

Name:	Will & Helen Taverner
Location:	Exeter, Devon
Herd size:	360 milkers
Adding value:	Ice-cream processing and farm-gate sales



Will Taverner: “We take a ‘calf to cone’ approach with our ice-cream”

Cool approach to business

text Rachael Porter

The cross-bred herd, which comprises South Devon bloodlines, suits the ice-cream business run by Will Taverner and his parents Robert and Helen. Will has been working on the family unit for 18 months, involved with both managing the herd and making ice cream. Not only does the high butterfat content of the milk result in a tasty product, but the autumn block-calving system complements the seasonality of the business. And the breed also inspired the brand. Orange Elephant is the name of their ice-cream, which comes from the nickname given to the somewhat thick-set cows kept by Will’s great grandfather. “My father thought the name ‘orange elephant’ would make for an unusual and catchy brand name for ice-cream, and he was right.”

Ice-cream production began at the farm in 2005, using some of the 2.4 million litres of milk produced by the herd. The rest is sold to Arla. The mark up is well

worth the effort and demand continues to grow, year on year. The farm also has a courtyard and play area, to attract families to the ice-cream parlour. Will and Helen manage the ice-cream side of the business, which is seasonal, running from March through to October. Prepping for the spring and summer ice-cream season starts in early March for Easter opening, which is on March 29 this year. “We’re an autumn-calving herd, so I can focus on the ice-cream business in summer and then I’m free to focus on calving and winter feeding come November.”

A new counter is being installed in the ice-cream parlour, so 36 of the 50 flavours they make can be displayed. The award-winning elderflower and lime yogurt flavour is a customer favourite, as are vanilla and strawberry. Will says that, as well as the excellent quality ice-cream, a welcoming and easily accessible set up is vital to attract passing trade.

He is also charged with promoting

the business through social media and he says that this plays a key role in advertising and increasing brand awareness. “We added 2,000 followers to our Facebook page in 2017. And we had several thousand visitors, who came and bought ice-cream, in the summer.”

Some ice-cream is also sold wholesale. “But the majority is straight from the farm gate. This keeps costs down. Putting a van on the road to deliver to local shops, restaurants and other retail outlets may be cost-effective one day, but not now.”

His focus is on ‘organic’ growth and doing what they’re already doing, but ‘better’ and more efficiently, rather than going out and pushing sales. “For now the return on investment is supporting the dairy business and providing extra income for both me and my parents.”

➔ To find out more about the Taverners’ business, visit: www.tavernersfarm.co.uk