

Blend modern genetics with native characteristics and the Hereford is providing the total package for Simon Cutter's field to fork enterprise

What goes around comes around, reflects Simon Cutter's farming business – a low input organic system completely self-sufficient in feed. And it's one which Hereford quite naturally fits in to, he says. However here comes the twist.

Simon is focused on using some of the Hereford's most modern genetics to enhance its overall performance yet at the same time make sure he retains the breed's hardiness, its natural ability to graze and to rear one calf per year, and maintain eating quality.

"We are selecting sires from within the breed's top 5% EBVs for milk and ease of calving – we have used the imported Al Redgate Redford, Kairuru Xavier, Moeskaer Salute, Pine Hill Glenfern and the odd homebred bull. Stock bulls have included Romany 1 Director and Energize and we are currently using Alderville 1 Prosper. In fact the majority of the herd now carries imported genetics. Most of my cows carry 25% British Poll genetics and all heifers have their first calf to a British Poll bull. We're currently using Baysham 3 Franz.

"Ideally we would like to select the curve bender type sires – those which also have good growth and eye muscle to help enhance carcass value, which leads us to Australia and New Zealand where a marbling EBV is being developed along with a pasture fed and grain fed EBV," he explains. "Whilst using my eyes and ears is very important, I'd say 60% of my decision making is based on EBVs which reflect the value of specific traits an animal will pass on to its progeny.



Factfile

100 tenanted acres, 50 acres parkland keep Model Farm County Council holding

550 tenanted acres in HLS agreement Courtfield Estate

100 pedigree Hereford breeding females

400 Easycare ewes



"We are aiming to breed a medium sized 600kg cow, not as small as the Traditional Hereford but one which is an excellent pasture converter with ample milk to rear a 300kg calf off forage at 10 months weaning. We retain annually the top 10% of the herd's heifers for milk and calving ease EBVs for replacement purposes and cull the bottom 15% of the cows in order to make herd genetic progress. The steers are grown on a pure forage diet to an average 550kg liveweight target finishing at 24 months and retailing through our farm shop."

The finishing cattle overwinter at Model Farm which grows high protein nitrogen fixing forage crops - clover, lucerne, forage peas, and vetches which are fed in a wholecrop mix together with triticale. "We aim to keep things simple and are now



completely self-sufficient. We don't purchase any feedstuffs apart from minerals.

"We also aim to make top quality silage, and grow Timothy grass with lucerne to get a better balanced silage. However we've yet to crack lucerne, simply because so little research on the crop has been completed in the UK. In 2013 our lucerne silage turned out to be rocket fuel at 26% CP and we made four cuts amounting to 22 tonnes freshweight."

Simon achieved an ambition to farm in his own right in 1988 after securing the tenancy of Model Farm, Hildersley, Ross-on-Wye, a 100 acre County Council unit. The break came after studying agriculture and working on farms in the UK and overseas. "I'm a first generation farmer, so it was literally a dream come true and to have the opportunity to pioneer an organic livestock rearing enterprise long before the organic bandwagon started to roll post BSE."

A portion of Model Farm was later taken for development, however 12 years on he had the opportunity to extend the business by taking on 550 acres of rough grassland on the nearby Courtfield Estate. Apart from increasing cow numbers, it enabled him to develop a stratified system.

"I started farming with a suckler herd comprising a mish mash of breeds. We used various native terminal sire breeds, and found that Hereford produced beef which was perceived by our farm shop customers to consistently offer a better eating experience.

"Our next major decision influenced by TB, was to develop a closed herd, phase out the commercial sucklers and replace with pedigree Herefords, initially sourced from the Knightwick herd, which we insisted would be farmed in a commercial sustainable system. We are not pedigree breeders," he says.

Taking on the additional land led to Simon sourcing additional commercially reared pedigree Hereford cows. He was also faced with a new land management challenge. "We agreed to introduce a system which continued to offer amenity value to the landowner and also be eligible for HLS entry.

"Working with Natural England we immediately began to



return 300 acres to traditional river meadows. We introduced a specific approved grass mix to the meadows and developed a rotational grazing system. In winter, we roll out big bales of hay to distribute seed. Overall, the system works very well; we are being supported to deliver public goods, whilst the Herefords being natural grazers have come up trumps helping to re-establish and enhance the meadows."

The herd is split calving, Spring and Autumn – the latter being the most profitable, says Simon. "The baby calves stay out all Winter and then take advantage of the Spring flush grass. Furthermore, the autumn crop only needs one housing period and grows a bigger proportion of weight from grazing thereby costs are reduced considerably.

"Whilst we live a 20 minute drive from the Courtfield Estate, I've found checking the cows just once a day during calving is sufficient simply because they don't need any hands on help and new born calves are keen to get up and start suckling."

He adds: "The breeding cows have got to be exemplary; they've demonstrated real hardiness and outwinter with just supplementary forage and minerals. They don't even seem to mind snow settling on their backs."

Model Farm Shop

"Hereford beef was once good enough to rule the world and I know for a fact things haven't changed. We could never replace our Hereford beef for another breed without customer revolt!" Simon reports.

"I've found from years of experience that customers first and foremost demand consistency and quality and our pure Hereford beef is delivering. It's provided the best eating experience of all other breeds of beef we have ever offered in our farm shop. Hereford beef has firm flesh with superb marbling which when cooked has that unbeatable taste, texture and tenderness. That's why farming Hereford cattle is also a customer driven choice."





all our beef has been reared from a sole homegrown forage diet.”

The Hereford cattle are killed at a local family slaughterhouse, returned to the Cutter’s cold store for hanging for a minimum of 21 days as per PFLA rules, and cut in their own butchery. The businesses is currently trading an average 1.5 Hereford carcasses per week, of which 15% is sold over the counter along with a range of other organic meats and fresh produce, while the remainder is traded into M5 corridor towns direct to the end user via a home delivery service. It also supplies weekly pop up shops in Bristol and Birmingham.

In addition, Model Farm Shop butchery cuts up two to three carcasses per week for other Hereford breeders selling direct.

“As we continue to expand the business, both the existing offer and with a take away and cooked products venture, then I would like to achieve a critical mass; demand for Hereford beef would outstrip our own supply and we could create an opportunity to co-operate with other farmers producing pure Hereford 100% pasture fed beef.”

The farm shop was established shortly after Simon took on the Model Farm tenancy. “It was an outlet for our home reared pigs and initially we were known to be cheap and cheerful however since organic conversion and offering a different branded product with accompanying price point the clientele has changed.”

After a period of closure and extensive refurbishment, the shop reopened in Summer 2014. Not only has it provided a new opportunity to introduce Simon’s sons to build the business - Jonty is a trainee butcher while George has introduced a courier service, but also to step up what’s on offer.

“I want to produce the healthiest beef possible for our customers and I’m aware that pasture fed contains a higher percentage of omega-3 fatty acids – the good fats, compared with beef from cattle fed grain based diets. We’ve achieved accreditation from the Pasture-Fed Livestock Association (PFLA) which will certify

