

# BE BOLD, GO GLOBAL



The John Platt Scholarship

Recipient's presentation  
of findings 2008-2017

# Rebecca Thelwell 2017

## Australia

### **Australia- Disease control through biosecurity: Focusing on Johnes disease in cattle**

#### **Disease control: Keeping up with the Johnes**

Last year I was lucky enough to be one of the recipients for the John Platt Travel Scholarship.

As I have worked for Nantwich Vets and APHA, as well as on my own family farm, I have seen first hand of the devastation to farms caused by disease.



Johne's disease is one of the fastest growing diseases in the UK and Europe and more must be done to take control of it. It is a debilitating and irreversible infection common in many herds with the main clinical symptoms being scouring and severe weight loss with no loss of appetite, eventually resulting in death. It is spread from an infected animal to youngstock through ingestion of faeces and milk and in severe cases it can begin in the womb. Even when we look at the bigger picture, some cows which have the illness underlying can manifest through other issues. These can be high cell count, mastitis, poor milk yield, infertility and lameness. These symptoms alone will cost the farm a lot in treatment and loss of production. I wanted to find a practical solution to share ways that we can reduce the disease spread in farms in Cheshire.

I aimed my focus on Johnes's disease over others as we are continually learning more and more about this disease and there is so much that we can do to prevent the spread of it.

So I decided that hygiene and biosecurity were the main factors that farmers can focus on to control the spread of this disease and after looking into it, I discovered that Australia have been very influential in the reduction of the disease. They have almost eradicated TB and are now doing what they can to stop Johnes's in its tracks. This is most likely due to their strict on-farm biosecurity but also because of the government reaction to Johnes's.

I contacted a farm vet who works for the University of Sydney who also trains student vets. I thought this would be a good place to start and in January I embarked on my educational adventure to Sydney.

I shadowed her while we explored many farms in the area and got to see a variety of different farming styles and practices.

The average herd size in and around Sydney is similar to the UK although some that are further inland can have livestock in the thousands.

I realised that farmers in Australia have similar views and face the same problems and obstacles as farmers in the UK and that the main difference when speaking to them was just their accent! However, weather is much less of a problem there- the temperature rarely drops below 10 degrees even in the winter so most of the farms are grazed year round and feed silage during the hot summer months when there is little rain and the grass is minimal.

As Australia is so big most cases of farm management are based on a state by state basis. As I was in Sydney I focused on New South Wales but the majority of what I saw was implemented nationwide.

The first major difference to here is that Johnes's Disease is notifiable in some states in Australia including New South Wales.

If an animal tests positive for the disease, it has to be culled. Up until June 2016 the farm

would then be under quarantine with no livestock movements onto or off the farm until they were clear of disease. They would then need two clear herd tests before they could be opened up again. In Australia these herd tests are through a 'yard scrape'; a pooled muck sample from the collecting yard. If this comes back as positive, every animal in the herd will have a blood test to determine which animal gave the positive sample.

One farm I went to had been through this ordeal and although he agreed that through compulsory culling that they had become clear, he expressed concerns to the method. The first was that yard scrapes can be tampered with and although it is for the farmers benefit not to spread the disease, certain cows could be left off the yard when samples were taken. He then described how his positive cow was bought in and that he was closed up for months but the farm where he had purchased the cow from and all the other farms that their herd was dispersed to couldn't be traced as their tracing system is not mandatory.

He thinks that because of this issue they stopped putting farms under quarantine after having a positive result but kept the disease as notifiable and still cull any cows that give a positive result to Johne's Disease. The government also encouraged an industry standard of requesting a farms testing history when buying an animal so that informed decisions can be made.

Animal Health Australia have created a biosecurity manual for their livestock farmers to place the emphasis on the importance of biosecurity. This is an essential part of the disease control in the country and something that everybody- farmers, vets, ministry officers, visitors etc should all be aware of and can implement to some extent.

This manual is compulsory for accredited farms but is highly recommended to all livestock farmers. It states 'Good biosecurity practices prevent the spread of infectious disease and invasive pests or weeds between farms as well as protecting Australia from diseases and weeds that occur overseas. Biosecurity procedures address the containment of disease outbreaks when they occur.'

It suggests the following:

Keeping a documented Farm Biosecurity Plan

All livestock movements onto the premises have a known health status (e.g. Livestock Health Statement/Declaration or equivalent)

All introduced livestock are inspected for signs of ill health or disease on arrival at the property and kept in isolation for a period of time

Livestock are inspected regularly for ill health and disease and appropriate action undertaken where necessary

The risk of livestock straying onto or from the property is minimised

There are systems in place to notify a veterinary practitioner, or animal health officer, if unusual disease, illness or mortality is observed

Where reasonable and practical, the movement of people, vehicles and equipment entering the property are controlled and, where possible, movements recorded

Any other procedures or practices that contribute to minimising the risk or spread of disease

After speaking to farmers about these plans I discovered that not only do they do it for their own sake and for animal welfare and farm productivity and efficiency, but also to issue a positive image of farming to the consumer. A cow that is chronic with Johne's disease looks very thin and ill and this creates a very negative impact on the producer. We must do what we can to limit this disease and once a biosecurity plan is in place it is much easier for everybody who works on the farm and who visit the farm to know where they stand and what to do.

