

## DIARYdates

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# Size doesn't matter when it comes to animal welfare issue

By Debbie James

THERE has been much written about the 1,000-cow dairy in Powys which can now be built six years after the farmer first submitted a planning application. I have seen it described as 'factory farming' and a 'mega dairy' and mostly preceded by the adjective 'controversial'. But perhaps the word controversial is better reserved for dairy systems in Japan where cows are chained in their stalls 24/7. There is even an electric wire to prevent the cows arching their backs



when they go to the toilet. The size of the dairy at Leighton is the reason why it has been thrust into the media spotlight. In comparison, the herds in Japan are mostly around 70 cows. But the welfare needs of

these cows are no different, be they in a small or large herd. Scale is very much a factor in poultry production. I have visited several poultry farms – both free-range and cage systems – the latter now known as 'colony' systems since the European Union last year forced all farmers to move to the higher-welfare colony system. Under the old system, producers were allowed to keep 18 hens in one square metre. The new system allows for 13 hens in the same area, but the hens never leave their cage and are unable to walk more than a few feet. Last month a leading

chicken expert suggested that many free-range hens were no happier than those in colony cages. No system is perfect, each has its good and bad points, but what is interesting is that half of all the eggs consumed in Britain are free-range or organic. There are two key criteria that define hens as free-range under EU and British Lion guidelines. Firstly, they must have access to the outside. This is accomplished by opening a series of hatches along the side of the hut during daylight hours. And secondly there must be no more than nine animals per square

metre. The cows tethered on Japanese dairy farms are being denied one of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's five freedoms - freedom to express normal behaviour - defined as the provision of sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind. In the poultry sector, surely only free-range birds can express the full range of natural behaviours for hens. We had a few hens once and they were forever foraging for natural foods, flapping their wings and dust bathing. That they couldn't have achieved if they were confined to a cage.



## We want to hear from you!

**H**AVE you got any farming news? If so, we want to hear it – straight from the horse's mouth! You can send your stories and pictures on any agricultural-related matter, from showing success, top mart prices and diary dates to your equestrian or countryside news. In the upcoming editions we'd also like to feature your readers' letters, so if there's something you want to get off your chest now's your chance. To get in touch, email [wfeditor@walesfarmer.co.uk](mailto:wfeditor@walesfarmer.co.uk) or call the Wales Farmer newsdesk on 01437 761759. Please note, photographs should be sent as .jpg files, at least 1MB in size.

## PLANNING matters

## City regions will benefit rural areas too

**REGIONAL** planning in Wales looks set to take on a new dimension in 2014. The creation of Welsh city regions has gathered momentum throughout 2013, both commercially and politically, but what is all the fuss about?

The city region concept strives to improve economic growth from infrastructure improvements for existing and new businesses. The term infrastructure is relatively broad – for example: physical infrastructure improvements in rail, road and telecommunications.

However, it also includes less tangible investments in business services, supporting existing businesses and also assisting new



In his regular column for Wales Farmer, **WAYNE REYNOLDS**, director of Atriarc Group, offers and insight into the emerging city regions being developed across Wales.

businesses as they develop and expand in to the regions. The definition of a city region has been hotly debated, but two key areas have now been identified:

south east Wales and south west Wales. While the term city region implies an urban focus, large areas of rural countryside are also defined. The south east

region essentially encompasses Cardiff, Bridgend, Newport and the surrounding valley communities, whereas the south west region comprises Swansea, Neath-Port Talbot, parts of Powys, Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire. A region for north Wales hasn't formally been identified, as questions have been raised as to whether north Wales has a sufficiently large urban centre upon which a city region could be based.

While urban centres will see the initial benefits from any regional development programme, the rural economy also looks set to benefit. For example, many have noted that regional growth will lead to an increased demand for local produce. The rural tourist economy will also benefit from city region marketing campaigns aimed at attract-

ing national and international investors. Other benefits will also be derived from improved transport connections for delivery of goods and services. The south west region is also likely to benefit from a rural broadband programme to assist rural business growth.

The creation of the city regions also looks set to improve the way in which local authorities collaborate with one another.

However some sceptics have identified that it will also pave the way for ministers to set about merging local authority services before eventually merging local authorities. For many this is not such a bad thing, although it does raise the question: will we see a fundamental change in how the regulatory planning system in Wales is structured?

