

SHORTHORN

Issue 3



The Dairy Breed of the Future:
native breed, natural grazers

Ian & Eiddwen Harries - Gelli Herd



Gelli Darlington Cran 20

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Ian and Eiddwen Harries and their children Eiddan, Owain, Lowri and Awen moved to Crosshands in 2000. They farm 155 acres on site and 26 acres are still utilised at their previous farm. Land is also rented for maize and around 30/40 acres of grassland (just because its fashionable to do so says Ian).

Total milkers is around 120 cows with about 40 being Dairy Shorthorns and the rest Holsteins. They are milked through a 12/24 Gascoigne parlour which was installed in 2003 replacing one that had been there for 35 years. Apart from family labour there is currently just one employee, Philip Harries (who I am told is no relation) 5 days a week. The backbone to the whole operation according to Ian is definitely Eiddwen who works off the farm full time but also starts milking in the morning!! The interest in the Shorthorn breed also stems from Eiddwen whose father started the Penycloed herd in 1979.

Always try to buy animals with good udders

The Gelli herd was started in 1994 with two purchases from Drisgol, a calf and Drisgol Darlington Cran 20. When purchasing both Ian and Owain agree they have 3 main categories:-

- 1.) Good type
- 2.) Milk yields
- 3.) Show potential

And they always try to buy animals with good udders as they feel that bodies are far easier to improve than udders.

Showing Success

They obviously have a good eye for a cow as they started showing shorthorns in their own right in 1999 and have come on in leaps and bounds. They all say 2006 is their most successful year yet winning:-

Heifer champion at the Royal and Champion in both breeds at The Royal Welsh, Carmarthen and Pembroke.

They have also won the production/ inspection classes for all ages and champion cow in the region for the last two years, Ian does however say that with showing there is a huge element of luck involved.

Less stress on the Shorthorn cows

Currently the herd average is 7600kg for the shorthorn and 9400kg for the Holstein, but yield isn't everything and Ian points out that the Shorthorns are smaller cows requiring less maintenance. There is also less stress on the Shorthorn cows and as a result they are easier to get back in calf and last longer, which in turn reduces the replacement costs.

Winter ration is 40% maize and 60% grass silage with concentrates to yield fed through the parlour, and in summer it is grass with concentrates to yield. The yield from forage is an impressive 4300kg.

Current bulls being used in the herd are:-

Gelli Rudolph (Gelli Darlington Cran Ex94 x Wenvoe Briars Masterman), Glanhirwen Prince, Tonlea Wild King, Innisfail Prince of Diamonds and Marleycote Jack, but are always on the lookout for something new and exciting.

Embryo plan

Looking to the future Ian says when Owain comes home there will hopefully be a commercial run dairy herd and a nucleus herd of around 5/6 individuals from each breed to use for embryo work. Eventually all the young stock will carry eggs and the more commercial cows will be served to the beef bull.

If the Shorthorns were not profitable they would not be there.

Ian maintains his interest in the Holstein cow but says it is a great credit to the blended shorthorns that they are performing so well and holding their own. If the Shorthorns were not profitable they would not be there. Owain says his passion is for a good cow of either breed, but he loves the challenge of the shorthorn breed as the smaller gene pool makes it much more challenging to work with.

With the keenness of Owain I am sure the dairy cow and in particular the modern dairy shorthorn cow has a long future at Crosshands.

Milking for PROFIT



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Something special is happening on a family run dairy farm, near Hexham, Northumberland. They have found a way to sell milk at a price which allows them to live AND reinvest!

“We were getting sick of working long, hard hours”

Having been at Marleycote walls, Slaley, since 1860, the Baynes family (David, Shirley and sons Richard and Paul), though keen to continue milk production, wanted a better price for the end product. “We were getting sick of working long, hard hours, only to be robbed at the end of the day”, says David.

