



Field Day Notes

Once a Day

Tuesday 22nd February 2011

Speakers: Neil and Eileen Bateup, Colin Holmes.

Questions to be answered at the field day

Some of the key questions farmers who attended the field day had about the system were:

- *When is the best time to go OAD?*
- *What difference does it make to the stocking rate?*
- *What is the potential/cow production?*
- *How do you manage newly calved/colostrum cows?*
- *How do you manage the SCC and mastitis in cows?*
- *Is there an effect on the in-calf rate?*
- *What is involved in the transition to OAD?*
- *OAD benefits?*

Main points from Neil and Eileen

History of the Bateup farm business


1972	80ha, two paddocks, 120 cows.
1992	Stopped winter milk, bought neighbouring farm.
2000	Hands on TAD herd, 640 cows, heifers on milking platform.
2001	Bought 47ha, heifers on this.
2002	Concerned about pressure on young stock, thin, hard to get in calf. Heard that DairyNZ was working on OAD. Put heifers and second calvers on OAD to try and grow them better.
2003	Added the top producing cows to the OAD herd – all up 40% of herd on OAD. Impressed with the results.
2004	Whole herd on OAD.

Note: The last 2-3 years have been dry and this has affected profitability as money has been spent on buying in feed, this would have also occurred if the system was TAD.

Farming philosophies

Neil outlined the philosophies underlying their farming business:

- Want to be low cost with no bought-in feed. Some conservation is done on farm (silage) and this is fed out over 6-8 weeks in summer.
- The farm needs to be sustainable long term. 4 things are needed to make this happen:
 - The farm has to be economic.
 - The animals need to be looked after.
 - The people need to be looked after.
 - The farm has to be environmentally sustainable.

 **Low cost, sustainable farming**

The pros and cons of OAD

In a nutshell Neil felt they are:

Pros

- Good for the people working on the farm.
- No capital investment is needed as it is a management change, this makes it easy to switch back to twice a day milking if you find the system does not suit you.
- Effluent production at the dairy is lower.
- Reduces farm operating costs e.g. animal health (they do not use CIDRs or induce cows and have few problems with lameness) and shed costs. *Costs are somewhat higher at the moment as they have been using bought in feed to cope with the drier conditions in the last 2-3 years.*

 **Average farm costs: \$2.60/kgMS**

Cons

- Cows are not milking to their full potential.

Day to day management

- The cows spend the entire day in one paddock, they are not shifted.
- In the spring time they are on a 21 day round. The herd is broken into 4 groups using a paddock per group per day.
- There is no cropping on the farm, and no re-grassing, this also results in cost reductions.
- In the first three weeks of the season colostrum cows are milked twice a day for two days post calving to gain the premium prices for colostrum. If colostrum cows are not milked twice a day there will be a loss of colostrum quality (IGG levels are lower).
- Fertiliser is applied on the basis of results from soil testing.
- Nitrogen is added in early spring.

- Cows are stood off in winter on two old dairy collecting yards, and on some old cattle yards. A wood chip base is used and the existing effluent ponds from the dairies, although not a lot of effluent is collected.

The differences in stocking rate

Neil has added about 10% (he is at 3.1 currently).

Colin believes you can leave it the same (if you have prepared well in the transition).

The transition period

Culling of cows

Few cows needed culling in the transition period – just one line of heifers from a particular bull. Only 12 cows out of 700 went dry early in the first year of OAD. As an ongoing process cows who are less suited to the system are culled during the normal culling process.

Body condition score

Neil noticed an increase in the BCS during the transition but this has dropped away now as the cows milk better. Generally they are at 4.5-5 at calving.

Mastitis

The same number of cases of clinical mastitis occur now as prior to beginning OAD, however Neil has noted a recent increase in black mastitis cases. Teat sealing of heifers is carried out.

He sticks to the withholding period of a set number of milkings e.g. 4, as it is not worth risking a grade. Many companies now include a OAD recommendation in their labelling.

Colin feels that mastitis is an ever present threat, and needs careful monitoring.

Production

The herd peaked at 1.45 kgMS this season.

Colin's OAD discussion group produces 1.55 – 1.6 kgMS on average.

Heifers in an OAD system suffer more of a production loss (at 75% of those on TAD), however Neil believes they grow better and have better in-calf rates.

Reproduction

They currently operate a 12 week mating period (having pulled back from 16 weeks). When they first went OAD they had a 5-6% empty rate.

Colin noted that in general OAD herds have good fertility - this has been confirmed in his OAD discussion group.

Genetics

The herd BW is now 112 (in the top 5%).

Mixing of OAD and TAD

Neil would not consider mixing the two different systems e.g. TAD till Christmas and then OAD after, as it would affect labour costs and he believes it would negatively affect the success of his mating.

Key points from Colin

Colin is involved in running an OAD discussion group. This has given him valuable insights into how OAD works on typical dairy farms. There are 5-600 herds on full lactation OAD currently. People's perception of OAD is important, they are fearful to make the change.

Audience comment: some people are forced into OAD by external conditions e.g. drought, they have found it suits them and then they have stuck with it.

- OAD leaves more time for cows to graze, ruminate and rest, this has animal welfare benefits.
- Removing a milking introduces flexibility into the system.



Food for Thought. Considering the high human and labour costs of TAD, does sticking with TAD need to be justified rather than switching to OAD??

Focus on profit

Your cost/kgMS is the most important fact to know. Most farmers can instantly tell you what the payout is, but are unsure what their costs are. Profitability is a key factor to consider when considering OAD.

The management of your transition is very important as you are likely to lose income during this time.

The longevity of OAD cows

The longevity of OAD cows is good as they have good fertility and less animal health issues (particularly lameness). Neil believes they get an extra year of production out of OAD cows.

Transition

- You will almost certainly lose production in the first 1-2 years.
- Mastitis: don't start OAD without getting on top of any SCC problems.
- Jersey and crossbred cows seem more suited to OAD.
- Maybe start OAD in December and use the following period to identify the cows who will not cope with OAD.
- Plan and Prepare to minimise issues.
- Wintering will be less expensive as cows finish the season in better condition.

Top tips for someone considering OAD

- Just do it! It is not rocket science and it's not like coming out of the closet – don't be embarrassed!
- Observe your cows closely and feed them well.
- Making the decision to switch to OAD is the hardest part.

- Plan and Prepare. Managing the transition is important.
- Monitor mastitis.
- Understand your budget and where your profits and costs are. The benefits are obvious.

Audience comments:

- The people that benefit the most from OAD are our children.
- OAD is such an attractive option that children are willing to come back farming rather than moving into other careers.

Summary

Once a day is a full system change which may not suit everyone's management style or farming goals. The management required is not dissimilar to a twice a day system, however if you are having problems on a twice a day system then converting to once a day is likely to aggravate these. Ensure you are efficiently operating a twice a day system before you consider changing. The potential production drops can be minimised and managed by increasing stocking rate slightly.

Unfortunately there is not one recipe for converting to a once a day system, there are many advantages but also some potential system implications. If considering once a day, ensure you have clearly defined what outcomes you hope to achieve and seek advice if unsure of the potential changes to your system.