

'Kiwi' cows and heifers are thriving on UK units

# Antipodean advantage

Two leading breeding specialists from New Zealand have recently visited the UK. Here they explain why they think CRV Ambreed sires, bred to produce daughters that are ideally suited to grass-based systems, are winning favour on some units

text **Rachael Porter**

**K**iwi genetics may literally come from the other side of the world – as indeed does New Zealand's spring-calving grass-based management system – but both are working well on suitable UK units. And who better to testify to that than CRV Ambreed's breeding specialists Sue and Mark Duffy.

The Kiwi couple spent a few weeks in early 2017 visiting UK grass-based system units – more than 45 in all. And both were impressed by what they saw

and even go as far as to admit that they were slightly envious of the comparative advantages of producing milk in our climate.

"One of the key differences here in the UK is the ability to be flexible," says Mark Duffy. "If the weather is particularly bad, cows can be housed – particularly on the shoulders of the grazing season. Few, if any, dairy units in New Zealand have housing facilities – or forage to feed – so herds and

businesses are very much at the mercy of the weather," he explains, adding that the daughters by Kiwi sires that he saw in the UK actually look better than their New Zealand counterparts. "They have better body condition and are performing well."

Sue Duffy agrees that the Kiwi genetics are perfectly suited to UK grass-based systems. "Since we previously visited the UK, many more producers have adopted a management system, similar to that used in New Zealand. So there's a growing place for Kiwi genetics in these herds. And we've a lot more sires to offer this year too."

## 'Trouble-free' management

The CRV Ambreed sires that are available transmit 'trouble-free' management traits, such as good legs and feet and udders, as well as good fertility. "And they're particularly good for calving ease. That's essential in New Zealand where producers are calving a large number of cows and heifers, all in a matter of weeks," explains Mrs Duffy. She's seen cows and heifers by Kiwi sires in UK herds: "They certainly have better coverage than their Kiwi counterparts – but they're not fat. They're just in the optimal condition for calving and good fertility. We can still have issues with this in New Zealand, despite the genetics."



*Kiwi breeding: cows and heifers, sired by CRV Ambreed bulls, are becoming increasingly popular in the UK*

I'd say that some sires' daughters look all the better for being managed on a UK – and therefore less extreme – system.”

“The Kiwi genetics make for superior animals here in the UK, I think. Climatic and management conditions may be slightly different, but they suit the genetics very well indeed.”

Stocking rates are also higher in the UK, mainly due to the flexibility that allows cows to be housed and more easily buffer fed, if necessary. “This has to be better for the grassland, in terms of ley lifespan and productivity because excessive grazing and poaching can be avoided in extremely dry or wet weather. There's a greater capacity to manage whatever mother nature throws at the unit. Back home, we just don't have those options.”

This is partly down to herd size. The average in New Zealand is between 600 and 800 cows – much bigger than the UK. Again, this gives the UK herds an advantage as they're able to buffer feed and enjoy the benefits of 'easy to manage' cows in a less pressured environment.

### Growing emphasis

Another key difference here, compared to New Zealand, is the type of milk contract producers have. “Back home, producers are all on solids contracts – they're paid for fat-and-protein yield –



Derbyshire-based producer Paul Dean and breeding specialist Sue Duffy discuss sire selection for his spring-calving herd

not total milk yield. But there is a growing emphasis here in the UK on butterfat and protein yield and some producers are paid on constituent yield only. That said, they're still a minority.

“The good news is that CRV Ambreed sires offer both high constituents and milk yield to fulfil UK contracts,” says Mr Duffy.

As well as production, functional type (with an emphasis on udders) is also a vital part of the breeding puzzle for cows managed and milked on a grass-based system. So the Kiwi focus, since 2005, has also been on functional-type traits. Stature and capacity are also vital if animals are to be well suited to a long grazing season and consuming large quantities of grass. “These traits are the focus of the CRV Ambreed programme,” says Mr Duffy. “There were issues with udder attachment in New Zealand. So breeding has concentrated on selecting for stronger ligaments to improve attachment. That's been fixed quite nicely during the past decade. And, again, UK producers can benefit from these genetic improvements if they use our sires.”

CRV Ambreed's sires are predominantly Friesian, Jersey and Friesian Jersey crosses. “UK herds can be more selective when selecting sires – they can match on an individual basis, if they choose to. In New Zealand the approach tends to be more sweeping to keep things simple,” he explains.

Sires that are popular in the UK include Maelstrom – a Friesian bull who has also

proved popular in New Zealand. “He's versatile and offers better-than-average fat and protein, as well as good functional type.”

Stravaganza is a bull better suited for herds taking the pure Friesian route and again he offers good milk constituents and good functional type to produce daughters that perform well on grass-based systems.

Mission – a Friesian cross – is new and hasn't been used much in New Zealand so far. “UK producers are getting first dibs on him. He offers plenty of fat and protein with good, high milk yield. And he has functional type traits too – the whole package.”

### Perfect package

Mrs Duffy's 'go to' sire – or her 'one to watch' – is Viper: “I'm particularly excited about him and what he can offer to UK grassland-based producers. He's a cross-bred – 11 parts Friesian and five parts Jersey – and, on paper, he offers the perfect package. He's positive for protein, fat and fertility. And he promises to sire daughters with good body capacity and udder conformation. I really like him. He's a genomic bull – he's not daughter proven yet. But I think he's going to cause quite a stir.”

What's also exciting about him is that he's available in the UK, but not yet in New Zealand. “UK producers will get the first bite of the cherry. That's a first and shows the level of confidence and commitment that we have to our sires and their suitability to the UK market.” |