

# Butcher Tom Jones expresses his passion for Hereford Beef



*Butcher Tom Jones back on the farm with his Hereford herd*

I have been supplying Hereford beef to restaurants and butchers, primarily in London, for more than ten years and during this time its popularity has flourished. My first major breakthrough was with the acclaimed William IV at Ladbroke Grove in North London in 2002. Since then I have supplied a number of top restaurants including the Anchor and Hope in Waterloo - regularly described in reviews as 'the best in Britain' and with awards to match. Its sister restaurant, the Great Queen Street, another customer, is a former 'British Restaurant of the Year' in the London Restaurant Awards.

The Hereford's fine marbling and excellent fat covering make it a prime choice for chefs to have it on the menu and because the flavour is so intensive very little needs to be added to the meat. Society may crave a low fat diet, but it is the naturally occurring substance that kitchens yearn for and repeat with regularity that 'you may be able to take fat out, but you can never put it in to the cooking process'.

The Hereford has a very distinctive true beef flavour which echoes the deep red soil from where they have evolved and carries creamy notes lent by that beautiful covering. It is also a name synonymous with traditionally assured beef, which allows chefs the comfort of putting the breed name on the menu. The name alone is the ultimate selling point. The manageable carcass is not to be overlooked and the general size of the breed is at satisfactory level. Food fashion dictated that the Hereford was bred to a small stature, a size that saw it eclipsed by bigger, bulkier Continental breeds. Now the size of the Hereford that I routinely see at the Spring and Autumn Hereford Society Shows and Sales do the breed justice and allow for an easier sale at the deadweight end of the industry. I discovered that selling whole and half carcasses to kitchens was not only a better financial deal for myself and for them, but more importantly a better education and experience for the consumer as they have a greater choice of cuts, texture and flavour. I have taught kitchens how to butcher over the years, where they have not had the knowledge so that this has become possible, but it would not have been so had the carcasses been of the mammoth proportions often seen with other breeds. An average carcass weight of between 260 – 300 kilos is ideal to be cut, portioned and stored, but importantly provide the right

amount of meat to last the week – ready to do it all again the following Monday.

I was asked in April to record a programme for Farming Today on Radio 4 to give my take on the Hereford breed as part of National Beef week. I was asked to give my response to Continental beef breeders poo-pooing native breeds as they championed fast growing animals with greater meat to bone ratio and supermarket contracts. I said that in all the time I have been supplying Hereford beef I have seen it proudly promoted and mentioned on countless menu's, butchers boards and consumer lips not only from Herefordshire, but Kent, Cumbria, Devon and Cornwall. Not once have I seen a Continental breed name up in lights. Only the Hereford can shout above the din all the other breeds make!

I am lucky enough to be able to buy from fantastic Hereford breeders that support the meat from my own herd namely The Thomas' at Risbury Court, James and Edward Lewis from Boycefield and the Haven and from Colin Powell's Roughmoor herd. It is extremely satisfying to fly the Hereford beef flag as a Herefordshire lad and it is even more satisfying to be able to sell Hereford beef directly into a stellar Hereford kitchen. The Rule of Tum boys started serving fine beef burgers and Sunday lunches from the kitchen at The Beer in Hand ale and cider bar on Eign Street, Hereford, in January - and thanks to great success from this and a weekly stall in Hereford High Town they are now opening a new burger shop in Aubrey Street at the back of the Green Dragon Hotel. Proud Herefordians themselves they have been championing Hereford beef and Herefordshire produce for years and, like their London counterparts, are happy to underpin their reputation with glorious taste that Hereford beef provides.

There are intricacies to the breed carcass that allow it to stand out and aid its versatility. Not only does the fat covering contribute to the muscle flavour, but it provides a superb 'jacket' which allows the carcass to hang for a long period of time and protects the meat from breaking down too quickly which would result in slimy unpalatable meat and wastage. This dry aging of meat, hung for up to eight weeks, is why more customers are coming forward to purchase the fabled Hereford beef and in recent weeks a new customer, The Clove Club in Shoreditch, London, who describe the breed beef as 'truly exceptional' has just been awarded its first Michelin Star.