I have learnt so much on this trip and it really will stay with me forever. I am so grateful that the John Platt Scholarship gave me this experience. I will implement it into my farming practice

and suggest that others do too. I would highly recommend anybody who is thinking about applying for the scholarship to do it.

# Neil Quinlan 2015

## UK, Ireland and America



I was very fortunate to be awarded the John Platt Scholarship in June 2015. I am using the funding to enable me to increase my knowledge in heifer rearing. I have a strong interest in the rearing of heifer replacements as from personal experience I feel it can be an area that is overlooked, despite its vital importance for the future of the herd. The aims of my study are to identify methods of colostrum management, determine techniques used in supporting calves in their first two weeks of life, and investigate how weight gains are maximised, and growth targets achieved, from weaning to bulling age.

To date I have attended the 'Positive Farmers' conference in Cork, Ireland which specifically covered a session on calf rearing and young stock disease management. The session presented findings from Teagasc research farms which demonstrated the importance colostrum management techniques i.e. first milk within 2 hours at a quantity of 3 litres (the '123' rule). I have also attended a number of calf rearing conferences and aim to carry out on farm visits in the UK over the summer of 2016.

A large part of my study is to travel to America in order to identify how the large scale dairy units are able to successfully rear heifers; and to compare and contrast techniques used in the USA and the UK. I will be travelling to America in March 2016 where I plan to visit farms in Wisconsin and Idaho. I have arranged farm visits through Genus as well as independently; I am extremely excited about my forthcoming trip and looking forward to feeding back my learning when I return!

# Neil Roberts 2015

## Holland and Wisconsin



This scholarship offers a fantastic opportunity for young, progressive rural people to have the opportunity to travel and learn from some of the best agricultural businesses around the world.

As a progressive dairy farmer I wanted to advance my knowledge into achieving the most from a dairy farms main asset. The modern dairy herd.

We run a high yielding herd in the heart of Cheshire. Especially with the difficulty with the milk price at the moment we want to maximise the potential in every area of the business. Time and time again the biggest driver in this type of business is 'how we look after our modern dairy cow' and making sure she reaches her true potential whilst giving back to the business.

In the UK working within the dairy industry, we like to pride ourselves on our welfare, commitment and ensuring our dairy cows receive the best attention we can give. We know full well that this can be made so much easier if cows were housed the best environment possible 24 hours a day 365 days a year and ensuring that the whole staff team is prepared and clued up in achieving this.

We are moving into a new era within the industry where traceability, record keeping, drug usage, welfare and compliance will continue to dictate of the top end milk contracts. So, in advancing my knowledge cows and their housed environment I decided to use the scholarship money from the 'John Platt Scholarship Award' on the following courses. 'COWSIGNALS' in Holland and 'ALTA-U' in Wisconsin.

### **COWSIGNALS. Bergharen, Holland. (Certified Master Trainer Course)**

In June 2015 I spent 5 days with Veterinarian Dr Joep Driessen who is regarded as a global advocate in identifying, analysing and discussing cow behaviours. There were 10 others from all around the world from vets, advisors and dairy farmers looking to get a better understanding of dairy cows.

In a simplified nutshell 'CowSignals' is seeing the environment from a cows perspective. What does she need? What does she see? What is she telling us? It would be just like putting a Go-Pro on a cow and identifying areas were there could be a problem or bottleneck highlighting that something needs changing.

Stop, Look, Listen, What do you see? What is she telling you? He



successfully uses blogs and social media to convey this message to fellow dairy farmers, animal lovers and the general public.

Having now become a Master Trainer for 'The Cow Signals Company' I am now certified to train fellow dairymen on what to look for and improve in and around the modern dairy cow. I certainly made plenty of changes to the herds housing since coming back from the course at minimal cost and high return.

### **ALTA- U. Wisconsin, USA**

In November 2015 a small group of dairymen and veterinarians from the UK went on the highly advanced course in cow and people management on the very special Alta university (Alta-U) program based in Madison, Wisconsin USA (Aptly named 'America's Dairy-land')

It was branded the following: *'5 days in Alta-U is like One year in University'*

A super intense course spanning 5 days starting from 8.00am to 5.30pm which included a small classroom of progressive dairy people from around the world being tutored by the very best industry experts in dairy economics, fertility, cow health, staff leadership, genetics and dairy automation. They lent one on one discussion, advice, science, experience and innovations from the dairy industry through a number of classes based at Alta HQ in Wisconsin.

And what a course it was! Truly mind blowing how much new information, knowledge and contacts we gained from people whom work with the best dairymen and dairy businesses' around the world.

As a group we then spent the next 5 days driving around Wisconsin meeting, integrating and brain picking some of the most successful dairy producers in the US. The enterprises visited ranged from 300 – 75,000 dairy cows.

### **Conclusion**



Having regretfully not having much opportunity to travel and work around the world I now try and get myself off farm and learn as much as I can as fast as I can and from the most successful, experienced, knowledgeable people that I can learn from.

