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John Giles

COMMENT
—Southern Hemisphere grapes

Still delivering for the Southern Hemisphere

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NANTWICH—Grapes account for a major part of fruit exports from Chile, Peru and South Africa and serve as a useful barometer for the general fruit industries. What can these countries learn from each other's experience and how can it help in future challenges?

Grapes are of critical importance to the leading fresh fruit suppliers of Latin America as evidenced by the mid-to-long-term industry developments, particularly in Peru and Chile. These two countries dominate in Latin America and face similar opportunities and challenges to their historical Southern Hemisphere rival South Africa.

Each of these industries is clearly at a different stage of development, but they are bound together by a number of key factors, not least that they are central to the ongoing growth of the country's fresh fruit sector. From our experience in these markets, we believe that while still being in close competition, they also have more in common with each other than might appear to be the case.

A BAROMETER FOR THE FRUIT MARKET?

Grapes have been a fantastic success story in these three countries for the last ten years. While it has not been without its challenges, the table grape industry can be seen as something of a barometer by which other fruit sectors can judge their own success.

For example in Peru, grapes are now the leading export horticultural crop by value, worth some US$650m per annum. In South Africa, grapes account for over 30 per cent of the deciduous fruit grown and exported and in Chile, the crop accounts for a massive 730,000 tonnes of exports per year.

MORE IN COMMON THAN NOT?

Based on the insight that Promar has developed by working in the international grape sector for over 25 years, there are a number of other industry characteristics that these three mega-suppliers from the Southern Hemisphere have in common.

Firstly, planted area: in Chile, the area planted to grapes has been in gradual decline over the last 10 years, but production is still in the region of 900,000 tonnes per annum. In South Africa meanwhile, the area dedicated to grapes has shown the reverse trend by increasing from around 15,000ha to 20,000ha in the same period, and three key producing regions now account for 75 per cent of the country's overall output. Production in Peru has also been expanding rapidly, driven by export demand, not least in Asia and a local market of some 250,000 tonnes.

Export markets are another case in point. The US is still by far the most important export market for Chile and Peru, accounting for 47 per cent and 37 per cent of shipments respectively. Europe is also still a key market for all three, especially South Africa which

While it has not been without its challenges, the table grape industry can be seen as a barometer by which other fruit sectors can judge their own success

ABOVE—The table grape industry can be used as a benchmark for other industries
LEFT—Grapes have been a real success story in countries like Chile, Peru and South Africa

ships over 70 per cent of its total export volume to the European Union. Europe and Russia are still important destination markets for Chile, while Peru sends around 15 per cent of its exports to Europe.

However, Asia is the region that all three countries have their targets set on for the future. China already accounts for 13 per cent of all Chilean grape exports and for Peru, Hong Kong and China combined account for 18 per cent of shipments. Although South African exports to China are still modest, increased market access gained in late 2016 means that Asia now accounts for just over 10 per cent of South African exports.

Meanwhile, all three suppliers have proven adept at negotiating enhanced access to new destinations. This is especially true of Peru and Chile, who have negotiated numerous new trade agreements, especially in Asian markets, over the last five years. South Africa has been a bit slower off the mark in this respect, but still has highly favourable access to the EU and has managed to successfully overcome some of the non-tariff barriers it faced in China.

THE NEED FOR RESILIENT SUPPLY CHAINS

Based on the work we have been involved with over the last few years, the future development of the grape sector is key to, and closely interwoven with, the wider fortunes of the international fruit industries in these countries. And in many cases, they all face the same challenges.

These can range from extreme weather conditions as seen in South Africa and Peru in recent years – which can impact significantly on crop yields – to the need to look for newer varieties beyond Red Globe which dominates in Peru and Crimson Seedless, the foremost variety in South Africa. The overall volatility seen in terms of world prices, exchange rates, fuel and transport costs are also a factor with which all three countries have to contend, as are concerns over the cost and availability of labour and the use of scarce resources such as water.

All this points to the need to develop more resilient supply chains in the future to cope with the numerous 'shocks' to the system the sector has faced in the last five years. The fundamental causes of these shocks show no signs of going away.

At the same time, there are still tremendous market opportunities in Asia, not least the possibilities bought about by online purchasing and the trend towards convenience in more mature markets, as well as the ongoing rationalisation and consolidation of key players at the point of sale.

