



The Irish Montbeliarde Journal

Promoting the Irish Montbeliarde and all the many benefits the breed has to offer...



COOPEX MONTBELIARDE, our Know-How



LEADER MONTBELIARDE IN FRANCE

- **85%** of AI in France
- **15 000** Montbeliarde breeders members from 11 AI cooperatives
- Biggest Montbeliarde breeding program:
440 000 recorded cows,
35 000 females genotyped, **2 000** males genotyped
- **2.2 Million** conventional doses
+ **200 000** sexed doses produced
- Coopex Expo : Biggest Montbeliarde Event:
4000 people, farms tour + progeny show

SPECIALIST FOR EXPORT OF MONTBELIARDE



- **650 000** doses sold abroad in 50 countries in 2016
- **7 600** heifers exported in 2016
(Biggest Collection center, 850 places)
- Examples of Coopex experience :
Biggest Montbeliarde Farm in the World with **3000** cows in Russia





The future's
BRIGHT....

the future's
RED and WHITE

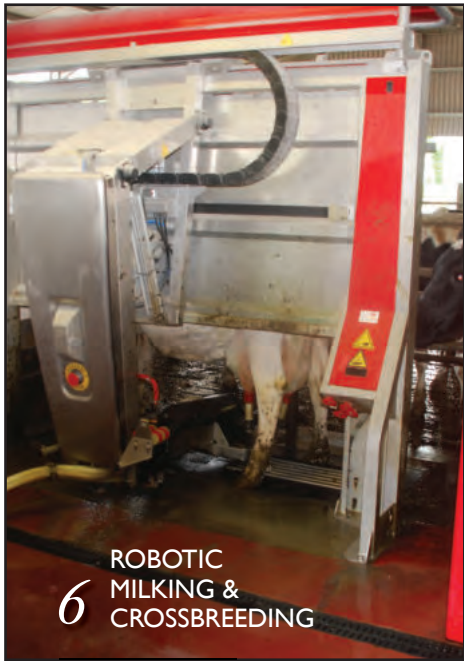
Look no
further than

MONTBELIARDES!

Montbeliarden are renowned for:

- Improved fertility
- Increased longevity
- High milk yields
- High protein levels
- Quality beef calves
- Reduced cell counts
- Increased cheese yields

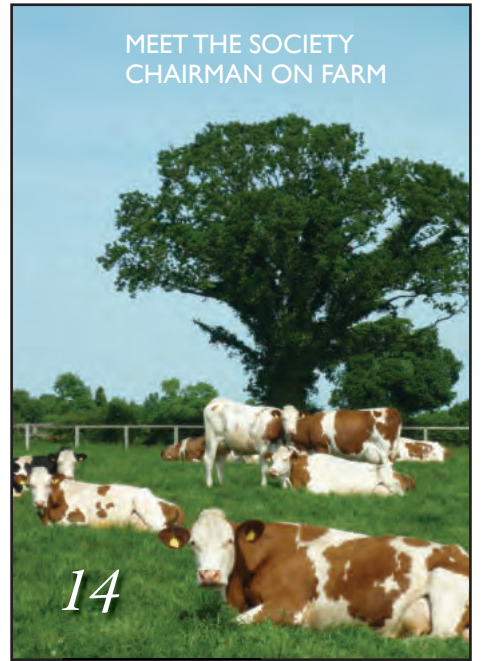
Seeing is believing!



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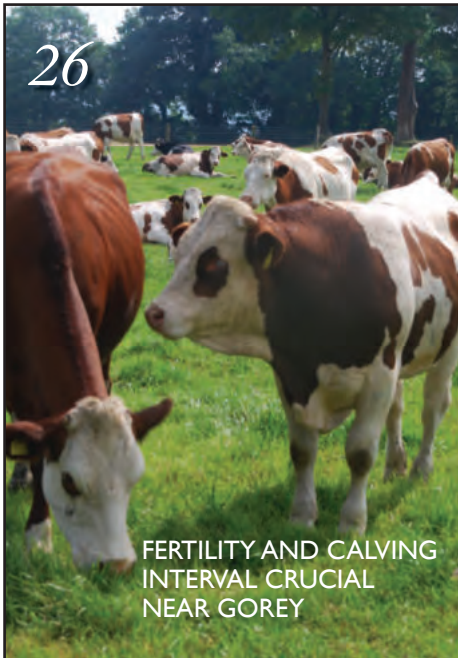


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COLONY MONTBELIARDES - BY THE SEA



ENJOY...

W

elcome to the third edition of the Irish Montbeliarde Journal, the first since 2005.

Since then a lot has changed with the abolition of quotas but the Montbeliarde breed has continued to thrive.

Across the world the breed is growing in popularity.

It is being used in both pure and crossbreeding programs with great success. In France there are over 360,000 recorded cows averaging 7466kg of milk at 3.89% butterfat and 3.45% protein. When used in crossbreeding programs the cows give just as much milk and their Holstein mothers. But the real advantage is their great fertility, calf value, cull cow value and low disease incidence due to their strength.

Having had Montbeliardes on my own farm for the last 15 years or so I have seen all of the advantages of the breed as stated above. Also the Irish Montbeliarde Society has contributed a lot to the success of the breed today. With a lot of committed breeders involved it has been easy to get advice on the breed.

Finally I would like to thank Ann Fitzgerald and Linda Cliffe for helping to put this journal together. For anyone who would like to find out more about the breed feel free to contact any of the committee members.

Best regards,

Kenny Roberts (Society Chairman)

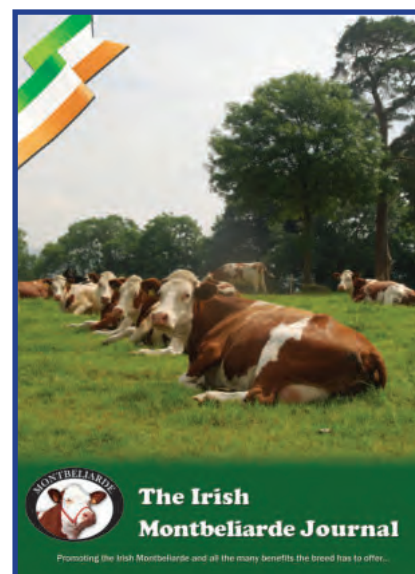
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Both parties welcome members feedback.
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Front cover photograph by Sarah Liddle
of cows content at
Jonathan Williams farm.



COOLELAN MONTBELIARDES

Herd Average: over 6000 litres 4.02% fat and 3.7% protein
109 milking, CI 363 days

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Crossing ticks the right boxes for the Drohan's

Heading down towards the South East and looking out towards the Comeragh Mountains and not far from Ireland's oldest city, Waterford, is home to a fairly large concentration of dairy farms. In a relatively small area you will find three TEAGASC led groups, encompassing over 80 farmer members which on average milk around 135 cows and the majority of these will have doubled in herd size over the last 10 years. Within this dense milk field at Ballynevin, Carrick-on-Suir you'll find the Drohan family, where Mark farms 140 cows with his mother Trish and grandparents Brendan and Margaret.

It's now some 17 years since the dairy cows on this farm started to change. Until then Mark's late father David had milked Holsteins on the farm, with big cows giving lots of milk and ultimately lots of issues, it appeared to be as Mark puts it that the 'wheels were falling off' - "Perhaps it was our fault as much as the cows but we had problems getting calves out, problems getting the cows back in calf and too many twisted stomachs to mention - so we had to change something, and we did look at everything, narrowing our decision down to either Montbéliardes or Normandes. It came down to the fact that there were more good Montbéliarde bred cattle about and we had a chance to buy from Pat Dunphy (latterly of famous Droopys Irish Greyhound stud fame) who had only recently gone into Montys having lost his herd previously to BSE, although we had missed his dispersal sale. Over the years we have come to decide that the right cross bred is the best cow for our farm. We aimed for 50% Holstein and 50% Monty, then we moved away from the Montbéliardes as there were not enough about, we reverted back to the Friesian but that was disappointing, we then had a spell about five to six years ago when we used all Monty semen, and for the last three years we have used about 70% Monty and 30% Holstein - basically we want a cow that is neither all Holstein nor all Monty to work for us here". Without doubt it now appears that the cow to suit this farm has attributes of both the Holstein and the Montbéliarde. When making breeding decisions the resulting type of cow is predominantly decided by the cross of the breed rather than the traits of the bull, in recent times Holstein has been mated to anything looking Friesian like and Montbéliarde has gone on anything with a white head, however, in efforts to maximise the crossbred strengths it is likely that next year it will be back to more of a cross of Monty on the Holstein types and Holstein onto the Monty sorts to maximise hybrid vigour again.

