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All go on home front as new calf shed arrives



Oliver McDonnell

WELL, it was with some delight that the lads viewed the lorry which arrived in the yard last week. This lorry bore the makings of their new calf shed and at last they could begin to see some of their plans put into action.

Of course, they had a phone call the previous week informing them that their shed was in the process of being made and of its imminent arrival on site, but they dared not get their hopes up after such a long delay. Not to worry — they got over the wait, deciding that it was of minor importance because they know that, once built, this shed will never need replacing — at least not in their lifetime. Such is the reputation of their builder, who is, after all, a family member, being Rosemary's brother,

Paul. As I write, it is in the process of erection, so it is all go here on the home farm.

There has also been a delay with the milking machine people arriving. If you remember, I mentioned that the lads planned to extend the milking parlour to 25 units each side, and were installing an automatic cluster-removal system and computerised individual feeding. These people are expected now within the next day or two and we are all looking forward to working with the changes.

The preparation work on the parlour was completed a few weeks ago when the lads extended the front out by about 12 feet. In so doing they had to move the meal bin to a different position at the side of the milking parlour.

In hindsight, these delays worked to our favour because they allowed us to get the silage in and to get the fertiliser and slurry spread over the silage area undisturbed.

Having said that, the sooner the new computerised system is installed the better, since the lads expect to save approximately €1,000 per month on feeding.

The cows continue to milk well, maintaining an overall average yield of almost six gallons, with which we are very happy considering one third of the herd calved down between September and Christmas and



Making a presentation to Tommaso De Pasquale, an Italian cattle dealer, on behalf of the Angus suppliers were, from left: Mimmo Fannuli; Tommaso De Pasquale; Albert De Coogan, President of the Aberdeen Angus Association; and Jim Mulvey.

these cows are now reaching the end of their lactation period. Where does the time go, I wonder, as I ponder the fact that it is almost time to consider drying off again. At the moment the cows are on a 22-day rotation system, spending two days in each paddock. Also, each paddock is topped after grazing to encourage strong new growth.

All but a handful of late-born calves have been outdoors for several weeks now and even these will be allowed out just as soon as they are off milk. The outdoors is the healthiest and most trouble-free place for these young calves, providing it does not become too wet. They have already received the first of their dosing procedure and in this

respect it is important to remember dates so that the follow-up dose can be given accurately and with most effect. All of the calves this year were given a copper bolus on our vet's advice, since we were a little concerned that they might be harbouring some deficiency.

Meanwhile, the maize crop is doing very well indeed and has more or less broken through the polythene at this stage. It was sprayed a couple of weeks ago for weeds, since we find that spraying after the crop emerges is more effective than spraying at the same time as sowing. There is no more to be done with this crop now, other than to watch it grow and develop until harvest next October.

Now, when a new tractor is

purchased, we normally expect it to remain trouble free for at least three years, apart from the normal servicing and maintenance. But not so with a new tractor purchased at the end of the heavy working season last year. This tractor has in fact done very little work to date so the lads were disgusted to see it loaded onto a lorry a couple of weeks ago for transport to the workshop.

It needed new brakes and could not be driven there. However, it was quickly fixed and we are hopeful of the job being done under guarantee.

Now that the silage is finished, the fertiliser has been spread, and the slurry applied all over the first-cut silage area, we can take some time out and

go to one of our favourite events of the summer calendar. This is the annual Haymaking Festival which takes place at Trim next Sunday, June 17.

I particularly like this event because, as well as all the modern attractions and competitions, it also takes me back to my youth.

I can empathise with such things as sheaf tossing and scythe cutting, not to mention working with horses and what we now call 'vintage machinery', but which was known as ultra modern in my childhood days. This is not to say that I am vintage myself, but it was a joy to work with the older generation of my day, as we all did in those times from when we were little more than toddlers.