

# GrasslandNews



**SECURE YOUR FUTURE** Step ONE

**HEIFER MANAGEMENT**

Identify the **best** cows within your herd to breed the best replacements

30% at 6 months  
60% at mating  
90% at calving

Hit **liveweight targets**

Target is the average of your herd weight

15% increase in lifetime yield

Heifers calving at 24 months

Good heifer management means an **increase in the cow's lifetime profitability**  
Cows **last longer in the herd** so you reduce your replacement rate and **save money**

**SECURE YOUR FUTURE** Step THREE

Devise a herd improvement plan with your LIC Farm Solutions Manager  
Agree your **KPI's** for the next few years  
Choose your bulls based on your, and the market's, requirements

**KNOW THAT...**

Every extra lactation from your cows is worth **£2000**

Every case of mastitis will cost between **£70 and £250** a cow\*

Every case of lameness will cost **£180 or more\*\***

Every heifer reared will cost you between **£1000 and £1500**\*

\* NADIS \*\* AHDB



## Secure your future in dairy

**There's probably never been a more pressing time for UK farmers to lower production costs and increase efficiency.**

LIC is keen to help producers secure their future in dairy in these challenging times and is promoting several steps to get farmers to challenge their existing systems with an eye on moving forwards into an exciting future.

"Heifer breeding and management is key, so make sure you identify your best cows to breed the best replacements," says Tim Bunnnett, European sales operations manager. "Make sure you hit target weights and calve them down no later than 24 months of age. A heifer calving at this time has a greater chance of staying in the herd for six lactations and will offer a 5% increase in lifetime yield.

**Next Tim challenges farmers to ask themselves the following questions:**

- Are your cows lasting more than 220 days in milk?
- Are they getting in calf easily?
- Are they good grazers able to make the most of home-grown forage?
- Are your cows in a comparable group (in other words, are you comparing third lactation cows with third lactation cows, not fifth lactation cows)?
- Are you milk recording and spreading your milk tests evenly across the year?
- Are you using a dairy calculator to plan your semen needs?

"Answering these questions will help you to identify your best cows," he says. "Key to a secure future is having a herd improvement plan... one developed with your LIC farm solutions manager, agreeing your KPIs for the next few years, and choosing bulls based on your,

and the market's requirements."

Fertility must be monitored carefully. The average UK calving interval is 402 days, the Irish is 394 days and the New Zealand 369 days. "Farmers should be aiming at 368 days or less." In setting KPIs here fertility must be recorded, targets for improvement understood and agreed by the whole farm team, heat detection aids used, and a culling regime put in place.

**"Understand which cows are making you money," says Tim. "Pick the heifers you want to breed from based on the values of their mothers in the herd. Use sexed semen wisely to produce more daughters from your top cows, reduce the number of surplus dairy calves and generate a viable bull calf, rearing it well to maximise its value."**



## Cream Fertility Winner

**Cornish herd manager and LIC High Fertility Award winner at the recent Cream Awards, James Major, believes a cross-bred “rally car” and attention to detail provide the perfect combination for fertility success.**

Adopting a more consistent breeding policy to reduce cow size and produce ‘easy care’, highly fertile, small cross-bred cows has been his focus over the past five years.

Farm advisors have questioned such an approach, suggesting instead a move to higher yielding, larger cows to cover the costs of an autumn system, where cows are housed at peak. However, James is adamant that his animals are more efficient.

The 700-cow herd yields 5817 litres a cow a year, and he believes the smaller size means they make less mess out at grass. They can also be stocked at a higher rate. The aim is 2 cows per hectare on the grazing platform, but this is currently 2.4 cows/ha due to TB issues.

James is farm manager at Hole Farm, Egloskerry, for A L Sayers and the Carswell Group. The farm is on an organic, Arla Garden, contract.

The Friesian and Holstein cow base has gradually been bred to KiwiCross™ bulls, with the gains in herd uniformity coming through this year. “They don’t get lame, they don’t get mastitis and they just turn grass into milk, whether that’s grazed or in the clamp,” he adds.

His perfect cow is deep bodied, with short legs, black feet and a “tidy udder”. Strong feet is a must considering the furthest paddock is 3km from the parlour. Four KiwiCross™ LIC bulls are used with varying proportions of Jersey and Friesian. They are chosen for good somatic cell counts, milk fat and protein, legs and feet and teat placement.

