



My Farm Focus

November 2020

LAUNCH OF ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERSHIP

between First Milk members and Lake District Creamery



In this year's annual report, we stated our commitment to enhance the protection of watercourses near our creameries by reducing nitrate, phosphate and sediment discharge. Members in West Wales have been working with Haverfordwest Creamery for over five years and together have completely offset the creamery's nutrient discharge from the effluent plant. First Milk is now looking to set up a similar partnership with members supplying the Lake District Creamery (LDC).

The group of 33 First Milk members near Haverfordwest Creamery has achieved the offsetting targets by implementing well understood good farming practices. These include not applying manure and fertilisers to high phosphorus index soils, fencing off water-courses to prevent livestock entering them and not spreading slurry at high risk times. The key to their success has been sharing experiences with neighbours and working with ADAS, our approved consultants, to record and monitor these actions properly.

First Milk is hoping to attract 25-30 local members to take part in this initiative. The benefits for those who volunteer are:

- A webinar to hear how maximising nutrient use and protecting soils can lead to business benefits and compliance with Defra's Farming Rules for Water. Also, hearing how being part of the Haverfordwest group has benefited another First Milk member.
- Ability to identify fertiliser cost savings and reduces the risks of diffuse pollution/run-off from your land
- Payment for the time required to record and share data
- Helping your local creamery enhance its sustainability credentials which are

increasingly important to our customers and others stakeholders

We call on members in Cumbria to volunteer and help support your co-operative.

First Milk has recently had discussions with Aspatria Farmers and we are very supportive of their initiative to develop farm nutrient management plans. We believe both these projects will improve the sustainability of dairy farming in Cumbria.

To register your interest, please contact Toni Bruce on 07831 610430 or ToniBruce@firstmilk.co.uk

"Being part of the nutrient offset has helped us assess our current nutrient use, and consider the impact of our farming practices on the watercourses running through our farm. Knowing the value of the nutrients created on the farm allows us to fully utilise slurries and farm yard manures, protecting the environment and saving us money on purchased fertilisers."

Mike Smith, Pelcomb Farm, Haverfordwest

PROJECT TIMELINE The project is scheduled to run as follows:

DATE	ACTIVITY
December 2020	Virtual meetings/workshops for prospective group members
January 2021	ADAS to collect data from farmers via telephone calls/ email and video meetings
February 2021	Use farm data to assess potential of group
March 2021	Members to receive their baseline reports and agree actions they will implement in 2021/22 with First Milk
October 2021 - December 2021	First Milk Membership team will collect evidence of actions implemented to enable ADAS to report on group outcomes and benefits to LDC milkfield

Crossbreeding for and milk quality

Black and white cattle have formed the backbone of the dairy industry throughout most of our lifetime and there's no reason why they won't continue to do so in the years ahead. The Holstein's milk production potential has gone from strength to strength over several decades and its conformation has improved across many functional traits.

But alongside these improvements, producers have raised concerns. These range from a general decline in fertility and lower milk quality to a steady rise in maintenance costs as Holstein cows have increased in stature.

While efforts are now being directed at improving these issues, a growing band of producers are turning to crossbreeding as an alternative and quicker cure.

European genetics company, VikingGenetics, has seen a recent explosion of interest in its ProCROSS crossbreeding programme, buoyed by the results of a 10-year crossbreeding trial carried out at the University of Minnesota in the US.

The trial demonstrated significant gains in fertility and a range of health traits, without compromising

milk production, when the Holstein was bred in a three-way rotation with VikingRed and Montbéliarde.

In fact, milk quality was actually higher – an important benefit for most modern contracts – and calving interval shorter, contributing a positive advantage to the all-important lifetime daily yield (kg fat + protein).

The higher value of bull calves was a further benefit of particular relevance to First Milk members who have pledged against their euthanasia.

The upshot of the Minnesota study was that daily profits were, on average, nine percent higher for the Holstein x VikingRed x Montbéliarde than the pure Holstein.

It is these breeds together which are now defined as the ProCROSS, and the trial itself which has given many UK producers confidence to use the structured, three-way breeding programme.

The trial found the three breeds knitted well together. The Holstein brought production and udder traits; the Montbeliarde offered fertility, body condition and



Alister Edgar with his son, Archie

First Milk supplier secures future with ProCROSS

First Milk supplier, Alister Edgar, has recently started breeding his black and white herd to ProCROSS. He was attracted by the quality of milk he could gain through the crossbreeding programme.

