

## News

*Providing practical support to professional producers*

## DAIRY COSTINGS FOCUS REVEALS PERFORMANCE GAP

**As the song goes (well almost): It's not where you are or what you do that counts – it's the way that you do it.**

Here we consider what changes to the dairy system could improve margins. The evidence from Dairy Manager costings show the dairy system chosen or where in the UK a farm is based has less effect than you might expect and how well the system is managed is more important.

When Kingshay recorded herds are ranked by margin over purchased feed (MOPF) in the second edition of the Dairy Costings Focus Annual Report 2013, there is a 5.5ppl difference between the top and bottom 25%, or £55,000 for a herd with a 1million litre output. When the data is ranked by many other parameters, such as region, herd size, yields and feeding system, results typically vary by less than 1.5ppl in MOPF. The exception is when ranking by yield from forage, where the top 25% achieve a MOPF of 3.5ppl more than the bottom 25%.

"When we look at the ranking by MOPF in more detail, we see the top 25% herds secure 1.8ppl more for their milk, mostly resulting from higher volumes and negotiating better contracts, although their

milk quality is better too," says Kingshay Senior Farm Services Manager, Kathryn Rowland. "The remaining 3.17ppl comes from improved feed use efficiency, including getting more from forage."

"Since March 2012, the gap between the top and bottom 25% has widened from 4.9ppl, with the top 25% down 0.35ppl and bottom down 0.95ppl in the current year, with those using more purchased feed harder hit by rising feed prices," explains Kathryn.

"Feed is not the only cost to take into account when reviewing the best way to manage dairy cows, but it is the biggest and most variable cost, making it important to monitor it and manage use throughout the year. Our Profit Manager data shows a strong link between MOPF and profit."

Results from Kingshay's Health Manager service also show how the difference between the best and worst performing herds can be worth 1.6ppl in fertility costs and 2.3ppl in health costs.

This analysis of data to March 2013 compares the 2012-2013 year, hit by poor forage conditions, to the previous year as well as analysis by region, yield band and systems, plus results from Kingshay's Health Manager service, including fertility, cell counts and vet costs.

**The Dairy Costings Focus, Annual Report 2013 is available on [www.kingshay.com](http://www.kingshay.com)**

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Twice a month, Kingshay's farmer, consultant and vet members receive Farming Notes, along with a monthly checklist and have access to previous ones in the members area of the website at [www.kingshay.com](http://www.kingshay.com). Here are some highlights from those produced in recent months:

**Bull Management** – 33% of bulls are thought to be subfertile, but good management and annual checks can change those odds.

**Ventilation** – a ventilation calculation and tips on remedial action is timely for a pre-housing check for healthy and productive stock in the winter ahead.

**Listeriosis** – silage eye and abortion may be what's seen, but this bacteria which can grow in silage can have serious consequences.

**Reducing mastitis in the dry period** – the cow is at greatest risk of udder infections in the first and last two weeks of the dry period, making prevention vital.

**Fresh cow protocols** – having a protocol for all staff to follow offers consistency in the care of vulnerable, freshly calved cows and increases the chances of picking up problems early.

**Harvesting wholecrop cereals** – the optimum time to harvest wholecrops should be based on the ration nutritional requirements.

**Managing rumen health** - Monitoring rumen function and early corrective treatment can improve overall herd performance.

## COW COMFORT SURVEY

Have you ever really thought about what stress your cows encounter every day and how that impacts on herd profitability?

**Maximising cow performance means removing stress and being proactive on making your cows as comfortable as possible.**

Stress is caused by different factors but essentially it is the result of pain, fear or anxiety. These factors impact on performance in a number of ways but overall the impact is on dry matter intake which directly relates to milk yield, health and fertility, three of the main drivers of profit on a dairy farm. The recent Cow Comfort Survey conducted by Kingshay aimed to identify farm issues relating to stress causing discomfort. The survey highlighted the concerns of many producers on the effect of poor cow comfort and identified the survey respondent's intentions to address their own issues. For example 63% classified their cow cubicle problems

and injuries in the worst 2 categories (out of a possible 5 categories).

