



# COWS HOLD THE KEY AT KINGSPPOOL

Functional cows with innovative diversification is what makes the King's crown golden as Izzy Whittaker investigates

**R**unning a tight ship does not even come close to the business practice and work ethic of the forward-thinking King Brothers from Iron Acton, Bristol. All it takes is one phone call to the farm office to be impressed by the range of business ventures you can automatically be diverted to.

I travelled to the farm under false pretences, having thought that the duration of my visit would be focusing on the diversifying business that make the King's enterprise so unique, but after 10 minutes of being on farm, it was clear that dairying is very much at the heart and is the passion behind the King's empire.

Originating from Somerset, the King family moved to Bristol in 1918 after selling the family farm. From what started as an 80 acre mixed holding, four generations on and P. E. King Limited has, under the ambitious eye of brothers Michael and Chris King, morphed into the 1,127 acre profit centre it is today.

Now with a long succession of awards under their belt including herd competitions, shows and business focused titles such as runner-up in Farm Business Progressive Farmer of the Year 2011, winning the RABDF/

NMR Gold Cup has easily been the pinnacle and despite being an objective of their 2009 five-year business plan, is something that Michael modestly confesses: "we never dreamt we would win."

The current milking herd consists of 320 cows with youngstock managed at a second farm, 1.6 miles away. After an on-off relationship with TB the Kings wanted to put the money back

into the herd by investing in the *Smiddiehill Roxy*, *Weeton Debbie*, *Gordonel Mandy* and *Richaven Leda* families.

The farm is made up of both owned and tenanted land and its sandy loam based soils are cropped with 400 acres of cereals, 400 acres of maize, with the rest made up of temporary and permanent grassland.

The current herd average runs at 9,848kgs, 4.14%F and 3.39%P, 172 SCC, 19% rolling replacement rate, 399 calving interval and plans are in place to change to three times a day milking imminently.

## Powerhouse cows

Anyone who accuses the Holstein breed of being too angular, infertile and not built to last should walk through the powerhouse *Kingspool* milking herd where strong, functional

**LEFT** For prevention against *Johnes*, a pasteuriser was fitted to reduce the risk.





**ABOVE** The team receiving the Gold Cup. From left: Lyn Smith, Chris King, Philip Kirkham, Michael King, Martyn Smith, John Alvis, Iain McAlpine and David Cotton.

**RIGHT** Kingspool Brass Zena EX93 (2E).



### HERD STATS

- **Herd size:** 320
- **Herd classification:**  
52 EX, 126 VG, 116 GP
- **100-tonne cows:** 11
- **Annual production:**  
3,000,000
- **Replacement rate:** 19%

animals with a will to milk have laid strong foundations. The first 100 tonne cow to emerge with a *Kingspool* prefix was in 2005 and since then, 11 cows have topped the mark, with seven currently in the herd.

Easily the two most prolific families are 'Mandy' and 'Roma' and are what Chris describes as: "Functional not fancy cows."

Despite this underlying theory, both bloodlines contain many stand-out individuals. Eighth lactation *Kingspool Jocko Roma EX92(6E)* comes with 3 stars, has passed the LP100 milestone, is currently averaging 12,641kgs, 3.43%F, 3.10%P per lactation and should finish LP110 inside 305 days. *Kingspool Goldwyn Mandy EX90* is the herd's highest yielder, having broken the *Kingspool* milking record at 76.5kg/day, finishing her third lactation with a 305 day yield of 16,729kgs at 3.7%F and 3.33%P. *Goldwyn Mandy* is backed by an impressive nine generations that average EX90.

Showering success has been enjoyed on various levels; *Kingspool Jordan Princess EX93(2E)* won at the Bath and West 2010 and was crowned

Supreme Champion at North Somerset Show in 2010 and 2011.

14-year old *Kingspool Juror Dorothy EX94(5E)* also deserves note. As a young cow she enjoyed show success at the 2001 National Holstein Show and took the Berkeley Show Supreme Championship in 2005. In 2009 she won the Gloucestershire NMR Herds Competition Supercow award and has latterly earned her place amongst the elite high producers, completing 100 tonnes in her eighth lactation.

### Attention to detail

What stands out to me is the importance of cow comfort to achieve longevity in the *Kingspool* herd. Every drop of milk is squeezed from every animal and the older cows are given extra TLC – being loose housed to get that extra lactation.

As soon as a cow calves it is given a warm drink of electrolytes, put straight onto TMR and anything with three calves or over is given a bolus. All cows are fed to appetite with no feeding in the parlour; as Chris says: "All cows are here on merit, so they are all fed the same."

The high yielding group receive 27kgs of dry matter, the transition group

*'Classifying is the jam that keeps everything sweet'* Chris King

receives 15kgs a day and water troughs are cleaned every week.

Animal behaviour has also been analysed and addressed at *Kingspool*. December 2011 brought a new shed that combines loose housing and cubicle sand beds. Fresh cows are loose housed to give them an extra bit of help and are fed TMR with a high energy stimulator. Incredibly, after introducing these changes, the incidence of mastitis in the fresh group has reduced by 90%.

Heifers calve at two-years and are managed separately to the main herd in another new building. They are given

**RIGHT** *Kingspool Jocko Roma EX92 (6E)*  
3 brood stars  
LP100  
Averaging 12,641kgs,  
3.43%F, 3.10%P.





*‘112 storage units running at over 90% capacity’*



112 containers – cost for storage per month:  
 10ft x 8ft x 8ft – £100 inc VAT  
 20ft x 8ft x 8ft – £135 inc VAT  
 40ft x 8ft x 8ft – £210 inc VAT

the best chance to thrive and just before they are dried off, they are put in with the main herd. They are housed in head-to-head

*time for all members of the dairy unit team and we make sure that any new staff are involved. It really engages them and I think it buys everyone into the herd and helps share the passion for cows.”*

The herd now includes 86% GP or better with 52 Excellent and 126 VG.

