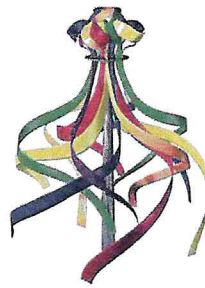


LKL Newsletter

May 2024



Editor: George Gordon Layout: Amanda Hargrave

MILK PRICES CREEP UP

Barber's announced 0.52ppl for May and a further 1.02ppl for June to a June price of 40.25ppl. First Milk increased 0.75ppl to 39.5ppl. Haverfordwest Tesco cheese increasing to 41ppl. The Co-op rises now total 3.5ppl after four increases. Freshways confirmed a 2ppl increase for June to 37ppl "in consideration of the rising cost of milk production and to ensure the partnership with suppliers remains sustainable." First Milk increased it's acquired BV Dairy price with a 0.65ppl for May to 38.25ppl.

EU MILK PRICES

The average milk price for the EU was £37.96/100kg, 15% less than in February 2023. The average UK milk price in February was 38ppl. The UK is unusual as 60% of the milk sold is for liquid use, much higher than other European countries. Romanian milk output increased 5.5% to 1.144mt, with Polish production up 2% to 13.051mt. UK production fell 0.1% to 14.855 billion litres.

WET SPRING STEADIES MARKETS

The damp spring is one of the wettest in living memory. The poor weather has helped demand remain steady while limiting seasonal milk production. The dairy market situation could have been more negative if the spring flush had not been so compromised by wet weather.

TSDG PRODUCTION COSTS

The Tesco Sustainable Dairy Group cost tracker decreased 0.6ppl for May to 41.82ppl. Sainsbury's increased Muller SDDG price to 40.55ppl. Co-op has increased its Co-op Dairy price by 0.12ppl to 39.96ppl.

ARLA UP 0.45PPL FOR MAY TO 40.45PPL AND +1.34PPL ORGANIC TO 50PPL

Arla have increased their prices again from 1 May. They cite rising retail sales and stable commodity markets. Arla gave a bigger rise of 1.34ppl to organic prices that took them to virtually 50ppl (49.98ppl) driven by growing demand and presumably an organic market that is getting tighter, due to farmers leaving in the past year or two when prices were poor.

ARLA EX CEO ASH AMIRAHMADI RECOGNISED

RABDF awarded ex-Arla Chief Executive Ash Amirahmadi the Princess Royal Award. Ash started his career at Unilever, after the University of Nottingham before embarking on a 20-year career with Arla. Ash believes the transition of Milklink into Arla was his toughest job. As Chair of The Dairy Roadmap Ash lead on sustainability. He is Chairman of the Institute of Grocery Development, sits on the UK government board of trade and was awarded an OBE.

4TH WETTEST 18 MONTHS ON RECORD FOR UK

For the UK as a whole, the 18 months to March 2024 ranks as the fourth wettest on record.



32 AGRI FATALITIES IN PAST YEAR

Figures showed the fatal injury rate in agriculture has hardly changed in 40 years. 32 people lost their lives following accidents on UK farms, including the deaths of three children. It makes Agriculture the most dangerous industry and stubbornly resistant to improvement. It is not good enough!! Start by improving your farm, please!

ADVANCE NOTICE

The National Herdperson's Conference is on Monday 8 and Tuesday 9 of July this year. Please see attachment for full details.

NEW DAIRY CONTRACT TERMS FROM JULY

Processors will be required to review their contracts in order to become compliant with new regulations. The new legislation evolved from the voluntary code of practice for dairy contracts, introduced in 2012. The voluntary code was established to stop unfair contractual arrangements and help stabilise the UK dairy industry. Lack of legislation enabled some processors to use unfair contractual practices leaving dairy farmers vulnerable to price and other changes.

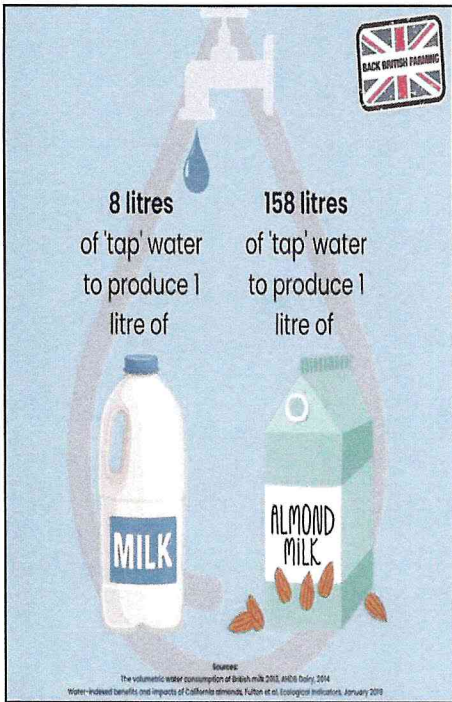


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NEWS



ARLA BUY VOLAC'S WHEY BUSINESS

The Volac Whey Protein business has been sold to Arla's Ingredients business subject to competition market authority approval.

