

Williams Farm Report



Phil and Elizabeth Williams' plans to establish a small pedigree Hereford herd for pleasure were overturned when one of their foundation heifers went straight to the top in the showing stakes - early success which led the couple to reconsider their objectives and establish new goals. The Alderoak herd is now scheduled within the next five years to double to 30 breeding cows, reach the breed's top 5% of Breedplan genetic performance and produce stock of high quality conformation for both pedigree and commercial producers. We follow its progress.

Spring 2014 was a memorable occasion for the Williams'. "Calving our homebred heifers for the first time heralded a huge milestone on our journey and gave us a real thrill of being able to register these animals under our own Alderoak prefix," Elizabeth explains. "We'd left these heifers to grow naturally to an average 550kg plus at 20 months; we calved them at 2.5 years to Wirruna Daffy, and literally just left them to get on with the job themselves, the calves were up and sucking within minutes, the heifers have had plenty of milk which is reflected in the fact they're on schedule to reach target 350kg to 400kg by weaning and housing at seven to eight months of age."

Phil and Elizabeth's infectious enthusiasm for the breed is apparent from the word go. They are first to admit they've been bitten by the pedigree bug and it's one they're keen to share.



Phil & Elizabeth Williams

"Hopefully our story will encourage more upcoming Society Members. Admittedly our success has been achieved with bought in stock in such a short space of time, however it's been done on a shoe string and now the huge challenge we face is maintaining the momentum with our own homebred stock."

The couple's Hereford journey began less than five years ago after they decided to establish a pedigree herd on their Alderoak Farm, a 104 acre part owned part tenanted Shropshire grassland unit based at Montford Bridge. However, their experience working with Hereford goes back further – to 2000, after they swapped their 100 cow grading up Holstein herd for native bred suckler cows and introduced them to the Hereford bull for store calf production.

"We bought our second Hereford bull from Bosa in 2009 and while we were there we had a good look at the females. I'd always wanted to develop a purebred herd of Herefords, they're quiet cattle and they are very eye catching," Elizabeth explains. "After years of persisting, the following year Phil finally agreed to invest, and we purchased our first heifer from Romany. A





Romany 1 Mink A84 K9

handful more followed from Baybridge, Kinglee and then back to Romany. Our objective was to develop a small herd and work quietly away, we had no idea what was around the corner.”

In October 2012, the Williams’ headed off to the Sale in Hereford and purchased the day’s Female Champion, the 12 month old Romany 1 Julia D1 J42 for 2,600gns. “She was the type of animal we wanted to base the herd on – sound feet and legs with good locomotion, high EBVs, and good conformation with easy fleshing off grass and forage. The following month we thought she may have the potential for showing.

“Days later we entered her for what we regarded as our local show at Shrewsbury. Little did we realise that the Hereford National Calf Show is the breed’s largest event in Europe with over 130 entries. The prospect of turning her out to such a major event was somewhat daunting to say the least since we were complete newcomers to the Hereford showing. We needed serious help so we discussed with Robert Wilson, from Romany, who is a huge source of help and advice and put together our first show team - Professional Showman, Andrew Hughes arrived to clip her, whilst our cousin’s son, Charlie Morgan-Jones from the Church Preen herd was introduced as handler.

“The rest is history. We had hopes she may be placed halfway up her class of 14, yet never in our wildest dreams consider she would win her class, and then go on to secure Female and Overall Championships. We were completely speechless.”

The following year, Romany 1 Julia D1 J42 went on to win several tickets on the Show circuit before securing the Intermediate



Alderoak 1 Beresford



Romany 1 Julia with Alderoak 1 Legend at foot 2

Championship title at the National Poll Show, whilst in 2014 at the same event, she was shown with her bull calf and stood in Reserve Supreme place to her half maternal sister – we were told that was a remarkable achievement.

“Julia” catapulted us within months of establishing our Alderoak prefix to the higher echelons of the Hereford showing world which we never ever anticipated. Initially we hadn’t bought foundation stock for showing; we simply wanted a few pedigree cows to work steadily away with.”

The Williams’ 2014 herd priority was to join a CHECH programme, a decision they believe important not only to enable them to develop a plan to achieve the highest health possible, but also to provide buyer assurance. “The herd went in at level II and we’re now aiming for level I,” Phil explains.

Herd expansion is set to continue however not at the expense of careful selection on visual appraisal - good feet and legs are a priority together with conformation. 2015 also sees the Alderoak herd commence Breedplan recording. “We’re great believers in Breedplan as a selection tool. We’ve used the data to select our purchases within the breed’s top 10% or above for calving ease, milk and birthweight EBVs. Entering the programme with relatively high genetic merit cattle will help us to take the herd as high as it can go, however we expect there will be pitfalls along the way,” says Elizabeth.

Introducing another female bloodline is on the cards, however fresh genetics arrived in 2014 in the form of a new stock bull, Frenchstone P. 1 Dood. “When we saw “Dood” at the Shropshire Show, we agreed he was the full package – length, height and cracking feet and legs, with the ability to add some scale and muscling to the herd. He also had EBVs to match and is within



Romany 1 Julia D1 J42 took the Reserve Supreme Championship at the National Poll Show 2014

the breed's top 5%," says Phil.

"Dood" was bought in a private deal before joining the Alderoak Show team and going on to achieve numerous accolades including Royal Welsh Junior Male Championship and other male titles and culminating in the society's Poll Bull and UK Bull of the Year Awards.

In 2014, the Alderoak show team brought home the silverware from over 10 National and Regional Shows. They admit it's a massive act to follow. "In 2015 we'll be going out with homebred stock accompanied with a little more confidence. Hopefully our success will encourage and inspire others to pick up the gauntlet and get out into the ring with their stock. The more cattle we are able to turn out, the more impact they will have on raising the Breed's profile."

The Williams final words go to Alderoak's extended indispensable team, Robert Wilson, Andrew Hughes, Charlie Morgan-Jones, their son, Richard and his partner, Lacey. "Without their mix of skills, none of our success would have been possible. A big thank you to all," says Elizabeth.

Alderoak Farm's tried and tested Hereford cross cows

The modern Hereford has a great future both within the commercial beef and dairy sector, says Phil Williams. "Hereford sired cattle have the ability to finish off forage based systems to specified carcass weights without over finish and they're docile and easy to work with. Furthermore Hereford cross cows have all those native characteristics and coupled with longevity – we expect an average 10 crops of calves.



Hereford Bull of the Year Frenchstone P. 1 Dood with owner Phil Williams at the Royal Welsh Show

He speaks from experience having used a Hereford bull over his 45 cow suckler herd for more than a decade. "Our spring calving cows just get on with the job and don't require any assistance, and they're rearing quality high performance calves off milk and grass; bulls are reaching 400kg by weaning at seven to eight months, and heifers 350kgs. They winter indoors on pure forage based diets and are sold to repeat buyers through the store ring at an average 10 to 12 months – bulls at an average 550kg plus and heifers 450kg plus.

"I believe it's over to us breeders to offer modern quality Hereford cattle, the type of animal which is in demand for commercial purposes and continue to deliver the level of performance that we've been consistently achieving."