So with the help of some grant aid

Having done extensive research, they discovered that you would have to travel a considerable distance to find somebody else processing their own milk. So with the help of some grant aid, they erected a purpose built processing unit. Although initial costs were high, they have since built up a substantial customer base, which



includes tea rooms, pubs, restaurants and farm shops. “Our list of customers just keeps growing,” says Paul, “we now have two part time employees to help us bottle and deliver the milk.”

Northumbrian Pedigree

The Baynes now bottle approximately 1000 litres of milk and up to 100 litres of cream, several times a week, under their brand name 'Northumbrian Pedigree'. The brand is marketed through their own website www.northumbrianpedigree.co.uk and also throughout the summer at the agricultural shows which they attend. Last summer they achieved a notable double, winning both the Dairy Event and Great Yorkshire Show Dairy Shorthorn Championships, with their home bred Marleycote Petal 95th.

“Buying local produce, a real buzz word at the moment,”

The herd is 115 strong, made up of 95 Shorthorns and 20 Ayrshires. They are currently achieving over 7500 litres per year, on a forage based diet consisting of grass silage, wheat whole crop and forage beans. Cows are topped up with a GM free home mix of barley, rape meal and Soya. “Its because we guarantee GM free feeds which attracts Northumbrian Pedigree to our customers,” says Paul “together with the fact that they’re buying local produce, a real buzz word at the moment,”

“We want cows which milk naturally.”

The make up of the Marleycote Shorthorn is mainly through a considered blending breeding policy. “We’ve been blending the Shorthorns for many years now, and its has certainly paid dividends,” says Richard “we like to keep a minimum of 50% shorthorn blood, with the rest made up of Holstein or Ayrshire. We have tried other breeds, such as Swedish Reds, but found that while they improved milk solids, they lost a lot of type and longevity. We want cows which milk naturally and produce a product we are proud to sell to our clients.”

We have many cows which have given over 10,000kgs,

The Baynes have now built up such a reputation for quality breeding, that they sell semen from homebred bulls to other herds, including many Holstein-Friesian units. “We are getting an increasing number of black and white breeders wanting to use our bulls,” says David, “dairy farmers are finding that the Shorthorn breed really is something to consider when looking for new blood.” “And its not a huge change of direction in terms of production,” adds Richard, “we have many cows which have given over 10,000kgs, but they are still around after seven or eight lactations, with little or no trouble from feet and fertility.” Its production figures like these which give the family the confidence to continue with the breed, “We’ve had the Shorthorns here for generations,” says David “there is no way we would change them now.”

All in all, with the Baynes family commitment and skilful breeding, Northumbrian Pedigree and Marleycote Dairy Shorthorns have a great future.

Dairy Cows on an Organic Farm



Soil Association

the heart of organic food & farming

This case study is taken from the 2003 Soil Association report Batteries not included. Reprinted with permission from the Soil Association

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In the 1980s Karl Barton was managing a farm in Dorset. He had been trained in non-organic agriculture and was none too pleased when the landowner announced that he wanted to go organic. "The main reason I agreed to go along with it was to prove organic farming didn't work," recalls Karl. "I was convinced it didn't make sense. But as time went on, I became more and more fascinated by what was involved, and I realised that farming naturally, without artificial chemicals, was the way forward." For a couple of years Karl couldn't even go into the village pub as the locals - many of them farmers - believed he was ruining what had once been a good farm. But the farm thrived, and by the 1990s Karl was managing 1000 acres of organic land in Dorset, as well as a further 2,500 acres of land elsewhere.

Karl's reputation as a skilled organic manager encouraged the Goodwood Estate to approach him in 2001. The estate had already converted 500 acres of poor land on the slopes of the Sussex Downs to organic production, mostly for fattening beef and sheep. Now the landowner, the Earl of March, wanted to gain organic certification for a further 2,300 acres of better farmland, together with a dairy herd. Karl was taken on as the new farm manager and he has set about a radical programme of transformation.