“Breeding is pretty important for fertility,” he explains. “I just want to get more cows calving in the first three weeks, and certainly in six weeks - and get those replacements born as early

as possible to maximise days in milk.”

In the last five years, empty rate has halved from 14-15% at the end of the service period, to 7% and the block has condensed from 14-16 weeks. Without the ongoing challenges of TB, Mr Major thinks this would be closer to 8-9 weeks.

The tightening of the block has been achieved by breeding replacements from the most fertile cows and also by culling for fertility. “You’ve just got to be ruthless,” says Mr Major.

At breeding time, James admits the team are “pretty anal” when it comes to heat detection. Everyone has a notebook to record cows seen bulling, while a Whatsapp group enables the team to take a photo of a freeze brand so James knows which cows to check. Tail paint is used for heat detection with orange tail tape also being put on any cow seen bulling so they’re easier to pull

out for service.

“Our organic status means we’ve got to be on it to make sure cows are clean and cycling. It’s front loading the block and making sure cows have 2-3 cycles before mating,” James adds.

Maintaining and monitoring cow body condition is also seen as another influencer to cow fertility. “Body condition is very important for fertility. If they’re too lean, they’ll be working too hard. If they’re too fat, they’re lazy.”



**JAMES & HIS PARTNER SARAH**

In numbers	
Average milk yields (per cow per year) Litres	5,817 litres a cow a year
Milk fat % and Milk protein %	4.62% fat and 3.75% protein
Average milk from forage per cow per year (litres)	3,804 litres a cow a year
Concentrate use per cow per year (kg)	1 tonne per cow per year
Cows eligible to serve on day 1 of the service period	95%
Submission Rate	96% in first 25 days
Six week in calf rate	90%
Nine week in calf rate	97%
Conception rates in first 3 weeks	74%
Cows and heifers calved within the first six weeks of calving.	84% (50% calved in first 14 days)
Milk solids/cow/year	481kg per cow per year

# Grazing in a wet Spring

**With the relatively warm and wet climate we've been experiencing, including the flooding and high winds from recent storms, many farmers will still have seen grass continuing to grow across most of the winter months.**

Some may question why one would persevere in these challenging conditions (other than the worry of the back of the silage clamp arriving quickly), but there are many benefits of early grazing.

- 1 Understand the high value of winter stored pasture, and what even a small amount of this in the diet can do to benefit production;
- 2 Early grazing stimulates the grass to regrow, boosting growth rates before grass starts to take off. Early grazing also helps you keep on top of grass as it goes from dormancy into the spring flush, something that happens very quickly and often catches us out;
- 3 Grass is the cheapest high-quality high protein feed we can offer.

## Optimise benefits

If you haven't already done so, you need to walk across your fields now. You may be surprised that some areas of your farm could be grazed even in very wet conditions. Take measurements so you can stock take grass storage across your farm, described as average farm cover (AFC). Sometimes waiting for the whole field to be dry enough is missing an opportunity.

One of our key goals for grazing on the first rotation is to set residuals for the season. Wet conditions can make this particularly challenging, and even very experienced grazing farmers can get this wrong. The key to successful management is to always measure first:

- Know your grazing herd demand -

understand clearly their DM intakes given their stage of lactation and account for herd size fluctuation so you're setting them up to succeed;

- Know how much grass is available to consume in the area you plan to graze (typical DM% for winter stored grass of 20 - 25% is likely to be much lower given the wet high-growth conditions so fresh grass analysis or a cut and weigh DM test can provide clarity);
- Know the impact that supplement feeds are likely to have on grazing: up-to-date silage analysis of DM% (results from autumn and winter are probably no longer be relevant) and timing of the availability of supplements can have significant impacts on residuals and potentially soil damage.

Soil damage is significantly reduced by removing stock from the area as soon as the grass is grazed (on/off grazing). Putting lots of stock onto a tightly confined area for a short time period causes less long-term damage than small numbers on a large area for an extended period. Use of electric fencing to create temporary tracks to access different breaks can help limit significant soil damage across large areas. It's cheaper to rectify a sacrificial strip if required than repair a whole field.

## Rotation planner

The use of a spring rotation planner can also help in challenging conditions. The nature of a rotation planner dictates daily grazing allocation on extended



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round lengths, creating grazing pressure on a confined area that fits well with the on/off grazing strategy. The long rest period after grazing in tender conditions gives soil, and the sward, plenty of time to recover and tiller as the growing conditions become more favourable.

