For Cheshire dairy farmer Richard Davenport, the fact his vet practice Nantwich Farm Vets invests so much time in helping him keep his cows and calves healthy is an absolute godsend.

Richard says: “We have been going through various stock and management system changes recently, all designed to make the job a lot simpler for us, but the help we get from Nantwich's Vet Tech team is absolutely fantastic.

“Their record-keeping is superb and when we have so much else going on their input is fast becoming essential.”

Richard, who farms in partnership with his parents and brother David, runs 450 milking cows for the family business at Top O’the Town Farm, Broomhall, near Nantwich. The family also runs another farm near Sandbach and bought a hill unit a mile away from Top O’the Town in 2013 to house youngstock, giving them just under 405 hectares (1000 acres) in total.

The latest project is a move from all-year-round to block calving, together with a move away from Holstein Friesians to the use of Scandinavian genetics, which are renowned for their health traits, and Montbeliarde for their cheese production credentials.

Richard says: “We are selling our milk to Joseph Heler, which sources milk locally within a 45-mile radius of its cheese production plant in Nantwich. We are paid primarily for improving constituents rather than volume.”

With the move to block calving, the Davenport family sat down last June and realised they had to do something different.

Richard says: “I have always wanted to move to block calving, both to give us a break and to allow us to focus on other things during the rest of the year.

“With 42 grass paddocks to graze spread about the area, cows often have to walk five or six miles a day, so we really need those robust health traits.”

The target now is to calve the 450-cow herd between August 1 and November each year, aiming for an average annual cow yield of 8500 litres with 4500 litres coming from forage.

Pressure
With the move to block calving, the Davenport have had to plan for the inevitable increased stocking pressure from having a lot of calves on the ground at any one time.

Richard says: “Where we previously had to cope with 30-40 calves a month, by Christmas we will potentially have 400 in one place.

“Unfortunately, our buildings System change puts renewed focus on prevention of pneumonia

Richard Davenport has made an investment in vaccination.
On-farm support

WHEN Jess Tonks or another member of the three-strong Nantwich Vet Tech team visits Top O’the Town Farm every two weeks, the first thing they do is check the calving record.

Any new calves born which are two weeks old are vaccinated with Bovilis® Bovipast RSP, which protects them against the key viral causes of pneumonia RSV and PI3, as well as the prevalent bacterial causal agent Mannheimia haemolytica.

Interestingly, data collected by UK veterinary laboratories between 2011 and 2013 found this bacterium was the most commonly isolated pneumonia pathogen in calves under six months of age. It cropped up in about 30% of samples.

The vaccination regime requires two 5ml doses under the skin about four weeks apart. Immunity to RSV, PI3 and Mannheimia haemolytica develops about two weeks after the priming dose of the vaccine.

Richard says: “This support really is invaluable. We now know every calf born on-farm will get protected. It is also great peace of mind to know nothing is being missed. It is a great service.”

Calves stay in the hutches until they are 21 days old and are then moved onto another farm where they will be kept in batches of 20 and fed seven litres/day of milk via a computerised feeder.

They are weaned at about 68 days of age when eating 1.5kg/day concentrate feed.

Growing heifers will be turned out in March and graze until October. In autumn 2018, the whole group will be synchronised at 14-15 months of age and served, half of them with sexed semen and the other half with conventional semen. Bulls will then go in after five days to mop up any not in calf.

Richard says: “It is all about focus. The way we are gearing things up means we can focus on one key job at a time, which helps with attention to detail.

“To be successful as a modern dairy farmer, you have to invest wisely and maximise production potential.

“To do this, you simply cannot afford to compromise animal health. I am a big believer in good records, monitoring performance and using tools such as vaccination to prevent disease.

“Our recent experience has shown just how effective it can be when it is done properly in tandem with good stockmanship.”

We must secure and maintain this performance level through and beyond the move to block calving.”

Use medicines responsibly. See: www.noah.co.uk/responsible for more information.

Bovilis® Bovipast RSP contains inactivated Bovine Respiratory Syncytial Virus (strain E2/88), Parainfluenza 3 virus (strain SF-4-Reisinger) and inactivated Mannheimia haemolytica (serotype A1) for the active immunisation of cattle against BRSV, PI3 virus and M. haemolytica. Withdrawal period: Zero days. Legal category: POM-V. Available from your veterinary surgeon from whom advice should be sought. Bovilis® and Bovipast® are trademarks of Intervet International B.V. or affiliated companies or licensors and are protected by copyrights, trademark and other intellectual property laws. Copyright © 2017 Intervet International B.V., a subsidiary of Merck and Co, Inc., Whitehouse Station, N.J., USA. All rights reserved. Further information is available from MSD Animal Health, Walton Manor, Walton, Milton Keynes, MK7 7AJ, Tel: 01908 685 685; Email: vet-support.uk@merck.com; Visit: www.msd-animal-health.co.uk.

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