This is, of course, all much easier said than done. Those that will thrive will be the well organised and well informed, and those that have a genuine long-term view of the future that goes well beyond the challenges of the current (and next) export season. Our advice to the wider fruit industry based on our insight of what has happened in the last ten years would be to watch and learn from the grape industry and use it as a benchmark for your own sector in the future too.

Farming UK (online)
September 2018
James Dunn

Oxfordshire farmer named Milkminder manager of the year

Leigh Woolmer of Stuchbury Manor Farm, Banbury has been named Milkminder Manager of the Year award 2018.Mr Woolmer manages a 160-cow Holstein Friesian herd, on behalf of the 2,000-acre Marston St Lawrence Estates.He overcame tough competition to scoop the national title, according to the agri-food consultancy behind the award, Promar.James Dunn, Promar Managing Director and judge said: "Leigh's attention to detail has been a big driver in the success and technical performance of the herd, which averages 8,966 litres, with 4% butterfat and 3.2% protein."He uses his 19 years' experience to achieve great results," Mr Dunn added.Good milk quality

Mr Woolmer has achieved consistently good milk quality recordings as a result of a rigid five-point parlour routine implemented on the farm."Each cow is pre-sprayed, wiped, and stripped before milking, and sprayed again before leaving the parlour," he said"This has led to an average somatic cell count from the last 12 months of 86,000/ml, along with a bactoscan of 9,000/ml."Mr Dunn added that the health and welfare of the herd is the key priority for the farm."The estate invested in a cubicle system around 18 months ago, replacing the previous open pen system in order to further improve udder health, and the results have been significant."The cubicles are cleaned twice a day, and scraped as often as possible, which has seen mastitis cases reduced considerably," he said.'Meticulous standards'

Around four years ago, the farm was also faced with a significant Neospora outbreak, with nearly half the herd aborting in a year.Mr Dunn said: "This was a huge blow for both Leigh and the estate, but he has been determined to tackle the issue with a strict breeding policy."Milk testing is carried out before drying off, and any cows that have tested positive are put to beef sires, along with any that may have a history in the dam, to prevent any carryover to the next generation of the herd."Leigh's technical performance, meticulous standards and eye for detail are a rare commodity, and it's great to be able to reward a manager who is focused on making the most of his milk to drive the business forward," he said.

Darlington & Stockton Times
September 2018
Nigel Davies

Increase in average dairy feed bills

By Mike Bridgen

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THE average dairy farmer saw their purchased feed bill for June rise more than nine per cent compared to the same month last year.

The National Milkminder survey found it had risen to £9,777 per herd – based on the average herd of 210 cows – which was 9.1 per cent higher than June 2017.

Nigel Davies, Promar's national consultancy manager, said: "Aside from practical challenges, these numbers serve as a prompt to start planning ahead to help understand the financial implications of ensuring that there will be adequate supplies of both home-grown and purchased feed for the months ahead."

He said producers should aim to get an understanding of the potential cost implications of feeding livestock right through to this time next year and beyond.

"This is a real challenge for many," he said. "For this reason, using a costing service like Milkminder can be beneficial tin helping to give an accurate indication of likely purchased feed costs, against which farmers can compare the likely costs of other feed sources.

"For example, additional feed this year could come from catch crops sown in the autumn or spring, or other external sources of forage."

Mr Davies encouraged farmers to map out the relative costs of any additional feed sources now rather than waiting until next year and finding a better decision could have been made.

The survey sample for June showed production levels of milk litres and solids survived the challenge of the late winter, and remain largely unaltered from June 2017.