LACTALIS GLOBAL NO 1 PROCESSOR

Lactalis is the largest dairy processor in the world. It's sales rose 4.3% to EUR29.5 billion in 2023, but net profit remained low due to inflation pressure. The net profit was EUR428 million compared to EUR384 million in 2022, a net profit margin of 1.45% of sales, well below the 2.0% recorded in 2021. Consumer behaviour led to a drop in sales volumes. The group invested EUR920 million to modernise its dairies and cheese factories in France and North America. Lactalis' important countries are France, the United States and Canada.



MICHAEL OAKES HANDS OVER

Outgoing NFU dairy board chair Michael Oakes warned farmers should focus on 'building relationships' which benefit the dairy industry as a whole. Mr Oakes spent 14 years on the NFU dairy board and eight years as chair, and has handed over to York dairy farmer Paul Tompkins. Mr Oakes said his main achievement was "Introduction of new legislation to ensure transparent dairy contracts". It took longer than he thought owing to 'Brexit, the pandemic and Defra's lawyers'!

EA SHAMBLES

The Environment Agency (EA) revealed 9,000 staff have quit their jobs amid funding cuts and sewage scandals. Figures obtained by the Liberal Democrats show an estimated one-in-five staff left the agency in 2017. Since 2016, 8,836 staff left which wiped out the Government's recruitment drive. Government funding for environmental protection more than halved the £170 million budget of 2009-10 to £76m in 2019-20. The agency has been plagued by complaints of low pay, understaffing and low morale. Tim Farron said there was a correlation between cuts to the agency and an exodus of staff. An EA spokesperson said: "Since April 2021, we have seen more than 4,800 people join the EA with a drop in those leaving".

BLUETONGUE THREAT THIS SUMMER

Bluetongue could arrive on a large scale this summer. The unpredictability of BTV-3 is worrying and farmers and vets should be vigilant.

IRELAND 5BN LITRES TO 10BN LITRES IN 8 YEARS, NOW THREATENED BY EU N LIMITS

The lifting of EU milk quotas in 2015 has seen milk output in the Irish Republic doubling from 5 billion litres to over 10 billion litres, but the expansion may have stopped. The new environmental reality is for lower nitrate (fertiliser) levels being forced on dairy to combat declining water quality. Ireland is one of three EU member states that has a nitrates derogation (at 220kg organic nitrogen per hectare as opposed to the standard 170kg). The European Commission cut the limit from 250kg to 220kg this year in response to a major deterioration in water quality linked to increased dairy production since 2015. If the 220kg limit goes as part of an EU-wide review process next year (presumably back to 170kg), the impact on output volumes could be very serious. NZ has similar environmental restrictions that have effectively put the brakes on any further NZ dairy industry expansion.



IRELAND

BIRD FLU IN UNPASTEURISED US MILK

US officials have confirmed the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in dairy cattle and milk. Samples of unpasteurised



milk from affected cattle in Kansas and Texas were confirmed to be positive for HPAI. Cattle exhibited flu-like symptoms, fever, and thick discoloured milk, accompanied by a sharp reduction in milk production.



NEWS

EARLY START FOR TICKS

APHA are warning the current warm weather may contribute to an increase in early spring ticks. Consider the possibility of tick-borne diseases when examining livestock. Infections (protozoan and bacterial) transmitted via tick bites can lead to severe diseases. Tick activity has two seasonal peaks; one in spring and the other in late summer. Tick-borne diseases include:



- ◆ Louping ill
- ◆ Tick-bourne fever
- ◆ Redwater fever
- ◆ Tick pyaemia

For further information on ticks, visit the Sustainable Control of Parasites (SCOPS) website.

