



COWMEN COMMENT



Above: Cows out in the field in early January.

Feeding the calves is always the absolute favourite and very easy to organise.

'Would you like to feed the calves?' has them queuing up, hands outstretched for handfuls of hay. I then tell them to feed the calves through the gates at the front of their pens and everyone is happy, including the calves, who are naturally curious and like to nibble hay and suck little fingers. The children become even happier after the obligatory hand-washing when it is time for baby chinos and ice cream.

Children

The children love getting their boots muddy, but the bus driver had begged for clean wellies for the return journey. Fortunately, my son-in-law Chad was at hand and washed every boot in situ by hand ready for the return journey.

I am told that 70% of farmers are now only using genomic bulls. These bulls have predicted yields, type and behaviour, but nothing is guaranteed or proven. This rush for genomics is manna for the semen companies which are able to sell

new bulls every year with ever better predicted figures. Why are the first genomic bulls not appearing as proven bulls now, if the genomic figures ring true? I think it is because any faults that are apparent in the proofs are absent in the genomic predictions, making genomics look a better bet.

My biggest concern is longevity, which seems to have gone out of the window. Can we really predict how long the offspring of a young genomic bull with a dam who has done one, or even no lactations is going to last?

I was hoping to get an AI company interested in our Friesian bull, Brinkworth Hildebrand, as he has a good spring calving index of 336.

Unfortunately, we then gave the bulls an IBR inoculation. It was not until I started talking to semen companies that I found out no AI bulls can be marketed if they have had an IBR vaccine. An own goal I'm afraid.

And the final own goal: Brexit. In my husband's words, it is a 'banquet that gives everyone indigestion, each one leaving the table blaming everyone else for choosing the wrong menu'.

Farm facts

- ▶▶ **Farm:** Family run 185 acres dairy farm in North Wiltshire
- ▶▶ **Herd:** Closed herd of 100 Friesian type pedigree cows
- ▶▶ **Yield:** 7874 litres
- ▶▶ **Soil type:** Heavy on Oxford clay
- ▶▶ **Rainfall:** 749mm
- ▶▶ **Milk buyer:** First Milk

• Cow kennels perfect shelters



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