One challenge for dairy farmers constantly gaining momentum in Ireland and further afield is labour - simply there are dwindling numbers of people wanting to milk cows and a severe and growing shortage of skilled labour, in part exacerbated in spring calving Irish herds which have huge seasonal demands for labour, which now adds another positive dimension to the fact that the Drohan's decided and then just over two years ago installed Lely robots. Installing robots was in fact no way related to the Montbéliarde cross cattle on the farm but at the time grants were available through the TAMS scheme, with a buying group established as we were all members of the TEAGASC discussion group and the family

decided a 24/24 rapid exit parlour would cope with herd expansion to 200 cows, lots of time was spent in visiting parlours and dairy facilities (over an 18 month period) and after much consideration and having to travel to Holland as there



Above: The herd is milked by two Lely robotic milkers which were installed by Mark and family.

were virtually no robotic milkers nearby the group virtually en masse decided on Lely robots, with seven out of ten members ordering machines. It was Lely machines over other makes due to their understanding and experience of working with cows still on a grazing system and the back up support offered by the company post installation.

Managing a spring calving herd of cows with robots and grazing certainly brings it own challenges as Mark explains. With two Lely robots installed the machines would be maximised if 160 cows were milked all year round and to this end it is more hassle than it is worth shutting down the robots for any dry period, which has seen cows recycled and kept milking if not in calf - the next step is to introduce an autumn/winter calving group to better utilise the machines. With cows grazing and using the machine visits to the robots show huge variation during the year, when there are lots of fresh cows the average for the herd can be up at 3.6 visits per day, while later in the year, with up to 1.5km to walk from the centre of a paddock to the robot average visits per day can drop below two. Currently the farm operates a two grazing block system - A and B, with 12 hour splits between the two, although a third C paddock is soon to be introduced. The biggest drawback is cows being lazy in the Autumn when grass is plentiful and



Above: A selection of the crossbred youngstock which will be bred to either Friesian or Montbeliarde bulls depending on their current type, markings and appearance.

before buffer feeding is added to the diet, but the aim is with all Lely machines to yield 10 litres per cow per milking.

Mark does mention though that the Red and White coloured (and therefore obviously Monty crossbred cattle) are noticeably more active, if changeover of the grazing gate from paddock A to paddock B is 11am, then more red cows will have been through the robot earlier to transit to the B paddock. While the breed is recognised as having a slightly different temperament - in so much as they prefer 'the carrot than the stick' as Mark puts it, there is no doubt that the Montys are content in robots where they are left to their own devices, although initially they were perhaps a touch harder to train than their black and white counterparts.

The herd is averaging around 6000kg at 4.40% fat and 3.51% protein with milk sold to Glanbia and this is on 160 acres of home land which supports the cows and replacements with a further block of 70 acres six miles away which supplies silage ground and grazing for calves. With heifers away from home stock bulls are run with these, many of which have been sourced from the well known Gobbinstown herd of John and Ann Fitzgerald. While bull calves have been taken through to finishing at 14-16 months of age as space allows one summer at grass not two this is not proving to suit the market and will be stopped to facilitate the move to fit in winter calving cows. Cow numbers on the farm are still continuing to rise following a severe knock due to Schmallenberg virus, which affected nearly half the milking herd, with 40 of the 90 milkers not in calf and subsequently leaving the herd and a further 10 or so also suffered fertility problems - this meant a lot of cows had to be replaced and the herd is still recovering from that unforeseen challenge.

Going forward Mark is conscious of inbreeding and making sure that bulls are not related to previously used stock bulls, and he also needs to ensure the udder conformation is right for the robots, teat placement and the tilt of the udder can cause issues with the sensors and lead to refusals which can hinder the machines performance, for example a cow whose udder tilts further at the back and cuts up to the front may need to be programmed for only two visits per day and then only one visit when in later lactation to mitigate the issue of failures - teat placement is a consideration in proven sire selection and the tipping of calves at dehorning to ensure removal of extra teats is also crucial - the record for the Drohan's is seven teats, with the three extra's being nipped - making sure that only four remain for the robot arm to hone in on in later life when the cow is in productivity.

There is no doubt that the robots have aided the cell count within the herd, Mark is very impressed with the machines ability to isolate information and cell counts on each cow for every quarter at every milking, leading to a herd cell count of under 100, and early indications of issues before a tangible case of mastitis, this is just one area of the robots which is constantly reviewed and discussed within what is now a group of dedicated robotic farming enthusiasts which have now accumulated lots of firsthand experience and knowledge over the last couple of years - in many respects the group of seven who took the plunge to install the machines were the trailblazers in securing milk production in this part of Ireland a couple of years ago - now as Mark says the group can throw ideas, ask questions and buy together with economies of scale while for any other farmers considering the move to robots it's a relatively easy decision which can be seen on a local farm - taking a lot of the time out researching and deciding on the way forward - especially now labour is such a scarce commodity, and as Mark says the crossbred Monty cow can suit the grass based system that it's based on as well.



Above top: A stock bull from the Gobbinstown herd runs with the cows and moves as they do through the paddock system.

Above: Montbeliardes and their crosses have been harder to train on the robots but they have settled and responded to the system well.



ISU'S

how to use the index for your benefit...

In France the current index used to evaluate an animals overall merit is the ISU. It features on every bull proof and is calculated from a number of different factors. ISU's are a useful tool in bull selection and for overall comparisons between different proofs. In general the higher the ISU value the better the animal, although one must always look at the full proof for the entire picture...

ISU is a very similar index to the American Net Worth, and while heavily influenced by production it places emphasis on the functionality of the animal. As with the rest of the world French proofs are published in April, August and December each year, and the ISU has a rolling base which evolves each year.

Production traits form 45% of the ISU value. On the French bull proofs the combined production figure of fat and protein, accounting for both weight and percentages is described by the INEL figure. Production/yield traits are calculated using the Best Linear Unbiased Prediction (BLUP) model that evaluates all the attributes of the selection index, using reference sires and accounting for different environments and the genetic influence to reach final figures for milk, fat and protein both in kilos and as a percentage.

The remaining 55% of the ISU figure is made up of five components:

► Fertility = 18%

The average is 0, with scores of 0 and above (>0) desirable as it indicates more fertile daughters

► Udder Health = 14.5%

► Productive Life = 5%

The average is 0, with scores of 0 and above (>0) desirable as it indicates more functional longevity

Productive life or longevity also incorporates scores for other functional traits including calving ease, temperament and milking speed all of which have scores on any proof.

► Muscularity = 5%

► Type Final Score = 12.5%

The Type traits on the French proofs have 100 representing the average with a standard deviation on the scale of +/- 12.

Type final score is further subdivided into:

► Udder composite (40% of type final score) – again consisting of several factors including fore udder, rear udder height and width, udder balance (tilt between fore and rear udder), udder depth, central ligament, teat orientation and total teat score. All of the factors are scored on a scale with 100 being the average score and any deviations above that suggesting the bull will provide an improvement.

► Body composite (30% of total type score) - is vital in determining the capacity of the animal in terms of intakes and therefore final carcass weight. Body composite includes measures of stature (10% of final body composite), depth of body (10%), chest width (35%) and chest depth (25%).

► Feet and legs composite (15% of type final score) – made up of scores for rear leg set (where 100 is the ideal score) and foot angle which for Montbeliarde needs scores above average indicating improvement. Two newly introduced traits within the feet and legs composite are rear leg rear view and hock thickness.

► Rump composite (10% of type final score) – based on rump width and length and thurl width, which is important for determining the maternal calving ease and rump angle.

► Beef or Muscularity (5% of type final score) – more commonly known as body condition the muscularity is measured both at the withers and the thigh with higher scores indicating better conformation.

With ISUs being so heavily influenced by the production traits forming 45% it is perhaps always worthwhile considering each of the elements that make up the remaining 55% to ensure the bull you select is right for you, and will make the improvements in your herd that you require.

WHAT AN ISU IS MADE UP OF:

45%	Production Traits
18%	Fertility
14.5%	Udder Health
12.5%	Type Final Score
5%	Productive Life
5%	Muscularity

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ECUADOR

the other grazing country...

ECUADOR - THE FACTS AND STATS

Surface :	283 520 km ²
Population :	16.2 million people
Capital:	Quito, located at 2,850 metres above sea level
Exports:	Ecuador is the leading banana exporter worldwide and also produces cacao, coffee and exports a lot of flowers
Farming fits:	Agriculture stands for 6.1% of the GDP and 27.8% of the total active population
Dairying:	The dairy production is spread over three eco-regions that divide the country: the Sierra produces 73%, the Costa produces 18% and the Oriente (or Amazonia) produces 9%
Number of cattle:	4 million
Land use:	11% of the country is cultivated and 18% is used for extensive grazing area
Milk produced:	The milk production per day is 5.4 million litres coming from about 298,000 farms
Milk processors:	44 dairies
Milk price:	Between 0.45 and 0.50 US dollars, which is 0.40-0.44 € (2016-2017)

The dairy industry in Ecuador

There are four million head of cattle in Ecuador where 12% are dairy cattle, 19% are beef cattle and 69% are made of dual-purpose breeds.

On average, milk production per cow is about 5,000 litres per year.

Ecuador has 298,000 dairy breeders where most of them are small or medium size farms: 65% of the milk is produced on farms with less than 100ha.

From the 5.4 million litres produced per day, 2.8 million are processed through dairy factories; 1.2 million is processed to cheese and 1.4 remains on farms for direct consumption and feeding calves.

The Montbeliarde breed : a perfect match in Ecuador

Within the Machachi region, at about 3,100 metres above the sea level, the Montbeliarde breed expands her numbers and fully enjoys the climate and geographic conditions.