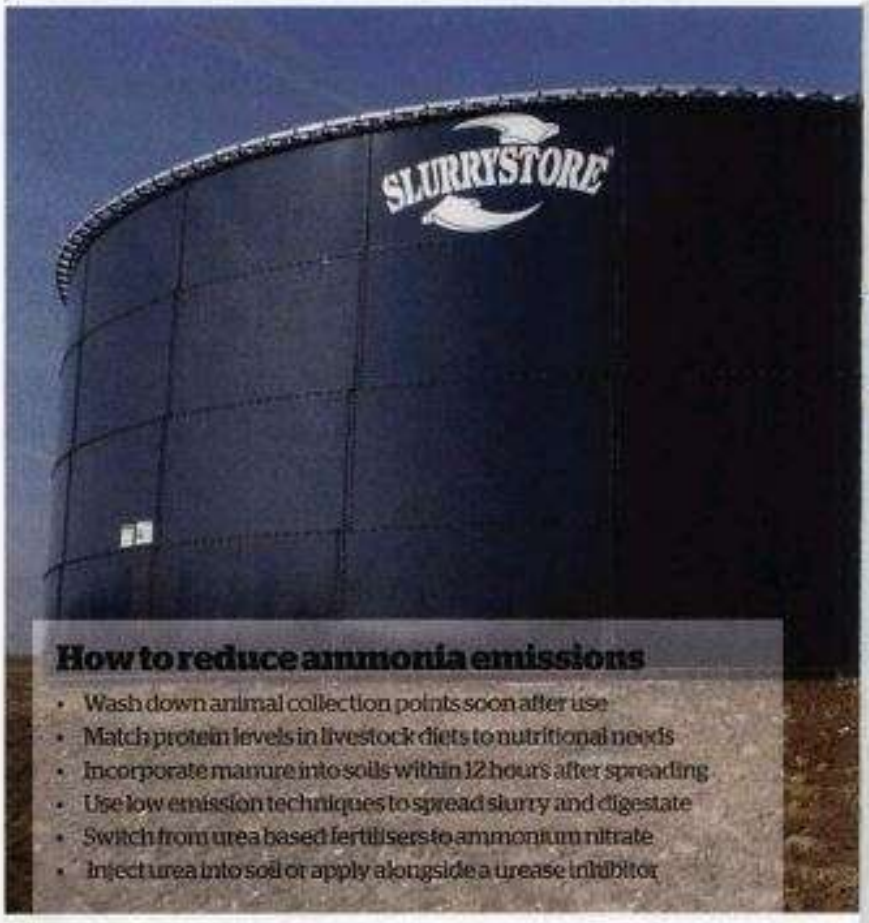
The survey showed that in June 2017 the cows yielded 25.9 litres of milk per day; concentrate use was 0.28 kg/l; concentrate price was £215 per tonne; and total other purchased feed cost £254.

In June 2018 the cows produced 26.1 litres of milk per day; concentrate use was 0.28 kg/l; concentrate price was £233 per tonne; and total other purchased feed cost £295.

Anglia Farmer
October 2018
Tom Gill

Plan ahead to meet new ammonia rules

- New rules expected as soon as 2020
- Major on-farm investment required
- Dairy and beef farmers both affected



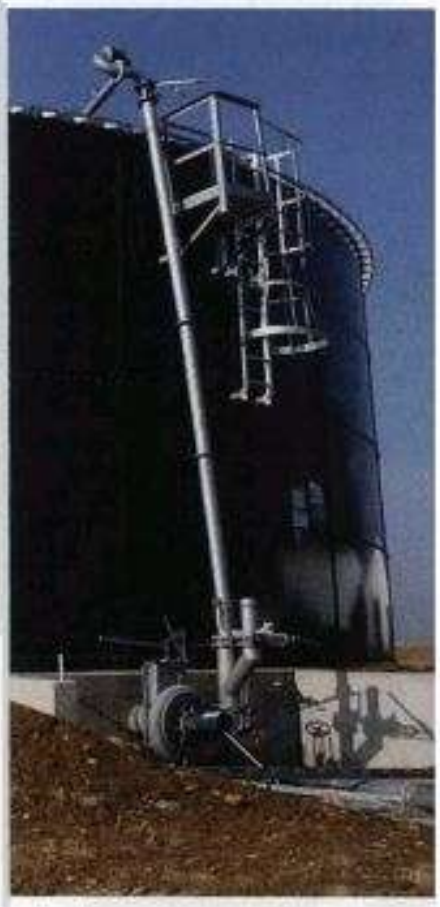
How to reduce ammonia emissions

- Wash down animal collection points soon after use
- Match protein levels in livestock diets to nutritional needs
- Incorporate manure into soils within 12 hours after spreading
- Use low emission techniques to spread slurry and digestate
- Switch from urea based fertilisers to ammonium nitrate
- Inject urea into soil or apply alongside a urease inhibitor

Livestock farmers are being encouraged to consider how their businesses could be affected by new legislation to curtail ammonia emissions from agriculture.

Beef and dairy farmers are among those most likely to be affected by proposed regulations, believes Tom Gill, head of environment at Promar International. A proactive approach is key to meeting any change successfully, he says.

