



EU and UK agriculture policy... where is it going?

By Edward Lott
edward.lott@kiteconsulting.com

That is a very good question. Listening to the speeches from Hilary Benn (at the time of writing still Secretary of State at DEFRA) and Nick Herbert, the Conservative shadow minister, at the Oxford Farming conference in January, the rhetoric has definitely changed. No longer are farmers and food security dirty words - following the volatility in prices since 2007 politicians have at least woken up to the fact that food is a critical resource.

In Europe the big change is that Marian Fischer Boel has stepped down as EU Agriculture commissioner, replaced by Dacian Ciolos (pictured). Mr Ciolos, a Romanian, is a skilled agriculturalist and was very impressive in his interview for this commission post. He has set up a pan-European team around him but with heavy representation from Eastern Europe.

His key objective is to carry through the review of the Common Agricultural Policy in the next 18 months so that the framework for how the policy will look post 2013 can be put in place. Mr Ciolos has launched a public debate this month on the future of the CAP and is inviting comments about what the policy should deliver going forward. Strangely, this consultation does not mention the CAP budget, which currently uses 40% of the EU's total spending (€50bn).

There is extreme political pressure to reduce the budget and it is a question of how large the cuts will be rather than if they should take place, such is the fallout from the deterioration in the public finances of all EU countries. Some commentators mention cuts of 20-30% post 2013. In addition to this, there is also likely to be redistribution of monies from Western to Eastern Europe. This will be assisted by most Western EU states moving to flat rate payments for SPS. It is very likely that Welsh and Scottish historic based single payment systems will convert to flat rate payments (as in England) after 2013.



Photo: European Parliament

Mr Ciolos has been very firm on one area, milk quotas, maintaining that they will be abolished in 2015. However, in countries such as Holland and Denmark, where their industries are secured against the value of quota, it is not yet clear whether the EU will help them restructure or will let the market decide, as has occurred in the UK over the last six years.

In the UK the oratory has changed but there is no money to back up any policy. It is very likely that DEFRA and the RPA will be required to deliver the heavy cuts in spending any new government seems bound to impose. It will be very interesting to see if and/or how DEFRA and the bureaucracy of the RPA and rural development policy changes after May 6th 2010.

Future planning

- Assume significantly lower SFP payments between 2013-20
- In Scotland and Wales budget for introduction of flat rate payments, probably over a period of years
- Profitability will increasingly depend on the market
- Need to ensure that processors and retailers are aware that prices need to compensate for removal of SFP
- Most farmers have used SFP as support for producing food no matter what the consultants said!

in this issue...

Proactive Mobility Management

By Cath Woods
cath.woods@kiteconsulting.com

Lameness is undoubtedly a 'silent thief' in the dairy herd with much of the industry undervaluing the economic penalties associated with each case. The direct and indirect costs of poor mobility are huge and impact upon productivity, fertility, staff time and cow longevity. At today's prices, the average cost for a single case of lameness equates to approximately £334.

March saw the first of a series of Proactive Mobility Management meetings hosted by Kite, in conjunction with DairyCo. An evening meeting was held in Whitchurch, Shropshire, with guest speakers, Dr Nick Bell from Bristol Veterinary School, a leading UK expert on cattle housing and mobility and Kite Consultant, Sam Evans. The objective of the meeting was to highlight the major issues contributing to poor cow mobility and to explain how better management and housing can dramatically improve mobility, helping cows to meet their productive potential.

A pilot workshop the following day included a practical, on-farm session at Asney Park Farm, Wrexham, courtesy of Mike Done, covering preventative foot trimming (Dutch 5 Step method), mobility scoring and building modifications to reduce lameness.



Dr Nick Bell at the Proactive Mobility Workshop

Top tips from the workshops

Look after your heifers

Sole ulcers are one of the top three lesions observed on farm. They are rarely seen in youngstock but can be triggered

around calving due to the structure of the laminae in the foot changing, which allows the pedal bone to drop and rotate. It is alarming that 15% of heifers have painful foot lesions by 60-120 days in milk. Once the pedal bone has dropped, it will not return to its original position so these heifers are likely to have impaired mobility throughout their lifetime. By housing heifers on straw yards for the four weeks either side of calving and implementing a routine trim at 60-100 days post calving to remodel the foot, the potential for ulcers to develop is minimised.

Footbathing

Any type of footbath is a sound investment where digital dermatitis exists. The new style automatic footbaths remove the hassle factor, making it easy to footbath cows frequently and with the correct concentration of agent. With non-automatic footbaths, make sure you know the capacity of the bath (target 1litre/cow) so the right concentration of agent can be used.

