



NEWS RELEASE – 16 September 2011

Same products, new markets

A Wiltshire company is developing an unusual market for a very traditional product.

Hills Quarry Products sells the material extracted from its quarries at Calne and Woodsford in Dorset to a number of clients. As you might expect these range from building firms to people wanting to gravel their driveways. The sand and stone has plenty of uses but one is becoming increasingly popular – and that's for dairy farmers.

The modern dairy is a complex operation with farmers deploying all manner of gadgets to make sure their animals are producing as much milk as possible. No aspect of the cow's welfare is overlooked in an industry where margins are tight and it is vital production volume is maintained.

Now Hills has tapped into this by offering an alternative to the straw traditionally used as bedding in the milking stall. Its high quality sand is increasingly being used by farmers as it can lead to healthier and more productive animals. Indeed a contented dairy cow can produce an extra litre of milk a day if her resting time is increased. Multiply that across a herd of several hundred being milked on a daily basis and the returns are considerable.

Peter Andrew, divisional director – Quarry Products, said: "Farmers are always looking at ways of enhancing the environment and welfare of their animals. Using sand bedding is not only more efficient it is also cost effective."

The sand, which is particularly fine and with low silt content, can be spread in the stalls as soon as it is delivered. It is easier to clean than straw as muck doesn't stick to it. Once it has been used it can be ploughed straight into the field – which is particularly good for those farms sitting on soil with high clay content.

In contrast, dusty straw bedding can provide a home to all sorts of microbes which harbour diseases. Also, it needs months to rot down before it be spread as manure while sand can be dispersed immediately.

A key to Hills' success in the market is deploying a sales team with excellent knowledge of their product and an understanding of what farmers' require.

Peter said: "What sets us apart is not just the quality of the product but the fact that our staff know what they are talking about. Farmers can quickly sense when people aren't knowledgeable about their area and consequently you will have a difficult time to convince them of the merits of your product.

"We make a point of taking our sales people out to farms so they can understand exactly what it is that farms need and why it is that our sand bedding meets that need."

Sales have increased so that now more than more than 100 farms use sand sourced from the Hills' quarries. One of those is Two Pools Farm at Iron Acton near Bristol. Owners, the King family, have a herd of 325 producing three million litres of milk a year and have just won an award for the quality of their cattle.

As well as supporting such award-winning farmers, Hills Quarry is now looking to expand its sand bedding operations further by targeting the poultry industry.

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Hills Quarry Products

Hills Quarry Products specialises in the production and supply of quarry products and ready-mixed concrete to the construction and agricultural sectors. It is a dynamic regional business which, while centred on Wiltshire, has stretched its boundaries into neighbouring areas to become one of the region's largest suppliers. Hills Quarry Products is a wholly owned subsidiary of The Hills Group Limited, a privately owned family company established in 1900. www.hills-group.co.uk

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