In this area, near to Quito, climate is moderate with temperatures through the year between 18 and 30°C in the daytime and 2 to 10°C at nighttime and the altitude is between 2,500 and 3,700 m.

Most of dairy cows are settled here, within herds of 50 to 60 cows on average. Cows are mainly Holsteins but rustic breeds seem to better fit for milk production and living in this hilly and fresh area.

To date, we count approximately 70 farms or haciendas, which use the breed in crossing programs and wish to see their herd evolving into the pure breed.

Very widely appreciated for its hardiness, character and its strength, the Montbeliarde is capable of "surviving" in systems exclusively based on pasture (a mixture of Rye grass, Kikuyu and clover) where it is necessary to walk with a lot of differences in altitude. The other undeniable quality of the breed is her ability to reproduce. By presenting at the same time shorter open days and better fertility, the Ecuadorian breeders are assured of a calf a year and longer milk production.

Breeders' Testimonies:

In Machachi area, the herd is made up of 350 cows with 150 in production.

Located at 3,300m above sea level, the herd is mainly crossed Montbeliarde cows in 3rd generation and more.

The objective of this herd is to get pure Montbeliarde cows since they perfectly fit to the conditions there in terms of climate and relief.

The breeder mainly enjoys the rusticity of the breed "during the drought we had in 2016, only my pure Montbeliarde cows kept their capacity and shape". Hardiness, strength of legs and fertility are other of the breed assets that are making the breeder happy breeding Montbeliarde.

In Cotopaxi area, the farm is made of 45 cows in production, at an altitude of 3,300 m.

The breeder wants to get pure Montbeliarde cows so he has been using this breed on his Brown Swiss and Holstein cows for the last 5 years.

The 3rd generation he has are in their first lactation and produce about 18 litres a day with 3.8% fat.

He likes the strength and resistance of the breed, along with its fertility.

Cows are grazing on 30ha of land all year-round and gets about 3kg of concentrate per day along with a bit of hay and alfalfa.



Above: Cows grazing in the Machachi region.

Below: A Vikos JB's daughter.



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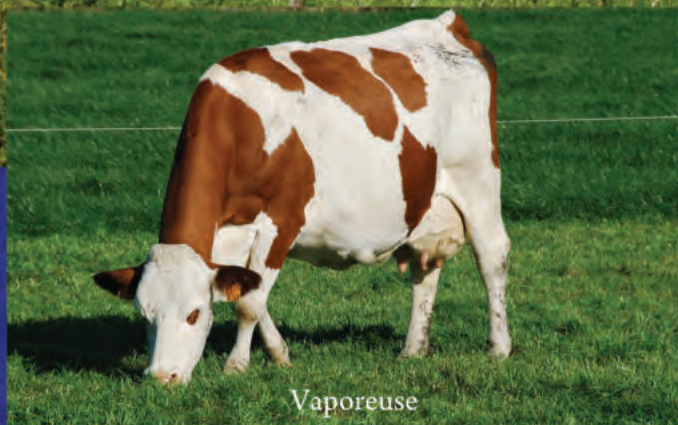
Gneeveguilla ~ County Kerry ~ Ireland





The Colony Montbeliarde Herd

Est 2007



Vaporeuse

*We are a small family farm on the Atlantic coast.
The Bunlahinch Clapper Bridge runs through our farm.*

*Built in the 1840's, it's part of the rich
history of the farm and where the farm name and
herd prefix has grown from.*

*The Colony farm has been in dairying for 60 years
the last 10 years having been reinvigorated by the introduction of Montbeliarde to the herd.
The establishment of a pure bred Montbeliarde herd has given us sustainability into the future, fertility
and herd health are not compromised by high production.*

*We are now fortunate to have excellent breeding stock for sale every Spring,
both in calf heifers and breeding bulls.*

We are very happy to assist anyone with enquiries about the breed.

Richard and Lorena Austin & Family

Louisburgh, Co Mayo

Tel: 087 6994559



Improving on efficiency at Coolelan farm...

Kenny Roberts farms alongside his uncle Roy at Rathangan in Co Kildare. He is the current Chairman of the Irish Montbeliarde Society, and moved from Holsteins to Montbeliardes after returning home to farm in 2001 gradually building numbers along the way to the current herd of 109 milking Montbeliardes...

Having studied at Harper Adams and then worked out in Australia and Wales Kenny returned to the family farm in 2001, keen to experiment with different breeds and move away from Holsteins with the aim being to look for a breed that offered good dual purpose qualities to fit their system. His father had a keen interest in both horses and greyhounds whilst his uncle has always leaned more towards the beef enterprise part of the farm. Kenny experimented with Normande first before purchasing three Montbeliardes, where he recognised the qualities on offer with the breed that would allow them both to continue dairying at Coolelan as well as maintaining the beef enterprise of the business. The transition to Montbeliardes was then two fold, David Clarke supplied Kenny with two batches of 10 and a batch of 15 heifers from France, meanwhile the best of the black and whites were crossed with pure Montbeliarde semen. From 63 cows, herd numbers increased gradually with over 90 milking in the year post quotas to 109 milking today. Kenny explains that around 85% of the herd are now pure bred Montbeliarde with the remaining 15% still crossbreds, although these will continue to diminish in number going forward as he continues to use only Montbeliarde semen for AI.

Restructuring of the farm has also occurred in recent years. Just up the lane from the original farmstead a new shed was erected to house the dairy herd

during winter. 111 rubber matted cubicles were installed which are surface dusted with lime, all on slatted floors with the shed offering the option of splitting it up to three batches to house the milkers and maiden heifers. It also comes complete with a new 20:20 swing over Fullwood parlour and backing gate, and a drafting unit including new crush, improving the handling facilities on the farm and allowing it to be more of a one man operation. Operating on a low input system, the 112 acres allocated to the dairy platform have been split into paddocks of five acres and above with the grazing land all surrounding the new shed. 'Originally the cows would walk up to 50 minutes to pasture, which was a considerable distance and time consuming at either end of the day, whereas now the furthest paddock away from the parlour is no more than 20 minutes away' adds Kenny. From turnout on or around the 10th of February each year, the paddocks are grazed every 21 days using a grasshopper device on the plate meter regularly to obtain grass covers on the farm. In addition the cows are fed in the parlour with a 13% protein, high energy cake, on a rate of 1-4kg depending on yield and stage of lactation with an allocation of 640kg concentrates fed per head per year. During winter grass silage is the main component of the diet and the milkers and in calf heifers are fed on high quality wrapped bales whilst later calving dry cows are fed wrapped round bales of grass silage made from poorer quality fields, which is longer stemmed and saves on incorporating any straw into the dry cow diet.



Above: An Angus sweeper bull is run with the milkers to keep a tight spring calving block and a calving interval of 363 days.

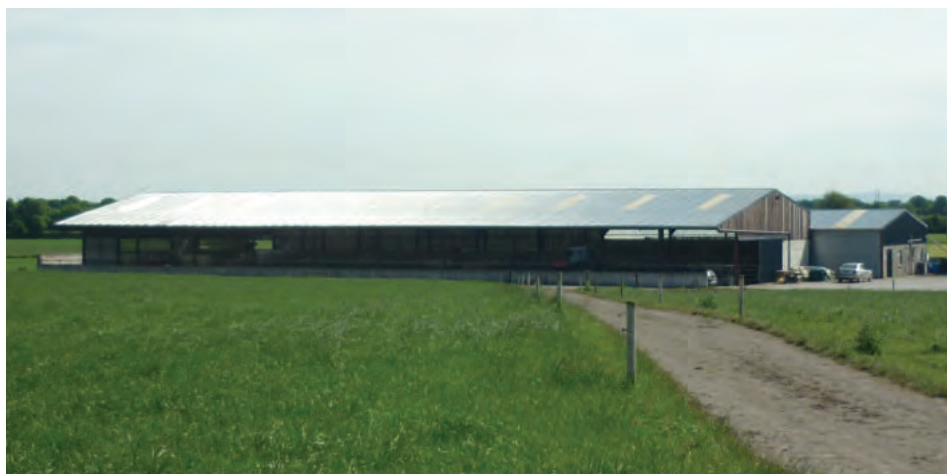
A spring calving herd, as with the majority of herds in Ireland, it is a vital philosophy to keep calving interval down and this is running at 363 days. Calving begins on the 1st of February with 78% of the herd calving in the first six weeks and the remainder calving over March and April with the target to have finished by no later than the 20th April. To keep the calving period tight, cows are served for the first six weeks by AI and then an Angus bull is used as a sweeper with cows scanned and pregnancy diagnosed to ensure they are in calf. With good rates of conception in the Montbeliardes Kenny bases his semen orders on 1.5 straws per cow, although with a surplus of semen left in the flask each year this is likely to be reduced going forward. A second younger Angus bull is also kept on the farm to run with heifers. Kenny aims to breed a medium sized cow with plenty of power as he believes this is the key to maintaining the dual purpose nature of the breed which suits his system best. Current service sires include the genomic sires Ialga and Hummer alongside proven sires Crasat, Ficastone and Elastar, and whilst he has used a little of the genomic sires his focus remains on using proven bulls to guarantee consistency in the replacement heifers bred. Milan, Reddon Brink and Micmac are previous proven sires that have done just that providing consistency in progeny born which has influenced the progress of the herd overall.



