



## Moving with the times at Bridge of Aird

**Aiming to constantly improve their herd and diversifying in any way possible to maximise their returns for their dairy herd is the Love family of Bridge of Aird, based in Stranraer.**

Currently milking 130 Holsteins between, Andy, Christine and their daughter, Kayleigh, along with one full time tractor man, the family have been in the tenancy farm for 97 years.

Aiming for the perfect picture the cows are outside for as long as possible during the summer months – aiming for around seven months – to help promote the milk the family sell locally.

“Instead of super-sizing the business we wanted to explore how we can get more of a margin on the milk we sell and that is that is why we turned our focus to local customers,” said Kayleigh, who ventured into selling their own milk on farm in October 2021, with the milk vending machine arriving in December 2021, the whole process was filmed through This Farming Life.

“We were selling pasteurised milk over the door hatch for a couple of months, but it was very time consuming as we had to be there all the time,” said Kayleigh, who really pushed the idea of the vending machine to the family.

“We spoke about it for years but of course Covid came around, so things did take a little longer than anticipated. Where we are located it is a hard place to farm so we have to make the most out of our location, and engaging with tourists is the way to do that.

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Providing their own milk is time consuming, with the Love family drawing the milk from the first couple of sides of cows in the morning, depending on how much they require that day, which is pasteurised by means of a long time and a low temperature (LTLT) method and non-homogenised to retain the flavour and protein. All the machines in the milk hut need cleaned along with bottles filled up for the day, and the 12 different milk shake flavours checked.

If this isn't already enough, there is also a home baking machine and local produce machine too, along with providing milk to numerous local trade and hospitality businesses. On average 230 litres of milk will go through the milk machine, which of course comes down to seasonality, but this equates to around 5-10% of the milk produced on the farm.

Last year the farm produced 1.2million litres of milk, in which the remaining of this goes to Lactalis for cheese making, with cows being milked twice a day through a 12 a side swingover parlour which was installed in 2007.

"Since our milk is going for cheese making, they pay heavily on protein, so it is important we get the quality of our milk as well as the volume," said Andy, with milk achieving 3.4P and 4.2BF.

Kayleigh added: "Even selling directly to the public you want the ButterFat to be high as you can really taste the difference, with the milk being a lot creamier and tastier."



To achieve this high-quality milk, perfecting the diet is essential, which is looked after by Davidsons Dairy Tech consultant Michael Carruthers.

Michael will analyse the silage of which the family do two cuts annually, with first cut last year analysing well at 28%DM, 68 D value, 10.9ME and 14.5% Crude protein. Michael will then make up a partial TMR diet to feed, which is supplemented with compound through the parlour, fed according to the yield of the individual cow. Currently the cows are being fed Elite 16 which is a highly palatable, high-energy nut with top quality starch and protein raw materials formulated for high yielding dairy cows.

"Our cows are doing a lot better after making the switch to Davidsons Animal Feeds, the cake seems to work well with them, and we have seen vast improvements in the milk both quality and quantity. Our mastitis cases have dropped, and our cell counts have improved," said Andy.



Kayleigh added: "If you keep their stomach right, everything else seems to follow."

"The service is also second to none at Davidsons Animal Feeds, I am very good at being a typical farmer and realising the feed bin is low when I need it the next day, and the girls in the office are very good at fitting us in the best they can," added Andy.

"We do find the diet does need to be managed carefully when the cows are put out to grass as the milk quality does dip slightly, however it is a lot less labour intensive keeping them outside and it is also a bonus point having free range cows," said Andy. Through the winter cows will be housed in the cubicle shed with mattresses and will be bedded twice a day with sawdust, along with an automatic scraper keeping them clean. Cubicles are scraped down and rebedded twice a day and will be spread with anti-bacterial product twice a week to help kill any infections in the shed.



"As we do everything ourselves, we make sure everything is cleaned every morning and night to improve cow health," said Kayleigh, with cows being wiped and cleaned down in the parlour, we are able to see any sign of anything and are able to treat for anything early. Udder health and hygiene are very important to the farm and their aim of producing a quality product for their customers to enjoy. Somatic Cell Counts are currently running at an average of 60 and the Bactoscan figure at 10.

Helping flag up any health activity is the herd-monitoring technology the Genus pedometer. The system is used to maximise the herd's performance, aiming to improve fertility, health and well-being.

The pedometer allows for more detailed monitoring of lying and standing time. The placement of the tag on the front leg allows for extremely accurate monitoring of behaviour and changes in activity which could be indications of an oestrus event or very early onset of disease. The pedometer also allows you to also install the 'Feed Face' function which monitors cow's eating behaviour at the feed fence.

The main reason of course is when the best time to AI the cows are, which is all done through Genus. Calving takes place all year round, with heifers calving down at 26 months of age. This is the first year the family have gone completely sexed semen for the 30 heifers that are retained annually. The rest of the herd all go to the beef semen as a different income source.

"We only breed dairy calves that we need to retain, we are restricted for housing youngstock, and it is very time consuming rearing the calves. We would prefer to focus on our milking herd," said Christine, with the beef calves – which are all AI'd to the British Blue sire and followed up with an Aberdeen-Angus bull – are sold between three and four weeks of age at Ayr auction market.

Looking at the future of Bridge of Aird farm, the family aim to keep improving the herd and developing the diversification side of the business.

"When things get tough rather than trying to produce more, we need to get more out of what you are producing. We are restricted by acres here and with the cow numbers we have we are able to look after the herd ourselves.

"We are always going to continue to focus on our bespoke produce that local people support and being as sustainable as possible," concluded the Love family.