

# 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

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- LOW WELFARE
- POOR ANIMAL HEALTH
- LOSING MONEY
- NO FUTURE

# Calving practice

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- 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
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# Our Wendy

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- 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







# An honest conversation

The farm needed to close or modernise it couldn't continue down its current path





2018-2020

To survive we had to intensify,  
Right?

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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

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# March 2020

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- 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





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- 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?

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- 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 won't.
- 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

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- 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