#### **Milk Tendering**

In what to me is completely unheard of in the dairy industry, the Kings tendered their milk to local buyers based on the health and welfare of their product on offer. Coincidentally, the tactic led to an eventual outcome of an extra 2ppl from their existing buyer, Farmright.

Michael says: *“Tendering our milk was a first for milk buyers but it was attractive to them as it showed us to be business-minded and they want to be working with like-minded people.”*

However, since then they are in the process of forming a 20 million litre milk group – The Phoenix – and are in negotiations with new milk buyers after a turn of events led to Farmright recently folding.

#### **Diversification**

Aside from *Kingspool* Holsteins, industrial lettings and vinegar make up the P.E. King portfolio that includes King Vinegar, Backfield Farm Business Park and Mayshill Industrial Estate, Kingspool Seeds and Yate Self Storage.

Backfield Farm Business Park and Mayshill Industrial Estate includes storage units and workshops that have been

cubicles and always have extra feed space at the feed barrier.

Martyn Smith is the Head Herdsman in charge and makes the breeding decisions. Current sires in the flask include *Berryhill, Alexander, Windhammer, Fever, Seaver, Sid, Windbrook, Wyman* and *End Story*. Martyn also uses a small amount of genomic bulls, but only uses them as he would a young sire, making use of the added information available.

Cow management is proving extremely effective with only two DA's since June and aside from routine weekly visits proving 'prevention is key' – calls from the vet are rare. Surplus fresh heifers and 2<sup>nd</sup> calvers are sold through Sedgemoor, Bristol and private sales.

#### **Award-winning youngstock rearing**

*Kingspool* Holsteins has received widespread interest, particularly from the National Youngstock Association (NYA), for their youngstock rearing and Martyn's wife Lynn has a meticulous handle on this area. Having been runner-up in British Dairying's 2011 Calf Rearer of the Year competition, Lynn runs a very efficient system and leaves a fool-proof plan so that anyone can walk into the calf department and feed the calves.

For prevention against Johnes, a pasteuriser was fitted to reduce the risk. After the first six months there was a significant improvement in the calves and reduction in antibiotic treatment. An average of 43 treatments had been reduced to 12 and 12 calf scours had decreased to one. Now no vaccinations are made on the calves, only BVD and IBR when they are six months old.

Newborn calves receive six litres of colostrum within the first 12 hours of life. Milk calves being offered ad-lib hay from day one. They are weaned at eight weeks old and weighed at birth and weaning with a calculated DLWG of 1.1kg day. Regular smoke tests are taken to check ventilation and a 4ft wall fan was installed three years ago to improve airflow.

#### **The impact of Classification**

Classification has shaped the herd by maintaining the focus for breeding and selection. Chris says: *“Initially we didn't have a clue what we had. We first classified in 1997 and had one Excellent – which was the first Excellent Black Jack in the UK – and a VG two-year old from the Roma family.”*

*“Now classifying is the jam that keeps everything sweet. It is an exciting*



### Annual sales volume of core vinegar products

- Spirit vinegar: 1m litres
- Malt vinegar: 170k litres
- Non-brewed condiments: 115k litres
- Distilled vinegar: 78k litres
- Wine vinegar: 48k litres



#### ABOVE LEFT

Kingspool Jordan  
Princess EX93 (2E).

#### ABOVE RIGHT

Kingspool Juror  
Dorothy EX95(4E)  
- VG88 2nd lact in picture.

#### Quickfire Questions

Shottle v Goldwyn - **Goldwyn**  
Genomics v Proven - **Proven**  
Spray v Teat Dip - **Teat Dip**  
DIY v Technician - **DIY**

converted from poultry units. 82 units are at the Backfield site and 30 at Mayshill. There is a variety of tenants ranging from bespoke racing car trailers, architectural model makers to MOT and vehicle repair centres with occupancy running at over 90% in the last four years.

160 caravans, motor homes, boats and trailers are also stored at Backfield Farm and Mayshill Industrial site, with the costs based on £38.50 inc VAT per month, £398 inc VAT per annum.

Innovation continues to prosper through the development of micro-storage units for smaller storage space, with costs reflected by the footprint size of the item stored.

The vinegar trade was explored after a disappointing venture into the egg pickling business. After research and development,

the Kings Vinegar umbrella encompasses 14 different types including spirit, malt and non-brewed condiments – the type found in fish and chip shops. The vinegar business is also run from a converted poultry unit.

Obviously security is a pressure point with the responsibility of high value items and technologies on site, so no risks are taken and electric gates, fob access, CCTV and high fencing has been installed.

#### The Future

Plans are well under way to develop the 290-head youngstock farm. Using the effective 300-cow business model at Two Pools Farm, next on the list is to replicate that at the youngstock farm and contract rear the youngstock.

The farm is running at over-capacity with every corner filled, so the mid-June 2012 completion date can only come quick enough.

Open Farm Sundays are also a scheme recently undertaken by the family as they actively want to engage the general public with food production.

The Kings can only be commended on their quick-thinking business sense that is founded on strong management and a work attitude that doesn't become complacent with the current and strives to better itself.

### FARM FACTS

- Size: 1,127 acres
- Soil type: Sandy loam
- Rainfall: 850mm
- Sea Level: 200ft above
- Location: Between the Vale & Cotswolds, 11m from Bristol

#### RIGHT

Kingspool  
Spirte Roma 2  
VG88 (Gdam:  
Kingspool Jocko  
Roma EX92  
(6E)).

