

Dendor Farm Feature

The Jones family and their Dendor prefix are familiar to many pedigree and commercial livestock farmers in the UK and beyond. Dendor came from the herd founders, the late DENIS Jones and his wife DORIS. We find out how their, son Aled, his wife Jenny and their three boys, Guto, Twm and Ianto along with Aled's sister Sian are progressing the herd's genetics on their Powys unit.

Breeding pedigree Poll Hereford cattle for the commercial marketplace is more than a business for the Jones family. It's steeped in that unquantifiable stockmanship coupled with passion and commitment which is being passed down the generations.

"For over six decades, Dendor has focused on breeding bulls which commercial producers want to buy – that's both suckler and dairy men, as well as fellow pedigree breeders; we've always placed emphasis on producing cattle which are hardy, healthy, easy feeding and milky," Aled explains. "We trade the vast majority over the farm gate but we also do support the official Society Sales in Hereford. Any bulls or heifers that we rate not good enough to sell or retain for our own breeding purposes are culled for our box beef scheme."

Each sale is not the end of story. The family firmly believes in after sales service and makes a concerted effort to find out how their stock settles in and works. "Our customers are very valued, and their feedback is important to us," he says.

Dendor cattle are bred and reared on what is essentially a low input mixed farming system. "Each cow must rear a calf – that's the one basic rule we farm by, and we're succeeding. Over the last couple of years we have an average 99% of calves reared per cow per year from our low input system.

"We breed females that graze at up to 1,100' in Summer and can convert forage in to milk as cheaply as possible - that's what it's all about. During Winter months we minimise variable costs feeding high DM haylage and minerals whilst bought in creep is reserved for the bulls as well as the calves to prevent a check at weaning." Spring born calves are weaned at seven months – bulls at 350kg to 430kg and heifers, 300kg to 350kg.

"We're always looking to improve the herd and introduce new genetics and since the British Hereford herdbook has a relatively



small gene pool we've had to look further afield and recently purchased bulls from Denmark and Northern Ireland."

The Jones rate cattle breeding to piecing together a jigsaw accompanied with clearly defined selection criteria. Priority is given to locomotion plus top line and then the head. "Yes heads are chucked in the bin, but if you don't have a good head, then you won't have anything good behind it," says Aled. Easy fleshing and good loins follow together with carcass weight that meets with market specification. "Weight gets you out of a lot of trouble. Farmers can chase a few extra p/kg premium achieving





better conformation, but a top grading carcass cannot make up for the value of those extra kgs.”

The family has been performance recording their herd since the 1970s being amongst the first to take up the MLC Beefbreeder scheme. Since then, they’ve embraced Breedplan, however it is not a priority, says Aled. “We would rather the cattle looked right however if they have accompanying data, then all the better. The last bull purchased did not have data but he moves well, has a great top and excellent cosmetics – the bits we needed for the next generation.”

Dendor bulls have also been selected for low input grass based systems. Neck length and muscle width are both essential to aid foraging ability which is, after all, one of the Hereford breed’s greatest attributes.

“There’s also the Hereford’s essential visual characteristics – white crest, white socks and that deep red colour. We like to

breed cattle with traditional markings. Last but not least is style, our cattle must have presence if they’re going to work for us.”

Dendor’s latest investments include:

- The Danish bred SMH Euro secured on visual assessment via photo, he appeared to have presence and he came from a reputable breeder. The decision paid off. The Jones say Euro has proved to be bomb proof, he’s easy fleshing, easy calving, and his daughters have proven to be really milky.
- The NI bred Solpoll 1 Gilbert was selected for depth of muscling and clean lines. His sire was the Canadian bred Christies 1 Radar who had been admired as a calf.
- Lanscombe 1 Orkney selected for his full loin, locomotion and cosmetics.

When it comes to female selection criteria then milk is the number one priority. “Her calf has to be as big as possible at weaning simply because we have six or seven months winter





Showring success

The Jones' kitchen shimmers with silverware, not the culinary type but coveted Hereford trophies collected from some of the Summer Shows and Society fixtures they've attended over the 2013/14 season. The family say showing cattle is hard work, yet it's something they really look forward to and find rewarding.

"The ring provides us with a great opportunity every year to show case our cattle and for meeting and greeting other breeders, both old and new customers, and to catch up with folks we only tend to see at these events," says Aled.

Whilst they have had many successes over the years they have never before scored a hat trick – they are thrilled.

The Hereford Cattle Society presented the following awards to Dendor:-

Female of the Year to the two year old heifer Dendor 1 Molly 41st who secured points at a number of Shows during the season including Grand Female Championships at Shropshire County, Anglesey and Kington and Reserve Grand Female Championship at the Royal Welsh. Her showring success is matched by Breedplan performance data; Molly is within the breed's top 5% for Terminal and Self Replacing Indexes

Sire of the Year to the four and half year old stock bull Solpoll 1 Gilbert who sired a string of Dendor progeny including Female of the Year Molly 41st, Jennefer 15th, Honeysuckle 14th, Ruby 20th, Molly 42nd, Lomax, Lukakau and Leroy.

Show Herd of the Year to the herd winning the most number of points gained from all eligible shows across the UK.

In addition, Dendor won the Welsh Area Herd Competition and finished a commendable third in the National Herd of the

here and have to buy in supplementary feed." The herd is virtually closed to new breeding females in order to maintain its high health status," says Aled. "Our preventative herd health plan was replaced three years ago with a CHeCH programme which enables us to reassure our customers the health status of the cattle they are purchasing."

Factfile

290 DA, SDA acres owner occupied, 120 acres rented

50 pedigree Poll Herefords and followers

800 Welsh Mules for finished lamb production

The Dendor journey

Gwastadgoed, Llanwnnog, Caersws has been the home to the Jones' pedigree Herefords since the late 1950's. Denis and Doris started farming together with a dairy herd. They had a great deal of contact with the Graig herd and this was where their interest began in Herefords. A Horned cow with bull calf at foot was one of their first purchases. The bull sold for more than the cow and calf purchase, prompting the couple to realise that Herefords could turn money in to profit and they fast became 'more than a bit of a hobby', but it has never been so easy since says Aled! Gwastad Hereford herd was established in 1960.

The herd expanded and to meet growing demand, switched to Poll Herefords during the 1970s and Dendor Poll Herefords began. The family did dabble in Continental genetics during the next decade, but they continued to develop the strongest of the original Poll Hereford female lines in a more or less closed Poll herd. They endeavour to develop the Dendor Herd as a provider of modern Poll cattle which retain the traditional qualities of the breed.

Whilst Aled had returned home in the 1980s to help manage Gwastadgoed, Jenny had got the teenage travel bug and left behind her family's farm to travel Europe and gain work experience on the journey. First port of call was the Royal Show in 1986 to meet David Prothero and from there on to work with the Vaughan, Chapman and Frearson herds. She eventually arrived to Dendor and the rest is history.

Over the years small parcels of land have been purchased enabling them to expand the family partnership. Sian is home when time allows and their three teenage boys have been brought up to be involved in the farm's activities including working with the cattle and they're familiar faces at Shows and in the Hereford young handlers ring. Guto has gained a BTEC in Agriculture at Reaseheath College and is heading out to gain experience with other farming enterprises, whilst Twm and Ianto are completing their higher education at Llandovery College on rugby scholarships. "The boys have been encouraged to find their own way although home is always here for them." says Aled.