CHICKEN LITTER FEED BEHIND H5N1 BIRD FLU IN US COWS

The H5N1 outbreak among cattle in the United States has probably been caused by contaminated feed. In contrast to Britain, American farmers feed cattle and other farm animals ground-up waste from animals including birds. Cows across six US states, and at least one farm worker, have become infected with the highly pathogenic virus, only the second recorded human H5N1 case in the US. The development is of concern because it allows the virus, more opportunities to mutate. H5N1 first detected in cows may have been transmitted through cattle feed called "poultry litter", a mix of poultry excreta, spilled feed, feathers, and other waste scraped from the floors of industrial chicken and turkey production plants. In the UK, feeding cows proteins from other animals has been regulated since the outbreak of BSE 30 years ago. Experts fear it could be the poultry litter feed that passed the virus to cattle. Feeding of poultry litter to cows is a known factor in the cause of botulism in cattle. The presence of H5N1 in US cattle herds increases the risk of the virus getting into humans via farm workers, but the spread of the virus to pig farms is the big threat. Because pigs have receptors on some cells that are similar to humans, it makes it more likely that the virus could mutate and jump to humans. Thus far, the virus hasn't shown any signs of such a dangerous mutation.



MYCOPLASMA BOVIS

Endemic within the UK, mycoplasma bovis (M.bovis) causes diseases including respiratory disease, middle ear disease, mastitis and arthritis. M.bovis often presents itself as calf pneumonia. M.bovis is different to typical bacteria as it lacks a cell wall, which influences what drugs can treat it, as penicillin will not work. The most likely route of M.bovis spreading is via cattle to cattle. However, it can be transmitted on equipment or by staff. Looking at the spread of M.bovis within a herd, it is largely spread within calf populations. Transmission between calves occurs through nose to nose contact, aerosol transmission and it can also spread through milk or colostrum. However, vets do not think colostrum and milk play as big a part in the disease spread. Focus attention on managing the risk of formite spread and respiratory pathogens in the calf environment. M.bovis can spread through automatic and group feeding systems in large groups of calves. Ensure optimal feeding rates are in place to increase calves' resilience to respiratory pathogens and get stocking rates and air quality right. Pathogens are present most of the time and a lot will depend on the stressors on calves as to whether they succumb. Eradicating M.bovis is difficult. New Zealand opted for a stamping out policy through testing and culling which has worked. UK farms have removed M.bovis by isolating and removing carrier animals, although most UK herds will just have to manage the disease to an acceptable level. Maximise calf resilience to reduce the disease. Manage pathogens through vaccination, stocking densities, air quality, colostrum quality and improved hygiene. Keep calf groups small and don't mix calves with large age ranges.

Get your free quote for electricity!

LKL Services are working with Agri Power Solutions to offer you, our customers the very best of energy rates! If you want a free, no obligation quote in your own time to see what's on offer please follow the link <https://agripowersolutions.udcloudpcw.co.uk/>

Contact Number:
07425 129570

sales@agripowersolutions.co.uk

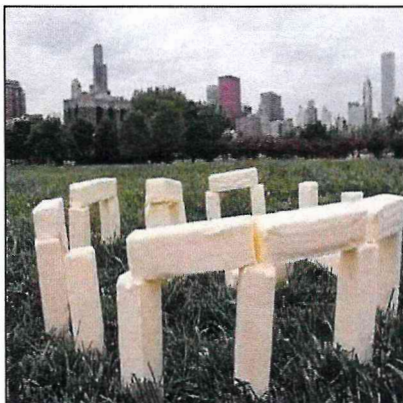


PEOPLE CELEBRATING SPECIAL BIRTHDAYS!

Dimitar Ivanov Dimitrov, Jakub Horčić, Relu Korosi
Ionut-Claudiu Pop

WELCOME TO:

FARMERS L & L Trowbridge Ltd, B V & S M Johnson



Is that butter?
No, it's Stonehenge.
I can't believe it's not butter.

When nobody cancels the plans and you actually have to go out



I appreciate the metric system for functionality's sake, but it just doesn't flow as romantically when used in narrative:

"He ran kilometre after kilometre, until the sun dipped into the horizon".

"His father was the metrestick against which he measured his worth".

"Her heart beat faster with every 25 millimetres he approached".

I love the phrase "with all due respect" because it doesn't specify the actual level of respect that is due.

When someone tells me to do something that I was already **GOING TO DO!**

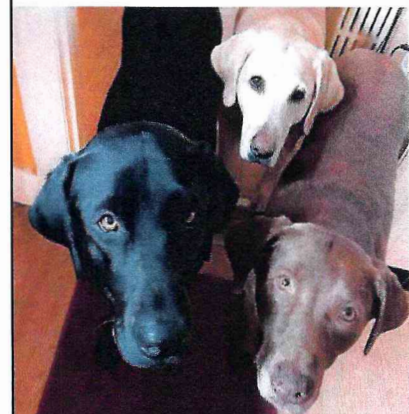


They've brought him on in case it goes to pens.



