



The automatic feed carrier takes 15 minutes to distribute the feed.



All cows are housed together under one roof at Ennerleigh Farm.



Bunkers hold a day's worth of grass silage, maize silage and wholecrop.

matic feeder, yields increased by 14 per cent," he says. "After the first month our feed specialist did some costings and found we were getting more milk per kilogram of feed, saving £2,500 a month."

### Yield boost

GEA's Anthony Andrew says automatic feeding should boost yields and improve feed conversion efficiencies considerably. "There are a lot of automatic feeders used on the continent," he says. "Based on a retail price of about £175,000 the payback period should be less than two years."

Unfortunately, the switch to robotic milking knocked the cows' yields back, and ongoing difficulties with some software means they have yet to fully recover.

"The best cows are milking up to four-times-a-day and giving 60 litres, but the switch to robotic milkers hasn't been as easy as we'd imagined – unlike the automatic feeding which the cows took to immediately," says Mr Partridge.

"One of the benefits we have seen is cows milk for longer – they're still giving 30 litres a day when they are drying off."

Sheds are fitted with one-way gates and herdsmen take time to show fresh calvers around the house and robots so they know where to go before they join the main milking group. Cows are fed 2.75kg of a 19 per cent protein blend while being milked, with high yielders topped up with up to 10kg of a 16 per cent blend.

"The system monitors when the cows are milked and automatic gates ensure they are directed to the robots or straight through to the main shed as appropriate."

Cows are bedded on mattresses with sawdust and lime, which are cleaned and topped up every other day, while transition cows and sick cows have their own individual pens. "We have automatic

scrapers and I raised every second row of roof panels to improve ventilation," says Mr Partridge. "We also have two roof fans and are experimenting with blocking off roof lights as they can create hot spots."

The gate system includes an automatic footbath, through which, cows are taken once-a-day, while activity monitors help to identify cows which are in heat. "If the computer thinks a cow is in heat it will direct her into a different part of the shed after milking, so we can easily find her."

Mr Partridge uses ABS's Reproductive Management System (RMS) to inseminate the cows, choosing bulls based on their strength, legs and feet.

"Years ago we bred for milk but they couldn't walk well, so now we select on type," he says. He also runs a stock Holstein bull with his heifers, with Hereford and Aberdeen-Angus bulls as sweepers.

### Calving

He says: "We calve heifers from two years and take the calves off as soon as possible. We make sure they have colostrum and then put them into individual pens where they get milk powder and surplus milk twice-a-day."

"We wean them at six to eight weeks old and turn them out to grass, depending on conditions."

Mr Partridge takes three to four cuts of silage and will soon be building two new clamps adjacent to the feed bunkers. "At the moment they're over the other side of farmyard. It used to take us two-and-a-half hours to feed the cows – now it takes 20 minutes. We use less diesel and have installed solar panels to reduce electricity costs."

"With automatic feeding and milking we have a lot more time to spend looking after cows' needs. It is an easier life for us too – we're not constantly rushing around trying to get the next job done."

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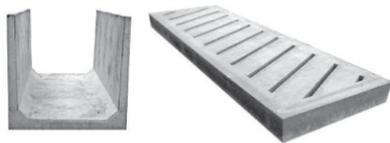


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<sup>1</sup> Charlier, J et al., (2009), Veterinary Parasitology 164, 70-79.

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