



I was lucky enough to be invited on a HIPRA trip to Spain recently to look at their vaccine manufacturing facility near Barcelona. As part of the trip, we also visited one of the local dairy farms and had an interesting insight into dairying in this part of Spain.

Catalonia is situated in the north-west of Spain and is a region associated more with vineyards than dairy farms! By Spanish standards the region is warm with moderate rainfall but it felt like our summer when I was there at the beginning of April.

The farm we visited is a member of a local cooperative supplying milk to both liquid and cheese producing markets. The current milk price was 32 cents per litre (28 ppl) but the farm is in the process of organic conversion - the organic price is currently 60 cents per litre (52 ppl)!

There were 210 cows on the unit, being milked twice daily and averaging 34 L / cow / day. The cows are housed all year round and fed a mixture of zero grazed grass, maize, grass silage and lucerne - bought in feed was minimal but did include a soya blend. The move to organic is going to mean the cows will be grazed at least 2 hours every day.

The milkers were cubicle housed on straw bedding and fed a TMR once daily - there were no OOP feeders or in parlour feeding. There were 2 cow groups based on days in milk and a separate milking heifer group. Dry cows and in calf heifers were on loose bedding and fed a dry cow TMR.

Mastitis rates were low although the farm has started to vaccinate against mastitis as environmental e-coli type mastitis has been an issue in the past. The farmer now performs on-farm milk culturing of mastitis cases and no longer treats certain types of mastitis with antibiotics.

The aim is to calve heifers at 24 months and the farm is now using a mix of sexed Holstein semen and Aberdeen Angus semen across the herd. The market for Holstein bull calves continues to shrink.

Heat stress is a major issue in this region and the farm has recently installed a sprinkler system alongside fans to try and combat this. Fertility is a huge challenge during the summer and the annual number of services per conception is 2.7; worse in summer. The farm was on weekly vet visits and synch programs are used to drive submission rates.

The farm is now using automated body condition scoring technology to monitor individual cow performance - this helps identify individual problem cows but also helps to highlight trends across groups of cows.

On the vet side of things there were some interesting differences between Spain and the UK. The farmer's vet is not allowed to sell prescription meds - instead they issue prescriptions to the farmer who buys them through a local pharmacy. The veterinary services are paid on a set monthly contract, this includes fertility work, herd health planning and call outs. The farm also uses a vet for herd nutrition and an external veterinary consultant for milk quality.

There is a strong focus on profitability, including annual costings and benchmarking all farms within the co-op. Alongside this, the farm tries to engage with the local community and consumers by encouraging school visits and having regular open days on weekends.

Mike

## Red Rose Group Fertility Benchmarking

The table below displays a summary of fertility data we have access to for the Red Rose Dairy Discussion Group allowing you to see how you perform against the group.

	Herd size	305 day yield	Culling rate	Calving interval	100 day in calf rate	Conception rate	Days to 1st service	21 day Preg rate	Age at first calving
<b>Average</b>	184	9284	32%	394	38%	43%	83	16%	835
<b>Maximum</b>	860	11615	73%	478	54%	61%	143	24%	1085
<b>Minimum</b>	50	5307	13%	365	13%	27%	54	6%	703

## Red Rose Dairy Discussion Group Trip

Last month our annual coach trip took us to Yorkshire. One of the farms we visited was Manor Farm run by the Dickinson family. Here's a round up of our time there...

The Dickinson's run 270 jersey cows on 140 Ha of rented land in a split block calving system to achieve a level milk supply. The cows are split into autumn and spring calving groups and run separately to streamline management, as cows require different treatment at different times of year.

The discussion group was shown the spring calving cows grazing a kale forage crop over the winter. Once the group had calved, they would be slot into the rotational grazing system run on the farm. The spring calving cows are outside all year-round bar for the 14 days prior to calving.



The autumn calving cows were also grazing in a rotational manner around the farm. These cows are calved September - November and housed until early turn out in February and grazed until 21-14 days prior to calving.

As Johne's is a major issue in the jersey breed, the family have taken steps to reduce the spread from cow to cow and from cow to calf. The group was shown an existing building being renovated to house 4 individual calving pens that can be cleaned and disinfected between cows. All cows and heifers are bred to sexed semen if they are low risk for Johne's disease. All other animals are bred to a Hereford beef bull.

The calves start life in individual hutches and then are put into groups of 15 in the existing calf building. The discussion group was shown the calf building where a new fan and duct system was installed last November. The group was told that calf pneumonia rates and overall illness had dropped significantly since this was installed. All jersey cows had coats from day one of life and had them until weaning. The calves are fed on whole milk taken from the bulk tank that is pasteurized as the Dickinson's believe there is no adequate milk replacer for jersey calves.

**The major take home message from this farm was making the most of the resources available to them - grazing stock for as long as possible, and modifying existing buildings to provide the best outcome for the stock on the farm.**



**01772 861300**  
[www.redrosedairydiscussiongroup.co.uk](http://www.redrosedairydiscussiongroup.co.uk)