

The AmeriKiwi Farmer – February 2009

This year continues to be an interesting one, and we have been making a few changes to our regimens.

First, we are going to start using a techno-grazing method to make better use of our grass. This came about mainly due to the fact that our farm could see a much larger return in calf prices if we reared them and brought them back for finishing on the back side of our farm, which is rarely used for the milking platform. The techno system uses GPS mounted on the ATV to accurately line up grass breaks, giving cows exactly the amount of grass that they need.

I am also trying out some pasture management software that will be able to track fertilizer application, cover, growth rates, irrigation, grazing, and other factors. I want to make the most efficient use possible of the grass, with the price of milk currently so low. A number reported in the NZ Dairy Exporter (which I think may be unrealistic, but gives a general idea of gains to be made) is that for every extra ton/ha of grass harvested, there will be a profit gain of \$300.

In order to get more calves reared and healthy, we also are looking to change the way the calves are raised. They will be in individual pens (more like an American system), to help stop the spread of disease. It is easy to look at the loss of a calf as “not that big a deal” when it happens, but the cost adds up, especially when one sick calf can get a whole group sick. And, this definitely occurs during the wet winters over here.

We are also going to switch our genetics supplier so that we can select a team of bulls, allowing us to pick the bull best suited for each cow/heifer. Even though we don't have a good knowledge of what the current cows EPDs are (only their breeding worth), we should be able to make informed decisions based on data gathered by ProTrack™. We hope that this will allow us not only to improve our production by importing some US genetics, but also to select for various desirable conformation traits, while still keeping the high NZ fertility rate.

I think our current genetics supplier needs to realize that these farmers aren't as naïve as they may think, and can make informed decisions on desirable genetics rather than getting a bull randomly chosen by computer with a high BW. The high BW only leads to those herds which have a high BW being able to sell their genetics and profit. In fact, some of our highest BW cows in our herd are our lowest producers.

I am still looking forward to whether we will move forward with our plans to implement the iDataFlow™ system on the farm. I think that with the rumination monitor and heat watch system, it has the capability to far exceed what our current automation system has to offer, in terms of potential financial return.

Perspectives of a AmeriKiwi Farmer – David Noellsch – February 2009

If any farmer were ever to buy a drafting gate, for the love of God, get one that drafts like a sheep sorting system! The gate that we have lets approximately three cows a day out that I have set up to draft. This defeats the efficiency of a one-man milk shed, when you have to constantly watch and chase down cows that just walk through the gate.

On another note, my parents are coming to visit on March 16, so I will be taking some time off to travel around New Zealand (with a short jog over to Sydney) while they're here. I'm looking forward to seeing some more of the beautiful countryside, along with other New Zealand agricultural highlights. They'll be bringing some American treats like peanut butter and ketchup that I miss, along with some John Deere merchandise for the Smith family.

Gee, speaking of wearing of the green – Happy St. Patrick's Day to all back home, from your AmeriKiwi farmer.