Research demonstrates that grass swards can recover extremely well from a single significantly damaging event with little to no long-term impact. In this instance time is your friend, leave the poaching damage to rectify itself.

Something also to be mindful of with the grass growth over winter is that the uptake of nutrients will have been higher than normal. Couple this with the possibility of nutrient leaching due to higher rainfall, and nutrients within the soil could be lower than expected. This is unlikely to affect growth in the first round, but if not rectified it could see a lower spring flush through the second round.

N, K and S are the main nutrients likely to be impacted, and different soil types will be affected differently. Once again, fresh grass and soil sampling can assist with making the necessary adjustments to your usual spring fertiliser policy.



# Spring walks in Wiltshire and Scotland

**The British Grassland Society, in partnership with LIC and AHDB, will be holding two spring walks in April, the first in Wiltshire on April 21, the second in Scotland on April 23.**

Robert Mallett is the host for the southern event. With 230 autumn calving cows in milk at Northleaze Farm, Highworth near Swindon, he has set about to show that high-yielding pedigree Holsteins can milk from grass, managing to top 11,000 litres a cow with some 4000 of those litres coming from forage.

"Grazing can be a challenge, but when you get it right, there's no doubt it pays. Grass is the most cost-efficient feed available, and I started to go this way because I was looking for cost savings. You lose so much feed, especially protein making silage and carting it to the clamp rather than grazing it fresh from the field."

Today he reckons he will save around £200/day in purchased feed alone as soon as the cows get outside, in addition to less bedding, labour and slurry.

**On April 21 the farm will have four different stations:**

- 1 Grass – the how and why and infrastructure;
- 2 Silage policy – how it fits with an 11,000 litre herd;
- 3 Three times a day milking – the economics of the highs and lows of grazing
- 4 A new beef enterprise – use of sexed semen and its role in the farm's developing meat business

Three-times-a-day milking works well at Northleaze, with the cows milked at 5am, 2pm and 9pm. The grazing platform of a little under 50ha is mainly split into 1.1ha paddocks, with the low yielders turned out into paddocks after each milking, and the high yielders normally going out once a day after the morning milking.

One of the secrets to getting the most from a grazing Holstein, he believes, is for them to graze as calves. "They learn early this way, and we've had no issues with getting them to maximise grass utilisation. It's not just about growing the right quality, it's also about utilising it properly."

Sexed semen was used across the whole herd for the past two breeding seasons in the autumn, and with accurate heat detection through the use of CowManager ear sensors, there hasn't been a single heifer that's scanned empty. "Accurate heat detection is key as we need to produce about 60 replacements, with the top 50% of cows served with sexed, and the remainder put to beef. All the heifers go to sexed."

Due to pressures from TB his son David has started an enterprise to rear the beef calves with large framed animals from proven Belgium Blue Bulls. "I hated giving them away but it remains to see if we can make a profit from an intensive but forage-based system."