Allocating investment to improve the cow environment is likely to be cost effective, particularly where specific problems reach above average levels. Of the survey respondents, more than 85% intended to make improvements to their farm infrastructure in the next 5 years.

Comfort is not just about lying areas as a poor concrete surface, inadequate ventilation, poor cow flow or a bad trough design can all induce stress and lower cows' feeling of wellbeing in the housed environment. Pain factors emanating from lameness and mastitis can also result from a lack of adequate comfort.

Stress factors are not always obvious and time should be taken to stand back and observe your cows' daily routines and consider what actions could be taken to reduce stress and improve comfort. Investing in a better cow environment can make

a big difference to the economics of milk production.

The Kingshay Cow Comfort Report will shortly be available to members providing some interesting information from the survey. The report will also enable farmers to make their own assessment of cow comfort on their farm, help to prioritise which are the areas in most need of investment and suggest ways to improve them.



A cow enjoys the comfort of the Kingshay designed M2M cubicle

## GRASS SEED

**Reseeding with palatable grass varieties can help as part of a plan to improve margins over purchased feed.** Palatability is a key selection parameter when Kingshay grass seed grazing mixtures are formulated, using data from our grazing preference trials here

at Bridge Farm. Kingshay cutting mixtures take into account sward persistence, as well as yield and the palatability of aftermath grazing.

Members and non-members can discuss their grass seed requirements by calling Kingshay on 01458 851 555 with special discounts available exclusively to members.



### FARMING NOTES from Kingshay

#### MANAGING RUMEN HEALTH

The rumen is the powerhouse of the cow, converting feed into energy and nutrients. It's a complex ecosystem with billions of microorganisms. If it's not working properly, the cow's health and productivity will suffer.

**Key points:**

- Rumen health is crucial for overall cow health and productivity.
- Factors like diet, stress, and disease can impact rumen function.
- Regular monitoring and early intervention are key to maintaining a healthy rumen.

**What can go wrong?**

Rumen acidosis is a common problem caused by a sudden change in diet, particularly a high concentration of starch. It leads to a rapid drop in pH, which can be fatal if not treated quickly.

**Assessing rumen health**

There are several ways to assess rumen health, including observing the cow's behaviour, checking the rumen contents, and using rumen pH testing.

**Prevention and treatment**

Prevention involves maintaining a consistent diet and avoiding sudden changes. Treatment for acidosis typically involves administering rumen buffers and antibiotics.

### FARMING NOTES from Kingshay

#### FRESH COW PROTOCOLS

The post-calving period is a critical time for a cow, as she transitions from pregnancy to lactation. Proper care during this period is essential for her health and the success of her lactation.

**Key points:**

- Early detection and treatment of problems can prevent complications.
- Consistent care and monitoring are essential for a smooth transition.
- Staff should be trained in the correct handling and care of fresh cows.

**What can go wrong?**

Common issues include mastitis, metritis, and retained placenta. These can significantly impact the cow's health and milk production.

**Prevention and treatment**

Prevention involves good hygiene and early detection. Treatment for these conditions often involves antibiotics and supportive care.

### FARMING NOTES from Kingshay

#### ENCOURAGE YOUR FRIENDS & NEIGHBOURS TO JOIN - THE MORE MEMBERS WE HAVE, THE MORE INDEPENDENT WORK WE CAN DO FOR YOU.

Joining Kingshay offers many benefits, including access to expert advice, resources, and a supportive community of fellow farmers. The more members we have, the more we can do for you.

**Benefits of joining:**

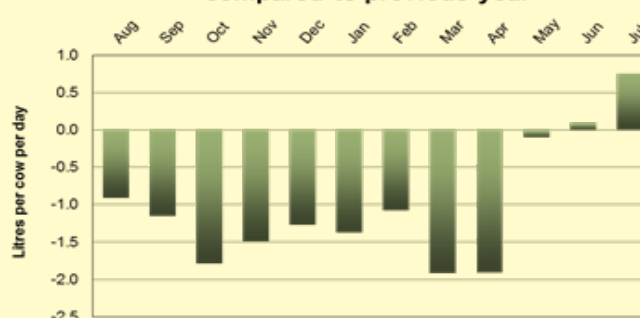
- Access to expert advice and resources.
- Supportive community of fellow farmers.
- More independent work we can do for you.

