



*ForFarmers' Chris Woodget (left)  
and Olly Neagle*

# Investing in grass leys fit for the future

One Hampshire-based producer has been renovating grass leys, before moving to a new unit, to secure the future performance of his Jersey herd. We caught up with him to find out more.

**TEXT** KENDRA HALL

**W**hen Olly Neagle's county council tenancy, near Botley in Hampshire, was earmarked for development by Winchester City Council, he saw the replacement farm that he was offered as a chance for a fresh start and to move his pedigree Jersey herd to the next level.

With a significant investment from the council, the 70-hectare Attwoods Drove Farm is undergoing a facelift

ahead of the milking cows' anticipated arrival in summer 2019. At his current location, Upland Farm, the 120-cow herd is averaging 6,100 litres of milk, at 6.10% fat and 4.02% protein. Alongside his contract with Arla, Olly and his partner Julie also sell around 1,000 litres of milk a week through an on-farm vending machine. "We have people come from as far as Oxford just to buy our milk. It's been a huge success and we have plans





Vending machine: around 1,000 litres are sold from the farm gate each week

to expand this venture once we are at the new farm,” he says.

As well as upgrading cow housing and installing a new parlour, a significant project at the soon-to-be occupied farm has been the renovation of grassland. “The fields were in a poor state when I first saw them,” says Olly. “They were full of weeds and the ground was very rough. This site offers us a lot of flexibility in terms of grazing and cutting options. With 50% of our milk coming from forage, it is important that we get this right from the start and maximise our use of the drier ground to get as much from the grassland as possible.”

### Grassland investment

Olly asked ForFarmers’ forage specialist Chris Woodget for advice on how to bring the grassland at Attwoods Drove back to life. After assessing soil type and conditions, Chris recommended reseedling with Extragen, a medium-term multi-cut silage mix, and Trogen, a long-term cut-and-graze silage mix. Both are from ForFarmers’ TOPGRASS range. “This farm has dry, chalky soil and we needed grass leys that were suited to a multi-cut silage system,” explains Chris.

“Extragen is 35% Lofa, a hybrid ryegrass plus, and a mix of Aber tetraploid hybrid ryegrass and diploid perennial ryegrass. This has been developed for multi-cut systems and is well suited to Olly’s requirements.

“The fourth-cut silage harvested in August 2018 was really good quality with 29.1% dry matter, 11.2 MJ/kg of ME, 169g/kg of protein, and a pH of 4.1. This was all from a crop grown in difficult conditions.”

### Cost saving

“We planted the Extragen in several fields during autumn 2017 and again in different fields in autumn 2018, as well as the Trogen,” says Olly. “Even after the dry summer, we harvested more than 54.4 tonnes fresh weight per hectare of silage and I was even able to graze beef cattle for an additional eight weeks. Based on those results, I’m looking forward to what we get in a more typical growing season.”

He adds that this has underlined the importance of investing in grassland. “If I had any advice for other producers then it would be to invest in fertiliser and better leys. Grazed grass is the cheapest feed on the farm, and you get out what you put into it. The money I spend on seed and fertiliser is a small investment compared to the value of the resulting forage. And because our forage is high quality I can reduce, and save money on, the level of concentrate we feed.”

With grazing somewhat limited in his current location, Olly is looking forward to seeing how his cows perform once they are relocated. “My herd has the genetics to deliver excellent results. With the new forage setup, plenty of grazing, and a decent milking parlour, I know that their intakes will increase. There is no reason why we shouldn’t be seeing yields closer to 7,000 litres.

“And once we see how the cows do on the new farm, I’d like to look at how to adjust our rotations to add different leys, or even remove maize due to the time and effort it requires. Grass is easy to establish. The cows can graze it and we can cut it. It just doesn’t fail us.”

Future milkers:  
heifers at Attwood  
Drove Farm