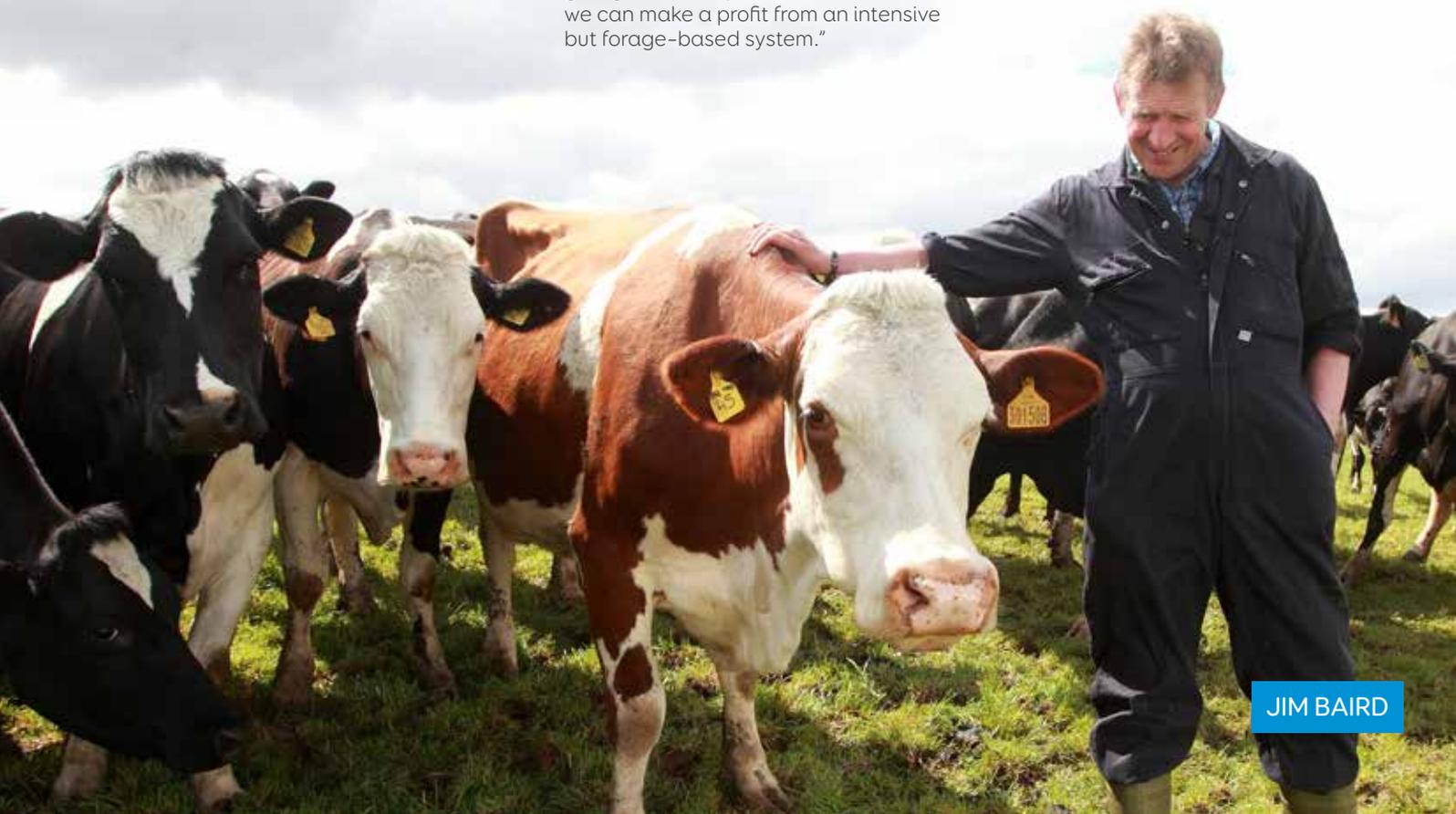
**ROBERT MALLETT**

Moving to a grass-based system has been a challenge – with additional costs such as electric fencing and the installation of water troughs across the farm – but Robert does not look back.

"I'm looking forward to BGS members coming to look around and challenge me with their questions. There are still lots of improvements to make, and I look forward to learning more myself on the day."

On April 23 the focus moves north of the border, to the farm of First Milk vice chairman, Jim Baird.

**Go to [ke.events@ahb.org.uk](mailto:ke.events@ahb.org.uk) to book your place or call 01904 771 218**



**JIM BAIRD**

Farming 260 acres, all grass, at Nether Affleck Farm near Lanark, he runs 230 dual purpose milkers, most are a two-way cross using black and white cows with Norwegian Red and Montbeliarde. This has ensured his dairy beef calves return a good price when sold in big lots each spring.

With yields of around 7800 litres, and 5000 of these litres coming from forage, four cuts of silage are made to ensure high quality and he supplements rations with 1.3 tonnes of concentrates/cow and brewers grains.

“Once the cows are out at grass – the target is for them to be out by April 10 – they get very little else. We are very committed to a milk from grass system and gear all our planning around keeping our costs down.”

Cows are autumn calving, beginning 1st October and 85% calve in 12 weeks. “We have been steadily increasing cow numbers on a 20% replacement rate so I have been more tolerant of late calvers than perhaps I should.”

The areas due to be covered here will be: breeding for the right cow, plant physiology and the environment, silage cutting, and grazing in challenging ground conditions.

With heavy stocking rates it hasn't always been easy to reseed, and Jim points out that in his area grass does recover quickly. Strip grazing around the 12-acre paddocks ensures good utilisation, and he is religious about the use of a plate meter from spring onwards, sometimes cutting grass in front of the cows, and aiming to get in to paddocks when covers are 3000kgDM/ha.