"The first thing I had to do was completely redesign the dairy enterprise," explains Karl. "The sheds where the cows spent the winter were inadequate and the milking parlour had been designed to suit the dairyman, not the cows." The estate spent a considerable sum of money on refurbishing old sheds, erecting new ones and replacing the old equipment in the herding-bone parlour. Most of the cows have gone too. "The black-and-white cows simply weren't suited to an organic system," explains Karl.

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He sold off the majority of the farm's 160 Holstein Friesian crosses and drafted in Dairy Shorthorns from the herd he had established in Dorset.

In his view, Dairy Shorthorns have much to recommend them. They are very efficient at converting grass into milk, and their bull calves make excellent beef animals, unlike those of high-yielding black-and-white cows. "And they are much hardier than modern black-and-white cows like Holsteins," explains Karl. "If you get a really hot day, or if it's raining hard, you'll find the black-and-white cows hiding in the shade, fighting flies. Red-and-white cows like my Shorthorns are out there grazing, whatever the weather. That's what they should be doing."

Modern, high-yielding dairy cows may produce over 10,000 litres of milk a year, but there is a price to pay in terms of their welfare. Mastitis, lameness and a number of other diseases and afflictions mean that a significant portion of the British herd suffers pain and discomfort. While non-organic farmers can use a whole battery of the drugs to keep their cows in production, organic farmers are restricted: ingenuity, good management and homeopathy are their principal weapons against disease.

So how do organic Dairy Shorthorns compare with non-organic herds of high-yielding black-and-white cows in terms of production? The latter may yield more milk, although by the time Karl left Dorset, his cows were averaging 6,500 litres a year, more than many cows on non-organic farms. Non-organic farmers like to point out that they get more grass per acre than organic

farms. True. They might average 10 tons of silage an acre, compared to eight tons on an organic farm. However, artificial fertilisers increase the amount of water in the silage, rather than the amount of sugar and carbohydrate. "My eight tonnes will feed 1.1 cows during winter," says Karl, "whereas the conventional farmer's 10 tons will feed just one cow."

On many non-organic dairy farms, cows are worn out after two or three lactations, and culled to make way for replacements. Karl reckons that he gets up to eight lactations from most of his cows, which suffer relatively few health problems compared to high-yielding Holsteins and Holstein Friesian crosses. The male progeny of his Dairy Shorthorns are fattened outdoors on grass and make good beef, to be killed after 24 months or so. In contrast, there is no market for many of the bull calves produced by high-yielding black-and-white cows, unless they go to the continent to be reared as white veal - but this not an option for organic farmers as the export of their livestock is prohibited. It is frequently said that longevity, or the lack of it, is not an animal welfare issue. But it is an ethical issue, and many would question whether there is a place on the organic farm for the massive-uddered, high-performing, short-lived Holsteins whose male offspring are, quite literally, useless. Karl Barton doesn't think there is.

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Dairy Shorthorn: Ideal for Organic Milk

**FARMERS
WEEKLY**

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If you were setting out to breed the ideal dairy cow for organic milk production you'd be hard pressed to find anything to beat the modern Dairy Shorthorn. That's the opinion of Cumbria farmer James Robinson. And for a man who is disappointed if his cows don't achieve six lactations you begin to understand why.

"She's not a cow that falls apart after two lactations and she knows how to look after herself; she's got a strong constitution and she'll thrive off a high forage-based diet. She's the perfect organic milker" says James Robinson who runs the Strickley herd.

He's the fifth generation of the family to farm at Strickley, Old Hutton, near Kendal. There have been Dairy Shorthorns on the 240-acre farm since 1875 - but things are changing.

You could almost say the herd is going full-circle because on June 1st next year the Robinson family will achieve full-organic status - a change that will hopefully see returns from milk jump considerably." This was the sensible option to lift our milk income. The Dairy Shorthorn cow has changed a great deal in recent years and more commercial milk producers should take a look at her. But despite the modern look she is still ideal for organic milk production," says James Robinson who farms with his mother and father, Kathleen and Henry.