Keep your mind open! Use it as a sponge. Get wise, learn from experience and mistakes firstly and then use the above types of experiences to be proactive and produce that extra 'attention to detail' to make your business even more successful.



# Sara Pederson 2013

## Wisconsin

At the 2013 Cheshire Show I was delighted and privileged to be presented with my John Platt Travel Scholarship. Whilst as a farm vet I am involved in the treatment and prevention of many different conditions across a number of species, my real passion lies in the prevention and treatment of lameness in cattle.

Lameness is considered to be the most common cause of pain and distress in the modern dairy cow and thus a great concern in the eye of the consumer. It is my desire that through my John Platt travel scholarship I can ensure that I find out the latest information, technology and techniques to help Cheshire farmers reduce lameness on their farms.

Having had to put my original travel plans on hold, I now plan to travel to Wisconsin in April 2014. My travels will start by attending an advanced foot trimming course taught by world renowned foot trimmer Karl Burgi and learning about his approach to both preventative and corrective foot trimming. I will then be spending time with the research teams at University of Wisconsin-Madison to find out more about their latest findings and how these can be applied at farm level. My trip will end with a series of farm visits to learn how farmers have tackled their lameness problems and how they have overcome any barriers they have faced.

I am really looking forward to undertaking my travel scholarship, and more importantly, sharing my new knowledge on my return.



# Adam Brown 2012

## Germany and America



Applying for the John Platt Travel Scholarship was one of the best things I have ever done!

The Scholarship gave me the opportunity to study and research anaerobic digestion which is a form of renewable energy. Having the Scholarship helped to support my travels financially for the weeks I spent in Germany and America. It also enabled me to visit some of the biggest and impressive AD plants and technology in the world. The people who supply these AD plants such as 'Vogelsang', 'MTenergie', 'WIE', 'Clear Horizons' and 'Altech' were the most helpful people I have ever met, without them I couldn't have done half as much. The fact of telling them I had won this Scholarship and a student at an agricultural college from England meant I was no threat to them. They were interested in showing me around everywhere and being honest about their products which isn't always the case in this country due to competition.

There was so much I learnt about anaerobic digestion in both of these countries especially Germany. With having over 7,000 AD plants ranging from 50kw-2mw, 23,000 wind turbines and millions of solar panels I could tell the German government is really behind all types of renewable energy. The government also hands out a 40% grant to mainly farmers as well as providing them with FIT's to support them over 20 years. Having money handed to you like this comes to no surprise why Germany is such a 'green' country. It was a real eye opener and fascinating to see the amount of wind turbines, solar panels and digesters around everywhere, and the thousands of acres of land to come with it. As well as the government been happy for producing lots of green energy it meant the general public could have the electric and gas at much cheaper rate than we ever would.

America doesn't have a fraction of the amount of renewable energy sources but the ones it does have seem to be in a very big way. I did notice the American government were starting to utilise their waste products like food waste and slaughter waste (ETC) to feed these digesters which would have just as much calorific value in it as maize would. This particular AD plant I visited was the biggest plant in the world it was fed waste food and products to reduce the need for landfill and the poisonous harmful gases which would usually be left to escape into the atmosphere. Not only these digesters produce heat and electric but the bi product left after the anaerobic process becomes a bio fertiliser, which can be spread straight onto land and reduce the cost of buying manufactured fertiliser.

All the photos and information I collected on my travels will be put to very good use. I hope to do plenty of talks and presentations to students, farmers, young farmers and anyone who is willing to listen about my travels and the importance of renewable energy.

Personally I think AD is the most fantastic form of renewable energy as it benefits everyone and everything especially the environment by reducing the 'carbon footprint' and will be something which will become very popular, very soon.

I seriously recommend for any young enthusiastic person to consider applying for this Scholarship. It would be such an achievement as well as meeting lots of very interesting people and their ways of doing things.

**If there is an interesting topic to do with agriculture...which there is, then study it!**

# Nicola Fair 2012

## Canada and America



This year I was lucky enough to be one of the recipients of the John Platt Travel Scholarship. At the end of October I flew over the Atlantic to start my adventure. After a few days exploring Chicago I headed north over the border to Canada to attend the first International Dairy Cattle Welfare Symposium hosted by Guelph University.

This event brought together people from all over the world with an interest in the welfare of dairy cattle. As well as researchers, about 50% of the attendees were farmers and other people connected with the Canadian dairy industry. David Fraser from the University of British Columbia opened the symposium talking about our understanding of animal welfare. He suggested that to address consumer concerns farmers need to present themselves as professionals. He compared this to how the medical profession has changed from country doctors on horseback to white coated professionals and the trust this brings. Lots of very interesting work was presented which could potentially alter some of the things we are doing on farm, such as pair housing better for calves than single housing?