Above top: The stamp of Kenny's breeding is apparent in the herd, with cows of medium size showing plenty of strength and power with good udders.
Above: The 20:20 swing over Fullwood parlour and backing gate is just one feature of the new shed that has reduced the labour requirement on the farm, making it suitable for one man to milk on his own.



Above: Kenny Roberts, Society Chairman amongst his milking herd at Coolelan farm.



Above: The dairy unit is all under on roof, including 111 cubicles on slatted floors, parlour and handling facilities.

All calves born are kept with 97 calves reared through last year. 30-40 Monty heifers are reared for replacements, whilst both the beef crosses and Montbeliarde bulls are sold as finished stores direct to a factory at 23-25 months. The beef enterprise coincides well with the spring calving system as calves can spend two summers out at grass on some of the unfavourable land, after the first summer they are brought in with all the bulls castrated over the winter months and housed on slatted yards and after a second summer at grass are brought in again and finished on meal.

With numbers now over 100 milking the herd continues to develop with 30 heifers brought in last year and the oldest cow in the herd milking in her 13th lactation, it is the longevity of the breed that has allowed Kenny to increase numbers in a short space of time, this year some of the older cows will be culled as more replacements will be available and the herd continues to improve. The herd averages 6000 litres per cow at 4.02% fat and 3.7% protein, with Kenny's top producing cow last year yield 9300 litres. In 2016, 5400 litres were sold per cow with the other 600 litres per head of milk used to rear calves. Milk for calves is taken from the parlour in a separate dump line to fill a mini bowser that can then be transported back to the main farm where the young stock are housed. Looking to the future next year will hopefully see investment in an automatic calf feeder and a transition into rearing calves on powdered milk which will be less labour intensive and alleviate pressure on their busy time of year at calving. With only Kenny and his uncle working full time on farm labour is limited and thus it is important to keep things as efficient as possible allowing him to spend time with his wife Ann Marie and two young children Ben, six and Alannah, three.

As Chairman of the Society in Ireland Kenny believes the focus should be on promoting the benefits of the Montbeliarde. As a previous chairman of his local discussion group and still heavily involved with the group it is fascinating to him that his herd of Montbeliardes frequently come back with lower EBI values, however when comparing costings, the herd compares favourably with many of the Holstein herds in the group especially when you consider kilograms of solids, a calving interval of just 363 days on the low input system at Coolelan. Indeed the herd has been in the top 10% of producers supplying Glanbia on protein percentage, calving interval and percentage of heifers calved at 22-26 months.

GOBBINSTOWN HERD

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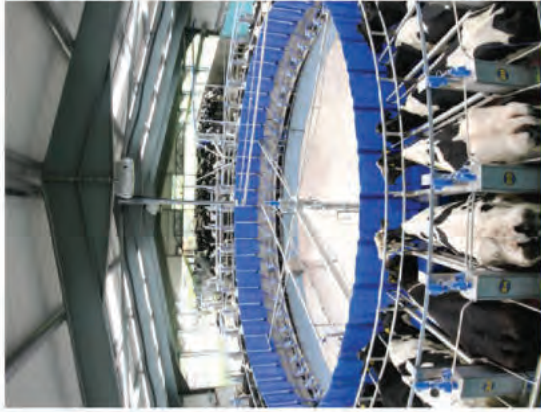
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Montbeliardes on UK Soil...

The Blackcombe herd of Montbeliardes are based in Cumbria just minutes from the West Coast. Michael Wilson and family have built numbers gradually since 2002, Michael is a past chairman of the UK Society and a great advocate for the breed. The Wilsons story so far...

Michael Wilson farms in partnership with his parents, John and Isobel and brother, Brian. Monk Foss farm covers 280 acres with a further 120 acres of rented land all located just a few miles from the Cumbrian coastline and extending from the foot of the Blackcombe fell in the South West corner of the Lake District. Whilst the farm has been within the family for over 150 years, it had up to 2002 been a mixed farm of 60/70 beef cattle, 200 sheep, and a dairy herd of 110 head plus followers. Michael explains that the herd stemmed from the traditional Friesian and then followed the path of the Holstein Friesian and latterly the Holstein which had become almost too extreme for their farm system, at this time they had experimented with going back to using Friesian blood lines with mixed success prompting a change. An advert in the Farmers Guardian for an open day to view the herd of Montbeliardes at Lordswood Farm, Somerset in August 2002 sparked Michael's interest initially in the breed and after attending the event 14 Montbeliardes were purchased from the Lordswood reduction sale a month later in September establishing the Blackcombe Montbeliarde herd. 'Having always had pedigree cattle we never really considered the cross breeding route' Michael explains 'whilst it may have speeded up our transition to Montbeliardes, the breed was in the early stages of becoming established in the UK and staying with two breeds and keeping to pure Montbeliardes I considered exploited the niche offered by the breed which was rapidly growing in popularity. Staying pure bred and pedigree would allow us to market surplus stock and breeding bulls for the increasing

demand which is still the case today'. Over subsequent years purchases from Hilliard Dent (Jomat herd) and importing cattle from France saw numbers of milking Montys increase to around 30 by 2006 forming a quarter of the herd.

Next followed investment in a new 120 cubicle shed at Monk Foss in 2006 allowing cow numbers to further expand by purchasing a small herd of 50 pure and cross bred Montbeliardes from Mr Davis in Warwickshire, then again in 2011 and 2012, another 26 Monty's were imported from France and Michael visited Southern Ireland purchasing just over 20 in calf heifers and fresh cows, the majority sourced from John and Ann Fitzgerald at Gobbinstown and the Hanbidge Family at Brockna. With 70 pure Montbeliardes and 110 Holsteins milking in 2012, Michael was asked to make a presentation comparing the two breeds whilst on a trip out in France. 'With the herd heading towards a 50:50 split it proved an interesting exercise, comparing the two breeds on the same management system lead us to the decision to slowly phase the black and whites out altogether' Michael adds, '2015 provided us with an opportunity to sell the majority of the remaining Holsteins to a local farmer and we replaced them all with Montbeliardes, purchasing two further groups from France including a full herd of 67 head, ranging from milking animals right down to youngsters, buying whole herds is preferential to just purchasing odd individuals as groups settle and integrate into the existing herd far easier.'

The 220 milking herd today are split into high and low yielding groups, whilst the low group of about 90 graze from April to October the high yielders remain inside. The farm like many others continues to strive to monopolise on maximising the forage available and reducing concentrate usage and good quality grass silage is also a must for the Wilsons. With the high's remaining inside cow welfare and comfort is important, installing rubber matting in the passageways and raising the feed trough slightly have been two welcome modifications to the cubicles. Milked twice daily and fed dairy cake in the parlour to yield, the general TMR for the cows consists of 25kg of grass silage, 8kg of whole crop, 1.5kg of a 36% protein blend and 5.5kg of caustic wheat, the target is to keep protein levels high in the diet to maintain both yield and components whilst also managing the body condition score, which can be difficult with a hungry Montbeliarde! Feeds are purchased through NWF and they assist with the ration formulation to maintain a consistent diet throughout the year. Keen to maximise intakes the floor of the silage troughs are ceramic tiled to encourage the cows to clean up and they are currently trialling a 'compact' TMR mix, adding water to the blend, wheat and whole crop on a 1kg of dry mix to 1kg of water basis, the mix is left to soak for around 12 hours before the grass silage is then added just prior to feeding. The Wilsons have already noticed increased intakes and far less sorting of feed in the trough since they started. Also new this year is a plan to take five cuts of grass as opposed to the usual four, gathering it all with forage wagons and then clamping in the three available silage pits. Cutting every five weeks as opposed to six, first cut went into the clamp around the 3rd of May and the final cut will be in mid September. It is hoped they will achieve first class silage from the younger grass and more consistent quality across all five cuts, with an average rainfall on farm between 1800-2000mm per year this may seem a challenge, but Michael is confident it is achievable and comments 'we are fortunate to have a mixture of both light and heavy soils around the farm which will hopefully assist us as we can take the later cuts off the lighter soils when other ground on the farm might be too wet to travel

on.' Calving is all year round for the herd although there is a bias towards Autumn calving and going forward they intend to increase numbers calving in this period. It offers two major benefits, firstly milk is at a premium at that time of year and as they head into winter months they will be on a consistent and high performance diet and similarly it will see an increased proportion of the herd going out to graze at turnout time further utilising and maximising forage available on the farm.

Supplying Arla for the last two and a half years Michael admits their milk contract and associated stipulations has had an influence in both business decisions and breeding choices. The herd is currently averaging 8461 litres at 4.04% fat and 3.42% protein, running at 644kg of combined fat and protein per cow per lactation. Somatic cells average 183, which they are keen to reduce through selective dry cow therapy and scrupulous teat preparation at drying off time.