The government's recent announcement that it intends to



introduce stricter controls on livestock housing, fertiliser and slurry and manure management may have left some farmers feeling uncertain about the future sustainability of their businesses, says Mr Gill.

Potential benefits

But he adds: "Given that the proposed regulations are mostly focused on the enforcement of best practice – which many farmers are already implementing to improve efficiency on-farm – they are therefore in a good position to reap the potential benefits on offer."

Agriculture accounts for some 80% of the UK's ammonia emissions. And with manure and slurry applications accounting for 25% of agricultural ammonia emissions, all slurry and digestate will need to be applied using low-emission spreading equipment by 2027.

"The good news is that many farmers are ahead of the game and are already spreading slurry in such a way to maximise the additional benefits such as increased nitrogen value," explains Mr Gill.

Using a trailing hose to apply slurry, for example, can increase the nitrogen value by approximately three units per 1,000 gallons. This can help save money on feed and bedding as it allows for a quicker return to grazing.

Beyond best practice, the proposed regulations are likely to mean a significant investment in on-farm infrastructure. That is because the target date for slurry and digestate stores to be covered is 2027 and few farms currently cover stores.

Farmers are going to have to make financial investments in order to comply, says Mr Gill. "I'd recommend that they take time to understand the new legislation, particularly when developing both short and long-term business plans because this will help ensure farms are one step ahead."

The industry should take responsibility to help drive change, he adds.

"The new legislation will be daunting for many producers; however, I think it's a challenge that as an industry we should embrace. I believe that careful planning is key to maximising the available opportunities and minimising the potential impacts on business sustainability."

Tom Gill: Industry should be a driver for change

British Dairying
October 2018
James Dunn & Caroline Tillner

MILKMINDER AWARD 2018

Committed herd manager drives dairy business

Newly crowned Milkminder Manager of the Year, Leigh Woolmer, describes the struggles he overcame before rising to the top with the herd he runs in Oxfordshire.

A strong emphasis on milk from forage together with low cell counts are two of many factors which helped single-out herd manager, Leigh Woolmer, as Promar's prestigious Milkminder Manager of the Year, 2018.

Receiving the award last month, Leigh explained he 'likes to run the herd as his own'.

For the past 19 years, Leigh has demonstrated this to good effect in the 160-head herd he manages for Lord and Lady Richard Wellesley on Stuchbury Manor Farm in Oxfordshire. During this time he has driven down somatic cell counts to 85,000/ml, maintained yields of high-quality milk approaching 9,000 litres, and attained a particularly impressive 4,500 litres of milk from forage. All figures being the latest 12 month rolling averages from Promar Farm Business Accounts.

"We didn't realise the figures were that good until we were told," he says, also taking care to credit assistant herdsman, Daniel Griffiths, for his role in the farm's performance.

However, Leigh's high standards were recognised by his Promar consultant, Caroline Tillner—valued as a regular visitor with a 'fresh pair of eyes' who can tell him how the business is doing—who put him forward for the award.

James Dunn, Promar's managing director, who visited the farm for the judging, found himself in full agreement. "Leigh's attention to detail has been a big driver in the success and technical performance of the herd, which averages 8,966 litres, with 4% butterfat and 3.2% protein. He uses his 19 years' experience to achieve great results."

But the impressive performance Leigh has achieved on the farm, which is part of the 2,000-acre (809ha) Marston St Lawrence Estate near Banbury, comes in spite of significant set-backs experienced by the herd over the past four years.

During this time, an outbreak of Neospora set performance right back, due to contamination by dog faeces on footpaths across the farm, with nearly half the herd aborting in a year.

Having clawed his way back from this position by systematically blood testing animals, using beef semen on infected stock and their daughters, and striving to lift replacement heifer numbers by breeding uninfected animals with sexed dairy semen, it is all the more remarkable that today, the calving interval has levelled out at 385 days.

Using an average of two straws of semen per pregnancy is further evidence that health and fertility are back on track, and suggests 'DIY AI' is carried out with the same level of care and skill seen in all areas of the herd's management.

Nutrition strategy

Nutrition is also plays an important part in the herd's impressive figures, including good grassland management which has lifted forage quality, raised forage intakes and boosted milk from forage. This was also praised by the judges.