From Canada I travelled down to Wisconsin, one of the main aims of my trip was to see some of the work being done by the University of Wisconsin Madison through the Dairyland initiative. The Dairyland initiative is focused on promoting higher welfare housing for dairy cattle to help address consumers concerns about the industry. I was able to attend some of the training they run on building design. I found it very interesting that they not only invite vets like me but farmers, consultants and builders. I think this is a great way to give everyone that may have a say in the design of a building the opportunity to find out the information.

The training covered remodelling cow barns, designing transition cow facilities and ventilation systems for calf housing. The training on cow barns and transition cow facilities gave me some very interesting ideas and helped me get even more out of the farm visits later in my trip. But it was the calf ventilation systems that I found particularly interesting. Due to the extremes of temperature they struggle to get buildings to naturally ventilate in many parts of the US so they have to look at alternative methods of getting fresh air into buildings. They often do this by using positive pressure ventilation tubes, where a fan blows fresh air down the tube which escapes from holes along its length. The aim is to deliver fresh but still air at calf level. I know many people have tried similar systems in the UK and while some work very well others fail to deliver the desired results. There is a lot more science to getting these tubes to work than I think we have realised and this explains a lot about why some have not worked on farms. In the UK if we are building a new building we can get natural ventilation to work well for us but in some older buildings getting fresh air into them can be a real challenge. I saw some traditional Wisconsin barns that had installed inexpensive bespoke air tubes that had resulted in big improvements in calf health, I think there are definitely lessons we could learn from them.

My final week in Wisconsin was spent trying to get out on as many farms as possible. One of my aims was to see a range of different farms as many people in the UK get the impression that every farm in the US must have over 1000 cows but in fact the average herd size in the US is very similar to the UK. So as well as the very large dairy I knew there must be smaller units over there and I wanted to see some of these too. As well as arranging some of my own visits I was also able to spend some days riding around with various people in the industry to visit some of

the farms they work with. This included spending the day with one of the Wisconsin extension team and a day with a vet.

I saw a range of bedding types such as sand, recycled manure and compost bedded packs. It was good to speak to the farmers to find out why they had made their choice and what they liked about them. I found it interesting to see how farmers had adapted their housing to improve cow comfort. For example fitting a bedding retainer such as a piece of angle iron on to the back of a cubical bed so they can turn them into a deep bedded sand cubical. Sand was a very popular bedding choice on many of the farms I saw; several farms were recycling the sand using settling lanes which is something I would like to see more of in the UK.

As I said there is a range of farms in Wisconsin I visited some small 30 cow dairies where cows are still tied by the neck in traditional buildings. One interesting smaller unit was run by a lady in her 30's she had 90 cows and relied totally on bought in feed, another local farmer came in everyday with their mixer wagon to put feed out. The largest farm I visited was Pagels Ponderosa near Green Bay. This was a really impressive unit with just short of 5000 cows, their website <http://pagelsponderosa.com>, is worth a look as I really admired the way they work with consumers to help promote the image of dairy farming.

Wisconsin has some very impressive dairy farms. I was impressed by the importance that was placed in cow comfort, particularly in new builds. I think there are some lessons that we can learn from the US but I also think it is important that we remember that there are differences between the two countries, particularly in the weather, that means some ideas do not translate directly between the two. I had an amazing few weeks in North America and I would like to thank everyone involved with the John Platt Travel Scholarship for this amazing opportunity and I am looking forward to using everything I have learned to help UK dairy farmers.

# Paul Billington 2012

## Southern Ireland



### Southern Ireland. Past, Present and Future

#### Objectives

- To visit Southern Ireland and learn how the dairy industry is gearing up for the removal of milk quotas in 2015
- To investigate how family farms are managing to expand in a country where;
  - Land values are so high
  - Land parcels are so fragmented
- To consider what effect the removal of quotas will have on the UK dairy sector

#### Travels

Attended the Positive Farming conference in Limerick, January 2013. This year's conference was titled, "Profitable, Sustainable Expansion at Low Risk". Keynote speakers covered topics including:

- World dairy market outlook 2013 – 2020
- Developing people
- Practical experiences of expansion
- Does Ireland need strong integrated processing and marketing?

In addition to the conference I plan to return to Ireland in the spring to continue my studies at farm level.

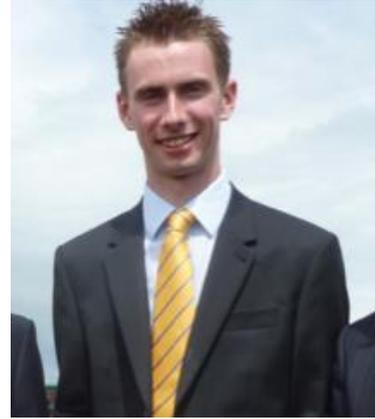
#### Application of findings

- Greater awareness of global dairy supply and demand
- Consider the competitive position of Irelands pasture based production
- Likewise the realities of relatively small, land-locked family farms – and how to progress from this
- How effective planning and budgeting is essential for any proposed expansion

I hope to reaffirm these findings at a practical level once I have completed the second half of my travel scholarship.

