

Six finalists put best foot forward in 2009 NMR/RABDF Gold Cup

Team spirit shines through

This year's six finalists in the NMR/RABDF Gold Cup have been judged on herd performance and on how they manage their herds to make the best use of their individual resources. While they all vary, the one common theme is their team approach.

text **Karen Wright**



Geoff Spence, Brompton, Northallerton, North Yorkshire

The Miresdale pedigree Holstein herd numbers 370 milking cows and 430 head of youngstock on the 84-hectare unit. Milk is sold to Arla on an ASDA contract.

Geoff Spence is the first to admit that although he's at the helm, herd management is a shared role and the team – both on and off the farm - makes all the difference.

Geoff and his herdsman Mark Fawcett do most of the morning milkings so they know, first hand, if the cows are up to scratch. But Geoff also expects staff Ian Shuttleworth and his son Chris to perform to the same high standards and flag up any problems. Any cows below par are given a sabbatical – or holiday. This has paid dividends in the past. Geoff is proud of his 13% cull rate and doesn't intend to put this in jeopardy.

But the team extends far beyond the farm. He relies heavily on his vet Mark Glover, KW feed specialist Steve Allen, secretary Vicky Anderson, Strutt & Parker farm consultant Paul Dennison and genetic analyst Drew Wilson. Geoff is in



The team – Geoff Spence, Mark Fawcett and Chris Spence

regular contact with them through on-site meetings, phone calls and emails.

Iain and Joyce McLean, Bushmills, Co. Antrim

Runners up last year, the McLeans run their 105-cow pedigree Priestland herd, plus almost 200 head of youngstock, with help from Iain's father John and their three children. Milk is sold to United Dairy Farmers.

While Iain has spent the past 10 years improving facilities, so labour can be reduced and the farm can run more efficiently, he still liaises regularly with his vet and nutritionist to ensure cows are kept healthy and achieving maximum yield.

And he would describe new technology as part of his team. Last year he installed a system to help him improve cow fertility. And, just one year on, using Heattime has seen his calving interval fall by an impressive 36 days.

He is considering using more technology in the form of NMR's dairy herd management program InterHerd – something his vet is encouraging too. Both can see it would improve the day-to-day management and herd efficiency.



The team – Joyce, Iain, John and Matthew McLean

Andrew Guilding, Fiddington, Bridgwater, Somerset

Andrew Guilding manages the Hill family's 350-hectare unit, Stockland Lovell Manor, where the 266-cow pedigree herd, plus 300 youngstock, is based. The success of the herd, from which more than 2.5 million litres of milk for the year ending March 2009 were sold to Tesco, via Wisemans, is a team effort. And Andrew knows that herdsman Michael Peach and Michael's wife Annette must take much of the credit.

Key players in this team also include their nutritionist and the vet who makes a weekly visit, mainly to PD cows and check any that have not resumed cycling.

The milking herd is housed all year round and managed as one group, with high and low yielders in separate areas. All milking cows are fed a maintenance-plus-40-litre TMR, from calving to drying off.

And to achieve high performance breeding is top priority with type traits put above yield. Bulls must be



The team – Diana Allen, Annette and Mike Peach and Andrew Guilding

at least +3 on type to be in with a chance of making it into the herd's AI flask.

All aspects of the herd – nutrition, health and breeding – need careful consideration and Andrew never under-

estimates the importance of the good communication skills he has encouraged within his team that enable them to deal with problems and move forward successfully.

David and Jane Homer, Chisbury, Marlborough, Wiltshire

Management of the Chisbury lane pedigree Holstein herd of 180 milking cows and 100 followers on 112 hectares is a family affair. David and Jane Homer's two sons, Chris and Geoff, and their nephew James all take key roles in ensuring the efficient day-to-day running and long-term success and sustainability of the business.

Milk is sold to Waitrose, via Dairy Crest. For the year ending March 2009, 1.6 million litres of milk were sold off the farm.

