



**Working together:** From left, John Whitfield senior, Richard Vecqueray, Trevor Whitfield, John Whitfield, Bruce Richards and Ian Ohrstad

## Dairy family benefit from Defra-backed health plan

DAIRY farmers Trevor and John Whitfield are reaping the rewards of farm health planning under a new initiative.

The brothers are fine-tuning their pedigree Holstein herd at Woodhouses Farm, Great Orton, as one of eight farms in the XL Vets dairy project run under Defra's Farm Health Planning scheme.

This year, Defra has committed £1.6 million to fund 27 dairy and beef health plan initiatives.

Woodhouses Farm stocks 150 milking cows in its pedigree Garnet herd, run on 260 acres.

Paragon Veterinary Group's Bruce Richards said: "Through fortnightly routine visits we have continuously identified and tackled health and production issues.

"What we haven't done in the past is actively document and plan the strategies and control measures, allowing us to review and benchmark them regularly as a means of measuring progress."

A number of core health problems have been identified and a herd health plan is being developed to target these.

Trevor Whitfield said: "Already, the few changes we have made have given improvements all-round.

"In the past, for example, we have not used a nutritionist, but that is something we are seriously considering. The Holstein is a finely tuned animal which needs to be fed accordingly."

In the last 12 months, 23 cows out of 100 received treatment for lameness, and a locomotion score carried out in August showed that 28 per cent of the herd was lame.

Trevor recently demolished a wall in a shed so that he could set up his crush permanently to make trimming cows' feet less of a chore. He has gates set up so that he can separate off cows at milking time and get them into the crush quickly and easily on his own.

A high level of milk fever was one area Trevor and John identified as needing attention.

As part of an action plan, forages and the dry cow TMR have been analysed, with emphasis on mineral status.

Blood and urine have been collected from transition cows to analyse their acid-base balance, their macromineral excretion and their energy status pre-calving.

Preliminary results reflect a high potassium and sodium intake and consequential poor calcium mobilisation so a specific diet has been formulated.

Cell counts at the start of the initiative were well above 200 and threatening to put the milk into a lower price band, now they have been reduced to 150.