

# Hereford Cross Breeding Pays Dividends

By Matthew Sharp.



Less hassle, increased profitability and reduced input are just some of the reasons Simon Bainbridge of Donkin Rigg Farm; Northumberland changed to using Hereford genetics in his 150 cow commercial suckler herd.

Simon, who farms in partnership with his parents and wife made the switch from continental cattle to the Hereford and Aberdeen Angus cross; the Black Baldie, across his 640ha upland SDA and moorland farm and hasn't looked back since.

"We needed to develop a system which suited the farm so we changed to organic and tried to create a system which was all grass and forage based," he said.

Visiting herds around England and Scotland opened Mr Bainbridge's eyes to the benefits of the Hereford breed and how they could be commercially viable for his farm.

"We wanted a smaller cow which costs less and is efficient. The Hereford was ideal as it puts fat on easily which aids fertility and costs us less going through the winter. They're also easy to manage."

The use of the Hereford bull over Aberdeen Angus females meant Simon could breed the ideal suckler cow which would withstand the harsh climate typical of Donkin Rigg but also allowed him to maximise the main resource on the farm; grass.

Thanks to the Herefords ability to thrive off a forage based diet, Simon has grown 1400 tons of pasture silage and 800 tons of red clover silage this year which will greatly reduce his feed costs.







“Our dry cow ration consists of silage and straw and our grower ration, which is fed to in-calf heifers and weaned cattle, is a mix of silage, oats and straw.”

“The cattle keep condition on well which allows us to prioritise grass for our heifers but also means we can finish fat cattle before their second winter.”

By reducing feed costs and finishing off grass, Simon has managed to develop a holistic approach to feeding cattle without the need for expensive bought in feeds which has saw his costs decrease and profit margin increase.

Using the Hereford has directly impacted the farm’s cash flow and profitability as it’s eliminated any need to creep feed calves but has also meant cattle can be finished much quicker, typically at eighteen months old.

However, while keeping costs down is a priority, having a saleable end product which provides a good return is imperative to the business, something which Simon has no qualms about.

“The cattle finish well consistently grading out at an R4L which is what we want. I also expect to be selling some heifers, either maiden or with calves at foot, for breeding too as we are a member of the Premium Health Cattle Scheme which will add value.”

Aside from the Hereford’s ability to finish off grass and fill a variety of markets, the ability to calve at two years old with no



problems is something Simon praises the breed for.

“Heifers need to weigh at least 370kg and have a pelvic area of 142cm squared, this way we don’t get any calving problems.”

Aside from ease of calving, Simon looks to EBV figures to satisfy his other needs and wants in making sure he produces exactly what he and his market wants.

Thanks to great breed progress made in recent years, much down to the Breed Societies Breedplan Recording System, EBV’s have been readily available so that Simon can select bulls on figures rather than looks alone.

“We look for maternal figures in our bulls so that they breed the correct female. We also look at fat values as fat keeps them going through winter and aids fertility,” he added.

The temperament of the Hereford also aids other enterprises on farm which includes 400 Swaledale ewes and 800 Mule ewes which are put to a range of rams including the Texel, Bluefaced Leicester, Hampshire Down and Romney.

Employing only one shepherd to join Simon and his father on the farm means having a system which is easy to manage and reduces the strain on labour is of great importance.

The use of the Hereford as a terminal sire to produce Black Baldie cattle has allowed Simon to develop a system which is simple yet profitable and fits well with his family farm.

With feed costs escalating and world commodity prices high, finishing cattle from forage is likely to become more important in coming years. That is where the Hereford fits perfectly into a commercial system.

