Alan Wilson farms a commercial Holstein herd of 300 cows outside Dromore, Co. Down which are milked three times a day. He first used Ultrabond in November 2012 after a mycotoxin problem with his whole crop wheat meant processors refused the milk for 6 days.

"After the milk was rejected, I took advice from my consultants, Farmgate Nutrition, and they informed me it was mycotoxin contamination in the wheat that was causing the milk to be tainted. I was then introduced to Ultrabond and thankfully the problem was solved after a few days feeding it to the herd. Over time, the SCC (somatic cell count) reduced from 250,000 to an average of about 160,000.

"I would say looking back that it took me about six months to get over the total effect of the whole crop wheat problem; by which time I had lost a lot of milk and the cows weren’t holding, which was costing me money every day. The pregnancy rate was as low as 18%. But my herd’s fertility has improved steadily since using Ultrabond and it’s now sitting at 22% with a calving index of 385.

"The cows calve all year around with an average of 25-30 calves per month. The pre calving cows, which are under the most stress, are fed a different diet and given less silage than those who have calved. We keep our high yielding cows indoors all year, whereas cows that drop below 23 litres are sent out to grass and are only milked twice a day."

Milk cows are fed TMR (total mixed ration) and are split into three groups based on their stage of lactation. Diets are formulated using grass silage, whole crop wheat, haylage, chopped straw and concentrates. The herd is currently delivering a milk yield of 8,500kg at 4.18% butterfat and 3.43% protein.

"The dry cow is the most important animal in a herd and my nutritionist is the key man on my farm. If you give the dry cow the correct diet 21 days before she is due to calve, it makes the process all the easier and you are able to maximise her yield. It all works together. You need the data and the science behind it."

Alan uses Genus RMS AI and the farm vet is in the yard every fortnight doing PD (pregnancy diagnosis) sessions.

"I simply couldn’t do without Ultrabond. It’s doing what I need it to do. I couldn’t afford the risk of not feeding it to the cows. Margins are tight given the high cost of production so I need to be doing all I can to make the farm viable."

Optivite: for science, support and results
David Wilson farms 250 acres outside Newtownabbey in Co. Antrim with his 19 year-old son Jonathan. The Wilson’s herd, Gravelhill Holsteins, is made up of 170 pedigree cows that are milked twice a day. Their diet is based on grass silage, whole crop wheat, hay and concentrates and cows are fed to yield in the parlour. The current rolling 12-month average milk yield is 9700kg at 3.95% butterfat, 3.23% protein. David’s highest yielding cow is known to give 74.6 litres per day.

“I was on a farm walk in Ballymoney one day and the vet that was running the event, Dr Dan Ryan, talked about this product he was using on his own dairy farm in Cork called Ultrabond. He referred to mycotoxins in silage and how they are invisible to the naked eye but can cause various problems to cows and their fertility. At the time he said it cost just £9 per cow per year to feed this binder so I began to take note of Ultrabond and enquired some more.”

Dan undertook pregnancy diagnosis at the Wilson’s farm and noticed that there was a startling trend for embryonic deaths diagnosed in the early stages of lactation.

Having heard in the past that binders could be expensive, David decided to try Ultrabond on the advice of his feed consultancy company, Farmgate Nutrition.

“I began using the binder in June 2013 and have seen great benefits so far. We are experiencing lower embryonic deaths thus tightening our calving pattern and are using less semen straws than before. We have also seen a big reduction in swollen hocks over the past 12 months and a reduction in the calving interval of 13 days, from 403 to 390.”

“Since using Optivite’s Ultrabond I haven’t looked back. For the price of a semen straw per cow per year, I am definitely seeing the results and I’m certainly not losing any time over cows not holding.”

After he left school, David began to grade up the pedigree herd, buying imported embryos from Canada and he has since developed his own cow families. “If you are going to milk cows, they might as well be good cows,” referring to the Holsteins that David holds in high regard.

David bred Gravelhill Alexander Hope, the highest classified heifer in the UK, VG89 points at two years old, which was sold in January 2013 and later became Heifer Champion at the Balmoral Show that year. She went on to be the Irish National intermediate Champion and qualified and was nominated the All Britain Junior Reserve. David still has her heifer calf in the herd.

Optivite: for science, support and results
Harold Johnston farms 220 commercial Holstein cows, some with pedigree status, on his farm in Ahoghill, Co. Antrim.

The farm operates calving from late August to the end of April working off black and white sires. Currently milking twice a day, the milk yield is over 8,000kg at 3.76% butterfat and 3.17% protein. But Harold is planning to milk three times a day when one of his sons joins him working on the farm.

Cows are fed to yield in the parlour and the diet is based on a TMR (total mixed ration) of grass silage, whole crop wheat and concentrates. Milk cows are kept in two groupings – early lactation and late lactation.

Dry cows are fed a different ration involving chopped straw, concentrates and minerals in addition to grass silage. They are also split into two groups – far off and close up. Ultrabond is included in the feed of both groups of dry cows as well as the two milk cow groupings.

Harold works alongside Farmgate Nutrition, where they assist him in creating balanced rations suited to the farm’s silage analysis. Having tried other absorbers in the past, Harold began using Ultrabond in June 2013 and has seen an improvement in somatic cell count, calving index and a reduction in swollen hocks.

“I know since using Ultrabond the somatic cell count has been staying at an acceptable level and not fluctuating like it used to.”

Harold Johnston | Ahoghill, County Antrim, Northern Ireland

For further information contact Richard Webster:
Tel: 07703 203686
Email: richard@rwn.org.uk
Web: www.rwn.org.uk

Optivite: for science, support and results