Always looking to breed a strong cow with a natural will to milk, the selection criteria for sires is first and foremost for yields of fat and protein, whilst a positive score on fertility is also a must and all the ISU figures are taken into consideration. Sires that have already made their mark on the herd include the top names Nikos, Triumph, Redon and Urbaniste, whilst heifers calving at the moment are by Brink and Crasat, Michael preferring the Brink daughters that have calved, but his partner Laura favours the Crasats with Ekedid and Cardiff JB daughters still to calve. Bulling heifers are bred from Hyper, Harnay, Hummer and Dolley, with the most recent calves on the farm including



Above top: A grand daughter of Gobbinstown Rhona EX92 by Crasat she is an exciting prospect for the future.

Above: The latest stockbull sired by Harnay he is a son of Blackcombe Philipine 4, who has produced over 53,000kg of milk in five lactations.



L-R: John, Michael and Brian Wilson farm the Blackcombe herd in partnership.

both Gulilluxe and Cortil daughters. The family has always looked to use the top bulls to ensure the best genetic gain with each generation and they consider that the UK breeders are fortunate to have both Coopex and Jura Betail offering such a range of sires in the competitive market. The cows and heifers are bred using a Coopex mating programme, with Ferreol Roche visiting at least once a year to discuss bulls, view the herd and update the programme accordingly. Keen to exploit the best of all worlds, the Wilsons have also selected a batch of 50 heifers to mate to Jura Betail sires. Bulls in the flask at the moment are Hummer, Harnay, Flipex JB, Jalgary JB, Impec, Jilbeer and Jombrink JB. Using a selection of bulls from across the two companies may also identify outcrosses and with no need to keep all your eggs in just one basket! Sexed semen is used on heifers with an age at first calving at the moment sitting around 28 months and the target is to reduce it to 25 months. A heifer will have two straws of sexed semen before being turned to the Hereford bull. With stock bulls always in demand the cows are only served with conventional semen and the bottom third of the herd are mated to Belgian Blue.

One of the well documented benefits of the breed is increased calf value and cull cow value, selling calves at the local auction market once a month; Belgian Blue crosses range between £400-450, with the Herefords between £350-380 and pure Monty bulls £280-300. Looking at last year's costings, calf sales at Monk Foss provided an added 2.85p/litre and cull cows sold followed closely behind adding a further 2.8p/litre, which is a welcome addition to the farms bottom line when the milk market is volatile.

In recent years the herd has enjoyed numerous successes in both the Cumbrian Milk records competition and the UK Montbeliarde Society National Milk records competition. At this last year's Cumbrian Milk records dinner a daughter of Gobbinstown Rhona EX92, Blackcombe Rhona was the highest yielding heifer in the coloured breeds, whilst in the Society competition Brockna Sally has secured the title of Best purebred cow for 305d weight of fat and protein for two consecutive years, showing the strength of two original Irish purchases, and the Blackcombe herd has been the best herd on both milk yield and on overall production for the last two years. Michael concludes that whilst these awards are gratefully received and recognition of the results they are achieving, it is not something the family is focussed on, they would rather turn their attention to the farm costings and where improvements in efficiency can be made. Kite consultants provide costings every six weeks and they are an invaluable tool for the business, not only so the Wilsons can control costs and monitor fixed costs, but it is also good to have a fresh pair of eyes look at the business and bring new ideas. Looking to the future there are many ideas on paper to come to fruition both in the short and long term. The long term will see surplus heifers sold on a regular basis and possibly a new shed to rear an increasing number of Blackcombe bulls to meet market demands, they currently rear and sell around six bulls a year. With the ever changing world of science Michael is keen to see the influence of genomics on the herd and although he has already been using genomic bulls in the herd there is a genuine interest in genomic testing some of the herd's top females. In the shorter term and returning to the goal of maximising forage, investment is planned in laying cow tracks and operating more of a paddock system, this will also rely on the installation of more water troughs, which for a farm that is not on a mains water supply (instead it is supplied direct from the fell and natural springs), will no doubt provide a challenge! On the other hand it will improve farm/forage efficiency and save a lot of time moving electric fences! Heifers from bulling age upwards are cubicle housed over winter, with grants obtained in the past funding rubber mattresses in some of the cubicle houses and further matting to be installed this year to increase cow comfort of the old mattresses. Also planned for this year is to cover two of the silage pits which again has been partially grant funded. All this and with five cuts of silage to make it will be a busy 12 months for the Wilson family!

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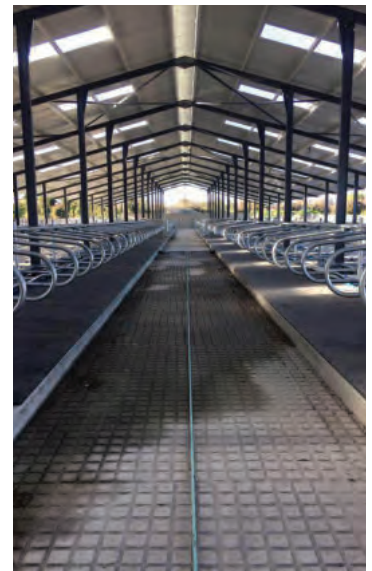
Pictured are John and Ann FitzGerald with family, Glanbia reps & NDC reps.



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Maximising output through Spring calving

For Jonathan Williams, a third generation farmer his 130 cow Montbeliarde herd is all about simple efficiency. The breed suits the system, enabling him to maximise output with a Spring calving herd. Limited in numbers by the 100 acres of owned land around the farmhouse and buildings and an additional owned block of 30 acres about 1.5 miles away, and limited to the manpower of Jonathan and a relief milker - the Montbeliarde has furnished him with the type of cow he wants and is profitable. Up until 2009 the herd at Barnadown was much the same as many in the region, calving all year round and in the parlour 365 days a year. However since then a conscious decision was made to run a tight Spring calving herd.

This sees what many would consider a ruthless attitude - regardless of how good a cow is if she is not in calf after the nine weeks of serving then she will be sold out of the herd at the end of her lactation. Based on this year's Herd Plus figures 135 calves were born from 130 calvings, and 33 heifers calved in at an average of one year eleven months of age over a period of five weeks and five days from 6th February. Meanwhile the cows calved also from 6th February over 8 weeks and 2 days with 95% (124 cows) calving in the first six weeks. After switching the parlour off by 1st December with all cows dried off over the last week of November, by early February work is intensive for Jonathan. This year the cows peaked at 28.5 litres and for a six week period at the start of February onwards a relief milker is drafted in for morning milking and bedding up cubicles etc to lighten Jonathan's workload.

However things can almost be as busy during the serving season - in an effort to make the whole herd 100% Montbeliarde any Black and white cows are served to Belgian Blue together with any cows which Jonathan does not plan to breed from or milk the following season - these will then be sold as sucklers to local beef farmers. Cows will have two chances to AI - with Ferreol from Coopex selecting four sires and making the mating recommendations. A stock bull; a bull calf which has been kept from the previous seasons calving is then put with the cows while the Angus who has run with the heifers for three weeks following their single service to AI then runs with the cows as well until 1st July when all bulls are removed. The cows and heifers will then be scanned in August with any barrens then milked through until drying off, at this time cast cows average circa 900 Euros which Jonathan is aware he could increase by feeding them up and keeping them on, but with the farm at capacity and stocking density maxed out this is not an option.

Similarly this is true for replacements - which are minimal and as per requirements

due to limited space and manpower. The herds replacement rate runs at 23% and there are 36 yearlings now served to calve in Spring 2018, with another 36 heifer calves at grass from this year's calving period. With such limited space any surplus females and all bull calves are sold straight from the farm. This is another income stream enhanced by the Montbeliarde breed - bull calves are sold at a week old to average about 260 Euros, and the extra females (particularly any born after 10th March each year which will not then be an age to calve at around



Above: A hembred stock bull is reared from the previous calving season to run with the milking herd up until the 1st of July each year.

two years old within the six week heifer calving window) are sold to average around 400 Euros. At this time of year focus can be on the main milking group of 129 cows and there are only then two other groups of stock to check at grass.

The ability to run a mere 368 day calving interval Jonathan puts down to a number of factors. The inherent fertility within the breed is one component. For sure when comparing this herds performance against other farmers within the 15 farmer strong Tinahely Discussion Group (which is part of the Agricultural Catchment programme run by TEAGASC to encourage Farmer Engagement and Knowledge Transfer) then fertility in his herd is exceptional and higher than many herds with other breeds.

Furthermore, keeping the herd in good condition and well fed with a positive energy balance is crucial. The herd is fed a flat rate of 4kg concentrates per day during lactation, this is easier done in the parlour at milking with grass and silage the other diet mainstays. Jonathan also considers the feeding of his fodder beet and sugar beet mix very important in maintaining energy in the diet of the fresh cows. 150 tonnes of imported fodder beet, washed and chopped is purchased in one go- this is mixed with an articulated lorry load of sugar beet nuts at the rate of 5:1 and ensiled, with it



Above top: The cows are only in for a limited time at milking through the summer months, so in the collecting yard there is opportunity to buffer feed the herd whilst they are waiting to be milked.

Above: Cows will lay outside for as long as possible, minimising the time spent in cubicles, which is believed to play an important role in controlling cell counts.



