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## **TEAMWORK TAKES YORKSHIRE FORWARD TO GOLD CUP FINAL**

Making its NMR/RABDF Gold Cup competition final line up debut is North Yorkshire-based Metcalfe Farms. The family partnership is run by brothers David, Brian and Philip, with retired parents John and Thora, and help from a team of 20 staff.



This team includes 12 staff, who milk the 900-cow herd three times a day through the unit's 32:32 rapid-exit parlour, which is running for 20 hours each day.

The herd has been expanding for the past four years, almost doubling from 550 head using a mixture of bought-in and home-bred replacements. Housed all year round and fed a TMR, the herd's average production, for the year ending September 2014, was 10,926kg of milk at 3.58% butterfat and 3.14% protein, with a somatic cell count of 196,000cells/ml.

The next big step for the business, according to Philip, is installing a new rotary parlour – a 72-point Boumatic. “This will offer us scope to increase cow numbers even further, possibly by an additional 300 or 400 cows, and ‘future proof’ the business.”

The business has altered substantially during the past two years and since the Metcalfes entered the competition in 2014, young stock management has undergone a transformation. All heifers up to 12 months old are managed away from the main farm at a specialised unit. And another unit takes them from 12 months through to calving at 24 months old. “Heifer rearing is a job in itself and requires an organised – almost regimental – approach,” says Philip.

The business has also invested in training and developing staff. “We’re building a skilled team using local people,” explains Philip. “And because we’re running a large herd, putting protocols in place is essential and has proved invaluable when it comes to ease of management. Full-time staff members are allocated key responsibilities, such as ‘calf feeding’ or ‘fertility’, and they produce regular reports so we have a handle on what’s happening.”

He adds that, for him, cow numbers are not really an issue now. “We’ve got a dairy ‘blueprint’ in place and it’s working well. For me, it’s very much about managing people now. There are several ‘right-hand’ people in the team, including herdsman Mark Chapman who manages the staff rota, and the business is a success thanks to their skills, hard work and dedication.”



Good communication and a clear over view of the dairy are vital to its continued success, particularly when there are three other separate businesses on the farm that demand close attention. Diversifications include a haulage business, a lorry and repair workshop and an anaerobic digester, as well as two other 'dairy' business that include agricultural contracting and pedigree Holstein sales.

"There's certainly plenty to keep us all busy," says Philip, adding that the dairy is his main responsibility. "The diversifications do relieve some of the pressure caused by milk price volatility. It's good not to have all our eggs in one basket, so to speak."

Selling surplus stock from the pedigree Washfold herd also helps with cash flow. Philip is looking for longevity when selecting sires: "We're looking for at least five lactations and a lifetime daily yield of more than 25kg. We want to calve heifers, with plenty of chest width at a target age of 22 months, that can carry condition with a well-attached udder, good feet and legs and locomotion."

He adds that breeding is part and parcel of building a herd with the future in mind. "After considerable expansion, we're now looking at a period of fine tuning and consolidation. The new parlour will allow us to further improve efficiency," says Philip. "We've always wanted to do things right and do them well. That's our motivation."

The Metcalfe's unit and dairy business will come under the scrutiny of this year's judges RABDF Chairman, former Gold Cup winner and Lancashire-based Jersey producer Ian Macalpine, NMR Board member and Isle of Anglesey-based producer Trevor Lloyd; and 2012 Gold Cup winner from Worcestershire, Mike Miller.

The winner of the 2015 NMR/RABDF Gold Cup and the runner-up, who receives the NMR Silver Salver, will be announced at 4pm on the NMR stand at the Livestock Event, NEC Birmingham on July 8.

### **Unit facts**

- 900-cow Holstein herd, plus 600 followers

- Herd average production, for the year ending September 2014: 10,926kg of milk at 3.58% butterfat and 3.14% protein, and a SCC of 196,000cells/ml.
- Heifers rearing in two groups – birth to 12 months old and 12 months to 24 months old – on two separate farms away from the main unit.
- Staff rota – individuals allocated responsibility for key areas of dairy management
- New 72-point rotary planned – with scope for further cow-number expansion to ‘future proof’ the business
- Milk sold to Paynes Dairies
- MOPF per litre – 21.44ppl