

# Since changing over to Keenan, yields have increased by 4.65 litres/cow/day and a margin increase of £1.25 per cow

by Andy Collings

As economies of scale are increasingly acknowledged by the dairy industry, herd expansions are not unusual. But most choose to do it gradually and not double cow numbers in just a few weeks, as one Cumbrian farmer plans to do.

Matt Bland and his wife Sue are set to make one of the biggest changes ever to the way they run their dairy farm. Based at Heskett Farm, Dacre west of Penrith the Bland family farm 375 acres of which about 300 acres is down to grass with the remainder used for whole crop wheat and whole crop spring beans - the latter considered to be a useful source of protein and is forage harvested in September. The current herd comprises 150 cows of which 130 are in milk with the plan to increase the herd up to 300 cows over the coming months.

"With the construction of the new 98-head cubicle housing and the large number of heifers we will be purchasing, it really is an important investment for us," he says. "And it's one which will also double up our silage needs and the amount of work required in the ration mixing department." Having said that, an element of pre-planning has ensured that his ration mixing capacity is well matched to the expected volumes the larger herd will require.

Just over two years ago he exchanged his Strautmann tub mixer wagon for a Keenan 360, an 8-tonne capacity, horizontal paddle mixer. "I wanted a mixer which could produce an even and consistent mix which the cows would want to eat in its entirety and not just pick through," he explains. "And, in this respect, the Keenan machine has been able to do this - even in the dry-cow ration which has a higher percentage of straw."

The MF 360, with its heavy duty, suspended tandem axle, simple



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two-chain paddle drive and low-power, low fuel requirement is in use every day of the year.

"It is and continues to be an incredibly reliable machine which has not missed a beat since it arrived," he says. "And despite its large capacity, it is also a nimble machine - the steering rear axle helps it to manoeuvre around the buildings."

When the cows are housed, just one load is required of a ration based on molasses, straw, silage, blend, beans and brewers grains, with the whole ration halved when they are out at grass. For the dry cows, a similar ration but one containing a higher percentage of straw (5kg/head) is fed - the 360 quite capable of mixing a part load for the smaller numbers involved. Since adopting this ration, he says calving problems have all but disappeared and the cows re-entering the herd have had a more level lactation. But Mr Bland discovered that the mixer wagon could produce more than just a good mix - it could also produce extra income through increased milk yield and, as a result, larger and better margins.

"Our latest figures reveal that, since changing over to the

Keenan, yields have increased by 4.65 litres per cow/day and there has been a margin increase of £1.25 per cow," he says. Our FCE has also increased by 0.28.

"We also use Keenan's PACE technology which is a good management system. It helps take out many of the variables by recording the amount of each ingredient used and monitoring the ration's performance in respect of milk yield," he explains.

"This is all channelled through Keenan's data base which can then advise us on ration changes or the volumes we should be feeding." He adds that the record made of each ration - how it was made, when it was made and the precise weights of each ingredient - also means that he can entrust the feeding job to another person, should it be necessary.

"I suppose we have been working and planning for this enlargement of the dairy for some time," he says. "Not least has been the decision to become a 'flying herd'. We cross the cows with a beef breed - Limousine, Blonde d'Aquitaine

and Charolais, for example and buy in our replacements as calved heifers." Not perhaps everyone's management choice but Mr Bland points out that if he didn't take this route, the farm's limited cattle housing would mean having to arrange for the contract rearing of heifers and there would be greater pressure on labour resources.

"The bottom line is that there is no guarantee that a home-bred heifer is actually going to be a good milk producer," he says.

"But if I buy a calved heifer I can at least see she is all there and where she came from."

Mr Bland concedes there are still many obstacles to overcome but he is satisfied that the key requirements are in place - not least the feeding system.

"To recoup our investment we need to produce milk - and that makes it essential we are able to provide an accurately and consistently mixed ration that will deliver the goods," he concludes.



The PACE system is seen as an important management aid which provides information regarding yield and ration performance levels.

For more information on fuel economies visit [www.keenansystem.co.uk](http://www.keenansystem.co.uk)