The family calves around 150 cattle a year - including calved heifers sold at breed society's sales - and rarely has to assist more than a couple of calvings. The herd average isn't high at 6750 litres (4.5% fat and 3.45% protein) - but sustained lifetime production is a priority and that's what these Dairy Shorts are good at.

"It's no good if a heifer costs £700 to rear and then falls to bits after two calves. No one can keep that up and stay in business," says James.

"The modern Dairy Shorthorn is more dairy-like than she used to be as red and white genetics have done their job; but we've retained the fertility, good feet and legs and wearability that the breed is renowned for.

"We've got cows in their tenth lactations that haven't lost a month in their calving interval, have never needed to have a foot lifted and are averaging 8500kg. That's got to be a model dairy cow for the commercial milk producer," says Henry Robinson.

The Robinson family imported the first Illawarra Shorthorn semen into the UK from Australia in the 1970s and have maintained a commitment to breeding cattle with stature and angularity.



Genetics

"We're using genetics from North America but only selectively; our ideal cow is 75% Dairy Shorthorn and 25% red genetics, which could be Holstein or Friesian. The hybrid vigour is essential for the breed's development but we have to be careful to maintain the correct genetic balance and give us milk and angularity without weakening the breed's other functional traits."

This will be the first spring that no nitrogen has been used on the farm but while the Robinsons are confident their grassland management and new high-clover swards will make up for the lack of compound fertiliser, future winter diets will double the cost of bought-in feeds.

Cows are fed a grass-silage mix which includes a 15% protein, 30% starch meal fed at 3kg per head per day providing M+18 litres. Forage is providing 3,800litres with total concentrate use at 1.5 tonnes per cow. The high dry matter (40% DM) silage fed during the 2006/7 winter was providing cows with a daily intake of 12kg of dry matter; mature Dairy Shorthorn cows in the herd average 580kg live weight.

"The Dairy Shorthorn is hard to beat as a forage converter so she's ideal for low in-put systems; but we've sold heifers that have gone on to give 10,000 litres on high-input regimes so it proves that the breed is very adaptable."

Calving index is 380 days from an 80% conception rate to first service.

Diversifying was not an option for the Robinsons and increasing cow numbers would have meant a hefty investment in buildings. But switching to organic production with the Dairy Shorthorn cows seemed an obvious solution.

"It'll be a huge challenge but the returns will hopefully be there. We've re-seeded 20-acres this year and every meadow has been over-seeded with clover. We can already see the difference even though we've not used any fertiliser since spring 2006."

"I'm confident we'll be turning out on to plenty of grass in May but without the nitrogen we can expect higher dry matter silage this season."

GM-free feeds (costing about £4 a tonne above conventional rations) have been fed this winter to meet the conversion criteria and from December 1st 2007 only organic feed can be used for the final period prior to achieving full-organic status in June 2008.

"That's when we'll be facing £300 a tonne for concentrates but we're hoping to grow triticale and peas. The challenge will be making sure we've got enough grass but still devoting some acres to alternative forages," says James Robinson.



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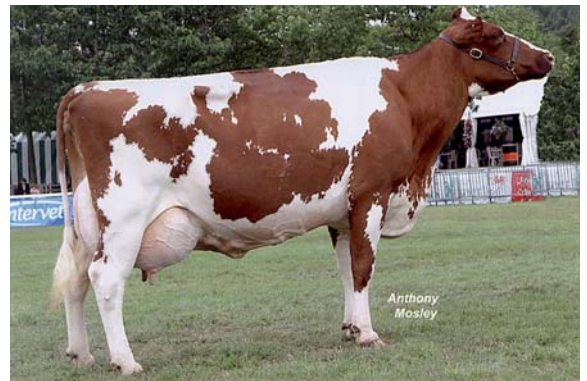
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