



## News from Hall Farm

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I know they say that in Britain we always talk a lot about the weather, but as farmers we have the excuse that it does have such a big impact on our day to day activities and the running of the business, as you can see from this issue's newsletter. After such a cold spring, culminating in a very wet May, we seemed to be straight into a scorching summer with subsequent lack of grass growth.

### **Beef and sheep**

The hot and humid weather has meant a close eye has to be kept on the sheep to treat any fly strike - flies laying eggs in the wool which then hatch into maggots which eat into the flesh. All the local sheep farmers have been battling against flies this year. We are now into the main season for lamb sales, with the last ones weaned, so that the ewes can start putting a bit of weight back on before the autumn.

Fattening cattle and heifers, when first turned out, were not impressed with the wet and cold and proved to be an adventurous lot, jumping fences from one field to another (luckily only within our farm boundary) as well as into the pond in their field. Once the rain stopped and they were moved down to the river meadows they settled a lot better. However, they could not resist one last explore of the farm just before Farm Sunday, charging round and flattening some of the hay crop which was just beginning to look attractive.

### **Dairy and grassland**

It has been a difficult summer, we had to cull several cows due to the mastitis problems mentioned previously. Then with the hot weather - we had no rain through June and most of July - the grass stopped growing and has been parched and yellow. Even with so many cows dried off for their summer break, this has made us very short of grazing. In addition, the cows just can't be bothered to graze in the heat. They have access to silage when they come in for milking and we have been bringing them in out of the sun on the hottest days too. Silaging was a good three weeks late, (9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> June), due to the cold wet spring and then the contractors struggling to catch up. By this time, the weather had already turned dry and hot, which has really restricted the grass regrowth even on our heavy clay soil, on both silage and the hay aftermaths. Supplementary feeds for the winter will be expensive and in short supply, as many farmers are already feeding a full winter ration; most of our cows are in late lactation or are dry before calving again, so we are less affected than those who have cows at peak milk production. The second cut of silage was then much later due to the delayed first cut, and it took the contractors only half a day to cut over 50 acres, about a third of the usual time taken, indicative of the low yields of grass. However, we will now be able to give the cows a bigger area to graze and there is some leafier and more succulent grass ready for the cows as they calve. We have had 2 calves in the first week in August, both beautiful Holstein heifers which will stay with us to enter the herd in a couple of years time.

### **Arable**

We will be harvesting our wheat crops any day now, they are looking pretty good. Other farmers on lighter land which does not retain as much moisture, have been finding that their harvested barley crops have been disappointing due to the lack of rain. We did not sell any of our wheat last summer, choosing to store the

surplus which we did not need for cattle feed. We have just sold it all, as we wanted our storage bins empty to accommodate the new crop. It is nice to report that prices are up a good 15% on 12 months ago.

### Wildlife and Stewardship

We have had some great feedback from visitors on our farm walks and visits, for organised groups and members of the public. Highlights have included Farm Sunday, when we had a quiz and several farm walks, a visit from children from Belarussia through the charity Friends of Chernobyl Children ([www.focc.org.uk](http://www.focc.org.uk)) and the Welland networking group. I was delighted when the barn owl put in appearance at the evening walk for the general public. The owls are definitely breeding again although I have not yet seen the young yet.



Children from Belarussia enjoying a day at Hall Farm

Show attendance has included Melton Country Fair and Leicestershire County Show and the monthly accredited Melton Farmers' Market in Nottingham Street. We will also be at the regional Food Festival ([www.eastmidlandsfoodfestival.co.uk](http://www.eastmidlandsfoodfestival.co.uk)) in October (now one of the biggest in the country).

Our skies are currently alive with swallows - it seems to be a very good year for them and I counted 60 on the wires outside my window yesterday. The second broods are all just leaving the nest and rushing around the yards in a chattering, excited mob, gradually honing their flying skills ready for their long journey back to Africa in a few weeks time.

### Your support for dairy farming please

Many of you will recall my previous comments about the unsustainably low prices that have been received by dairy farmers over the last few years. Our farm is just one of thousands where it is very likely that within a couple of years we will have to exit the industry due to lack of funds to reinvest in cow housing and other facilities. Please support the WI campaign to raise awareness of this issue, by signing their petition and sending a post card to the Prime Minister. They are also planning an awareness day on 24<sup>th</sup> August to alert supermarket customers to the potential threat to our industry. More information is available at [www.womens-institute.org.uk](http://www.womens-institute.org.uk) (under 'campaigns'), or by contacting them on 020 7371 9300.



Youngstock and beef cattle in the river meadows

We have sent several batches of lambs to the butcher and are taking orders for more for September delivery. We are also booking in the first beef for the autumn, which will be ready around the beginning of October. Please phone or email your orders through as the autumn order books fill up quickly and we can book in another as soon as we have enough customers. We also have three more walks planned - see attached flyer.

Make the most of the rest of the summer - the nights are already drawing in! Best wishes for now,

Julia Hawley