Figures from Kingshay Dairy Manager show herds are finally reversing the downward yield trends of the previous year. July was the first month where average yields significantly improved on last year although they were still lower than May and June. Of those herds, 61%

saw a yield increase in July. A very different picture to our December newsletter where 77% of herds saw a decline in milk yields in October 2012.

July milk prices were the highest they have been for a long time at 31.1 ppl but margins still remain relatively low due to feed costs of £260 per tonne being 13% higher. Purchased feed use of 0.28 kg/litre is slightly lower with 35% of yield from forage, or 8.8 litres per cow per day. Butterfats continue to be a challenge, with

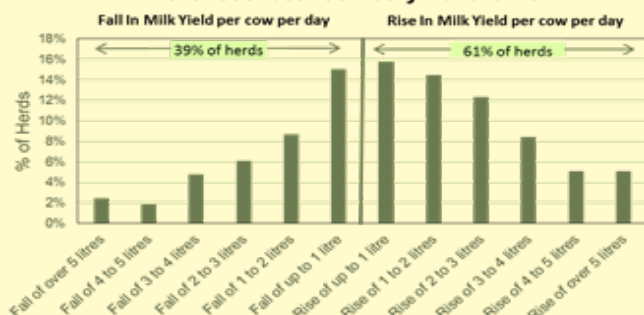
Change in Daily Milk Yield per Cow compared to previous year



most herds dropping from 3.95% last year to 3.82%. Cell Counts continue to be low due to the dry weather. They have dropped from 196 last year to 171 this month, making the rolling average for the year 176 ('000).

How do your figures compare? For the full analysis results go to [www.kingshay.com](http://www.kingshay.com).

Differences between July 2013 & 2012



## PRESENT FEED WELL FOR MAXIMUM INTAKES



Reviewing some of the photo footage from Kingshay's on farm trials has revealed troughs are often empty for several hours before morning milking, so we asked Kingshay associate member and nutrition consultant Malcolm Graham to take us through some intake issues

**Q: What's the most cows can eat?**  
A: I've measured group intakes of 25kg of dry matter a day, with high yielding Holsteins, so some individual cows could be eating up to 30kg. For any farm or group of cows, it will really depend on cow yield, cow size or breed and other physical or diet factors. What's important is to measure it, so you know what is normal and can pick up any issues quickly.

**Q: What are the consequences of low intakes?**

A: If the group intake is reduced by say 0.5kg DM a day below the optimum, the impact will be much greater on the heifers, weaker cows and the highest yielders, so they might be eating 1.5kg of DM

a day less than they need. This will reduce yields, but perhaps a bigger concern is poor fertility, particularly in heifers.

**Q: What physical factors are commonly reducing intakes on farms?**

1. Trough access space and design are important for all cows to get enough time at the trough, and the bottom surface should be smooth so cows can lick the trough clean.
2. Feed and water should be in front of cows 100% of the time. You often see empty feed troughs and you don't know how long they've been empty.
3. Rejected feed can soon get hot and smelly, so it will increase the amount of feed wasted, as well as reducing intakes. Troughs should be cleaned out every day. Fresh food should never be put on top of old, stale feed.
4. Presenting the feed well can also help intakes, so keep any mouldy silage out of the trough or mixer and ensure feed is mixed properly.

**Q What ration factors can reduce intakes?**

A: Forage quality is the biggest factor when it comes to the actual diet palatability and digestibility. Poor silage, particularly when it's acidic, means lower

predicted intakes, so the concentrate to forage ratio is typically increased and then you risk acidosis, which will again reduce intakes. Making good silage and regular reviews of intake and performance are essential when rationing cows.

