

Advice for a successful future

If you thought a farm attached to an educational establishment was an easy ride for a farm manager, just talk to John Cameron at Wood Park Farm near Neston on the Wirral. In addition to daily liaison with the vet school, running a TESCO Dairy Centre of Excellence and looking after a 200 strong Holstein Friesian herd, John also has to think about the future...

As part of the Leahurst campus Liverpool University's Wood Park Farm is run commercially, just like any other dairy farming operation. Having partnered with P&L Agriconsulting back in 2007, John reflects on the successes of the past five years and looks forward to the next.

"It became very apparent, through the years running up to 2007, that we needed to make some big changes in the way we ran the farm." John recalls. With yields low and the farm facing increased commercial pressure, John called upon the services of P&L Agriconsulting for a specific project. "In a bid to increase cow numbers, we invested heavily in new milking cow accommodation and parlour."

Will Phillips of P&L led the project to a successful conclusion as he describes. "The building work started in 2007 to deliver a new milking parlour and 200 strong milking cow accommodation. We designed the farm to provide the best in animal care and welfare, combined with outstanding faculty facilities for student use." With an approved Home Office licence, the farm also doubles as a regional facility for the farming industry. Taking advantage of this unique environment, the farm plays host to farmers groups and industry bodies, whilst holding training courses for technicians and agriculture merchants.

Satisfied with the initial plans and following successful delivery of the tender, John was confident to have P&L run the project whilst he got on with his many day jobs. "It's important to balance the demands of a commercial enterprise with the utmost need for animal welfare. P&L demonstrated their ability to meet these needs and work within budget." The herd has grown from 120 milking cows to 200, with yields substantially improved. The facility is home to an increasing number of University and industry led research projects and is used to demonstrate best practice within the industry. Will Phillips has been pleased with the outcome of the P&L led design and build project, "Whilst the project stands alone as an integrated building project, the facility is a fine example of delivering a targeted design solution into a business to energise it's future."

Sustained support

Whilst the building works have delivered in every way, P&L have continued to play a vital role in development of the farm since the start of the project as John Cameron explains. "The building project was only the start of our improvement program. P&L helped us think like a business and operate in harmony with our new facilities." As part of the comprehensive support network, P&L has been working with John to maintain sustainable, growth led management of the farm. "Only in understanding the needs of the business can a development plan be made." P&L's strategic business consultant, Adrian Caine, remarks. "With practically a blank canvas on which to lay out a development framework, we were able to analyse every facet of the business and work with the farm to capitalise fully on the investment." Together with P&L, John set out with a 5 year plan which was to take a focused, technical approach to farming practices linked directly to financial growth.

Milk yields have risen substantially from the 8,680 litres sold per cow per year in 2007 to 11,300 litres at last review. Fertility is firmly under control, with the herd's calving index running at 395 days and conception rates to all services of 50%.



John Cameron, Wood Park Farm

One of the prime factors in the improvement strategy was switching to three times a day milking as Adrian explains. "This strategy was designed to fill a gap in lactation that was evident between 60 and 150 days in milk. In combination with several additional cow management improvements, the farm has enjoyed many more financial efficiencies." John is now feeding using 25% less feed and producing 25% more milk with little change to rationing.

Delivery in the future

Like many farm businesses, day to day operational activity can restrict development focus and as a result, limit and often restrict important growth, something which John Cameron has faced in the past. "The continued support from P&L provides us with assurance and awareness. We have access to technical knowledge and advice beyond our remit within the operation of the farm." Setting out the next five year plan with P&L, John is looking forward to developing the business even further with a new programme of development through evolution of the business. John concludes, "With professional support and advice, we're confident the right decisions are being made to ensure a progressive, sustainable future for our business."



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for Farmers**

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