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**The Ethical Dairy hosts international research visit**

The Ethical Dairy has embarked on a series of visits and events to raise awareness of their Cow-with-Calf dairying model, starting with hosting an innovation visit of forty researchers and scientists last week.

The group visited as part of the Dairy-4-Future EU Interreg Atlantic Area funded project which brings together representatives from the dairy sector in the Atlantic Area of Western Europe to share on-farm innovation.

The visit, which included researchers from Ireland, France, Spain, Portugal and the UK, was organised by SRUC’s Dairy Research Centre in Dumfries and explored issues around sustainability, consumer engagement, adding value and the financial repercussions of transitioning to a new farming model.

Farmer David Finlay who led the visit said:

“Naturally what we’re doing is a radical departure from traditional models of dairy farming, and we are well aware that this approach is not for everyone. Nevertheless, it was very interesting and thought provoking to host a visit from fellow dairy innovators, and I enjoyed the questions that were asked and the open minded attitude of everyone who took part.

“We are at an interesting crossroads where our industry practices are in the spotlight like never before, and this is happening at the same time as political machinations, changes to subsidy regimes and the impact of climate change, which will lead to fundamental changes in the way we farm and produce food. We are not saying that we have ‘the’ answer by any means, but perhaps we have ‘an’ answer.”

Paul Hargreaves, Grassland Researcher with SRUC Dairy Research and Innovation Centre, said:

“Innovation is more important than ever to ensure the sustainability of the dairy industry. Forward thinking farms such as The Ethical Dairy provide working solutions to how dairying can evolve in the future and provided stimulating ideas for the researchers from the western Atlantic area of Europe.”

In addition to the academics, senior politicians and policy makers have also visited The Ethical Dairy over the past week to explore post Brexit rural support models, and David and Wilma Finlay have also launched a series of talks and tours for interested members of the public.

Taking place every Saturday during July and August and titled *Sustainable Food: Building the Biome*, the events explore contemporary food production debates in some depth, including the ecological approach to farming adopted at The Ethical Dairy and the wider political drivers that are fuelling the intensification of agriculture. Events are free of charge but booking is required.

Wilma said:

“Our decision to try Cow-with-Calf dairy farming has been heavily influenced by looking at our farm through the eyes of our visitors at Cream o’ Galloway, and by listening to the questions members of the public ask on our farm tours.

“Since we launched The Ethical Dairy brand we have been inundated with requests for detailed information, so these in-depth talks and tours are our response to that. We have always been open about what we do here, and we are encouraging people who want to find out more to visit, see our farm for themselves and to ask whatever questions they have directly to David and me.”

The Ethical Dairy brand was launched in March this year but is the culmination of 10 years of development and planning by the Finlays to create a sustainable food production system based on ecological farming principles. The approach has met with widespread support from consumers and the company recently announced a complete sell out of their Carrick cheese until November. The cheese, which won a Silver Medal at the Artisan Cheese Awards earlier this year, takes nine months to mature and a waiting list for the cheese is now in operation.

Wilma added:

“We have been blown away by the interest in our cheeses and in our approach to dairy farming, we certainly didn’t expect to run out of cheese quite so soon. We have started work on a new production facility to help keep up with demand, and in the meantime I’d ask people to bear with us while we replenish our stocks of mature cheese.”

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