Above: Jonathan Williams amongst his now spring calving milking herd that are averaging 6685kg at 3.77% fat and 3.42% protein.



Above: One of two groups of heifers that are to check daily, having only two groups allows Jonathan to focus fully on the milking herd.

eed from about 10 days into the calving season, once in effect milk is going into the tank. This provides valuable energy preparing the cows to be bred again.

Meanwhile with the target age at first calving at 23-24 months ensuring the livestock are well grown is also important and from turnout at around three months of age until they are scanned in calf they receive 2 kg/head of meal a day. All this means that the cows during their dry period can be low maintenance - at this time around one third of their diet comes from straw, no concentrates are fed, the cubicles are only dusted every three days with lime as there is no milk leakage on the matted beds and inputs are minimal.

The herds rolling average sits at 6685kg per cow at 3.77% fat and 3.42% protein with a combined weight of fat and protein of 481kg and as far as challenges and emphasis for the future Jonathan wants and is consciously trying to improve the herds milk solids particularly the fat - not only is it a tangible breeding objective but it is also something more exposed by the herds calving profile - especially when the herd is all very fresh and at peak production- incorporating more straw into the ration has been considered but this must not be at the detriment of yield or fertility. The inclusion of a Vitamin and Mineral supplement including high levels of Vitamin E has been very successful with the dry cows - resulting in calves showing more vigour from birth and thriftiness and cows are quicker to milk with less calving issues.

Similarly in recent years Jonathan has actively been soil sampling, now boosting Potassium and particularly Phosphorus in the soil - this has visibly improved the grass grown on the farm. A single cut of clamp silage is taken, while now the contractor may come to bale and wrap grass on the farm up to five or six times in one season. Jonathan does his own mowing and anytime there is extra grass which is getting ahead of grazing he will cut to make sure re-growth is immediate. This can be fed as needed and at this time of year when the cows are maybe only inside for a couple of hours around milking either end of the day - they can be buffer fed on this silage at feed barriers both in the collecting yard and in the main shed. With so much of the herd at high levels of production they are kept out of the cubicles in a bid to control cell counts - which run at a mere herd average of 68,000.



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Does crossbreeding have a place in modern UK dairy systems?...

Lora Fryars BVSc MRCVS completed her final year Veterinary degree dissertation studying the performance of Montbeliarde cross Holsteins on British farms. Here are extracts from that project, based on the findings of her practical research, the full article together with all references and supporting documents can be found at www.montbeliardeuk.co.uk. We thank Lora for allowing us to reproduce some of her work here.

Overview

Lactational production indicators, namely 305 day milk yield, milk composition (% butterfat, % protein), and fertility (number of services per conception) were compared between Montbeliarde cross Holstein (MX) cattle and pure Holstein (H) cattle. The data was collected from 12 farms across the west of England which had both H and MX cattle on the same farm. The farms were categorised into systems, so that the traits could be evaluated and breeds compared in each system. Farmers' perceptions of various traits for MX and H were also collected and correlated with the corresponding data.

It was found that MX had a higher butterfat and protein percentage and required fewer services per pregnancy on TMR and partial TMR systems; however, this was accompanied by lower 305d milk yields (kg), total protein (kg) and total butterfat (kg) yields. On the grazing system, MX required fewer services per pregnancy achieved, and had higher 305d milk yields, yielding larger amounts of protein and butterfat (kg) during a lactation.

Overall Montbeliarde X cattle performed best on a grazing system ($p < 0.05$) whilst Holstein cattle performed best on a TMR system.

Background

The Holstein dairy breed is championed for producing vast quantities of milk, and as such, has dominated the UK dairy industry since the Second World War. Over the years farmers have genetically

selected for and successfully increased the yields produced by the Holstein breed. Since then however, a direct relationship between increased milk yield and the deterioration of fertility, cow health, mobility and longevity has been recognised, alongside a significantly reduced genetic pool in the Holstein breed. This dependence on one breed makes dairy farming unusual when compared to other food producing sectors. Beef cattle, pigs, sheep and poultry all exploit crossbreeding and heterosis to create high producing, durable and commercially superior animals. So it seems a logical progression that the dairy industry would also start to utilise other breeds in their herd genetics.

In response to the decline in functional traits, as well as more recent industry pressures, there has been an increasing trend towards crossbreeding within modern UK dairy herds.

Current research demonstrates that crossbreeding the Holstein with other dairy breeds can improve fertility, survivability, lameness and milk constituents. Cow and udder health have also been demonstrated to be improved by crossbreeding as well as an increased feed efficiency - although this is open to debate. Conversely, crossbreeding has shown a reduction in 305 day milk yield. With all of this considered, a number of reports demonstrate that crossbreeding may lead to an overall more profitable business with the possible added benefit of reducing the environmental footprint.

Montbeliarde cross Holstein dairy cattle

In the UK, a number of farmers have started crossbreeding with the Montbeliarde. This breed combination creates an animal with similar stature to the Holstein but with an increased body condition score.

Montbeliarde cross Holsteins are reported to have better fertility and fewer days open than pure Holsteins. Studies have also shown them to have higher survival rates and reduced cull rates.

Whilst there are several benefits to this crossbred animal, studies suggest, these are traded off for a lower milk yield. Montbeliarde cross Holsteins have higher fat and protein percentage composition of milk when compared to Holsteins according to two separate studies. However, one of the studies showed that the higher percentage of butterfat and protein observed with Montbeliarde cross cattle is accompanied by a lower butterfat-plus-protein production in kilograms due to the overall reduced yield. Conversely, a separate study stated that "the 'Montbeliarde cross Holstein' cows were not different from pure 'Holstein' cows for fat-plus-protein production during any lactation". Contrasting studies have also described a difference in somatic cell counts (SCC) for the two breeds.

With all the factors combined, the overall profitability of Montbeliarde cross Holsteins was shown to be significantly greater than that of the Holstein in a study comparing 1491 animals across three herds in California, whilst it is generally accepted that crossbreeding could be more profitable in forage based systems.

The study

Research investigating crossbreeding the Holstein with the Montbeliarde is fairly limited with little reported from the UK.

The aims of this study were to establish whether current research regarding Montbeliarde cross Holsteins, in other areas of the globe, translates to what can be found in the UK dairy herd with a different climate and management to their overseas counterparts. A secondary objective was to investigate, how the Montbeliarde cross compares to the purebred Holstein within the various different dairy systems found in Britain and how the farmers managing those systems perceived the two breeds.

The performance of Montbeliarde cross Holstein and purebred Holsteins were compared for 305 day milk yield, services to positive pregnancy diagnosis and the butterfat and protein composition in 1458 cows, on 12 farms, categorised into three management systems based on the method of feeding cattle; TMR, Partial TMR and grazing. This data was then correlated with the perceptions of farmers' managing those systems.

Farm selection and data collection

Data was collected from farms which had both Montbeliarde cross Holsteins (MX) and pure Holsteins (H) milking on the same farm within the same herd. The requirements dictated that the feeding regime, parlour, housing and management were the same for the two breeds and that regular milk recording was carried out on the farm. Only first and second cross MX were recruited in the study (i.e. HxM and HxMxM).

Data was collected for 305 day milk yield, butterfat and protein percentage (average over 305 days) and number of services for individual animals. If the cow had not done 305 days of lactation, the projected 305 day yield, butterfat and protein was used.

Farmers' were then requested to complete a questionnaire about the management programme on the farm from birth to milking, including questions about the feeding at all stages of the animals life, parlour routine and housing arrangement. As part of the questionnaire the farmers' had to score MX and H, for eight different traits, on a 1-5 scale. A score of one would indicate the least favourable, and five, the most favourable.

Farms were then categorised into one of three categories as follows;

- 'TMR' – Cattle must be housed year-round, and fed a mixed ration of forages

and grains/concentrates (+/- vitamins/minerals/additives) without additional concentrates fed in the parlour.

- Partial TMR – Farms may graze their cattle at certain times of the year and feed a mixed ration of forages and grains/concentrates (+/- vitamins/minerals/additives). In parlour feed was accepted in this category.

- Grazing – Farms that either grazed all year round, or housed in the winter on forage based diet. Feeding concentrates in the parlour was accepted for this category.

Twelve farms and 1458 animals were considered suitable for recruitment to the study. After the farms were categorised into systems, there were 153 H and 23 MX in the TMR system, 616 H and 420 MX in the partial TMR system and 149 H and 97 MX in the grazing system.

Conclusion

The results displayed in this paper demonstrate that on a UK grazing system a Montbeliarde cross provides superiority over the Holstein for almost all traits. It would therefore be reasonable to expect that the Montbeliarde cross would be the most profitable animal on a grazing system.

On a partial TMR system, whilst milk yield, total butterfat and total protein were shown to be lower, the results correlate closely with a large study in California (which demonstrated the reduced yield was balanced by fertility, cull cow values and longevity to produce a more profitable animal).

Finally, this dataset showed that out of all three systems the Holstein was most suited to the TMR system, however profitability of each breed is difficult to comment on, whilst milk yield, protein and butterfat yield is higher for the Holstein on this system, the Montbeliarde cross still outperformed the Holstein for fertility.

