

Hereford bulls crossing with Jersey Suckler Dams – the perfect match for ‘Farmer Fate’

Hereford bulls and Hereford cross Jersey suckler dams are the unusual mix being used successfully by Lincolnshire farmer, Tony Lockwood. Neil Ryder talked to Tony alias ‘Farmer Fate’.

Lincolnshire farmer, Tony Lockwood describes himself as Farmer Fate. Certainly it was chance rather than planning that has led him to develop a successful grass based beef suckler enterprise based on Hereford cross Jersey cows put to traditional type, Hereford bulls on his Lincolnshire farm.

While Tony says his working and business life has been largely driven by fate, what is clear is that this is combined with a strong aptitude for business and the ability to build on the business opportunities that fate has given him.

It was the success of these other businesses that enabled him to buy the 24ha (60 acre) Westlands Farm, at Glentworth, near Gainsborough and return to his first love of full time farming.

“I was brought up on the family farm near Doncaster which had a Jersey dairy herd from 1948 to 1984. Much of the farm was taken by the Coal Board for mining waste. This led to major problems with sulphur poisoning and a long legal battle. My father and mother were left with about 50 acres which could only support them so my sister and I went out to generate income elsewhere. She now has a top holding in New Zealand and I went into the commercial world.

“I started out with no money, but was able to build up successful multi-media and other businesses until about 12 years ago my wife, Fiona and I were able to buy this farm. The other businesses were sold and I was able to do what I love doing – working with cattle.

“We decided to run a beef suckler herd but had no particular thoughts on breeds or crosses. Then fate took a hand and a local Jersey dairy farmer was using a Hereford bull to catch cows not in-calf to AI and happened to have some Hereford cross Jersey heifers. We bought 15 in two batches.



Tony Lockwood says having quiet, friendly animals is important.

“This led us to do some research into Herefords and thought that using the Hereford on our Hereford cross Jersey cows could work well. We felt that both breeds had good fertility, easy calving, the Jersey had plenty of high quality milk ideal for rearing beef calves while the Hereford offered high quality, marbled beef. In addition both Jersey and Hereford were calm breeds and easy to handle,” says Tony.

Westlands farm is a virtually all grass mostly down to five year leys with a little wholecrop being grown on a trial basis. The land is heavy with rainfall around 25 inches (627mm) annually.

Tony says: “I have set things up with a system that I can do everything myself. I have a lot of control through gates so everything moves round and is fed in the system which is getting more and more efficient. I suppose it is a bit naïve or arrogant, but I haven’t bothered marketing the end product yet because I am so involved in getting the production and the product right. I am leaving that until everything is right and word gets about. I am a great believer in fate and I think it is 90 per cent fate that I am here.

“We are spring calving but working towards December-January



Tight calving produces very even Hereford sired calves.



Use of the Jersey bred dams ensures good udders and plenty of high quality milk for the calves.

with February at the latest. We do manage to keep calving within an eight week block with a 99 per cent success rate. This one of the reasons we are using the Hereford.

“When the cows come in a lot will be fairly fat because they are grazed on a paddock system. They only have three or four days on a paddock and then they go on to fresh grass again so they are always eating fresh, short grass even into October. We try to use the minimum fertiliser with spreading all muck back on. The only thing I have to buy in is straw of which there is plenty round here.

“I am a cautious chap so I have enough straw for next year already and have not fetched a bale in yet up till August this year. I don’t believe in being caught out, and carry a year in hand. I have just tried wholecrop for the first time which was undersown with a two year ley.

“When cows come in the ones that are fat will go on to just straw and stay on that nearly up to calving. When they calve for the one or two months they will go on to nice sweet meadow hay. Then, when they have calved for two months, they go on to really high quality silage as the milk is starting to be better utilised by the calf.

“I try to take them to three months after they have calved before they go out. We know that then there will be a flush of grass with the mother being half or quarter Jersey the amount of milk produced will be vast. With that flush we need the calf to be of an age that it can take advantage of this. If that happens the calf will absolutely storm away. It is no good the calf being a month old and the cow stood there running milk.

“In 2013 we didn’t quite manage it because of the bad weather the previous year and the calves were about a month behind and were all right but not what they should have been. We had



This calf out of a Hereford cross Dairy Shorthorn dam compares well with those out of Hereford cross Jersey dams.



Nicknamed Bob, Dovemount Hogan is the elder of the two stock bulls.