“Our usual rotation length is 21 days through the late spring and summer, but we are flexible and it depends on grass growth. We don't 'abuse' any of the fields, and believe our farming is dependent on having the right cow for our system, which is why we use LIC genetics, and getting the maximum utilisation from every blade grown.”



## Save the dates



When you are planning to come to any of the events listed below, make sure you find the time to drop by our stand and say 'hello', picking up some useful herd management information at the same time.

-  **4-6 June**  
Royal Cornwall Show
-  **20-23 July**  
Royal Welsh Show
-  **16 September**  
UK Dairy Day, Telford
-  **TBC**  
Women in Dairy conference
-  **7 October**  
South West Dairy Show
-  **TBC**  
Welsh Dairy Event
-  **18 November**  
AgriScot



TOM MOORE, LAURA WALKER & OLLIE BAGLEY

# Introducing Walford College

**LIC is pleased to announce that it'll be working with the college, to bring a monitor farm to the Midlands. It's an exciting time as they have just started a transition from all year-round calving to an autumn block.**

There'll be two open days each year, where we'll discuss the progress of the transition, how the farm is performing against targets, and take feedback from open day attendees.

Walford College farm manager Tom Moore took over the running of the farm in 2019 - and was given the mandate to achieve a breakeven budget, promote best practice within the industry, and ensure animal welfare is upheld on the farm.

With a cost of production at 66.7ppl and with feed and bedding making up 39% of this, Tom knew that moving to a grazing system would lower these costs. To promote best practise, the monitoring process will see the farm track it's progress against key performance indicators for herd fertility, grass growth and covers, liveweight of heifers and cows, production efficiency and production from forage.

With most colleges and universities in the UK focusing on high input systems, Walford will play a huge roll in training the next generation of staff looking to obtain jobs within the grazing community.

## Infrastructure change

As the cows were never out to graze pasture, there wasn't any infrastructure in place. One of the first steps was to map the farm to create 18 paddocks on the 63ha milking platform. The paddocks are around 3ha in size, with a couple around 5ha. Each paddock will have four points of access, two off the track and one from each of the paddocks on either side.

Over a kilometre of sand tracks have been put in, linking the 18 paddocks. To preserve these tracks no heavy machinery will travel on them, instead they will move through the farm from paddock to paddock. A ringed water line will also be developed to provide water to all the paddocks.

Currently there are 154 milkers with a plan to increase numbers naturally up to 250 cows. There were 21 heifers of the right weight and age to go to the bull in autumn 2019 and 84 heifers for 2020.

## Weight targets

The current cows have not yet been weighed but an estimate of 700Kg for the average cow weight has been made. Going forward, the size being targeted is 550 - 600Kg. The bulls that have been used for mating this season are Sierra, Hammer, Beaut and Kelsbells.

The planned start of calving for the block is 13 August 2020, with mating started on 4 November 2019. Moving the herd into a single block will happen over a two-year period.

The rising two-year-old heifers for the 2019 season have been split according to age and weight. The oldest and heaviest were put forward for mating, while the younger and lighter heifers will be mated in November 2020 with this year's rising ones.

## Grazing key

This spring will see the training of the cows to graze lower in the sward as they are turned out for the first time. The plan is to have all the cows out grazing for some time from the start of turn out.

The high-yielding cows will be out to graze during the day and in at night with feed in the parlour. This is to ensure that they're able to maintain their yields without losing body condition.

The lower-yielding cows will be out on grass all the time with feed in the parlour. All cows will be turned out onto fresh grass every morning. It will be the role of low yielding cows to then clean up these paddocks in the evening while the high-yielding cows are housed. The goal is to be obtaining consistent residuals of around 1600KgDM by the end of the 2020 grazing season

We would love you to join us at our launch event on April 7. Contact the office on **01725 553008** to book your place.



**By Sean Chubb,**  
Pasture to Profit consultant  
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**THE NEW SAND TRACKS THAT HAVE GONE IN**

# Gnatts Farm signs off

**Gnatts Farm converted to a grass-based spring block system in 2014 and has been LIC UK's monitor farm for the past three years. Over this period it's concentrated on driving utilisation and efficiency.**

At the initial open day to launch the monitor farm, Dr John Roche spoke about the resilience model he and Dr Brendan Horan formulated for the 2013 Moorepark open day.

The model breaks the system into four parts: resources (grass utilisation), animals, people and business. Gnatts already had excellent people with a will to progress, and the business was driven by return on investment. As two parts of the model were in place and covered, we concentrated on the remaining parts of the model - grass production and its utilisation plus the animals.

