

# Standing still - not an option for Shraden Herefords!



The Timmis family is demonstrating how Shraden, one of the longest established herds in the Hereford Cattle Society's herd book can deliver performance to rival its Continental counterparts and meet with modern consumer demands.

"If you would you like to rear bulls to 700 kg target finishing weight within 14 months and heifers to 550 kgs within 18 months, then introducing Hereford genetics to the herd could provide a solution," says Melissa Roberts. "We've made some awesome progress in just five short years, progress which reflects the true potential of the modern Hereford as a meat machine, without losing the Breed's native characteristics," she explains. "

"We have changed direction to delivering bulls that are suited to suckler herds as well as supplying our own farm shop with consistent high quality beef—nowadays we are cattle breeders, rearers, finishers, processors and retailers."

It was the Timmis' decision to diversify and introduce a retail enterprise which heralded a change in Shraden's herd policy and a move right up the food chain. "For two decades we had been breeding Hereford bulls for the traditional dairy sector, being close to the Cheshire border, and a ready market, but with the gradual decline in demand from this sector and the



increase of Holstein blood requiring taller rangier bulls that took longer to finish ,we decided to change direction . At that time our bulls were reaching about 550 kg at mature weight ."

Enter the retail enterprise and meeting consumer demand for a consistent supply of high quality Hereford beef. Melissa explains: "To deliver, we agreed to take a very focused approach to the three key production inputs - genetics, feed and management which has led us to subsequently increase the average weight of our bulls by approximately 30% to average 700 kg to 750 kg. We are pleased to have increased the KO % to 60% - 65%, but more important as far as the shop is concerned is the saleable meat which runs at around 38% of liveweight. In essence we've exploited the Hereford's potential for muscling and its ability to easily flesh, yet we still have a medium framed animal, whilst our modern Hereford females continue to offer fertility, milk and longevity from a low maintenance management system.

In 2013 the calving herd averaged 95% calves reared from cows put to the bull. Longevity is reflected in the current average of 11 calf crops, and the breeding herd is managed on a strict forage based diet.

"Selection within the Shraden herd is 50:50 visual and Breedplan performance data based, and since we have an end market we can afford to be extra ruthless, whilst in the last five years new herd sire decisions have been made on specific traits. Visually we go for structure, length, locomotion and balance, and they must carry minimal waste, whilst we use data to select for eye muscle, retail meat yield and milk EBVs."



*Shraden 1 Horlicks & Shraden 1 Duchess winning Female Inter-breed and Male Inter-breed at Oswestry Show 2012*

## Fact file

### Moor Farm, Baschurch, Shropshire

330 acres arable, 50 acres grass

Arable contracting, grain drying and cleaning enterprises

Shraden Herefords, 60 breeding cows

Two Gloucester Old Spots sows

Moor Farm Shop and Tea Room

### The Timmis family

Mike: Arable Farmer and Contractor

Hazel: Livestock Farmer, Farm/Shop Coordinator

Emma: Transport

Melissa: Shraden Herd Manager, Hereford Cattle Breeders' Association Chairman

Elaine: Moor Farm Shop manager

Bulls used over the herd in the last five years include the following:

- Bosa 1 Ashley to improve scale and milkiness
- Greenyards 1 Eagle selected on eye muscle
- Hermitage Commando and Listimous 1 Grammar, both to strengthen bone and increase retail meat yield

Shraden invested in the following two bulls in October 2013:

- Baldinnie 1 Victory selected for scale, structure, milk and depth of genetics; Melissa judged the Scottish National Show 2013 where she placed him Male Champion
- Dendor 1 Knuckleduster selected for muscle and new genetics

The crop of bulls are kept entire to provide the Timmis family with the opportunity to select animals with breeding potential – those with the right structure, a level top, good locomotion length and style. The remaining bulls are finished for the farm shop along with the bottom third of heifers, whilst the remainder are retained for breeding purposes, either as Shraden's own replacements or sold into other pedigree herds.



Two bulls close to being finished and destined for the Farm Shop.

Herd health is also high on the agenda. A formal Farm Health Plan has been introduced featuring vaccination against BVD, Lepto and Pneumonia, screening for Neospora and testing for Johnes. Grass and silage are tested every year and results used to formulate a purpose built mineral to feed year round which has made a huge difference to herd health in calving ease, calf thriftiness and milk production.

"We have also introduced a new management and feeding regime. To exploit growth rate at its' most efficient we have always fed creep to all the calves from birth through to weaning at six months, by which time bulls are averaging 350 kg and heifers, 290 kg. Now, when bulls are housed they continue on an ad lib diet comprising home grown oats, grass silage, molassed sugar beet pulp and a premix concentrate. This results in them finishing four to six months earlier, and 150 kg to 200 kg heavier. The heifers are fed 2kg to 1kg /day with the breeding replacements removed from the diet at 15 months."

Melissa adds: "The fact that we are able to follow through every single one of our finished animals to hanging and cutting enables us to make more precise decisions in our selection of genetics and also feed management."

## The Shraden herd

Shraden carries some of the oldest genealogy in the Hereford Cattle Society herd book. Established in 1919 by Hazel Timmis' great grandfather, William Overall, an Auctioneer farming at nearby Shrawardine, Shrewsbury, its future is secured by the fifth generation - Melissa and her sisters, Elaine and Emma, whilst Emma's two children, Holly and Imogen could well be the sixth generation to take forward the Shraden prefix.

The herd's destiny was sealed back in 1981 when Hazel's father, Roger Overall, offered her a 'dowry' of nine cows on her marriage to Mike, an arable farmer. "I had the pick of my father's herd and selected from seven different families. It was an extremely generous gift," she says.