The Hereford cross Jersey bred suckler dams include dams with three quarter and higher Hereford blood. Milk yields tend to fall off progressively above seven eighths Hereford cows.

the driest year ever followed by the wettest year ever and that really put us out.

“Rather than ruin my fields in that really wet year we brought them in for a month in June. Because of our system of having reserves of fodder and straw it was not a problem to just open the gate and let them in. This year we brought them in for three or four days when there were big storms. It just takes that pressure off the grass.

“As a guide when we were selling the calves off at 9-10 months the best prices we got were about £760 and the worst down to £580. That was leaving me, taking out everything including diesel and fertiliser but not labour, £300 to £325 average over the cost it took to feed the mother.”



These first Hereford cross Jersey suckler cows typify the type of suckler dam favoured by Tony Lockwood.

“When the cows come in they are put in pens of 6-10 with a feed passage so I can feed the whole row or individual pens separately, As they start to calve, usually in batches as they were served, they move into individual calving pens.

“They then move off in pairs and move when ready into the next pen so they move down one side of the barn and up the other side in pairs. As they come into the last pen the calves should be two months old and go on into the pens that are empty in three or four pairs with plenty of room and fed silage with the young stock.

“When the cows are put into pairs we make sure that they are put with friends. It may seem strange but it does make a big difference. Sometimes the friends will push each other around at first, perhaps playing, but soon settle down. I can put two cows together that will settle down and two that will always be on edge. There is no doubt that they do have definite friends.”

“Because of the pens system, from day one the calves can feed alongside their parents and even when very young will be taking a little feed alongside their mothers because there is no competition from other stock. This is really important to me.”

“Before deciding to use Hereford we researched the breed and understand that that the breed has developed and grown on land that is very low in quality and trace elements. This has resulted in the Hereford thriving throughout the world on very poor quality land. Our current stock bulls are Ringby I.Am and Dovemount Hogan.

“At the moment we sell about half our calves as stores through local auctions – mostly Newark, Louth and Selby – and the rest are sold to a neighbour for finishing them before selling to a traditional local butcher using a local slaughterhouse. This works well and I think this mix will remain about the same as finishing beef here would mean carrying less cows. I strongly believe that livestock should be bred, reared, finished and slaughtered within the same locality. Apart from welfare, this would greatly reduce the risk of spreading disease,” he says.

He also believes that there will be a sustainable and growing market for high quality beef produced on low cost, environmentally friendly systems which also produce marbled beef with great taste.

And what of the future? As Tony says, that is down to fate and, of course, the opportunities it may bring!



This adjustable gate hinge system is widely used on the farm to give an extremely flexible gate and penning system.



A line up of Hereford cross Jersey heifers.

Fact Sheet

Tony and Fiona Lockwood bought the 24ha (60acres) Westlands Farm near Glentworth, Lincolnshire about 12 years ago. The farm is virtually all grass, mostly five acre leys, apart from a little wholecrop grown for the first time this year.

The farm is home to about 60 suckler cows, all Hereford cross Jersey apart from a couple of Hereford cross Dairy Shorthorn.

Feeding is based on home grown fine meadow hay grown on land rented from a neighbour and home grown high quality silage plus bought in straw for feed and bedding.

The cows are put to traditional type Hereford bulls for spring calving with calving being increasingly brought back to December-January. This ensures calves are old enough to make full use of additional milk available when their dams go out on to spring grass.

Winter management uses an interlinked system of pens. These are always bedded from the inside outwards to minimise dust within the pens. In addition the machine used for bedding is set for silage to reduce dust.

All cattle are given a three day pain killer injection when horns are disbudded as well as the normal local anaesthetic. Tony believes this is important for the welfare of the animal and helps avoid any setbacks in growth after dehorning. He is highly critical of farmers who will not spend the £1.90 cost for each animal..

Retaining homebred heifers means that the proportion of Hereford in the suckler dams can increase. In practice Tony finds that milk production is unaffected up to about three-quarters Hereford blood and there is a small reduction in seven eighths Hereford dams but is reduced greatly in 15 sixteenth Hereford dams.

Apart from the Hereford cross Jerseys, there are two Hereford cross Dairy Shorthorn dams which are a little broader than the Hereford Jersey crosses and, so far, are working well.

About half the calves are sold as stores through local auction marts. The rest are sold to a neighbour who finishes them at about at about 500kg-550kg liveweight and sold to an independent local butcher. They are also slaughtered locally with carcass weights around the 270kg mark.