# Richard Edge 2011

## Canada



During the Cheshire Show of 2011, I was very privileged to be awarded the John Platt Travel Scholarship to fund a fact finding mission to Canada. During the first week of November 2012 I set off to Canada to attend the first ever World Youth Holstein Conference and at the same time to visit the renowned Royal Winter Fair in Toronto. Upon arrival, we were thrown into team building activities that enabled us to start getting to know our fellow youth delegates who came from New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, Germany, Holland, France and, of course, Canada. In Canada, the average herd size is 77 cows with an average yield of 9,700. 94% of the national herd are Holsteins, located mainly in Quebec (46%) and Ontario (37%), and it was interesting to learn that milk quota is a major restriction in Canada for expansion.

A day spent visiting three very different farms then followed, namely:

- Cranholme – Milking 80 cows through an 8 aside rapid exit parlour, with every animal being kept in one barn. Interestingly they were bedded on deep compost, loose housing, which resulted in very little mastitis and increased lying times.



*Cranholme Holsteins*



*Bosdale Holsteins*

- Bosdale – Milking 150 cows in a tie stall barn, averaging 10,500 litres on twice a day milking. This farm stimulated the greatest discussion between the group in terms of the consumer perception of cows being tied up all day and the issues of cow comfort and welfare; is it right to have a cow tied up all day; they certainly looked very well looked after?
- Summitholm – Milking 355 cows producing 12,800 litres from 3 times a day milking, housed on deep sand cubicles, which they state allows them to house up to 1.4-1.7 cows per stall!



*Summitholm Holsteins*

The conference then ensued, with the main focus being on genomics and the numerous benefits it can bring to the industry. The identification of health traits was one benefit, so that breeders can identify which animals are more resistant to mastitis, metritis, ketosis, johnnes and genetic defects. Similarly with fertility, breeders can now breed from the most fertile bulls, but whereas in the past high fertility bulls led to a decrease in milk production, we can now identify which genetic lines can increase both milk production and fertility, without any detriment to other traits.

Feed efficiency was another key trait that can now be identified within the breed, and with the renewed impetus for being green and protecting the environment, we can also identify which cows produce lower amounts of methane per unit of production. Something I found particularly interesting was the knowledge that only 4% of the DNA in a dairy cow is actually the cow herself, the remaining 96% are down to the DNA of the microbes within her! Therefore if we can manipulate and identify the animals with the most efficient rumen microbes, we can again breed from these!

On a more practical level, factors affecting transition cow management were also raised. Research has now clearly shown that the four most important factors that affect a successful transition are primarily feed bunker space, followed by health screening, the provision for bigger, wider cubicles (48" wide and 9ft long) and the availability of sand cubicles rather than matts or concrete.

Following on from the conference we attended The Royal Winter Fair, where we were able to witness some fantastic cows, from a fantastic country. Not only have I learnt a great deal during my week in Canada to apply back on our dairy farm at home in Wimboldsley, but I have also made many life-long friends and had some amazing experiences. It is with this in mind, that I would strongly recommend anyone who is interested in developing their knowledge and experience in Agriculture to apply for the John Platt Travel Scholarship. Thank you.

# David Williams 2011

## Canada and America



In summer 2012, I was fortunate to visit Canada and North America over a two week period. The funding came from the John Platt Travel Scholarship, which I gratefully received at the Presidents lunch at the Cheshire show. The aim of my trip was to investigate how large scale farming works in relation to the general running of large herds, staff and in particular, fertility management. My better half, Caroline, who works as a large animal vet for the Willows Vet Group came along for the ride and turned out to be an excellent navigator for what became an epic road trip!

We started at my half cousins farm in mid Manitoba, Canada. Steve and Nicki Smith farm 4000 acres of the flattest land I have ever seen, not a hill in sight for miles! Here, they milk 400 cows through a 20/40 parlour, with plans afoot for a new barn to hold a further 400 milked by six Lely robots. An impressive investment made possible by an excellent milk price; 80 cents against a production cost of around 40 cents. They moved to Canada only 13 years ago, after selling a modest sized dairy farm in Staffordshire. The above figures show how many opportunities are available in this part of the world for those who are prepared to move and work hard.

From here, we travelled to southern Manitoba where there is a great density of dairy farms in an area roughly the size of Wales. We visited three farms in one day, two of which were using robots to milk the cows. The Borst family are milking 800 cows through twelve Lely robots and producing 21,000 litres a day. Strict protocols are adhered to by all staff to provide consistency in all aspects of managing the herd. From calving cows to feeding calves, everything was managed with the greatest attention to detail. Bulling cows are all observed using neck collars already required for the robots. Mr Borst said that no manual heat detection was necessary due to the collars being so accurate. This statement is backed up with a calving interval of 400 days.

Our next stop was the farm of Peter De Jong, who milks 850 cows through a 50 point rotary parlour. He milks three times daily and milking takes 17 hours per day. An interesting diversification was the use of separated manure which was dried out and used for cubicle bedding.

Peter then sent us next door to his neighbour, Warner Hoffman, who had just installed a brand new unit due to his last barn and all his herd being lost in a fire! His herd consisted of 600 Fleckveigh cows being milked through 9 De Laval robots. All feed was carried to the cows on a conveyor belt system, delivering small amounts of feed to the cows every four hours. Heat detection at this time was manual. However, Mr Hoffman was awaiting a milk detection system which measures milk progesterone levels to determine stage of heat. Another example of the use of technology in dairying.