## The Grass

Grass growing potential is good, soils are generally free draining, and with high rainfall the building blocks were there. Free draining soils can limit summer growth in prolonged dry periods, but that comes down to management of rotation length and acting early.

Soil structure is not so much of a challenge, but soil indices can be, so part of the strategy was to identify limiting factors and address them. Linked to this we looked at every paddock in terms of aspect, gradient, soil depth & analysis, last reseed, ease of grazing, infrastructure and whether the cows liked that particular paddock.

For example, we identified a track with a poor surface which serviced an area of the platform that was ideal for grazing in the shoulders, but was under-utilised due to the track. This was resolved by rolling and laying astro turf, resulting in

extra grazings on the shoulders of the season.

One extra grazing is an extra 1.3 tonnes of dry matter utilised. The key word here is the utilisation, there's no point growing grass unless it's properly utilised, and the key to this has been the correct entry cover and residual which drives grass quality and quantity.

For a grazing system to sit in balance and work effectively, stocking rate must be right, balancing cow demand to the ability of grass to grow and supply a large part of the diet. When this is right this enables the correct average cover to be maintained all season, which feeds and fills the cow with the correct body condition score to be maintained.

The correct body condition realises the genetic potential in terms of fertility and production. Gnatts has worked hard on their autumn rotation plan which then sets the spring rotation plan to deliver quality grass for the season post balance day.

## The stock

The cows originally came from Ireland and the UK and are LIC bred since 2014. Growing the grass and utilising it is paramount. But the right cow for the system is also imperative to turn the grass into milk solids and profit.

This means a cow that's not too big - so she doesn't waste energy on maintenance, yet one big enough to eat up to 18kg grass dry matter a day and produce a high percentage of her bodyweight in milk solids. This has been the focus in the last two years.



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Originally, in 2014, the milk solids percentage of liveweight was a healthy 72%. Through strategic genetic selection and high-quality management, this has climbed to the 2019 level of 94.6%.

## The future

The target for Gnatts is 100% + milk solids to liveweight. At one of the open days a year ago the attendees set a target of 18 tonnes dry matter grass growth.

The potential to do this is there and is being realised through the team's management. More grass grown and utilised means the potential for a higher stocking rate and more cows. The infrastructure could potentially take an extra 30 cows. Combining this with very efficient milk solids cows will mean a large drive in potential profit and return on investment.

A huge amount has been achieved in a relatively short period of time driven by the most important of the four parts to the resilience model. The team at Maristow and Gnatts are the gems of the system and I've no doubt they'll continue to improve and drive the profitable system further.



# Top bulls for 2020

**Our new bull catalogue is now available, please contact the office on 01725553008 if you would like a copy in the post or by email.**

We're offering you the results of 4.3 million NZ semen sales, 1.3 million international sales, 11 million milk samples analyses, 260,000 DNA tests and 10,500 software customers doing 100 million transactions from 6 million active animals each year to provide the very best options for this breeding season.

We're featuring three standout bulls already on their way, all of whom will be available to our UK customers this year. All have improved proofs in the latest NZ animal evaluation run. These are just some from a great pack of bulls available this year, so get your orders in fast before supplies run out.

First up is Lancelot, the number one NZ BW Holstein-Friesian available. He has excellent production at 86kgs solids, averaging 4.9% fat and 4.1% protein, high for a Holstein-Friesian. Fertility has risen consistently as he has added more and more daughters to his proof. All his TOP's are positive, especially capacity and udder overall. He produces ideal medium-sized daughters.

Next we come to Spot-On, a bull many feel will be the next LIC superstar. This A2A2 bull is the number one KiwiCross™ bull for capacity at 1.22. His proof shows 60kgs of milk solids at 5.4% fat and 4.1% protein. His total longevity is +446 days. He produces 502kg liveweight cows. He will suit any crossbred herd.

Dexter is well-liked by farmers as a Jersey, high production, high liveweight bull. He shows excellent type and capacity and offers +51kgs milk solids from a liveweight of 475kgs. He is one of the top fertility Jersey bulls available, produces excellent udders, and is the perfect bull to use as a first cross. He displays very high milkfat and protein, fertility and longevity, as well as a short gestation length. Highly valued bull by NZ farmers for his capacious daughters.

**Get in touch with your local FSM by contacting the office on the number below to find out who is in your area.**



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