Milking 70 head at Woodhouse Ploughlands in Kirkbampton, Cumbria, he was previously supplying milk on a liquid

contract and suffered a severe drop in price at the outbreak of COVID-19.

He says: "We felt very vulnerable on a liquid contract so moved to First Milk where fat and protein became far more important.

"We saw the change of breed as a move to lift our milk solids but not lose the black and white bloodlines we had been breeding for strength over many years.

"We'd actually had the recommendation by word of mouth from a neighbour who switched to ProCROSS seven years ago. He said he factored in a drop in milk production when he made the switch but thought he'd make other gains.

"In fact, he found he derived more milk from the ProCROSS because the cows stood up so well and were up and away far better than his Holsteins.

"Now we're supplying First Milk through the Aspatria Creamery which is only eight miles from the farm. We feel better equipped for the future with this contract and more confident we have the right breeds to supply the milk solids we need."

or health 7 gains

strength; and the VikingRed contributed calving traits, fertility and udder health.

Unlike some crossbreeding programmes, the breeds are also complementary for stature, helping to bring size uniformity and ease of management to a herd.

The better performance is not only attributed to the choice of these breeds but also the existence of hybrid vigour. This brings better performance to the outcrossed animal than the average of its parents and in a three-way cross, this is maintained indefinitely.

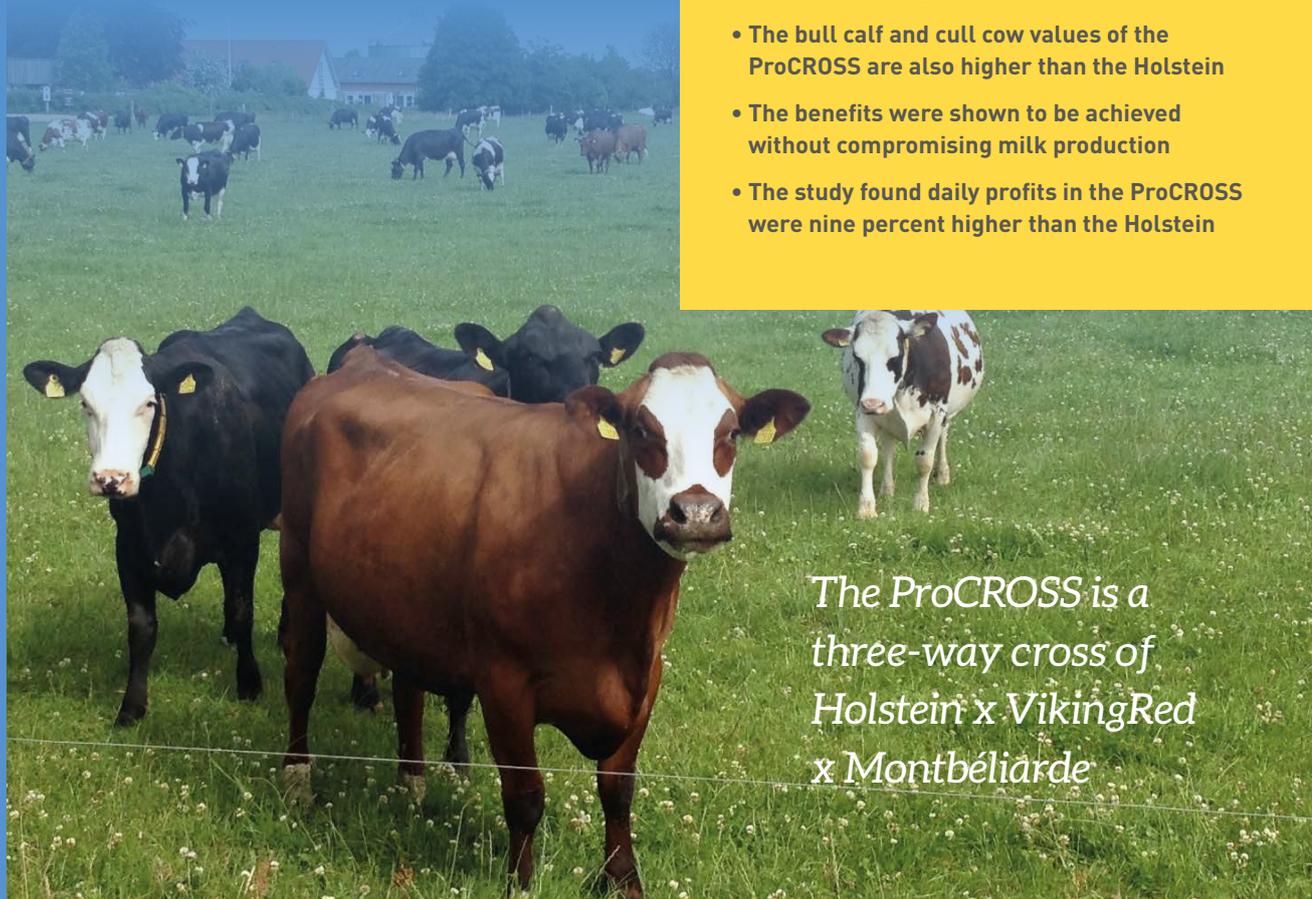
But most of all it is bringing robust and easy-care cattle, well-suited to typical UK grazing systems, to more and more producers across the country.

