



Farmers helping supply cattle to measure feed efficiency

Over 850 cattle have completed feed intake recording or are in the process of doing so as part of the Beef Feed Efficiency Programme. Calves are being taken from dairy farms and suckler units, and are either purchased or loaned to the project on a retained ownership arrangement.

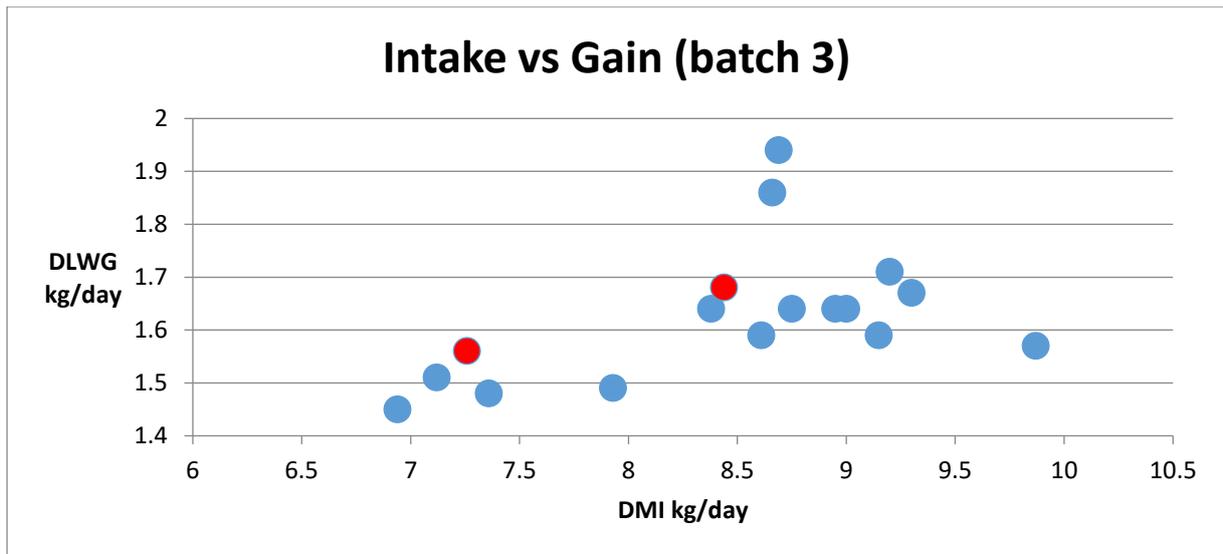
One dairy farmer that has supplied calves to the project is David Harrison of Dundraw Farm, Cumbria. David farms 480 dairy cows and with the expectation of rearing 200 female dairy calves produced using sexed semen. The remainder are put to a beef bull using a mix of AI and natural service. The cows are divided into 2 groups; half through the traditional parlour and half milked using 4 robots. The best of the female beef calves are sold at 16-20 months as bulling heifers, while the remainder and the male beef calves are finished on farm at approximately 24 months of age. Dundraw has adopted a policy of using high genetic merit Limousin AI sires as these produce an excellent beef cross dairy bulling heifer for which there is strong demand.

To date Mr Harrison has supplied the project with 39 calves sired by five different bulls, and more calves are planned for involvement in the project. The objective is to collect feed intake and performance data from around 8 calves per sire from over 200 Limousin bulls used across GB.

Calves from Dundraw Farm have performed well whilst on test, with daily liveweight gains of around 1.5 kg/day and average dry matter intake averaging just over 8 kg per day. Compared to the average weight of the cattle in the group, David's cattle were lighter at the start and were the only dairy bred calves in the batch.

The ration is based on grass silage, barley and a protein supplement to be typical of the majority of commercial growing rations.

The graph below shows the average growth rate and feed intake of the calves for each sire in a batch. Cattle with high growth rates and low feed intake are the most feed efficient. The graph below demonstrates the relationship between gain and intake for the sire groups in batch 3 at SRUC. Dundraw had two sires groups represented in this batch (represented by the red circles) which showed significantly different results; the higher circle represents a progeny group of calves that had faster growth rates but ate 1.3 kg per day more to achieve this.



Feed intake and performance of cattle on Batch 3 of the Beef Efficiency Programme

David recognises the potential of the project to enable selective breeding for cattle which eat less than others but grow at the same rate, in addition to the potential for big savings in feed costs across the beef industry.

While the initial focus of the programme will be on recording Limousin-sired cattle, the aim is to develop a system for recording feed efficiency that can be extended to other cattle breeds in the future.

If you have suitable cattle and would like further information, please call Natalie Cormack on 07866 934563 or email natalie.cormack@ahdb.org.uk. Or visit <http://beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/research/genetic-selection/genetic-selection-beef/beef-feed-efficiency/>