



Sharing feeder wagon cuts costs and saves time for four Wiltshire-based dairy farmers

From a discussion group developed a buying group and from this emerged a collaborative scheme to co-operate and cut the costs of feeding dairy cows. Four Wiltshire dairy farmers have found a way of substantially cutting feed costs by sharing a feeder wagon and tractor. Mike Green reports.

You have a tractor and feeder wagon used for two to three hours a day and for the rest of the time it just sits there in the yard rusting. Surely there must be a better way of utilising this expensive machinery?

These were the thoughts of a number of dairy farmers in Wiltshire who decided to tackle this inactivity head-on and do something about it. The idea was obvious and simple—use the tractor and forage wagon on four farms and cut costs.

“The prime motivator was to release capital,” says Robert Hislop, one of the members of the 3C & Me co-operative. “All we needed was a tractor and feeder wagon between the four of us—why should each of us tie up £15,000 on a tractor and £10,000 on a feeder wagon?” asks Mr Hislop.

The farmers had looked at this option five years ago but at the time was not viable. However, circumstances changed and a couple of years ago the group looked at the options again. Through Business Link they secured funding for a feasibility study into the project. Independent agricultural consultant Doug Green looked at how much each of the four farm-

ers were spending on feeding their cows and if there were any benefits from collaborating. Through North Wiltshire District Council they got a starting up grant.

The momentum started from the Calne farmers discussion group which formed the Apex buying group in the late 1980s. Initially with six members it now has 28 dairy farmer members. From these, four members decided to collaborate on the feeder wagon project—Robert Hislop and Robert Pickford who needed to update their feeder wagons, Charles Reis,

who had just bought a new Keenan feeder wagon and Jane Lewis who was looking to start feeding her herd a TMR diet. All had a herd of around 200 cows.

From this emerged a unique and efficient system of feeding the four herds. The group set up by buying the new Keenan feeder from Charles Reis and a tractor from Robert Pickford. “We bought them at a realistic price to encourage everyone to join the group,” says Mr Hislop. “The whole thing relies on give and take or it will not work.”

A local man was employed to drive the tractor (and there was competition for this post). He now works nine days on and three days off. Workers from Rob Pickford’s arable enterprise provide relief operators.

In September they replaced the original tractor with a Fendt 716 which is high speed, has adequate breaking, fuel efficient and economic to run for its 160hp. At the same time the feeder wagon was replaced with a larger version—a 22 cubic meter twin auger machine from Shelbourne Reynolds. They chose this make simply because they were offered the best leasing deal by the company.



3C & Me co-op members Robert Hislop and Rob Pickford.

English Farming and Food Partnerships is highlighting the benefits of co-operative activity through its ‘Share to Milk’ initiative which aims to highlight the many dairy farmers across England who are making progress in cuttings input costs by joining force with fellow producers.

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