



# THAT'S FARMING

Home > Dairy > 'I started milking cows at 19' – mother-of-three with two dairy farms



10/03/2023

## 'I started milking cows at 19' – mother-of-three w

- Advertisement -

*That's Farming* editor, **Catherina Cunnane**, in conversation with Lorna Burdge, in this week's **dairy farming se**

"I am a 40-year-old dairy farmer from East Devon **in the UK**. My husband (Jim) and I are tenant farmers with tw

I started milking cows at 19 and have had various careers linked with agriculture since graduating from univer:

My husband has always been dairy farming, having been brought up on a family dairy farm and then becoming

In 2017, we were successful in our application for a farm tenancy and moved our family to Devon, and in 2019  
second dairy farm with the same landlord.

Our business aim was to produce milk from grass on a low-input system. Block calving meant that we could keep the cows in a milking parlour and running the cows as a whole herd rather than groups.

We also decided to run flying herds, so that we could use all the grazing and forage production for the dairy herd.



- Advertisement -

### Original farm

Our original farm is 86-acres, and we established an autumn block calving herd of 100 cows milked through a

Initially, we purchased Holstein and Friesian-type cows; however, this herd has now moved to crossbred cows, with only a few remaining.

When we took on the second farm, we employed a full-time herdsman (Reg) to continue the management of the

### Second farm

On the second farm (170-acres), we established a 200-head spring calving herd, made up of Jersey and crossbred grazers of lower bodyweight which could graze the farm for longer each year, with only a short housed period.

This herd is managed by Jim and I. In 2020, we invested in a new 20:40 swing over parlour with MilkTech NZ A

This has significantly reduced the milking time for the spring calving herd, maximising their grazing time.

With taking on the second tenancy, we reviewed our milk contract and moved both units to Saputo Dairy UK, then to a solids contract – which the crossbreds and Jerseys are ideal for.

This has resulted in the Holsteins in the autumn-calving herd being replaced with crossbred cows over time to and maximise our milk price.



### **Labour availability**

With there only being three of us across the two farms, having the split block works well from a labour perspective.

Jim and I are available to help during busier times of year on the autumn-calving farm (eg calving and service) when we are busy on the spring-calving farm.

It also gives us a relatively level milk profile and income throughout the year.

### **Genetics and heat detection**

Both farms offer fantastic quality grazing for the cows, all are easily accessible, especially as we have invested in infrastructure.

Both herds run as flying herds, using AI to British Blue for the first six weeks of service, and then we have two further 4-6 weeks.

Calves are all sold at approximately 3-4 weeks of age to beef farms for rearing.

The spring-calving herd's 6-week in-calf rate is 75%, and the autumn-calving herd's 6-week in-calf rate stands at 80%.

We use Estroject breeding indicator patches for heat detection. We sticker all the cows four weeks before the re-breeding period, and check weekly during the AI period.

AI is carried out by a local company that supplies us with easy-calving British Blue semen.

Autumn-calving milk production stands at 7,000L, 4.6% butterfat, and 3.6% protein from 1.5t on concentrates.

Meanwhile, spring-calving milk production reports at 5,000L, 4.7% butterfat and 3.7% protein from 1.1t of conc

## Grazing

With grazing being at the core for both of our dairy herds, [weekly grass walks](#) are carried out on both farms du

The cows are paddock/strip grazed, with back fences to protect regrowth.

For the spring-calving herd, we grow a break crop of stubble turnips to supplement their grazing later in the su

For the autumn-calving herd, we lock up a field for standing hay which is strip grazed during their dry period.

All fieldwork is carried out by a local family contractors business, with fields for silage being incorporated into

Using external contractors enables the three of us to dedicate all our working time to the cows and has meant

Both farms have cubicle housing for the winter months.



## Herdwatch

The main tech we use on-farm is the Herdwatch app for all of our record-keeping.

We've been with Herdwatch since 2018 and have found it to be a quick and easy system to use for all our m

This means less of my time tied up with paperwork as I can record information live while working, saving me h

The benefits of having all the cow records on my phone have been critical time and time again, e.g., during PD calving cows, recording all our service information and [quickly registering all newborn calves](#).

In 2022, [Herdwatch](#) nominated us for Dairy Farmers of the Year at the British Farming Awards, with us being sl

This came as a complete surprise and was an amazing process to be part of.

### **Farmer Time**

In addition to farming full-time, I also spend time most weeks talking to school children about food and farmin

I believe this is time very well spent as for some of the children, the only time they have seen a cow is in a boo

We discuss what is happening on the farms during the seasons, and they get to see the cows and calves up cl

I also send them a milking video so they can see what happens in the milking parlour and we talk about how o  
importantly, the children get their questions answered by a farmer first-hand.

### **Future**

We are aiming to continue to tweak our farms, to improve efficiency, whether this is by better grassland manag  
milk price and optimise our low-input system.

We have no desire to get bogged down with too much technology, which will probably have little overall benefi

With three young children, we are always looking ahead and thinking about where we would like to see ourselv  
something that our children will want to have an involvement in or, if they will want to choose a different caree

### **Reflection**

When we first took on our tenancy, our aim was to produce milk from grass on a low-input, low-cost, simple sy  
side and give plenty of free time to enjoy with our young family.

We feel that we have achieved that aim, and even though our business has expanded, our aim to produce milk  
we do.

We look to continue with this type of system as it is working well for us with low labour and machinery require

In light of this, we believe we will be more resilient against potential market volatility in the future.”

To [share your story](#), email – [catherina@thatsfarming.com](mailto:catherina@thatsfarming.com)

- Advertisement -