

Northants suckler herd set for rapid expansion

George Coles, Northamptonshire

George Coles runs the cattle enterprise at Owen Farms, which comprises two units in Northamptonshire. There is 485ha of arable cropping and 93ha of grass, with 32ha down to solar panels and 20ha of poplar trees. There are also many hectares of woodland and disused railway line.

In 2014, 49 commercial (mainly Simmental-cross) cows that had been mated to a Simmental bull, calved in a 12-week period from mid-February.

The aim is to increase numbers up to 200 cows by developing two pedigree herds. One Red Aberdeen Angus herd will be established by importing embryos from Argentina. The other will be pedigree Simmental and will belong to George and his wife rather than Owen Farms.

The herds will all be high health status; the animals are already tested for IBR, Leptospirosis, BVD and Johne's disease.

Seventy three cows and heifers have been served either with a bull or by artificial insemination (AI) this year. The aim is to have 95 cows in-calf next year, using a combination of natural service, AI and embryo transfer. Heifers calve down at two years of age early in the compact calving period. They are all currently retained with a replacement rate of around 16%; eventually surplus heifers will be sold for breeding.



Investing for the future

There is a plan to grow maize within the arable rotation to feed to steers to finish them. Any surplus maize will be sold to a local anaerobic digestion (AD) plant. A clamp is being constructed and there is considerable investment in buildings and handling systems to allow for the herd expansion. More grass will be added to the crop rotation as required.

The suckler herd is run as one group and rotationally grazes around four fields. The calves have access to creep and some of the highest performing calves grow at more than 1.5kg per day.

A major challenge for the grazing system is the many footpaths crossing the fields, making sub-division with electric fencing difficult. There is also a risk of cattle picking up *Neospora* from the faeces of the large number of dogs traversing the fields each day.

George is a member of the Towcester Beef Discussion Group which is organised by Gareth Keevill of Towcester Vets. If you are interested in joining, [email Gareth](mailto:gareth@towcester-vets.co.uk).