For more details on the University of Minnesota study, please visit: <https://www.vikinggenetics.co.uk/media/news?show=apui>

This article discusses one approach to crossbreeding. Its inclusion does not indicate any preference on breeding strategies or genetic choices by First Milk. We appreciate each member needs to make decisions to suit their individual herd.

WHAT IS THE PROCROSS?

- **The ProCROSS is a three-way cross of Holstein x VikingRed x Montbéliarde**
- **Crossbreeding has been the subject of a 10-year study at the University of Minnesota**
- **The ProCROSS demonstrated better health, fertility and lifespan than the pure Holstein**
- **Costs of production were significantly lower, largely due to:**
 - > improved fertility
 - > lower health costs
 - > lower feed costs
 - > increased longevity
- **The bull calf and cull cow values of the ProCROSS are also higher than the Holstein**
- **The benefits were shown to be achieved without compromising milk production**
- **The study found daily profits in the ProCROSS were nine percent higher than the Holstein**



The ProCROSS is a three-way cross of Holstein x VikingRed x Montbéliarde

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

We are delighted to announce First Milk is launching its new Women in Agriculture group. In recognition of the vital role women play on our farms we are inviting First Milk's female members and farm staff to join the group. The group offers opportunity to share knowledge and experiences, make new friends and both seek support from and provide it to one another. By offering a safe and secure forum through which to share the highs and lows of farming life, we can create a valuable network of women directly involved with First Milk farms. Our female council members and staff are excited to be involved with the group and hope to share developments within First Milk, the industry as well as details of local events. We're also keen to gain a better understanding of the challenges you face and how we can develop this group to best deliver what you most need.

The Women in Agriculture initiative is an exciting opportunity to bring together all the fantastic women involved in First Milk. I for one am looking forward to where this will lead!

Jessica Mills, First Milk Member Council

To be involved, please contact your local Area Manager or the Membership Team on 0141 847 6800 or membershipteam@firstmilk.co.uk.



Jessica Mills' sister, Olivia, ready to join the Women in Agriculture group

Using video blogs to share farming experiences

First Milk Next Generation members have been using video blogs (or vlogs) to share their experiences with each other and offer support on common challenges. The vlogs cover topics including:

- Calf rearing, cow classification, bull calves, heathime
- Pre-mowing, re-seeding, earth pan buster, winter crops, grassland management
- Hedges, water management
- Young farmer education, succession, COVID
- Slurry channels, building on a greenfield site, cow tracks

To watch two of the vlogs, go to:

Jessica Ellwood:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySAgT5ALwNg>

Struan McGregor:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KthZt0CjOXw>



Jessica Ellwood

Jessica Ellwood from Brough Castle Farm near Kirkby Stephen in Cumbria. She milks 75 cows with her parents. Her mother, Sarah, also runs the Brough Castle ice cream parlour and tearooms, processing over 100 litres milk/week during the season.

Jessica is studying agriculture at Newton Rigg and keen to manage the farm alongside her father, David, and increase the herd by at least 20%. Asked about making the vlog, Jessica says it's not something she's done before, but found it a useful way to share what they're doing on farm and learning from others. She's looking forward to finding more opportunities to share what's happening on farm with the group.



Struan McGregor

The second vlog shows Struan McGregor in the new cubicle shed at Parkmill Farm. The McGregors milk 100 pedigree Holstein cows near Tarbolton in Ayrshire. Struan and brother, Cameron, are taking over more responsibility from their father and this vlog covers the issue of succession. For

the brothers to become more involved, and to futureproof the business, they've made a major investment at Parkmill, building new cubicles and a new parlour. Struan says he believes this will improve cow health and make milking the cows easier.

For more information about making a vlog to promote your work and your co-operative, contact Ashley Stamper on 07767 241452.



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