA start pellets and ad-lib barley straw to stimulate rumen development.

Andrew works closely with Richard Colley on a feed buying strategy, ranging from moist feeds and syrups to dry blends, with the main aim of managing risk.

"Through forward buying we lock down a percentage of feedstuffs for the coming months so Andrew knows what he will be paying for a certain proportion of his feed," explains Richard.

"Having access to the total feeds market means I can keep an eye on what prices are doing and work with Andrew to get the best possible feed solution. I know that this approach has helped to reduce feed costs significantly." |

*Consistent quality: caustic wheat stores well throughout the year*

