

Labour and straw savings justify cost of bedding and feeding by machine

By Wendy Short
North-east correspondent

LABOUR IS one of the most expensive elements of beef production, which makes the investment in a new bedder/feeder machine worthwhile, believes a Scottish farm manager.

As well as saving up to 14 man hours a week in winter, the machine has kept cattle cleaner and reduced straw use by about 25%, says Gordon Cairns, who manages JCJ Farms, Torthowald, Dumfries.

The beef enterprise consists of 260 spring and autumn-calving cows and 200-300 cattle are finished each year, with some stores purchased.

Before he bought the machine last winter, it typically took two men up to three hours to bed cattle every second or third day. It needed two men for the task for safety reasons, because they needed to get in pens.

"Now the whole operation takes just half an hour and only requires one man to sit in a tractor and drive along the outside of the building. So, we have switched to bedding-up every day," explains Mr Cairns.

Although dirty cattle were never a big problem, the even spread achieved by the machine has kept cattle cleaner and belly clipping is now much easier.

"Manhandling round bales also created an uneven spread, leading to

waste. The machine is more efficient – it blows straw evenly at a distance of several metres through 310°."

The farm produces its own straw from the 242ha (600 acres) of arable land. But the 25% saving on bedding has allowed more straw to be sold off the field and taken the pressure off at harvest time, he adds.

The dual-purpose element of the Kuhn Primor 5060 has brought other benefits.

"Depreciation costs are less on one machine than two. The feeder/bedder can also stay hitched up to one tractor. Previously, we either

BEDDING BY MACHINE

- Saving labour
- 25% less straw used
- Cattle are cleaner

had to tie up two tractors for the whole morning, or spend time changing machinery around.

"I am hoping the machine will last for 6-7 seasons, by which time it should have more than paid us back on our investment," says Mr Cairns.

List prices for the machine start at £13,900. Its manufacturer says the patented unroll system can handle two round straw bales at a time without jamming and it has a capacity of 5.5cu m. ■



Wilbert Girvan

Wilbert Girvan farms 960ha (2400 acres) of LFA land in the Scottish Borders. He runs 300 pedigree Luing cows, out-wintered on hill land, and 450 Greyface ewes

THE LUIING Cattle Society Open Day held at Scammadale, near Oban, was a great success. We drove up to Oban on the day before while the weather made a considerable contribution to the average 304cm of rainfall.

The following day dawned bright and sunny, which allowed everyone to appreciate the beauty and grandeur of Scotland's west coast.

Neil and Hazel McCorkindale hosted a wonderful display of pure-bred Luing cows with Simmental-cross calves at foot. Everyone attending was impressed by the quality and condition of cattle. Cattle that have been bred for more than 50 years to live outside all year and cope with adverse weather found in Scotland and further afield.

Back at home the work goes on. Bulls have finished their seasonal duties and are now secure in their winter quarters. Luing heifers have all been scanned before the 30-month deadline, with 42 out of 43 in calf.

Calves have been treated with Dectomax pour-on to rid them of any parasites before housing. One inconvenience of our well-insulated cattle is the need to clip a small strip on their backs to allow the active ingredients to contact and penetrate the skin.

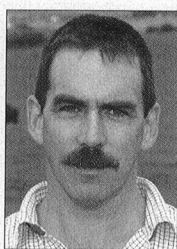
Lambs have all gone, the third year in succession that all our lambs have been finished in September. Clean grazing and cobalt are contributing factors in avoiding tail-enders that never seem to finish.

They averaged £49.51 before deductions – a marvellous price compared with a tonne of barley, but a shocking price considering it takes about eight lambs to pay the well-deserved shepherd's weekly wage.

I am told that part of the reason for the buoyant ewe lamb trade is that some arable farmers are venturing into sheep. All I can say is proceed with caution. Lamb production can and will have a steep and sometimes discouraging learning curve. ■

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Clyde Jones manages two 200-cow herds on a dairy/arable farm near Dorchester in Dorset. Both herds are spring calving. They are managed using New Zealand farming techniques over 140ha (350 acres) of chalkland



Labour and straw savings have been made with the Khun machine, justifying the investment, says Gordon Cairns.

New feeding regime

Moving towards using more home-produced feed in recent years is also helping reduce costs at JCJ Farms. Bought-in straights were costing £117/t, but the new ration based on home-grown grain has brought that down to just £75-£80/t, says Gordon Cairns. "With the new feeding regime, we have a better idea of quality and cost. However, there is still flexibility, because other feed materials can be bought if necessary," says Mr Cairns.