

# Somerset farmer predicts change in livestock feeding

**Somerset farmer, Keith Barrow, has changed the way he feeds his cattle and has reduced costs, improved nutrition and opened opportunities elsewhere on the farm.**

Beef and sheep producer, Keith Barrow (pictured right), believes a revolution is coming in the way we feed grain to our livestock and fails to understand why the system he is using on his West Somerset farm has not taken hold across the farming industry.

Farming at Higher Halsey Cross Farm in Nether Stowey on the fringes of the Quantock Hills, Mr Barrow and his sons, James and George, have transformed production on their family unit to accommodate over 800 head of cattle and 550 ewes – and still leave surplus land available for rent by a local biogas plant.

Always keen to make every acre work hard for the business and feed his stock as far as possible on home-grown feeds, he says a key ingredient of the cattle rations is moist crimped grain.

Having fed dried grain for many years and contemplated the cost of a new grain store and dryer as the business grew, he knew he'd have little change from £100,000.

"I could find a decent second-hand grain dryer for £26,000 and the grain store would have cost £60,000 but that seemed to me to be an awful lot of money," he says. "I could build a new livestock shed for less than that."

In search of alternatives, he says he stumbled across 'a product that suited us perfectly' at the Royal Welsh Show.

"It was on the Kelvin Cave stand in 2012 where I first saw crimped grain, and realised that, with the right preservative, we could store it like silage – even outside in a clamp in the yard," he says.

Giving the system a go at the earliest opportunity, he says they built a long and narrow clamp from large straw bales within the existing silage shed in their first year.



Cereal harvest was brought forward to begin on 10 July when the farm's contractor was delighted to have the work ahead of his peak demand and the flexibility offered by harvesting higher moisture grain.

"We found that between 30 and 33 per cent moisture the grain ran through the combine and the roller brilliantly, and allowed us to build a perfect clamp," he says. "We find we prefer to work with it at under 35 per cent for its better handling."

Continuing this system and increasing the crimped grain acreage every year since, he says: "The contractor now comes to us before everyone else and can combine all day – even when it's raining. Before that he could only harvest between about 12 noon and 7pm which wasn't fair on him and was a slow process for us."

Just as important as the timing was the quantity and quality of grain which increased from around 3.5t/acre (8.7t/ha) at 14 per cent moisture to 4.5 to 5t/acre (11-12t/ha) at 30 per cent moisture.

"Some, but not all, of the extra yield is obviously explained by the added moisture but you are harvesting a cleaner

crop with fewer losses from disease at this earlier time which also gives a higher dry matter yield per hectare," says David Warner, Kelvin Cave's southern area manager. "The nutritional value before the crop fully ripens is also at its peak and the fibre is more digestible."

"When you look at these figures, crimp looks really attractive on a cost basis, as our overall costs are similar whether we're harvesting 3.5 or 5 tonnes/acre," adds Mr Barrow.

The only equipment required for the crimping process was a bruiser or roller for breaking the grain surface, which was already on the farm, having previously been used for rolling dry grain.

"However, we decided to upgrade to a Korte 1000HD which we purchased in partnership with a neighbour," says Mr Barrow. "He uses it throughout the year to roll cereals for his dairy cows and we use it for just three or four days in the summer. It's a fantastic bit of equipment and really does what it says on the tin, and will crimp really well all day."

Meanwhile, the rations for the cattle were adjusted to make use of the crimp which