"We calve all year and the high-yielding group will stay indoors until they're in-calf, at around 150 days in milk, when they'll go out to paddocks," says Leigh, remarking that once they are out, they are not buffer fed. "They'll just get a little cake of up

Leigh Woolmer with the dairy herd.

to three to four kg per day in the parlour."

Paddocks are kept 'short and sweet' to maintain grass quality, he explains. "If there's enough grass, about four to six inches up my welly, then the cows go in and after a couple of days they come out. They don't eat it down too low because they get bored, so they come out regardless."

Applying a similar intuition to winter nutrition, the total mixed ration comprises a 50:50 mix of grass and maize silage, 4.5kg/head of a 30% protein blend, 3.0kg/head of caustic treated wheat, 0.5kg/head of molasses and 0.75kg/head of chopped straw.

"The straw lightens the load," he says. "I think of the cow's rumen as a washing machine where the straw adds volume and helps the feed go round, plus it helps with the scratch factor."

Milk hygiene control

Keeping on top of cell counts has involved precision in the parlour and adherence to a rigid five-point routine of pre-spraying, dry wiping and stripping before milking, and post-spraying before leaving the parlour.

Regular servicing and maintenance and careful selection of liners and clusters have also played a part in reducing cell counts.

"We chose our particular liners and clusters because they were lightweight and durable. We didn't think they would be harsh or damage the teat ends by pulling down on them," he says. "We've had them for five years and cell counts have slowly gone down over that time."

Alongside the 86,000 cells/ml, the careful parlour routine is also reflected in a Bactoscan of 9,000 cells/ml and very little mastitis.

"The mastitis rate bumps along at one or two cases per month," says Leigh. "However, we didn't have any at all this April or May which is really positive."

A recent investment in cubicles to replace a system of strawed yards has also contributed to udder health and added to the cell count improvements. Fitted with mats and bedded with chopped straw over lime, they are cleaned and bedded twice a day.

The success with lowering cell counts has been followed by attempts to use selective dry cow therapy in accordance with industry objectives to reduce antibiotic use.

"We're tinkering at the edges of non-antibiotic drying off," says Leigh. "We use a good teat sealant on everything but are trying to go without antibiotics on cows whose cell counts are below 50,000/ml."

Breeding goals

Breeding has also been undertaken with cell counts in mind. Bulls, whether genomic or daughter-proven, have always been selected with low Predicted Transmitting Abilities for somatic cell counts.

However, an even more important selection trait is feet and legs, explains Leigh. "Our cows don't have to walk far but they have to walk to the trough or out to grass," he says. "If they can't do that then the milk will not come."

Selling milk on a Muller contract with a base of 4% fat, he says he also pays attention to milk quality when it comes to sire selection. "I don't look for the high milk volume bulls any more as they don't have the quality."

The success of both the breeding and management strategies is seen in the herd's financial performance which includes a margin over feed and forage of 16.44p/litre and a total milk value per cow of £2,555 per annum.

"I know we can get more and improve on these figures, including health, fertility and cell counts," he says. "Good management is important—you want the best for your cows and yourself and the people on the farm."

James Dunn concurs and says: "The health and welfare of both cows and calves was a clear feature of this farm, and these were also important considerations when judging this award."

Farmer Guardian
19th October 2018
Promar International

NEWS

Dutch in joint approach to delivering public goods

Co-operatives take on land management

By Olivia Midgley

A COLLECTIVE approach to delivering public goods in agriculture is likely to produce the best results for both farmers and the environment.

In a model similar to one taken up by farmers in the Netherlands several years ago, the UK Government is assessing how groups of farmers can deliver public goods as part of pilot schemes in North Yorkshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

If successful, these collaborative approaches could be rolled out across the UK as part of a new agricultural policy.

Alex Datema, a farmer and chairman of Farmers and Nature, an organisation made up of 40 co-operatives in the Netherlands, said it was an approach which had seen good results for both producers and the environment.

There are 9,000 farmers actively working to protect farmland birds, according to Farmers and Nature.

Working

"We have 9,000 farmers actively working to protect farmland birds, water quality and landscapes," said Mr Datema, who was invited by the Embassy of the Netherlands and Promar International to address delegates from across UK agriculture and environmental groups in London.

"We used to have a system where each farmer would have a contract with the Government, but if you want to do something like protect farmland birds, you cannot do it on the scale of just one farm – it needs a landscape of change. This way, farmers feel a sense of responsibility for the collective goals."

