

Early Summer News 2020



Over the Rainbow...

We know from speaking with many customers that this continues to be a challenging time. Unending isolation due to health issues, juggling child education duties with work demands as well as shopping for neighbours & parents... everyone is under pressure. Businesses too. Over night we lost our school, café & leisure venue customers. These sectors take a significant percentage of our cows' milk- up to 65% in term time. At the height of lockdown we had 30,000L of milk a week without a market. This had to be sold on the national non organic spot market and achieved 16p /litre. It costs us 43p to produce a litre of milk on our farm (before packing and delivery.) The maths was, & still is, eye watering. We cannot turn off the cows or reduce the cost of caring for them... At the time of writing, there is talk of the schools partially reopening & our independent cafes are tentatively trying to make a go of 'take-away only' business models. Please support them if you can. Our predicament was lessened by you, our doorstep customer base, the reliable backbone to our business. Your increased orders, along with the welcome new customers, boosted doorstep milk volumes by 15%. This would not have been possible without some significant flexibility & pure grit from our team- farm, processing, administration & delivery, each person a vital link to help us reach our customers.

Thank you for all your tokens of appreciation sent in or left on doorsteps for your particular Milkman. Here are most of our wonderful team who have kept the wheels from falling off at Acorn.



In early spring Ethical Consumer Magazine featured a shopping guide for dairy, looking at the practices of 31 brands, to help consumers make an informed choice to support suppliers with an ethical, sustainable approach to dairy farming. If you'll excuse some trumpet blowing, Acorn Dairy was their **No.1 recommended brand!**

This was based on our high welfare and supply chain management. Due to the pandemic we didn't manage to share this news effectively with you. It is a big accolade for a small player. To put the marks into perspective, we scored 15 points while the highest scoring supermarket product was Waitrose Duchy Organic, with 8.5. The rest of the major supermarkets all scored between 0 and 4.5 for their non-organic milk. We are a wholly organic producer, who have held Compassion In World Farming's Good Dairy Award for High Cow & Calf Welfare since 2012. We say it often: we would not be able to farm to the standards we do, if we did not have customers with the same values as us, prepared to choose & buy the best milk.



Cranberry & her new born calf.

Landmark Birthday. Acorn is 20 years old.

Where did that go? This year marks 22 years of farming without chemicals, herbicides & pesticides & 20 years since our first doorstep milk deliveries to local homes. We shudder & smile in equal measure at the challenges survived: foot & mouth nearly took away our herd in 2001; building our own bottling plant in 2002 (& the finance required); our first hospital & council milk contracts; being part of Newcastle Uni research proving higher levels of antioxidants & Omega 3 in organic milk; Friends of The Earth bestowing a 'Good Energy' award when we began using our own wind powered green electricity in 2012; having James Martin cooking in the farmhouse kitchen; hosting over 8,000 customers & school pupils; helping to train 30+ vet students; successfully producing milk without the use of antibiotics; establishing our own vitamin supplement plans to boost cow health & reduce 'emissions'; & finally one of which we are very proud- our collaborations with fellow next generation farmers & expanding our initial 360 acres of land farmed organically to over 1000 acres. This is making an impact.

Organic farms have 50% more wildlife for a reason. We improve the habitats other species need to live. Organic systems are well placed to reverse the decades degradation caused by demand for cheap food & the intensive farming required to produce it. Healthy soils do not make headlines or excite people but hopefully they will be given weight in 'post EU' Agri. policy if our country is to be sustainable in its food production before the next 20 years pass by. Let's not leave our children with a mess too big to sort out or to allow the sight of cows grazing outside to become even rarer.



Farm Activity

Farming is constant. Some things we can control, some we can not... Tuberculosis (TB) is a massive problem for the UK dairy industry & without getting into the debate over how it is spreading, it IS steadily moving further north & east across the country. I often think that it would be nice to farm in the South West, warmer winds, more regular rainfall & excellent grass growth but then I think about TB. Friends in the industry tell of how they have lost anywhere between 10- 50% of their herd in a single year and of the time and finance consumed with annual or 6 monthly testing. Thankfully here in Darlington with our north east winds and limited rainfall, TB is not a daily concern. We are in a low risk area and are only required to test the herd every fourth year. That's not to say we are cavalier about it. We have strict biosecurity procedures. We do not buy in cows- we rear our own and the last person we want to see on the farm is another farmer in dirty wellies.

That said, when TB testing comes round it is still a tense affair. This week Barry, Colin and Derrick our vet, tested the cows and heifers over two days. As Derrick came marching towards the office, then stopped 2 meters from my window (for his own biosecurity) it felt like waiting for exam results. Happily we are all clear and can now embark on another 4 years of vigilance knowing that the grass might be short but the herd is healthy.



Our current crops of grass for both summer grazing and silage (winter feed) are looking okay. In April we were concerned the lack of rain and high temperatures were going to stress the grass plants into going to seed early. Thankfully the temperatures have fallen back but much like everything growing outside, the grass still needs a good drink. Over the years most of you will have heard us wax lyrical about the benefits of growing clover- its

high feed value, nitrogen fixing from the atmosphere, bees love it etc etc. Well this year we are running a trial to see if we can grow clover's big cousin, Lucerne. Drilled in May, Lucerne takes a year to establish but years 2 to 5 should provide 3 crops per year of high protein fibrous feed. It's a VERY deep rooting plant that likes to go looking for water in fast draining soils, so not ideally suited to our clay based soils but it is very drought tolerant. Can you see where we're going with this? Our average rainfall is approx. 600mm (24") and so far this year we've had 175mm. So we certainly need to look at more drought tolerant crops in the future. If it



works, we'll be feeding the Lucerne as hay to our freshly calved cows so reducing the amount of feed we buy and further cutting the carbon footprint of the herd. Watch this space & facebook for updates. Our field is bare at the moment but we expect a green haze to appear soon. Please excuse an image of a healthy looking Lucerne crop snaffled from the internet!



Changing your Order On-Line

Doorstep customers can now change their orders without typing out an email or navigating our busy telephone lines. From your phone, tablet or computer we invite you to click on the '**Login To My Account**' tab on the Acorn Dairy website and then **Register**. You will receive an email request to authenticate the email address you have given. Once we have activated your registration you will receive an email to confirm you are up & running. You are then able to add products, make one off reductions/ increases, change your standing orders, check account balances, give holiday cancellations etc. The process is straight forward and we expect and hope it will be very popular. (Please note only customers with a regular payment history or direct debit in place will be activated.)

There is a 3pm cut off for next day delivery alterations Monday- Friday and cleverly the system knows how much lead time is required for lovely Yeo Valley yoghurts and Kefir etc so there is no risk of disappointment. N.B. At the time of writing, your potential organic egg orders are still exceeding supply. While 'egg rationing' is ongoing, we can not add eggs to this 'self serve' option. There will still be a warm body checking the answerphone & emails but we hope this new option will be hugely popular. A reminder: always give your name & address when emailing & calling please. We receive several anonymous callers every week.

We look forward to welcoming you to a farm open day hopefully later this year & would like to wish you health & perseverance for whatever comes next in 2020. Thank you for your custom. Caroline & Graham.



Doorstep Delivery Service in:

Darlington | Barnard Castle | Richmond | Northallerton | Middleton St George | Aycliffe | Long Newton | Barningham & local villages. Delivery partnerships North East wide covering: Durham | Ripon | Harrogate | Newcastle | Alnwick | Morpeth | Hexham | Yarm | Stokesley