

MIGRANT E. EUROPEAN LABOUR FILLING A GAP IN UK DAIRY FARM'S NEEDS AS THEY GROW IN HERD SIZE – A CASE STUDY OF A EUROPEAN SUCCESS STORY

Tim Roberts

Tropical Agriculture Association

Abstract

Over recent decades the number of dairy farmers in the UK has declined; a process accelerated by the foot and mouth disease outbreak in 2002. Meanwhile herd size on those farms continuing in milk production has risen so that total national milk production has remained at about the same level.

Another issue which arose in the early part of the last decade was the opening up of the UK borders to the new Countries of Eastern Europe which became members of the European Union at that time. In particular there was a large influx of Poles who made a huge contribution to the British labour force. Not only were the well known skills such as plumbing enhanced but many also entered the agricultural work force especially as seasonal workers in fruit and vegetable production. It is less well known that many also came to work on dairy farms at a time when it was difficult to recruit local staff prepared to face the hard work and long hours of the job.

This case study illustrates a tenanted dairy farm in a village near Bath on land belonging to the Duchy of Cornwall. Polish labour was recruited through an agency some years ago and an excellent relationship created with the farmer such that a good number of the worker's family have followed on from one another over the years.

However as the economic benefit of a favourable exchange rate between the pound and the euro has declined so this family has returned to their homeland in common with many others.

The new order that has evolved suggests that it is now more difficult to recruit reliable labour from outside the United Kingdom let alone within.

Within the last couple of years there has been a huge interest in and uptake of robotic milking systems. Will these fill the gap in the shortage of labour?

Keywords: migrant, labour, dairy