The next day was spent driving! Over the border, across Minnesota and into Wisconsin. This state gave us the really impressive grand scale dairy units. In particular, Rosendale dairy, carrying an impressive 8,200 cows. Two barns: 400 feet wide and a quarter of a mile long; house all the cows which are milked through two eighty point rotaries placed only ten feet apart in the same shed! This was the most impressive thing I have seen in agriculture and the sense of awe is almost mind blowing! Each parlour has five men to run them, with a unit going on to a cow every eight seconds. Cows are milked three times a day and the parlours are both run for 23 hours a day. It takes only two hours for them to fill each articulated tanker, which are parked

outside ready to be filled! In contrast to the robot units, all heat detection is carried out manually using tail paint, with a very successful calving interval of 395 days. This farm is part of a large partnership called Milk Source, which boasts five dairy units totaling 25,000 cows!

We also visited New Chester Dairy which was being built as a carbon copy of Rosendale Dairy. New Chester Dairy was only half complete, but the scale of the operation was huge. The third Milk Source farm we visited was their main youngstock unit which held 9,000 dairy heifers aged from one day old up to six months old. The sight of 3,600 calf hutches is somewhat impressive to say the least. Calves are fed pasteurised waste milk collected from the dairy units until weaning at eight weeks of age. Then they are moved into larger sheds with a gradual introduction to bigger groups to minimise the stress of mixing.

Whilst in Wisconsin, we visited several other large farms. All were excellent places to see with unparalleled animal welfare standards. Of particular note were the Crave Brothers Dairy who were milking 1,250 cows on two units. This was a very high yielding unit with the best cows giving 70 litres plus per day. The fertility management was different again, with no manual heat detection taking place. Instead, all cows were placed on an ov/sync programme at 60 days in milk with first service at 85 days. Calving interval here was a very respectable 395 days, which shows that their methods are working well.

Then we were off to Michigan State via Chicago for a day off! In Michigan, we saw two large Jersey herds of 1800 and 4000 cows each. The reason for the smaller type of cow was simple. They eat less and they poop less! As well as ease of management traits which come with the breed. This goes to show that all types of cow can be used in an indoor system successfully.

A short drive and we were back over the border into Ontario, and the slower pace of life of Canada. We visited Niagara falls for a couple of days break. A fantastic place, even if the town of Niagara somewhat resembles Blackpool!

Feeling refreshed, we then travelled over to London Dairies near the town of London. The main enterprise here was the selling of their dairy heifers, of which they calve 4,000 per year. The best are sold in batches of 100-200 at a time to dairy farmers all across eastern Canada.

We also saw the 700 cow Stanton dairies, as well as a flying visit to Guelph University on behalf of Reaseheath College. We met Professor Steve Miller who is heavily involved in the genetics and genomics of dairy and beef cattle. He and his team are currently trying to match genes to fertility traits in cattle in the ever long pursuit for the perfect cow.

In summary, I would say that all of the methods of fertility management are working well on the twelve dairy farms we visited. Whether using manual "old fashioned" methods or the more up-to-date computerised systems; they all have a place in the smooth running of the dairy farms we saw. Notably, all the units having exceptional fertility figures. I suppose it's up to the individual farmers' preference and style of system that will determine which way he or she chooses to go. Whichever, it is important to recognise that success comes from the management and staff, as well as sufficient protocols to provide a consistent way of doing things for those all important cows!

This marked the end of our two week trip where I feel we both learned a great deal. I have returned home and am implementing some of the things I have learned such as ov/sync to help improve fertility. We are also changing the way we rear our heifers with a focus on attention to detail and cost effectiveness. All in all, I feel this trip has been a great benefit to me personally as well as for my career in farming for many years to come. For this reason, I will always be grateful to the John Platt Travel Scholarship for giving me the opportunity to broaden my mind and my future prospects.



# Katy Waller 2010

## America

In 2010 I was lucky enough to be awarded the John Platt Travel Scholarship with a view of travelling to America for the Great Lakes Ice Cream and Fast Food Associations Convention which is held every February. From my research prior to my interview, the Great Lakes convention is one of the largest in America and not only boasts a large exhibition trade show, but also offers 2 days of seminars and workshops, so a great opportunity for me to learn and liaise with the experts!



Anyway – a little bit about me...

I work in the family business - Blaze Farm Partners, at Blaze Farm in Wildboarclough which is set in Cheshire within the stunning Peak District National Park. We diversified in June 2002 and opened an ice cream parlour, tea rooms and nature trails and since then our award winning Hilly Billy Ice Cream has gone from strength to strength!

We've been fortunate enough to receive lots of awards over the years – Best Small Visitor Attraction in Cheshire and Warrington, Cheshire Farms Diversification Award Winner, The Future Of Farming Award in the North West Region – and we're lucky that as a family business (I'm in partnership with my parents, Harold and Florence, and brother Marshall) we all get on well!