The only running I do is running out of money.

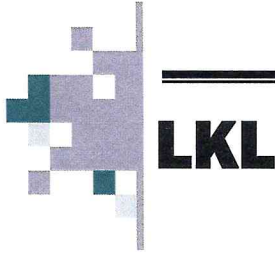
When you find something you like so you get it in every color



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Technical Note

OVERSEEDING

Overstitching can revitalise old pastures. Overseeding with a direct disc drill is now more widely used. This method reduces establishment costs. Direct drilling is the most reliable method where penetration of the existing sward is necessary with a channel created in the process, there is improved seed to soil contact. This enhances seed germination rates. Competition from existing sward can be challenging so graze grass tight before stitching new seed in. Direct disc drilling can also establish a break crop, such as stubble turnips or kale to avoid a grass-to-grass reseed to break any pest and disease cycles.

WEEDS IN CLOVER LEYS

The recent re-introduction of a popular clover safe in grassland herbicides means clover ley establishment may be easier. Newly sown clover leys are more susceptible to annual weeds. Chickweed and charlock, are quick to grow and will compete aggressively. Perennial weeds, such as docks and thistles, will also start to germinate. Annual weeds are the main concern in recently sown leys. The re-introduction of Triad SX is 'clover safe' and can be used from three leaves of the grass. It has strong activity against annual weeds, particularly chickweed. It has limited activity against perennial weeds, such as docks and thistles. In the second and following years there are more herbicide options available. Clover leys can be a challenge to get going but have significant advantages. Other farmers establish a clean grass only ley then stitch clover in at a later date.

Technical Note ... Continued

SOIL LEACHING OF IODINE AFTER ALL THE RAIN

Following relentless rainfall, forage quality could be compromised due to mineral leaching. Iodine, in particular, has been lost. Whether grazing or making silage, test grassland soils to ascertain if vital minerals are present at sufficient levels. Iodine is essential as a constituent of the thyroid hormones. Iodine deficiency is linked to thyroid enlargement; stillborn calves, poor growth rates, poor milk production and retained placenta.

EARLY FLY CONTROL

Warm and wet weather has provided optimal conditions for the overwintering of flies. Put controls in place before large fly numbers become visible. Once you start seeing flies, the population has already exploded, fly traps are a good way to monitor levels. The main flies affecting cattle include stable, horn, house, face and head flies. They spread summer mastitis and New Forest Eye, and cause significant production losses. Fly worry can cause growth rate losses of up to 0.3kg a day and 0.5 litres a day milk loss, due to the 'hassle factor' and reduced feed intake. A two-step approach, is best, using spot-on products, alongside management to control fly breeding sites. Keep stock away from fly breeding sites like wet and muddy areas. Fly control strategy is an important part of preventative healthcare.

ANNUAL ROLLING RESULTS All breeds All systems Herds Ranked by: **Bactoscan Cell Count Index**

