# Natural calf weaning

Our story so far



### Alistair Macbeth & Connor Nolan

- •Moved onto the farm in 2016 with no farming background
- •Both had full time jobs
- •Both vegan with zero interest in becoming farmers
- •Felt compelled to help improve the animal welfare on the farm



#### **THE SITUATION 2016-2018**

•LOW WELFARE

•POOR ANIMAL HEALTH

•LOSING MONEY

•NO FUTURE



#### Calving practice

- Calves removed at birth typically within 24 hours or less
- penned and bottle reared on milk replacer until 3 months old
- An uphill fight for every calf
- Scours and pneumonia common place



### Our Wendy

- Born and bred farmer
- •Moved to our farm in 1963 at the age of 23. A traditional dairy farmer
- •Totally understood our decision to be vegan.
- •Wanted better for her animals but had suffered a stroke and was reliant on staff





2018-2020 To survive we had to intensify, Right?

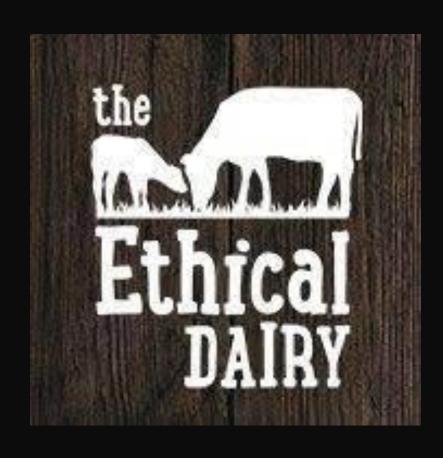
Over the next two years I tripled the number of milking cows in the herd. For the first time in years we were filling the milk tank.

Yet I was totally miserable. I'd done the right thing by Wendy but I Couldn't sustain this way of life. There was multiple issues but one big problem trumped all, I couldn't keep separating cows and calves.

Could we somehow find a balance?



#### We visited two places





### March 2020

- •Our first month keeping cows and calves together
- Still selling to ARLA
- •4 weeks together 24 hours a day then introducing night weans
- •12hrs together 12hrs apart
- •Nose rings and full weaning at 6 months



- •no Milk powder, less bedding, reduced labor and reduced vet bills.
- •Improvement in calf health and weight gain
- •Happy cows!!
- •Happy people!!!



The one that never followed the rules



## What does it look like now?

- Cows and calves together 24 hours a day for a minimum of 3 months
- Milk yield and condition-based decisions. If we don't need to separate, we wont.
- Night weaning in sight of mum until at least 6 months
- Recognising the need for a cow-by-cow approach
- Selling milk at £2.50 per liter



# What we've gained

- •A more holistic approach to our lives
- •A herd now 12 months free of antibiotics!
- •A strong unique selling point
- •A better work life balance and a significantly more resilient system
- •A farm we can be proud of