The herd is managed on a TMR-based system with grazing forming an important part of the milking ration from March to November.

A young team, David appreciates the enthusiasm and fresh ideas brought into the business by his sons and his nephew. Their ability to work as a team also allows David to spend time off farm, looking at other businesses and ventures. And, with her accountancy and finance expertise, Jane makes sure that whatever goes



The team – James Major, Chris, Geoff and David Homer

on in the yard pays – she has calculated that using grazed grass saves them £12,000 a year in TMR costs.

David works closely with his vet and

both use NMR's InterHerd to analyse trends and plan management decisions to ensure that herd health remains tip top.

'D'-day

The judges – RABDF chairman and producer Lyndon Edwards, producer and NMR board member Trevor Lloyd and 2006 Gold Cup winner Mark Roach – will announce the winner of this year's competition at the Dairy Event on Wednesday September 16 on the NMR stand at 4.30pm.

finalist	qual. lact.	yield kg	fat %	prot. %	SCC '000/ml	calv. interv. (days)	PLI (£)	times milked	lifet. daily yield (kg/day)
Iain McLean	81	10,778	4.29	3.09	113	401	+31	2	11.99
Geoff Spence	321	10,380	3.90	3.10	168	389	+21	2	13.14
Tom King	151	11,134	3.90	3.02	68	388	+71	3	14.36
David Homer	131	10,550	3.67	3.15	168	430	+13	2	13.17
Stephen Bendall	135	10,332	3.77	3.15	124	400	+20	2	13.22
Andrew Guilding	200	10,176	3.50	3.25	127	404	+12	2	13.32

Table 1: NMR/RABDF Gold Cup 2009 finalists' production data

Stephen Bendall, Marksbury, Bath, Somerset

Management of the Pensdown pedigree Holstein herd of 150 milking cows and 100 followers on the 186-ha dairy and arable unit involves the whole Bendall family. Stephen's father John, his brother Andrew and his nephew Richard all play key roles in ensuring the efficient day-to-day running and long-term success and sustainability of both the dairy and arable businesses.

Richard takes particular responsibility for youngstock and the aim here is to achieve consistently good growth rates so heifers can be calved on target and any surplus can be sold.

Milk is sold to Tesco, via Arla and for the year ending March 2009, almost 1.5 million litres of milk were sold.

Stephen cites his membership of the Tesco Sustainable Dairy Group as being a real benefit to his business, particularly guidelines from the cow welfare and environmental projects that the group is investing in.

He also works closely with his vet to make sure the herd is healthy with vaccination programmes for leptospirosis, BVD and bluetongue, and Johne's and IBR monitoring.



The team – Andrew, Richard, John and Stephen Bendall

Focussed on maximising the family team's management skills and to overcome a shortage of skilled milking labour, they have recently installed a voluntary milking system with two DeLaval robotic milkers.

Tom King, Martinstown, Dorchester, Dorset

Vortex Holsteins now number 200 cows with 170-head of youngstock on 120 hectares. Cow numbers have doubled and milk output has nearly trebled to the current 2.1 million litres in the past 10 years.

Average yields increased by 1,200kg a cow when Tom switched from twice to three-times-a-day milking two years ago – around the time that he moved to selling milk on a Sainsbury's contract via Dairy Crest.

This means that there are 21 milkings a week and Tom relies on his team to ensure all operations run smoothly. Herdsman Mike Ball, who has been with the herd for 10 years, carries out most weekday milkings. He is also responsible for herd health and welfare, working with the vet and monitoring data that is used in Sainsbury's Dairy Development Group's benchmarking system.

Tom and his father Alan share weekend milkings with part time help for weekday nights and weekends. They also work together on crop management, maximising the land's potential for forages – grass, maize and lucerne. Tom's



The team – Lewis Watson, Mike Balland, Mike Miners and Tom, Maggie and Charlie King

brother Charlie, an independent nutritionist, formulates rations and sources feed for the herd.