Latest Recording	WOO1	JE1	IVE1	GAY1	BRA2	ROT1	STA2	Cwrt	SEA1	PIC1	BOW3	ROT1	SK14	SAL1	MER3	LOT2	HEA1	BUT1	CHE1	DUT1	
Average	Mar 24	Mar 24	Mar 24	Feb 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Feb 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Mar 24	Jan 24	Mar 24	Mar 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Mar 24	Feb 24	Feb 24	
Cows in herd	278	181	246	98	535	187	438	401	156	301	253	176	437	262	223	283	528	176	539	332	
MILK PRODUCTION																					
Yield (ltrs/cow)	9361	13502	9101	5399	8458	10311	8248	6640	8229	11557	10484	10232	10575	6815	6255	9830	11763	8542	9308	8334	
Yield from all forage (ltrs/cow)	3233	2020	4981	2168	3827	3851	3524	2662	3293	4436	3257	3716	2434	2808	3175	2118	2568	3754	2841	2973	
% of total yield from forage	36%	15%	55%	40%	45%	37%	43%	40%	40%	38%	31%	36%	23%	41%	51%	22%	22%	44%	31%	36%	
Butterfat (%)	4.24	3.95	4.42	4.16	4.45	4.51	4.32	4.52	4.49	4.06	4.17	4.26	4.08	4.48	4.22	4.23	3.77	4.01	4.05	4.54	
Protein (%)	3.35	3.22	3.41	3.23	3.40	3.46	3.44	3.55	3.56	3.15	3.37	3.45	3.31	3.49	3.34	3.31	3.33	3.15	3.26	3.45	
Hygiene	23	8	10	17	20	19	19	28	24	19	22	19	32	25	15	28	29	30	35	38	
Cell Count	142	82	97	124	111	127	140	98	120	148	136	175	120	157	214	161	164	197	185	177	
Bactoscan / Cell Count Index	59	86	81	70	68	65	63	63	62	61	61	56	54	53	52	49	48	41	38	37	
Milk Price (pence)	41.32	43.62	42.57	36.19	39.14	43.63	46.37	39.58	43.74	39.29	42.01	41.77	37.84	40.06	49.91	40.86	41.58	35.52	41.39	41.98	
FEED																					
Concentrate use per cow (kg)	2770	4305	2097	4285	1194	2421	2401	1801	2602	3130	3434	2692	2620	2112	1602	3609	4001	2678	2776	2940	
Concentrate use (kg/ltr)	0.29	0.32	0.23	0.31	0.22	0.29	0.29	0.27	0.32	0.27	0.33	0.26	0.25	0.31	0.26	0.37	0.34	0.31	0.30	0.35	
Concentrate price per tonne (£)	329	299	344	301	358	361	320	315	280	339	292	342	293	302	477	314	366	298	313	327	
Other purch feed cost per cow (£)	158	692	0	391	115	6	33	119	0	181	137	194	496	1	10	143	157	77	211	0	
All purchased feed cost (p/ltr)	11.07	14.65	7.92	12.32	10.04	10.73	9.72	10.33	8.85	10.74	10.88	10.89	11.95	9.37	12.39	12.98	13.78	10.25	11.60	11.54	
MARGINS																					
MOPF per cow (£)	2794	3912	3154	3258	1571	2439	3016	1941	2871	3254	3262	3160	2738	2091	2347	2740	3270	2159	2770	2530	
MOPF per Litre (p)	30.25	28.97	34.65	23.88	29.10	28.98	32.90	36.65	29.25	28.54	31.13	30.88	25.89	30.69	37.52	27.87	27.80	25.27	29.80	30.43	
FORAGE																					
Stocking rate (cows/ha)	2.35	2.06		1.64	1.57	2.02	1.98			1.65			3.99	2.61		4.36			1.73	2.28	
Milk from forage (ltrs/ha)	6939	4152		6975	3412	7728	8145		7297				9709	7316		9233			4903	6764	
MOPF per hectare (£)	6557	8040		5341	2472	4925	6728	6971	5353				10920	5449		11943			4781	5756	

Kingshay can accept no responsibility for the information supplied to it. Every care will be taken by Kingshay to produce an accurate report but it does not accept any liability for any loss (whether direct or consequential) arising from any defect in the report.

LKL Services Herds					
Holstein/Friesian, Conventional Herds (matched herds)		Year Ending March 2023	Year Ending March 2024	Change	% Diff
Cows in herd		298	307	9	3%
Cow calvings		217	220	3	1%
Heifer calvings		92	111	19	21%
Stocking rate	cows/ha	2.42	2.44	0.02	1%
MILK PRODUCTION					
Milk Production	litres	2,833,086	2,948,121	115,035	4%
Yield per cow	litres	9,507	9,603	96	1%
Yield from all forage per cow	litres	2,967	3,190	223	8%
% of total yield from forage		31%	33%	2%	6%
Butterfat	%	4.19	4.17	-0.02	0%
Protein	%	3.35	3.33	-0.02	-1%
Bactoscan		23	24	1	4%
Cellcount		147	147	0	0%
Milk Price	pence	46.17	39.91	-6.26	-14%
Total milk value per cow	£	4,389	3,833	-556	-13%
FEED					
Total concentrate use	tonnes	875	887	12	1%
Concentrate use per cow	kg	2,936	2,889	-47	-2%
Concentrate use per litre	kg	0.31	0.30	-0.01	-3%
Concentrate price per tonne	£	341	320	-21	-6%
Other purchased feed cost per cow	£	158	162	4	3%
All purchased feed cost per cow	£	1159	1086	-73	-6%
All purchased feed cost per litre	pence	12.19	11.31	-0.88	-7%
All P.Feed @ 86% DM equivalent per cow	kg	3,300	3,301	1	0%
MARGINS					
MOPF per herd	£	962,540	843,329	-119,211	-12%
MOPF per cow	£	3,230	2,747	-483	-15%
MOPF per litre	pence	33.97	28.61	-5.36	-16%

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LKL League Table — March 2024 milk production, inclusion for herds with a Bactoscan/Cell Count Index over 37.

