



When would you start relating a year on a farm ?

July ? May ? September ?

What about January ?

January because it is the beginning of the calving season. But why not 9 months earlier ?

On a farm, everything is question of time. In French, we have the same word to speak about weather and time. This word is what a farm is.

Matter of time and weather...

Let's start with January...

January on Kastler's farm....

It is calving time. Cows are inside and outside. They stay close to a barn and when we see they are ready, we keep them inside.

It is easier to tag the calves and weigh them . The cow/calf pair stay inside 3 or 4 days and go outside as soon as everything is ok.

The grass stays green because it's not cold enough to freeze it, but it doesn't grow between mid november until early march, we can't keep too many cows out because the ground is too wet during the winter months.

The heifers are kept in a barn. They calve there, a mile and a half from the house. We can check on them with a camera...

The yearlings are also in this barn. We have to feed them every morning and every night. We keep all our bull calves, around 15 will be sold as breeding bulls, the rest get castrated at 8 months to be sold fat at 24 months. All the heifers are kept, one third is sold after breeding.

What's in the plate for the heifers, young bulls and steers?

They eat hay, haylage, a little bit of corn and a mix of triticale/oat/peas.

Because of our wet weather the quality of our hay is not good enough, that's why we need to complement the yearlings. The cows are on hay until calving then switch to haylage. They don't get grain until they get to the point to be fed for butcher.



A morning in January.



Calving in Bonen



Cows after calving



In and out.



Dad and daughter feeding.





In the barn in Rostrezec, over 100 heads during the winter.



Every two or three days, we add some straw for bedding.



Sister and brother.

February

Calving time, and weather permitting we start to spread manure on the pastures. It is the only fertilizer used.

Days being longer and spring time on the way we try to get our fire wood shores done, mainly by trimming trees around the fields.

Usually we hire some help from February to October, his job is mainly fencing, fire wood, tractor driving... and doing the job if we travel during the summer.





Cleaning the barn.





March

March weather can go either way, winter or spring.

Most of the calving is done, I mean that more than 50% of the calves are born and that is what will pay the bank...

We still have to feed every head, the grass is not yet growing, the barn is full of yearlings and we are pretty damned tired of bedding/feeding!

We get our electric fences ready, wood post driving. We seed new grass in the cereals mix, save us to plow and seed in August.

We drag the pasture, and climate change permitting we mow the first cut of haylage, mostly it is old grass from fall and winter when it was too wet to graze/cut.



Fire wood in the freeze...





Ready to mow.



April

Breeding time, busy time!

The kids have a 2 weeks school break, it's a good thing because all the help is needed.

We turn out the bulls with cows and heifers, 1 bull per 20/25 heads, there will be four herds that will graze all season separately.

We buy outside bulls, but we also use some of our farm bred bulls, which make the sorting of the pairs tricky to avoid related bloodlines, it takes a lot of planning, and family discussion. But working cows with wife and children is such a good way to test our bonds after the winter...

Meantime we have to get our corn fields ready for planting, more haylage to cut by the end of April in hay fields.

It's also the month when we clean the barns, all heifers/steers and bulls are turned loose on grass.

Some feeding is required depending on grass growth, we usually unroll haylage everyday in the fields, or use hay feeder.

We sell bulls all year long, but spring and fall are the big seasons for our customers, they usually show up on rainy days when they can't do their farm work.

We do deliver most the of the bulls, majority of them sold in Bretagne.



Enough John Deere??







May

Slow down time... maybe.

Corn is seeded, need to be watch carefully for birds (longshot required), weeds (full and between rows cultivation). Listen “The boy who wouldn’t hoe corn” song.

The fire wood is split hydraulic and man way, on quiet days.

The herds are checked twice a day for calves sickness but mostly to be sure that the bulls are doing their job, depending on motivation that might involve some walking, about 250 acres of pasture, divided in 5 acres paddocks.

All the herds are on a pattern of 5/6 days per paddock, with a 6 weeks rest before coming back.

Works well in May, tricky in summer and fall if it doesn’t rain enough.





Milan with June, his cow.



It sure is not fancy, but it's been working for the last 15 years.





June

Electric fencing is cheap, efficient, but it takes a huge amount of time to keep clean from grass, branches ...

Weed eater start almost everyday in June, and some time we get the trimmer on the tractor to stay ahead of the weeds.

Because of the long grazing season we have some ungrazed spots and weeds that have to be cut before they get to seed, more tractor involved.

By mid June we are on the go for haying, but it can rain and because it comes after the April haylage, we usually have to wait until late June early July.

Early June is the big auction sale in Limoges, Lanaud Station, we do attend, to buy or to sell, depending of the years.



Haying time.



Little bales for the neighbors...



Lanaud station in Limoges.



The auction.

July

Because hay is the main course menu of every head during the winter we need at least 600 round bales, 1/3 ton each.

It takes 5 days to dry and some teddings before we can rake and bale.

Lot of tractors driving, but school is over, sun is high!

We try to be done for the 10th of July, so we can come abroad!



"I will always love you but I don't have to like you when we work cows" Says the tee-shirt !



August

Harvest of the cereals mix can be done anytime from end July to mid August.

We don't have a combine, a contractor comes for a one day job. It's a fun time, but 2020 yield was pretty bad.

We bale our straw and also buy some to bale, we need 400 bales for winter bedding.

If July is dry we might be short on grass in August, the calves are getting big and the cow/calf pairs eat a lot more than in May.

We have to sort some pairs to get the culled cows fatten and finished for the fall, because the grass isn't rich enough in August.



Cereals harvest...





September

Back to school, days are getting shorter, so is the work, few acres might have to be seeded (clover/fescue/rye grass).

It's also a good time for business, breeders who calve in the fall (very popular in France) are looking for bulls ready to breed.

We try to get some firewood done in the low pastures before the rain comes.

And the last cut of haylage can be done anytime between mid September and mid October.



More fire wood.



Last cut of haylage.



October

Depending on grass we might start weaning the bull calves first, we weight them, keep 15 for breeding bulls and castrate the rest (the vet comes for that, they have to be sedated, French regulation). They will all be kept in the barn until next spring. It gives the cows a few weeks of grass to regain some weight before the winter.

We wean the heifer calves later as soon as the weather changes and depending on grass.

By the end of October, we harvest the corn (contractor), the grain is kept in big white sausage plastic.

We start plowing and seeding the cereals, it takes about 3/4 days for 40 acres.

Milan plows and Yann seeds, since 2017 he doesn't let him plow, except for his year off in Utah.

Usually our hired help quit at that time of the year, as the work slow down.







A share ownership on a young bull

November – December

Probably the worst months here, days are short, it rains, there is not much that can be done except feeding/bedding...

We try to start the trees trimming between the storms (it can be windy too), paper work also and a lot of nothing watching the rain pouring from the couch.

Christmas ends that period, never soon enough, as we are eager for better and longer days.



And January comes again...

Life seems easy on pictures...

Of course, unexpected things happen everyday.

And life is not easier here, even if the grass is
always green.