After school and Jillarooing around Hereford herds in Australia for six months, she returned home to work with the herd for six years. "During that period we had a particularly good female line in the "Portias." Shraden 1 Portia 36 had three winning daughters amongst many other calves. The eldest was Female Champion RASE 1975 and Female of the Year. Her second daughter was Female Champion at RASE 1977 and the third was Junior Female Champion at RASE 1978.

The show ring is an important part of the Timmis year, says Hazel. "Apart from being a shop window, it is important to be able to compare our cattle with what other producers have on offer and it is a great opportunity to meet with likeminded people and swap ideas and stories. A great place to mix business with pleasure! Hereford people are very good company!"

Accolades have continued over the years. Shraden has won several awards and many group titles including the Royal, Royal Three Counties and Shropshire where Shraden Herefords have featured strongly in several winning interbreed groups. Having always had a strong female show team, bull successes have recently been added with Shraden 1 Henson beating over 100 calves at the Hereford Calf Show in 2011 and Shraden 1 Horlicks winning Junior Bull and Reserve Elite Bull at the Royal Welsh in 2012.

Success culminated in 2013, when the family won the Society's coveted Bull of the Year 2013 Competition with Shraden 1 Joker - TI +26 SRI +31 - after securing first at Shropshire and the Breed Championships at the Royal Three Counties, Newport,

and Burwarton where he also won Native Interbreed title. “Joker” was also the joint Poll Bull of the Year 2013 with Dorepoll 1 499 Einstein. An April 2012 born Greenyards 1 Eagle son, “Joker” was out of Shraden Alice 283 who hails from one of the herd’s oldest families and was herself Reserve Female Champion at the Three Counties. At 480 days he weighed 840 kg, measured 140 cm at the rump and his peer/ sibling bulls killed out at between 60% to 65%. He has since been sold privately for £8,000 to join Philip English’s Churchlands’ herd at Banbury. “He was the type of bull I just couldn’t find fault with, in fact one we would like to have invested in ourselves,” says Melissa.

To guarantee continuity, the Timmis’ introduced the herd’s best cows to selected high EBV performance recorded bulls and the embryos are stored in a tank. “This is our own insurance policy to ensure Shraden’s future in the event of FMD and mitigate against any other unforeseen disaster.

Melissa already has the herd’s centenary milestone underway. “We’re on track to expand by 2019 to 100 breeding cows enabling us to increase the number of surplus heifers to trade for breeding purposes and equally more animals to sell finished through the farm shop.

“Our focus is for a uniform medium sized, well fleshed milky herd which is in the top 10% of Hereford Breedplan performance recorded herds. However, we want to develop a herd which is not just pleasing to us, but one to exploit carcass value with the consumer in mind. Breeding a ‘Joker’ within the Breed’s top 1% on performance data would be one of our goals.”

## Moor Farm Shop

The business’ seeds were sown seven years ago after both Melissa and Elaine agreed to develop a new income stream. They began with box schemes for home reared Hereford beef and Gloucester Old Spot pig meat. The laundry was turned over to sausage making, while the farm shop was initially housed in a single garage adjacent to the house. Within weeks, additional space was required and the shop moved to the family’s double garage.

In 2011, the Timmis family took the decision to progress with a purpose built shop at Moor Farm. With 50m<sup>2</sup> of retail space it has provided them with the opportunity for expansion and offer a plethora of branded locally produced food and drink, and homegrown vegetables. Equally important the new build offered space to continue to expand the butchery with hanging and preparation rooms, and develop a bakery with accompanying tea room. An on-line retail facility followed.

Today, the business is more than just a shop. It employs one full time butcher, two chefs, and two front of house staff, whilst Emma fills in transporting the meat and other goods. Over 31,000 customers have visited in the last 12 months. Demand for home



produced Hereford beef exceeds supply with an average 1.5 carcasses sold weekly increasing to five per week for the three weeks running up to Christmas. Full traceability, combined with quality and provenance, is assured with additional Hereford bred beef sourced from other pedigree breeders and also from commercial producers within the region who are using Shraden bulls. All cattle are slaughtered at a nearby facility, and hung for three weeks. “We are very proud of the fact that the shop only supplies Hereford bred beef,” says Elaine.

“We initially found the farm shop demanded an accompanying huge education exercise. Shoppers wanted a lean piece of beef with fat strapped on to it; they had no idea that great eating quality was influenced by intramuscular fat. The advent of Celebrity Chefs combined with slow cookers has certainly increased demand for home reared high quality beef, not just the favourites – fillet steak and rump - but now forequarters, chuck and brisket are all very popular.”

The Timmis’ latest venture is developing a supply of home bred and reared Gloucester Old Spots for both the butchery and bakery. Two sows have been secured and a breeding programme is underway.

2013 has been an exciting year not only with the Herefords and the new tea room but also Melissa got married in October to Dan Roberts. When Dan is not at work he is very useful fixing computer problems and has become very wary of the phrase ‘I have a little job for you!!’ In their spare time Melissa and Dan play the violin and guitar in ‘The Gregory S Davies Band’ and are called away to perform in gigs often twice a week and have even featured on Radio 2! Elaine is a retained firefighter with Baschurch and so often disappears at break-neck speed to the latest emergency. Melissa and Elaine also try to keep up with Twitter and Facebook which has helped in the past not only in attracting more customers to the shop but also in pedigree sales.

Nobody knows what 2014 will bring but you can be sure that if an opportunity arises we will probably find it impossible to resist, standing still is not an option!



Melissa serving another satisfied customer!



Melissa & Dan Robert's Big Day!