

Pilot Farmers from Northern Ireland on Tour in the Netherlands

(26th – 28th September 2011)

Nine DAIRYMAN pilot farmers from Northern Ireland, together with two dairying advisers, visited 6 pilot farms in the Netherlands, in a whistle stop trip covering 400 miles over 3 days. The pilot farms were well dispersed, with three in the north, one in the centre, and two in the south east of the country - one of which was De Marke.



The visiting farmers were much impressed by the technologies and management skills exhibited by the host pilot farmers.

- ✚ Animal management highlights caught their attention, and in particular the rigorous mastitis control, whereby animals are culled if they require more than a single treatment for mastitis. Such strong measures, however, have proved their worth by keeping somatic cell counts low on almost all farms.
- ✚ Also catching the visitors' attention were the steeply pitched roofs on cow sheds which allowed excellent air quality in buildings where cows were housed all year round, and the precision allocation of concentrates which yielded efficiency dividends.
- ✚ The visitors noted that relatively little grazing was practiced in the Netherlands, whereas zero grazing seemed to work well. They were also impressed by the high quality and dry mater contents of silages produced, and by the fact that long wilting periods did not pose a problem, unlike the situation in Northern Ireland.
- ✚ Perhaps most revealing, was the fact that farmers in the Netherlands placed a much higher importance on work/life balance than those in Northern Ireland, and moreover, appeared to readily accept rules and regulations emanating from the EU. While levels of farm borrowing on the visited farms were high, successors nevertheless appeared willing to accept responsibility for these debts.

All told, the tour was very successful, and the Northern Ireland visitors are indebted to the Netherlands team and pilot farmers for the hospitable receptions they provided, and wish to extend a big THANK YOU to all concerned.