(Bactoscan score 0 - 50 for rolling average Bactoscan of 50 - 0)

(Cell Count score 0 - 50 for rolling average Cell Count of 300 - 50)

Addition of two scores gives an index number, the highest wins.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS MONTH'S WINNERS:



Faye Woolhead
@ Hook Farm Partnership

(Wins £20 voucher)



Roy and Angela Williams
@ Messrs T K Jeans & Sons

(Wins £10 voucher)



ARE PROUD TO
SPONSOR
THE NHC 2024

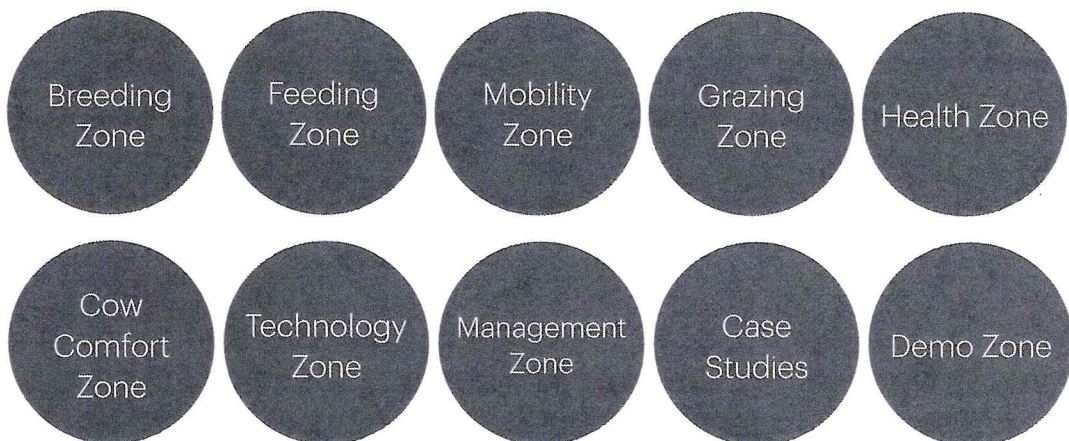
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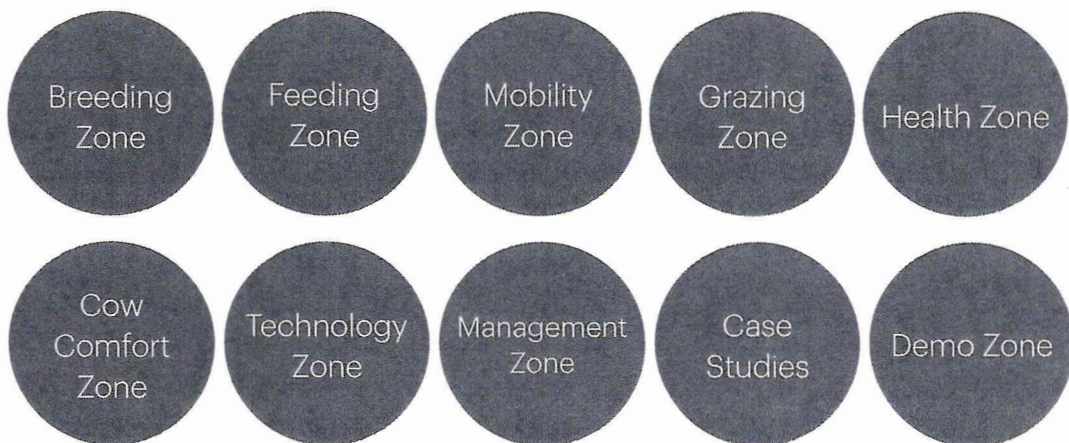
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WHETHER YOU ARE ON YOUR FIRST STEPS IN THE INDUSTRY OR A SEASONED HERD MANAGER - THIS IS YOUR EVENT!

Keeping up to date and on track with the latest thinking in herd management, breeding, nutrition and all the other aspects of caring for cows is crucial! Enhance your professionalism and personal development plus network with like minded people and industry experts! If you want to be educated, entertained and motivated the NHC is the place to be!