My main role at the farm is to make all the ice cream. We use around 3% of the milk produced on the farm and on average produce 14,000 litres of ice cream annually. This is mainly sold through the shop as ice cream cones eaten on the premises and litre tubs which are taken home. We also sell wholesale to local pubs and restaurants which accounts for around 5% of sales.

My ice cream recipe has evolved over the years as we've steadily grown the business with the last 'tweak' in 2009. In this time my confidence and experience has grown too and I now make a lot of the flavours myself and enjoy coming up with lots of new ideas.

I travelled to America in February 2012 and arrived at the hotel, which is joined to the exhibition hall where the trade show takes place, with 24 hours to readjust to the time zone and acquaint myself with my American counterparts. A mentor had been arranged for me through the convention so we all met up and chatted about our backgrounds and how things are similar but different with our ice cream backgrounds.

A lot of the women I met were from farming backgrounds like myself and they had diversified for the same reasons we had. It was interesting that the different states in America allowed different rights to the businesses. For example, the Kelley family (mother and daughter Karen and Betsy Kelley who looked after me for the convention) are not allowed to pasteurise their milk on site - they have to send their milk away to get pasteurised, then it's returned to them to make the ice cream from the mix on site in their creamery. Yet another farm in a neighbouring county is allowed to do the whole process on site – from raw milk pasteurisation to the finished ice cream product.

Ice Cream shops in America are also very different in the sense that they open till 10pm every night! They have such a late night soccer or basketball match culture over there, people think nothing of heading out late at night. They couldn't understand that I closed at 5.30pm! I assured them there was 'NO ONE' on the roads past 6pm and they just had to try and believe me!

Day 1 and 2 of the seminars were workshops which proved very interesting. Two ran alongside throughout the day and a CD with all presentations were given to all delegates so whichever you missed, you were able to catch up on. They all lasted 45 minutes which was just enough time to digest information, make notes and ask any questions.

They ranged from cleaning schedules over the year to internet advertising. T-shirts and branding to cake decorating. It was all very fascinating and has given me some great ideas on how to market and channel some business ideas for the future.

I was speaking on the second day and was on at the end of the afternoon with my presentation. By this point I had already spoken to many of the delegates through the 2 day seminars and the various breakfast and evening social events that were run by the event, so I felt quite at ease talking to everybody. I gave a brief rundown of our family farm and background through to why we diversified, how we did it and the ice cream making process that I run at the farm. It was nice that through the question and answer session at the end, other companies of similar size to ours – our American Counterparts – chatted about the similarities and pitfalls that they found with their businesses – all very motivating.

On the following 2 days was the trade show which was great fun with free ice cream samples all day!

I found this similar to the UK version with equipment on show, flavours, insertions, toppings and cones but in America, they also had shop equipment on show such as cash registers, and snack equipment like hot dog makers and nacho display counters and of course, it was much bigger.

One of the things that stood out with American ice cream is that all the flavours are several words long. For example, it's not just a 'Strawberry' ice cream, it's 'Strawberry Surprise with Sugar Syrup and Strawberry Sauce' – which I found quite comical towards the end. When talking to my mentors about it, they laughed and said that most of the time, they had to explain all their flavours to their customers and seeing that they had over 240 flavours (yes, you read that correctly) it was pretty time consuming!

One flavour that stood out for me was the 'Superman' flavour – a swirl of red, blue and yellow ice creams which looked fantastic! I also liked the different topping sauces and 'finishing off' ideas that they presented. A lot of the ice cream in America is custard based which differs from here in the UK so that was nice to taste too.

They also make their own waffles in America as opposed to us buying waffle cones in. This is a hot metal shaped plate where the mix is poured on and once cooked, the waffle cone is shaped and used for ice cream. Betsy said that she can easily make over 200 of these in a day and they charge the customer \$1 for a waffle cone.

After 2 days of the trade show, Karen and Betsy took me on a road trip to an ice cream farm 45 minutes away. Troy and his family had been to the conference earlier in the week and had invited us over so we headed out to see them. Their set up was amazing. Although they only milked 60 cows they sold all their milk through their shop – this was turned into ice cream, flavoured milk, household milk, cheese and butter – they even used the whey from the cheese and butter to make salad dressings. To walk around their production rooms was a great

privilege – the butter churns were huge and the room where the holding tanks were was massive. It was truly inspiring to see how the family had turned their business from a usual farm to this massive diversification, and in such a short time – they'd only been open for 5 years!

So – on my return...

I was lucky enough to bring some ice cream flavour samples home with me from 'The Green Mountain' flavour supplier (thankfully they didn't explode in my suitcase). They pride themselves in using pure ingredients rather than artificial and their Madagascan Bourbon Vanilla was absolutely gorgeous! The 'Blue Raspberry' is also delicious and goes down very well with both young and old alike.

I'm determined to make my own version of 'Superman' and haven't forgotten all the inspiring flavours I saw on my travels. Troy also gave me the recipe for his 'Salted Caramel' which still gets asked for now at home so I make that every few months too, it's delicious.