## EASY CHECK ON FORAGE SUPPLIES

Have you conserved enough forage for winter?

It's easy to check with Kingshay's Forage

Stocks Calculator, which is available free on the website [www.kingshay.com](http://www.kingshay.com)

The calculator works from the basic information to do all the maths for you. You just need to input the number of stock in each class, dry matter intakes and days they need to be fed. It compares this with the forage stocks available for which you input the size of pits, number of bales and can even add crops still to be harvested, using the acres and anticipated yield.

"This quick check at the start of winter will identify any likely shortages and when that is the case it will allow forage stocks to be stretched, possibly using straw or co-products, or more forage to be sourced in good time," says Kingshay's technical specialist Tom Bell.





**Much of the UK maize growing areas have enjoyed good maize growing conditions during the summer of 2013.**

Sunshine duration has largely been between 15% and 35% above the average, whereas rainfall is generally only 70-90% of the seasonal average. Warmer drier conditions have certainly been welcome after the 2012 growing season and the majority of maize crops have grown well despite a slow start in cool spring conditions. Crops grown on lighter land have fared well where seedbeds were well prepared enabling deep rooting of the maize plant. Deep roots

are essential in dry conditions enabling them to draw moisture from a greater depth. Heavy soils in particular have come into their own this season providing adequate but not excessive moisture throughout the season. This coupled with the above average heat units has produced some promising crops of maize.

Kingshay maize variety trials have grown well under these conditions and will provide some valuable information on the relative performance of the 38 varieties grown across the three trial sites when they are harvested this autumn.

## SILAGE ANALYSIS

**Ensure rations are accurate this winter by regular checks on silage quality.**

Kingshay's silage analysis offers easy to read results with full Feed into Milk data for grass, maize and wholecrop. Members analysis packs for two samples cost just £24.50 plus VAT (£30.50 plus VAT for non-members).



Buy one of our stainless steel silage corer cutting heads. Take core samples where you want, when you want. Members price £35 + VAT (£44.00 + VAT for non-members).

## NEW TEAM MEMBERS



**John Bennett** joined the Technical Team earlier this month. He brings a wealth of dairying experience, having been manager on two large 500+ cow units, the

first of which he built the herd from 110 cows to 500, achieving 9,500 litres with 3,500 from forage. John now divides his time between working with his father to develop the family dairy farm here in Somerset and his work in the Technical Team includes farm trials, research for Farming Notes and reports as well as One-2-One consultancy.

**Helen Frost** has joined the team to ensure the efficient running of the office. With her background in accountancy Helen will be keeping our books up to scratch. Prior to joining us Helen ran her own farm secretarial business. Outside work Helen is kept busy organising the local rounders team as well as buzzing around with her beekeeping hobby!



## KINGSHAY RECOGNISED AS INFORMATIVE AND PRACTICAL

**Kingshay was awarded the RABDF Prince Philip Certificate of Merit for its exhibit focusing on cow comfort at the recent Livestock Show, with judges recognising it as a very practical and informative stand.**

The exhibit was based around a theme of comfortable cows being profitable cows. "Comfortable cows get in calf, have less health issues, produce more milk and live longer. We know that cows should spend at least 14 hours a day lying down and a cow will give 1.5 litres more milk for each hour of lying time up to that target," said Kingshay's Duncan Forbes. The broad topic has been the subject of many of Kingshay's

independent investigations, including cubicle design and bedding materials.

"Our own cubicle design, now marketed by GEA as the M2M, with its unique, patent pending, angled top rail that allows precision positioning of the neck rail helps address these issues. Our investigations also mean there are many tips we can give on improving comfort in existing cubicles."

Our stand also included an eye-catching, hands-on bedding materials exhibit showing the amount of fluid each material absorbed or allowed to drain through. This will be set up again at The Dairy Show at the Bath and West Showground on

Wednesday, October 2nd.



## COMING SOON.....

New **Forage Costings Report 2014**, with updated advice and figures for grassland, brassica, maize and wholecrop forage options.