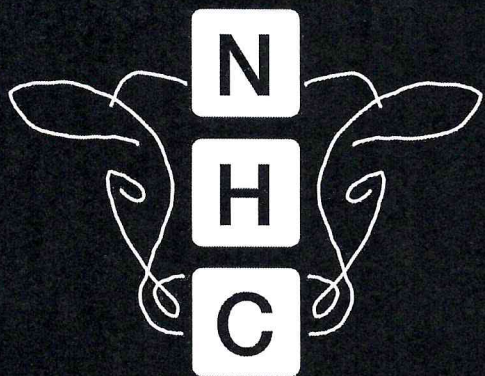
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Conference**

**8TH & 9TH JULY
2024**

**NEW DATES-NEW LOOK-NEW
FORMAT FOR 2024-SAME
GREAT PRICE £69+VAT - FULL
BOARD RATE**

THE EVENT...

Monday 8th July

Registration from 1.30pm

Start 3pm - Welcome address

4x Break out sessions of approx 45 mins each

Evening Gala Dinner, Awards & DMA Graduation

Tuesday 9th July

Main room session

Practical sessions/Workshops on farm /break out
rooms approx 45 mins each

Lunch

Main room sessions

Conference close approx 3.30pm



**THE ONLY EVENT
AIMED AT
PROFESSIONAL
FARM STAFF!**



Practical sessions on farm

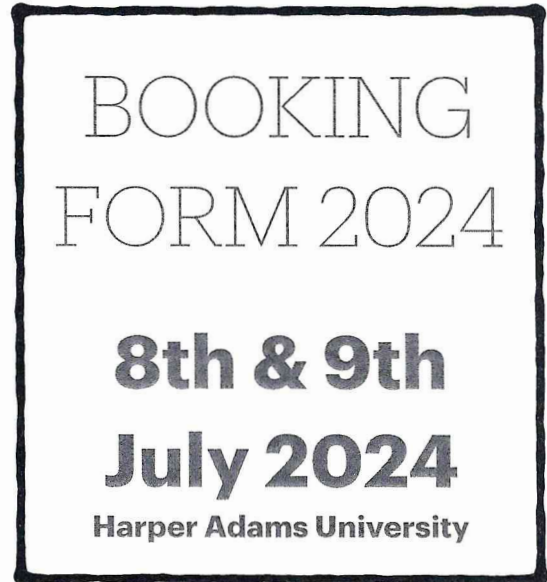
Breakout workshops

Trade stands and demos

Panel discussions

International speakers & session leaders

Great hospitality



www.nationalherdspersonsconference.co.uk

Applicant Name	
Farmer Name (where applicable)	
Invoice address (including trading name)	
Phone numbers – mobile and landline	
Email address	
Job title	
Herd size	
No of places @ £69 plus VAT (£82.80 inc VAT)	
Total amount enclosed (please make cheques payable to LKL Services Ltd) Alternatively by direct bank payment: 30-97-41 04226529	
Special dietary requirements	

*I enclose a payment of £ and understand that this is non-refundable
Places are only provisional until full payment is received. Full payment to be
received by 21st June 2024*

Signed _____ Date _____



Newsletter 2024, Q2

May 2024

Introducing our new staff member:

Katie Davison

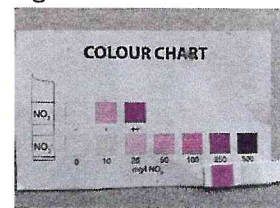
Originally from Scotland, Katie joined the DHHPS team from New Zealand at the start of April. Katie has spent the last 15 years working as a dairy vet in the Waikato, alongside farming 810 Friesian cows with her husband. Prior to joining the DHHPS, Katie was running her own mixed vet practice in New Zealand, which is still looking after lots of dairy cows and small animals. Katie enjoys all aspects of farm work and working with farmers to improve productivity and profitability on farm. Outside of work, Katie is generally kept busy with her two children and their various sports and musical activities.



Coming from New Zealand and moving into the May/June period (start of winter), we always have concerns in New Zealand about **nitrate toxicity in cattle**. During this time, many farmers start to graze new fast-growing annual and permanent pasture. Frosty mornings and overcast days are the greatest risk for nitrate outbreaks when pasture has been unable to photosynthesise.