Karen, her husband Tim and Betsy actually travelled over to see us at the end of January and we spent a lovely day showing them round and swapping stories. My parents especially loved chatting to them as even though we're miles apart, we're so similar in our farming practices – it's our turn to visit them next!

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to travel to America and see how things are done there. It's not necessarily better, it's just so different and even though I've not been able to implement all the new ideas I've learnt yet, I've still got those ideas and am ready to 'bank' them just as soon as I'm able too!

I'd recommend everyone to apply for the scholarship – it really has broadened my ideas and was the trip of a lifetime!

# Jonny Hewitt 2009

## America



In February 2010 I attended the North American Farmers Marketing Direct Association conference which was held in Lancaster Pennsylvania. The main highlight of the conference is the 3 day bus tour visiting the many farms who engage either with direct marketing (farm shops, farmers markets) and those farms who have engaged in agritourism. It felt like a masterclass in farm business being immersed amongst 225 fellow marketeers, farm operators, be it from the seasoned professionals to the people who have just started their journey, into engaging with the public. The overall feeling from the conference is that of optimism, despite the challenging times that people are experiencing, the general public do still want to take their families to get some fresh air, have fun, learn and eat good food.

From the ideas gained from the conference I have been able to expand and enhance part of our farm agritainment offering and learn new skills into social media marketing.

The John Platt Travel Scholarship enabled me to continue into travelling to new places, learn from new people and stand on the shoulder of giants to see further. Travel is a very important part of what we need to do in business.

# Ian McGrath 2009

## Holland and Sweden

Ian has had to postpone travel but is planning to visit Holland and Sweden to look at technological advancements in dairy farming. He is particularly interested in the use of automotive systems in farming, such as robotic milking.



# Rich Beck 2008

## New Zealand and Western Australia



In November 2008 I was very fortunate to travel around New Zealand and visit Western Australia on a 4 week study tour having been awarded the John Platt Travel Scholarship.

I started in New Zealand having joined a Livestock Improvement Cooperation group of 20 dairy farmers from the UK & Ireland on a 14 day study tour. We visited 16 dairy farms throughout the North & South Island across several regions including; Hamilton, Rotorua, Christchurch, Canterbury Plains, Dunedin, Invercargill and Queenstown.

The focus of the New Zealand study tour comprised of:

- Pasture management
- Fertility - cross breeding
- Environmental issues
- Economics of NZ milk production

Following the end of the tour I departed the group and travelled to Perth, Western Australia, where I visited a former Cheshire Young Farmer Ian Crawford on his arable farm. I was fortunate to be lent a 4x4 so, using some initiative, I travelled 400km south to a dairy region near Margaret River where I visited several dairy farms for an insight in to:

- Dairy commodity markets
- Business growth
- Issues relating to water supply & demand

The John Platt Travel Scholarship has enabled me to broaden my horizons and vision with a wealth of knowledge provided by an excellent experience of Dairy farming on the other side of the globe.

Over the past 4 years I have utilised this knowledge within our family dairy business, this has enabled us to achieve business growth and development whilst simplifying our system that suits all aspects of our farm.

# James Hague 2008

## New Zealand

When I applied for the scholarship five years ago I was running the family dairy herd at home and I chose to travel to New Zealand to study pasture management. Dairy farming is New Zealand's largest single industry with 95% of New Zealand's milk production being exported. Whilst in New Zealand I specifically studied the pasture management systems to adapt the grazing system that we had in place at home. I had recently switched the calving pattern at home from one of an all year round pattern to a spring calving system.



During my time in New Zealand I visited the South Island. At the time I visited, South Island dairy production was fast growing and represented over 30% of total NZ solids production. Overall the South Island had larger farms, larger herds, higher production per cow and per hectare and higher stocking rate than the North Island. The main dairy areas in the South Island being Christchurch and Southland. From my tour of NZ I built on my experience of block calving and was able to adapt the grazing system to improve the profitability of the family business.

I approached a representative from Dairy NZ who agreed that I could spend a week with them. Dairy NZ are independent, farmer-controlled and accountable solely to its farmer members. The main aim of Dairy NZ is to secure and enhance the profitability, sustainability and competitiveness of New Zealand dairy farming; basically the NZ version of DairyCo.

During the second week I visited Lincoln University Dairy Farm. This is a 186 hectare irrigated property, of which 161 hectare is the milking platform. It was converted to dairying in 2001 and is managed by the South Island Dairying Development Centre. The different soil types on the farm represent most of the common soil types in Canterbury. I also visited Kimihia Research Centre which is a plant breeding farm where they pay particular attention to grass swards that withstands wet winters and unreliable summers.

In the final week I visited Southland Demonstration Farm which is a partner farm of Dairy NZ. This farm operates as a commercial demonstration farm which provides a focal point for the dissemination of information to Southern South Island dairy farmers. Throughout the tour I was also able to visit working dairy farms seeing first hand every day farmers putting pasture management in practice.

The trip allowed me to experience alternative farming methods and I am grateful to The Cheshire Agricultural Society and Reaseheath College for the opportunity to do so.