

## Life as a dairy farmer

What a subject to be asked to write on! Everyone but everyone who is anything to do with agriculture is aware of the not so wonderful milk pay cheques currently. So I shall park that subject as we are not considering diversifying into selling our own milk or cheese.

After a 4 ½ year search for a farm to dairy farm independently, with many a rollercoaster feeling along the way, we finally moved into our own 20 year tenancy in September 2014. Well actually, the outgoing tenants were fantastically helpful to us and we were able to start groundworks in the field for the parlour and cubicles after it was harvested and we were also able to partially move ourselves in in September which made things much easier.

We were very fortunate that the autumn was quite gentle which enabled us to get the milking shed, slurry lagoon and cubicle shed done. Perhaps it isn't a good idea to let parlour and bulk tank fitters know that you aren't milking until February, as despite our request to have these fitted before Christmas we still ended up not being able to sell milk for a few days after we should've! Mind you the electric suppliers can well and truly beat any other inefficiencies – first contact was June 2014, we finally had mains electric to the parlour on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015 – and that was after many a phone call when the relevant person was off sick / on leave / not in the office generally at the moment in which we were told that they would get back to us tomorrow/within 48 hours, only to realise 3 days later that we still hadn't heard anything....

Spring was manic – to quote a near neighbour of ours: 'We always forget that the problem with block calving, is the calving bit!' Unfortunately we obviously had a few additional things to deal with – such as managing our dry cows on bales placed behind makeshift feed wires as we didn't have clamp silage, only the base of cow tracks laid as the weather turned in the autumn, a high percentage of heifers meaning that you often had one or two extras in a row ...

However by bringing dry cows and heifers through the parlour every other day to draft out springers and teat spray, the heifers were well adjusted to the parlour really. Sadly the lack of decent tracks took its toll in early spring, especially on heifers' feet. We could see that looming but could do little to offset it and we will probably pay for it in our fertility results.



Our discussion group visited us last month and all thought our stock were looking good, sadly at a higher cost than we'd planned as the 150 acres of new seeds (following arable) have been struggling in dry conditions. We haven't needed to worm our youngstock at all this year yet: we purposefully grazed them after the bulling/in-calf heifers to get some exposure and then moved them back to aftermaths. Their faecal egg counts were low so hopefully they have got some immunity, a bit of coughing suggests they had a little lungworm exposure.

So not surprisingly we've experienced the same issues as many others; we're finishing off our capital set-up with the final fencing and cow track work being done now and then we plan to keep on-going costs down to ride out this low milk price.



*Calves out on milk*

For more information on Westpoint please call our Launceston practice on 01566 86985.

**Rachel Risdon BVSc CertCHP MRCVS**