The audience, which also included representatives from Defra and Natural England, heard the co-operatives acted as an 'intermediary' between the Government and the farmer, with each agreement tailored to a particular area, for example the soil type or climate.

When a budget is agreed by a local authority, the co-operative then assesses what it can deliver for that amount. As an example, schemes to protect farmland birds could range from €100/hectare to €1,500/ha depending on the commitment the individual farmer makes.

Livestock sustainability consultant Jude Capper said payment for public goods and, specifically, improved welfare and less impact on the environment could become part of retailers' sourcing, leading to increased demands on producers.

Mr Datema said the end goal was to see farmers being rewarded by the market place for delivering public goods, rather than by Government.

Farmers Weekly
19th October 2018
Genus RMS seasonal system

Chalk is used on the cows' tails to show signs of bulling

How AI is helping a Welsh suckler herd

By Debbie James

Artificial insemination (AI) in combination with heat detection is fast-tracking genetic improvement in a new beef suckler herd.

Martin and Hilary Salmon and their son, Matthew, established a suckler herd of mixed breeds on their Pembrokeshire farm last year and are aiming to grow the herd from its current size of 44 cows to 110.

They hadn't kept their own livestock on 59ha Tregidreg Farm near Mathry since exiting dairying in 2004, renting out the land instead.

However, two years ago they decided to return to actively farming the land and explored different options with farm consultant John Crimes of Cymru Agricultural and Rural Advice (Cara), whose advice was funded by the Farming Connect Advisory Service.

Why they decided to use AI

Suckler beef production was a good fit with their existing agricultural contracting business.

The initial herd size dictated buying just one bull to run with the herd, but this would have limited them to a single breed. "We didn't have a breed in mind and, at that stage, we wanted a variation of breeds before narrowing it down when we had worked out which best suited our situation," Martin explains.

AI offered a solution and, through the Farming Connect Mentoring Programme, the Salmons sought guidance from Philip Jones, a Carmarthenshire beef farmer who had used AI for five years.

AI, used in combination with the Genus RMS seasonal system, gave the family the opportunity to use five different breeds. They selected sires that were easy calving and scored highly on progeny growth rates. Calving heifers at 24 months was important too.

AI results

The Salmons have been strict in their ambition to keep their calving pattern tight – cows are served for seven weeks and no sweeper bull is used.

"A tight calving pattern would have been our goal had we bought a bull, but it would have been tempting to have left him in for longer if there were animals still on heat. With AI we set ourselves a cut-off point and stuck to this," says Matthew.

Last year's cycle of AI resulted in 34 animals served and among these there were three empties. "We were very pleased with this result, the three that didn't get in calf were older cows so we accepted losing these from the herd," says Martin.

RMS – which involves tail chalking and observation by a technician trained to identify primary and secondary signs of heat – costs about £40 a cow excluding semen costs.

Last year an average of 1.7 straws were used per pregnancy and the conception rate to first service was 59%. However, the Salmons are confident this will improve year on year as they fine-tune their system.

"It took me three years to get to a 78% conception rate to first service from 1.3 straws," admits Mr Jones.

Benefits of using AI

AI has allowed the Salmons to access the best bulls and improve herd genetics without the cost of running a bull.

"A decent bull would cost several thousand pounds and within two years we would need to change him because his heifers would have been coming through," says Matthew.

But, as Martin is also a relief milker, it fits well with his daily schedule. "I come back here for breakfast after the morning milking so I get the cows in before the technician arrives at 10am." ■

FARM FACTS

- Mixed herd of Simmental, Limousin, Hereford, British Blue and Beef Shorthorn cows
- Calves are born in March/April, reared on milk, grass and silage, and sold the following January
- 4ha of fodder rape grown for winter grazing in conjunction with a reseeding programme, to be followed by peas and barley
- Four cuts of silage taken

Phil Jones (right) with Martin and his grandson Rhodri Lawrence and Matthew (left)

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR USING AI IN A SUCKLER HERD

- Adequate facilities for handling cattle are important
- Beef cattle are generally more flighty than dairy cows, so chalking animals to detect heat can be a struggle
- Not all females will become pregnant, so sweeper bulls might be necessary
- Make sure AI is done at the right time – 12 hours after the first signs of heat is recommended
- Call in the vet sooner rather than later if cows don't cycle in the first 21 days