Hybrid vigour was not accounted for in this report due to the dataset available. The majority of farmers involved in this study were only a few years into their crossbreeding ventures; however, it would be interesting to study how the 3rd and 4th generation crosses perform in the future to further aid farmers in their breeding decisions.

Farmers' perceptions

In a study of farmers' perceptions; farmers scored H and MX out of five for 8 different traits. A score of '1' was considered the least favourable and '5' considered most favourable.

System	Breed	Yield	Quality	Lameness	Fertility	Calving ease	Temp.	Cow health	Calf health	Overall score
TMR	H (avg.)	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.50	4.00	3.00	3.50	27.00
	MX (avg.)	2.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.50	3.50	3.00	25.00
Difference	MX-H	-2.00	0.00	+1.00	0.00	-0.50	-0.50	+0.50	-0.50	-2.00
Partial TMR	H (avg.)	4.64	3.00	2.71	2.43	3.36	4.14	2.86	3.50	26.64
	MX (avg.)	4.21	4.29	3.71	4.29	4.29	4.00	4.43	4.14	33.36
Difference	MX-H	-0.43	+1.29	+1.00	+1.86	+0.93	-0.14	+1.57	+0.64	+6.72
Grazing	H (avg.)	4.00	2.67	3.00	2.00	3.33	4.33	2.00	2.33	23.66
	MX (avg.)	4.67	4.00	3.00	3.33	4.00	3.33	4.00	4.00	30.33
Difference	MX-H	+0.67	+1.33	0.00	+1.33	+0.67	-1.00	+2.00	+1.67	+6.67
Overall mean difference	MX-H	-0.59	+0.87	+0.67	+1.06	+0.37	-0.55	+1.36	+0.60	+3.80

Average (mean) farmer perception scores out of five comparing MX and H in different systems for eight traits



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GAEC des Chardonnerets, one of France's best...

In February 2017, Coopex went to the Alps to see how the Montbeliarde breed is managed there. The GAEC des Chardonnerets, is one of the farms which was visited by several delegations from Europe and the Middle East. This family farm is run by three full time people: Isabelle with her husband Jean-Yves and her brother Gérard manage 85 milking cows and 120 head of youngstock on 160 ha mostly grazing land. Since 1954, the PELLIGRINI-PASCAL family have always worked with the Montbeliarde breed in their herd, because of its dairyness, good health traits and nice type which suit perfectly their breeding system. A long-lasting cow which produces well quantity wise and quality wise with high fertility to stay profitable as long as possible in their grazing system. For them, the ideal cow is the invisible one which isn't really noticed in the herd.

They are always focused on solid contents and low cell count, as they sell all their milk to a Cheese Cooperative producing Raclette, Tomme and Emmental de Savoie. They have a greater price advantage for protein percent than for fat percent, in these conditions they reached an average of 3.85% fat and 3.54% protein during 2016 -2017. They are very strict with cows having udder health problems (mastitis) because they want to guarantee a low cell count. Last year, they averaged a score of 89; which is really low, enabling them to get another bonus on their milk price. Every year they deliver around 740 000 L of milk to their Cooperative where they have 2 quotas (A and B being respectively 80% and 20%). Concerning milk payment, A and B quotas don't get the same base price. Due to the high solids percentage and low somatic cell count, GAEC des Chardonnerets succeeds to get a final price of 454€/T of milk for A quota and of 250€/T of milk for B quota. Even if milk quality is important for the milk price, Isabelle & Jean-Luc don't want to lose quantity. In the last two years, they reached around 8700 kg/cow in 305 days. They notice that it is an adapted level of production

with a balance between productivity and health traits. Jean Luc explains that they get very few lame cows or hypocalcemia. Isabelle confirms that she is very careful on feet and legs, she likes it when cows have great locomotion. Due to the farm organisation and the grasslands, she doesn't want to push lame cows to the pasture when they go grazing a bit further away from the farm, and even worse, she really doesn't like to wait for these same lame cows when they come back to the shed for milking. Jean-Yves oversees the fertility management of the milking herd and young stock as well. A good fertility management plan is a key component for successful dairy herd management. Improving herd fertility allows them to sell more milk per year and reduces the number of cows being involuntarily culled for fertility problems. Montbeliarde cows show heats very well so heat detection is easier. On the farm, 71% of cows are pregnant after the first AI, they use 1.25 straws/pregnancy and the Calving Interval is 385 days. 90% of sold cows are sold in milk and continue to produce in other farms for several lactations.



Above: During the Group Coopex Show, nine countries had delegations pictured with a Hollywood Ulemo Daughter.

It is a good way to make money for them as they like to breed lots of heifers and select them after calving.

For a few years, Isabelle and Jean-Yves' sons, Loïc and Quentin, who are still studying at college, have become more involved on the farm. They are very keen on participating in some local and national shows. It works very well for them, excellent results are reached with some NIKOS, REDON or FADIL daughters but the most famous one is Hollywood (ULEMO daughter) who won the Best Udder Prize at Swiss Expo, Lausanne (Switzerland) in January 2016, 1st Prize at the Paris show in February 2017 and more recently Grand Champion at the Prestige National Show in May 2017. She is an outstanding cow, very well classified and also involved in the UMOTEST-COOPEX breeding program. This excellent ULEMO daughter produced in her second lactation 305 days, 10,455 kg with 3.94% fat and 3.57 % protein. She will most likely reach more than 12,000 kg in her third one in 305 days. Hollywood is one of the best genotyped ULEMO daughters in France with an excellent milk potential and super type, especially for udder traits.

For the Coopex farm tour, the GAEC des Chardonnerets decided to prepare a nice group of cows to show the high quality of the full milking herd. 25 cows had been washed and clipped to be exhibited to all visitors, they were classified by rank of lactation from very fresh first calvers to more mature cows in their 6th and 7th lactation. All visitors were very impressed by the udder qualities, because on this farm,



Above: Hollywood Ulemo daughter Grand Champion National Prestige Show May 2017.

Below (right): Gaec Des Chardonnerets one of the Top herds for Udder Traits group of cows shown during the Coopex Farms Tour.

Hollywood is not an exception at all. Lots of REDON, URBANISTE, ULEMO, BRINK, BOURGUEIL daughters but also the newest CRASAT and HARPER daughters were representing the crème de la crème of mammary systems.

At the end of our visit, everybody got satisfaction and pleasure from tasting all the great cheeses produced from their milk with fondue and raclette. It was lovely to mix Montbéliarde breeders from different countries, happy to share their experiences with the breed around some cheese and a glass of wine.



Above: The visit to Gaec des Chardonnerets finished with wine and cheese in the cow shed.





MONTBELIARDE OPEN DAYS

COWS...MEET...EAT...



Sustainability is just as important as efficiency...

Richard Austin must have one of the most picturesque farm locations in Ireland, just half a mile from the Atlantic coast looking out on Clare Island and just outside Louisburg, Co. Mayo. Whilst the views are stunning a massive annual rainfall of 1.4m (4' 8") can prove challenging on the 100 acre farm that has been in the Austin family for generations dating back to the late 1800's. Richards philosophy of 'making the very best of what you have' alongside being a strong advocate for family farms has seen him modify the farm, renovate the farm house and change from Friesians to a milking herd of Montbéliardes since he moved to the farm in 1986.

When Richard first moved to the Colony to farm with his uncle they were milking just 24 Friesian cows, with the herd numbers very slowly expanding to 35 cows by 2000, at the time Richard explains that the cows didn't seem to be lasting and to maintain numbers they were continuously buying in replacements. He doesn't blame the cows as much as perhaps the system, either way he made a conscious decision to look at other breeds/crossbreeds that were hardy enough to suit the farm. The transition to Montbéliardes began in early 2007 and following a trip to France with Montbéliarde farmer Eric Kingston from Co. Cork, David Clarke imported 13 close to calving French heifers for Richard, with a further five brought in the following year and seven maiden heifers purchased in 2009 from Ireland.

Since 2009 the herd has remained closed with numbers organically growing year on year to 60 head in the milking herd today. In addition 20 in calf heifers are due to calve in at two years old in Spring 2018 and 20 heifer calves and 10 bull calves (which are sold on for breeding) are reared each year on the farm.

Keeping the Montbéliardes pedigree the same as the Friesians always had been, Richard has found the breed is highly productive and well suited to the farm. 'The French cows really stood the test of time with three of the 2008 batch still milking in the herd in their 10th lactation and above and they have all been bred again for calving next spring' adds Richard. Indeed from the initial 25 cows bought there are now 55 descendants in the herd today. One of his favourite French cows is another great example of the longevity offered by the breed, Vaporeuse was sired by Theo (a young test bull) and imported as an in calf heifer, she went on to milk for 10 lactations with a lifetime production of over 65,000 litres of milk, breeding four bulls all of which were sold on for breeding and four daughters all of which are still in the herd today. The herd is currently averaging 6,700 litres at 4.08% fat and 3.52% protein, with his current top producer Colony Stephany born in February 2010, recording 8000 litres in her last completed lactation at 4.2% fat and 3.6% protein, yielding 620kg of milk solids, she is now milking in her sixth lactation. Over half of the milking herd are in their fourth lactation and above, with Richard's replacement rate running at about 20% which takes into account his policy on selective culling. 'The Montbéliardes are reaching their potential as they are lasting longer' says Richard. His empty rate runs between five and six percent with cull cows fattened over the winter months. Similarly high cell count cows are culled out of the herd with Richard strongly believing this is the best way to bring your cell counts down, 'by milk recording and removing any problem cows from the equation we have now got our SCC down below 70 with TBC consistently in single figures' he adds.