High levels of nitrate and nitrite in plants are the primary cause of acute nitrate poisoning in cattle. Rapidly growing plants in rich nitrogenous soils are most dangerous. When this grass is consumed, the nitrate enters the rumen where the microbes convert nitrate to nitrite, and then ammonia. When high levels of nitrate are consumed, the conversion of the nitrite to ammonia occurs at a slower rate than the reduction of nitrate to nitrite, leading to a build up of nitrite in the rumen. Nitrite is able to easily enter the bloodstream through the rumen, and

converts ferrous hemoglobin to ferric methemoglobin, which cannot carry oxygen. The signs of nitrate toxicity are a direct result from a lack of oxygen, and you will often see **rapid breathing and frothing, tremors, difficulty standing/ weakness and gasping for air as the animals are suffocating**. The results of nitrate poisoning can be very dramatic, with animals often giving no warning and collapsing suddenly. Death is imminent without veterinary treatment, and so prevention is very important through on-farm testing of grass.



As we move towards silage time in the UK, it is important to remember that silage can also be a source of nitrate toxicity. Some environmental conditions (particularly drought) cause nitrates to accumulate in plants fertilized with nitrogen, even at recommended rates. By taking precautions, you can fertilize at recommended rates for maximum production of silage crops without fear of nitrate issues.

Any suspect feed should be tested for nitrate levels before feeding. The silage can also be tested at harvest to determine if nitrates are a cause for concern. When stored forages contain more than 1,000 ppm NO₃-N, intakes must be managed to avoid elevated methemoglobin levels in the blood and other toxic effects.

Remember **inhalation of even a small amount of nitric oxide (NO₂) from the ensiling process can result in serious and sometimes permanent lung damage**. If suspected exposure to nitrogen dioxide or nitric acid has occurred you should seek immediate medical help. For further information:

<https://www.nfuonline.com/updates-and-information/silage-pit-safety-advice-on-storage-and-handling/>



Fertility in spring block calvers

It has not been an easy spring so far, especially for those spring block calving herds who have struggled in the wet weather with poor grass growth and reduced grazing intakes. Unsurprisingly AHDB Forage for Knowledge has shown that UK grass growth rates in 2024 are well behind last year and the 5 year average, and spring calving cows have been struggling to meet their nutritional requirements from grazed grass. Given limited stocks of good quality silage on many farms, cows have lost body condition in early lactation, which will potentially cause problems later on.

With calving now finishing in many spring block calving herds, attention now switches to getting cows back in calf. The aim is to have **80% of cows calved within the first 6 weeks of the calving season**, and this requires that 75% of cows are back in calf by 100 days in milk (termed the **100 day In Calf Rate** – similar to the 6 week In Calf Rate, which is the number of cows in calf during the first 6 weeks of mating). **Less than 10% of the cows should be barren at the end of breeding**, sometimes called the **200 day Not In Calf rate**. Having a tight calving block means that workload is concentrated at key times through the year, with maximum grass utilization in the spring. Undoubtedly, the key is to ensure that the cows are fit, healthy and cycling by the start of the breeding season. There are many factors that contribute to this such as nutrition, genetics, infectious disease status and cow management.

Key current actions for spring block calvers:

- **Check body condition score in the milking cows** to ensure that cows are in body condition score 2.5 – 3.5 (on a 5 point scale). Individual thin cows should be examined for potential diseases such as lameness. However, if more than 10% of the herd are below BCS 2.5, then action will be needed to ensure that cows are maintaining or improving body condition prior to mating.
- **Blood testing the cows** will provide rapid and objective evidence of what the cows think of their current diet. With calving finished in most spring block calving herds, blood testing now focuses on the milking cows – and we have seen a number of herds still struggling with their current energy balance in cows over a month calved due to the poor grazing conditions. Correcting this is key to preventing cows losing too much body condition prior to mating.
- If cows are continuing to struggle at grass, then options include either A) some concentrate feeding in the parlour and/or B) buffer feeding with quality forage to help maintain intakes.
- **Pre-breeding checks** by your vet will help identify cows with uterine infections (“whites”) or cysts, and should be undertaken in all cows at 3 weeks calved in block calving herds to ensure that cows are clean and cycling prior to mating.
- **Start heat detection 35 days before the planned start of mating**, so that any non-bulling cows can be identified early and flagged for veterinary examination. Over 85% of the cows should have at least one observed heat by the planned start of breeding.
- Heat detection aids such as tail paint can help when used correctly, but do **not** replace twice or ideally three times a day paddock observations.
- Although they will usually have higher conception rates, don't forget about bulling heifers. **Aim for most heifers to calve at the start of the calving period** to give them longer to recover prior to re-breeding.

There is a limited window in spring block calving herds to get cows back in calf which will affect milk production next year. Take action now to get as many cows back in calf as possible.