This is unlikely in the short-term, but there is a lot of potential for a re-alignment of administrative boundaries over the next five to ten years. An updated Wales Spatial Plan could also play a key role in facilitating national transport infrastructure projects, along with greater guidance on wind farm development and energy generation. Regional collaboration is not a new concept, for example many local authorities already share legal services and collaborate on waste processing and minerals extraction. Further collaboration on planning and heritage matters would also assist ensuring a more consistent approach to decision making.

For further details or enquiries please contact Wayne Reynolds on 01994 220 667 or email [wayne@atriarcgroup.com](mailto:wayne@atriarcgroup.com).

# 'Come into my parlour' offer at new demo farm

**A NEW Farming Connect demonstration farm has opened its gates.**

Nuffield scholar Rhys Williams of Trygarn dairy, opened the parlour on the Lleyn Peninsula for an open day in December, where people had the chance to learn about the trials, plans and projects set to take place at the farm.

Gethin Davies, Farming Connect knowledge transfer facilitator for north, said: "Working with a pioneer like Rhys is a great opportunity for Farming Connect to explore new opportunities in dairy farming that will ultimately benefit the whole industry."

Trygarn is a coastal farm consisting of 173 acres of owned land with an additional 74 acres of rented land with a 300 spring-calving New Zealand crossbred herd.

Ten acres of kale, rape and stubble turnips are grown to provide winter forage for cows and youngstock.

The key element of the system at Trygarn is to maximise pasture, by extending the grazing season to the maximum and reducing winter costs.

The main aim is to maximise the profitability of the milking herd and to keep growing the business.

Rhys plans to milk record each cow in order to establish



**OPEN DAY:** Rhys Williams at Trygarn dairy.

which cows are most profitable and to aid decisions on the future structure of the herd.

He is also keen to improve animal health through implementing a fluke control programme following a problematic year last year.

Initially, Rhys will be checking

if there is resistance to Triclabendazole within the herd, which will aid him in choosing the best control strategy for next year. The milking herd is at grass from early February to early December and has an average milk yield of 5,200litres, with a butterfat average of 5.3 per cent

and 3.7 per cent protein. The milk is sold to South Caernarfon Creameries.

Other trials which will be run at Trygarn are reducing reliance on fertiliser while maintaining cow performance and the use of EID to monitor youngstock performance.

## The future's here and now as robots take the strain

TO most people robots conjure up images straight out of science fiction, but to father and son Richard and Matthew Roberts, working with robots is far from being a fantasy.

Cefn Maesoglan Farm is situated on 260 acres in the south-west corner of Anglesey between Brynsiencyn and Llangaflo.

After Richard's son Matthew, now 24, graduated from Harper Adams keen to farm, they went into partnership and started farming together.

They currently run a herd of 133 pedigree Jerseys imported from Denmark and are looking to push this to 160 in 2014.

The cows are all heifers in their first lactation and are averaging 24 litres per cow per day with 5.6per cent-plus butterfat and 3.4 per cent proteins, supplied to Glanbia, Llangefni where it is used for making mozzarella cheese.

They are establishing a pedigree herd under the title of Menai Jerseys.

They also grow 75 acres of cereals for wholecrop silage and grain and straw and cut at least three crops of grass silage.

A big investment in robots and associated specialised building works is not for the faint-

hearted. Richard said: "I knew we had to spend some time first getting it right, starting our research from 2010 onwards.

"One of the key things was to approach a lot of milk buyers to ascertain what they wanted and once we knew that, other things fell in to place.

"We went to Denmark and the Netherlands as well as plenty of robot farms here in the UK to learn and to get ideas. We saw units on which we based ours where the cows have plenty of socialising space and never get separated and are not stressed."

The cows are milked via two Lely Astronaut A4 robots. There is also a robotic manure scraper and silage pusher.

All the cows at Cefn Maesoglan are housed under one roof in a building that, in addition to the milking robots, has some highly specialised purpose-designed features, including an underground slurry lagoon, steep pitched roof and a simulated sunlight lighting system which influences both fertility and milk yield.

"Robots give you back your life - they take out the mundane, added Richard.

"Even when you are asleep at night you are milking.



**HANDS OFF:** Milking is an automatic process.

Automation is doing it for you around the clock.

"For example, the silage at the feed face is pushed up every two hours, day and night, and by automating this, we have seen cow intakes rise, which has put one to two litres of milk extra per cow per day into the tank.

"However, you have to be

comfortable with computers and are highly reliant on uninterrupted electricity supply so we have to have a generator to get everything back up and running in a couple of minutes if there is a power cut. If at any time we decided to stop milking, the robots are portable and easily re-usable."

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