Foot trimming routine

Aim to trim cows just before or at drying off and again at 60-150 days into lactation. Heifers should be trimmed 60-100 days into lactation. If you suffer from poor mobility, try to have a blitz on the whole herd to clear the back log, then endeavour to keep up to date with routine trims, so you can keep ahead of the problem, adopting a preventative rather than a reactive approach. By addressing locomotion score 1 and 2 cows, score 3s can be prevented! Use a foot trimmer who is category 1 affiliated to the National Association of Foot Trimmers, or ensure that staff are trained in the 5 step Dutch approach

Cubicle and feed barriers

Ensure cubicle and feed barrier dimensions are correct for your cows. Lying times in cubicles can be dramatically increased by moving the neck rail or improving the lying surface (e.g. sand).

Rubber matting

Strategically placed rubber matting can have a big impact on lameness and, when used appropriately, is worth the investment.

Target areas to consider rubber matting include:

- where cows have to turn round 90°+ corners
- the top half of the collecting yard
- the milking parlour
- the feed barrier (two strips are all that is needed - in line with the front and back feet)

Cow tracks

A multitude of materials can be used to construct cow tracks however, to reduce the incidence of lameness, walking

surfaces should be comfortable, free from stones and well maintained.

Regular mobility scoring

Get the tractor driver (or somebody similarly unbiased) to score the cows, twice a month if possible. Having a third party involved is likely to give the most consistent, true picture of the herd's mobility status.



Early warning systems

By Mike Bray
mike.bray@kiteconsulting.com

Wouldn't it be nice if your dairy had gauges, dials and indicator lights like an aircraft control panel to alert you to a problem?

Establishing and monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are comparable to the warning indicators that a pilot of an aircraft would have. Each morning when you walk into your dairy office you should view your KPI wall chart and from this know where to focus your time.

The wall chart contains key indicators for each area of the dairy that reveal how people performance has impacted on cow productivity the previous day or week. Any indicators that fall outside the accepted range should be highlighted and acted upon. The key indicators include dry matter intake, milk yield per cow (in the tank), locomotion score, mastitis cases, pregnancies and a fresh cow index (percentage of total culls that occur in the first 60 days of lactation).

So why should we record these KPIs?

Focuses your management

Most management decisions are based on educated guesswork. However, collecting this data and graphing it allows you to be more objective and target action points for the day. Employees also know where to focus their attention and everyone is in a position to address and head off problems quicker than ever before.

Saves time

These six key areas are easily recorded and assessed allowing you to focus on the main drivers for profit in your dairy. If required, the management team can drill down behind these key areas using additional information collected in your

records to diagnose and correct the problem

Improves communication with employees

People performance impacts on cow productivity. The more you focus on your staff by providing feedback, training them and setting measurable and attainable goals, the more your cows will reward you. This whole process will allow you to give your team a pat on the back when they are doing well, and proactively discuss any problems when they occur.

Improves margins

By reviewing current performance levels and setting targets you can make improvements in herd health and productivity thereby delivering higher profits.

Any dairy producer who has at least one member to his team can benefit from using KPIs. Certainly, if you have grown beyond the point of doing everything yourself, you rely to some extent on others getting the job done. Perhaps they are not as consistent in executing those tasks as you once were, or given the same set of circumstances they may make different decisions. Cows crave consistency so consider using KPIs as a means of monitoring that consistency.

We will shortly have KPI wall charts available to order so please contact your consultant for more information.



Mike Bray

Topical grassland management tips

By Paul Macer
paul.macer@kiteconsulting.com



The cold spring and now dry weather in many areas mean that grass growth has not been as rapid this year. By the time this issue arrives, however, some first cut will already have been completed and the rest will be getting fairly close to being ready in many parts of the country.

After cutting, the grass plant needs time to recover and should be left to grow until three leaves are visible before grazing. Do not turn cows into graze around the edges of silage fields, this will both compromise intakes and performance of the herd as the grass quality is not as good and cows will also tend to take off any new regrowth too early before plants have had a chance to replenish energy stores.

Apply fertiliser and/or slurry as soon as possible. Every day that application is delayed will reduce second cut yield by 1% and in the case of slurry applications increase the risk of contamination at second cut or subsequent grazing.

For fields that have been grazed since turnout, monitor levels of rejection and make sure that the grazing height is still low. Where there are areas that are not being grazed tightly look at "bottoming" the pasture with a mower as opposed to "topping". In many cases the latter operation is purely cosmetic and does not get low enough to reduce the proportion of stem in the plants sufficiently, resulting in aerial tillering as the season progresses.

Now is a good time to monitor individual field performance so that the reseeding policy for the autumn can be planned. Also take the opportunity to spray any fields where weed infestations were evident prior to cutting. For optimum results allow weeds to regrow and spray while they are actively growing but before they flower.

Kite news

Congratulations to Sam Evans (pictured). We are delighted to announce that he has now become a full partner in the Kite business.



For enquiries regarding the information in this newsletter please contact:
Kite Consulting | The Crown Buildings | Watling Street | Nr. Brewwood | Stafford | ST19 9LL
Tel: 01902 851007 | Fax: 01902 851058 | Email: enquiries@kiteconsulting.com