Working mainly on his own on the farm apart from help provided by a student during the busy summer months, when there is a large amount of tractor work and some weekends, Richard believes sustainability is the



Top to Bottom: Three functional cows exemplifying the tight udders in the herd today, all descendants of the initial 25 purchased to start the herd of Montbéliardes.

key. The farm buildings are designed for effectiveness and efficiency – the ‘U’ shaped shed housing the cubicles is slatted with rubber mats on cubicle beds and has automatic scrapers, and it joins onto the collecting yard and 10x10 side by side Dairymaster parlour that was installed new in 2000, so the cows are never far away during winter, with Richard admitting he will be one of a minority of farmers that enjoys farming in winter nearly more than in summer. With wet soil and a heavy annual rainfall there is only about six months of the year when grass can be utilised on the farm, so optimising grass growth is critical. 80 acres of land has been worked and drained to offer better grazing/silage ground, whilst the other 20 acres of rough grazing is used to rear young stock and beef crosses on. All the silage work is done ‘in house’ with Richard sharing resources with a neighbouring farmer allowing him to cut and bale silage when the ground is just right and then it is a race to apply slurry and get the grass growing again.

Operating a spring calving block between February and April, the milking herd graze on a rotational system whereby the land is in fields sized between one and eight acres and divided by strip wires, wherever possible the cows will graze three times before the wire is moved, offering flexibility in the grazing pattern around the farm. During the summer months the cows are also fed a flat rate in the parlour on a 14% Protein, high energy dairy nut,



Above top: Belgian blue heifers are reared and sold as in calf heifers to suckler herds, an important additional revenue stream to the farm.

Above: The ‘U’ shaped building housing the cows is linked to the collecting yard and parlour, which makes things easier through winter as the cows never move far and all is undercover.



Above: Richard Austin with his two children Liliana, 4 (left) and Dara, 6 (right).



Above: The Montbeliarde heifers are ideally suited to grazing some of the rougher pasture on the coastal farm.

up to 4kg per head when the cows are peaking at 32 litres. The winter diet for the milkers is primarily baled grass silage, with 8kg/hd of a 19% high cereal based concentrate fed in early spring to just before turnout in mid April, whilst dry cows are on poorer quality, longer stemmed silage with 2kg of an 18% protein nut fed pre-calving.

Maintaining a 363 day calving interval leads to achieving a successful tight spring block calving, Richard aims to breed a balanced cow with no extremes. Udders and feet are important individual selection criteria that he has particularly improved in the herd in recent years and he is also mindful of fertility and health traits alongside. During the 8-9 week service period proven Montbeliarde bulls are used on the better cows, the top two thirds of the herd served to pure Montbeliarde to provide 20 plus replacement heifers and 8-10 breeding bulls. Belgian Blue semen is then used on the less preferred cows and a red Angus stock bull is run with the heifers and then used to sweep up on the cows. Calf sales are an important source of revenue to the farm with the Belgian Blue cross bulls and Red Angus cross calves sold off farm at three weeks old. Belgian Blue cross heifers are reared through and sold as in calf heifers (served to the Red Angus bull) to suckler herds. Urbansite is a bull that made his mark on the herd in the past with current sires in the flask including Dahon, Ialgar, Ioupy, Triumph, Brink and Cortil from Coopex Montbeliarde and Jordren JB and Cardiff JB from Jura Betail. Richard is experimenting this year using the aAa (‘Triple A’) mating system, with the hope that it will provide the best possible sire match to each individual cow in his herd, allowing him to continue using the best genetics from the leading AI companies Coopex and Jura.

All in all Richard is looking to breed the best cows with the best production and best results for the homestead. Farm sustainability is vital to allow Richard time to spend with his young family whether that is surfing or just enjoying leisure time with his wife Lorena, son Dara (6) and daughter Liliana (4). ‘The farm is the home and not just a house and land’ a sentiment shared by all the family, with all of them loving the outdoors and the children always keen to help daddy on the farm. It is clear Richard has already developed a high producing, long lasting herd and whilst every farm is different, Richard appreciates the Montbeliarde has afforded him sustainability with added value from calves and culls with no added cost to the overall outputs of this small yet sustainable farm.

Interested in Montbéliardes? Join the Society today...



If you have decided to purchase some Montbéliarde cattle or semen this page is designed to offer some guidance on becoming a member and registering your Montbéliarde cattle.

BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE MONTBELIARDE SOCIETY...

- The first step is to contact Angela Lacey.
- At this stage you will also need to choose a prefix for your Montbéliardes. This might be an existing name that you use for another breed or be associated to your farm name.
- Annual membership to the society is currently €60/year (this is due from 1st April).

REGISTERING ANIMALS WITH THE MONTBELIARDE SOCIETY...

- You must be a fully paid up member of the Irish Montbéliarde Society to register any animals.
- When registering your animal it is important to check both of the following:
 - Is the dam of the animal already registered?
 - Does the sire have a full pedigree?
- If the answer to either of the above is no, you may find it difficult to register your animal as a pure Montbéliarde, and DNA may be required as proof of parentage of your animal.
- It is possible to upgrade your animals from non-registered to pure bred, although it does take a number of generations..
 - ASR's are usually the starting point. They are registered in their own right with a family name ear tag / line number and date of birth (if known), a sire can be added to their records if this can be verified. A certificate is then issued for these animals.
 - BSR's are usually progeny out of the above group and would be registered with full details of the ear tag / date of birth / dam / sire details verified from milk records or on farm records. ASR & BSR are both forms of supplementary register
 - FULL PEDIGREE animals can then be registered out of BSR animals with their certificates stating what percentage pure bred they are.



MONTBELIARDE SOCIETY OF IRELAND

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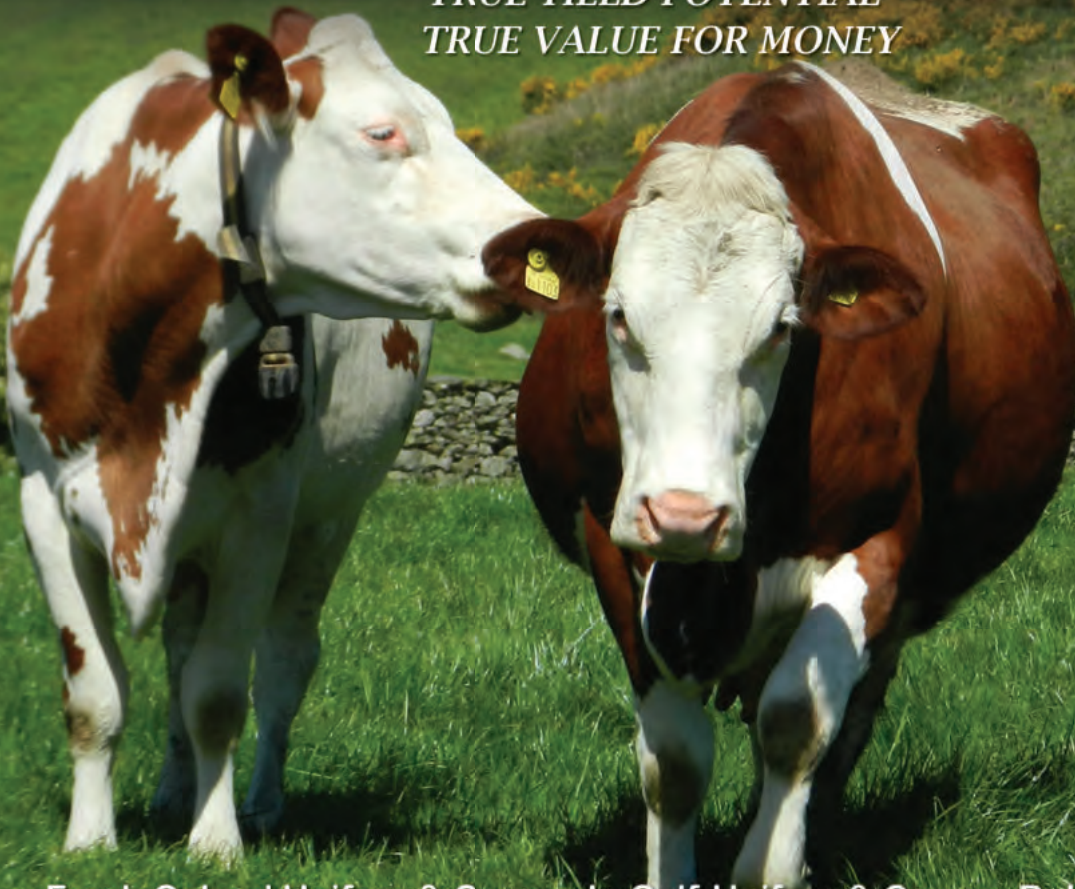
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