

Argentinian blood builds base of top herd

Having bred two UK sires of the year, Carolyn Fletcher is known for producing quality pedigree cattle. She explains how she has moulded her herd over time.

Carolyn Fletcher spent much of her adult life travelling the world due to husband Frank's job in the oil industry, but on settling at Barwise Hall, Cumbria, she pined to reconnect to her farming roots and set about establishing a herd of commercial cattle and a flock of Mule ewes.

After some time, Carolyn adopted the use of an Aberdeen Angus bull in the herd and purchased a number of pedigree females, going on to pave herself a name in this breed's circles, having great successes at many shows across the country.

After the devastating loss of all her stock to foot and mouth, when Carolyn began re-stocking, her breed of choice wasn't quite as she had expected. Carolyn recalls the first time she went to Argentina looking for cattle to import with a group of Scottish Aberdeen Angus breeders. They viewed some of the top herds in the country, including La Paz owned by Leo Worthing and Tres Marias owned by Horacio Gutierrez, where, she says, the Herefords were impressive.

She revisited the country with friends to look at stock to import embryos from. This trip flipped Carolyn's breed preference and determined her future, being so impressed with the Herefords she saw.

Carolyn had travelled to South America with the aim of bringing home 25 embryos, mostly Angus and some Herefords. On viewing the stock in Argentina, she chose to import half and half, without ever viewing the Hereford breed in the UK before.

"When I got to Argentina, the Herefords were good framed cattle with great feet.

The gauchos were very tough. If cattle weren't performing, they'd cut their throats. The cattle were also surprisingly docile given the large group sizes they were kept in.

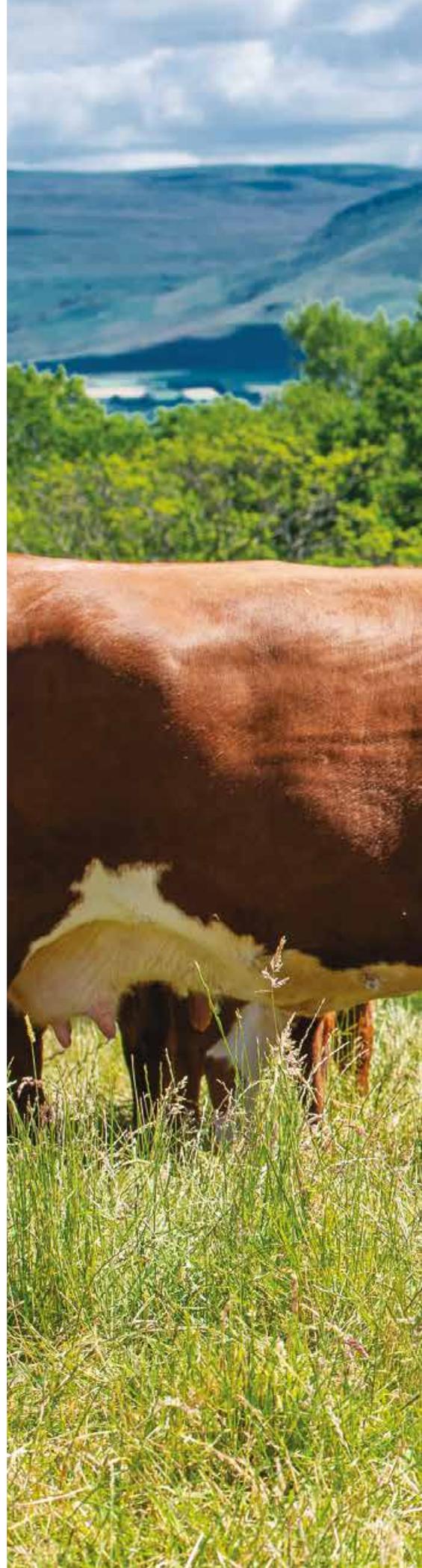
"I was going to buy Herefords from La Paz, and Angus from Tres Marias," explains Carolyn. "But I was asked why didn't I have Herefords and Angus from both? And that's what went on to happen. Strangely the best Herefords came from Tres Marias and the best Angus from La Paz."

The embryos were subsequently purchased and imported. Prior to the calves hitting the ground in 2003, Carolyn purchased Leo's Pride 1 Anni-Frid from Betty Ellis, Wigan, Greater Manchester at the Royal Show in 2002. This female went on to be Barwise Herefords' first show success, winning supreme and female champion at the National Poll Show the following year as a two and half year old cow. That year, the male champion was also bred by Betty Ellis, being Leo's Pride 1 Nelson, exhibited by DD Rowley and partners, Swadlincote, Derbyshire.

It is no mean feat breeding a sire of the year, let alone two, but Carolyn has done just that with Barwise 1 Wellington winning in 2009, also named poll bull of the year in 2004, and son Barwise 1 Lancer taking the accolade in 2018.

"The line which has produced both Lancer and Wellington breeds very well," comments Carolyn.

Wellington was one of the imported embryos from Tres Marias. His dam was Don Pancho X40 Etiqueta and is by Don Pancho Decathle.





Carolyn Fletcher farms Barwise Hall near Appleby-in-Westmorland, Cumbria



A Hereford cross Belted Galloway

Lancer, a son of Wellington, was out of Barwise 1 Grace, a HR4L Beyond embryo, imported from Canada.

She says: "I will flush a Beyond cow to Wellington as this breeding has produced fantastically good females and bulls in the past, like Lancer. It is lucky Robert Wilson bought Lancer because together with the Romany cows, some great cattle have been produced. It was through Robert's showing that Lancer gained the sire of the year title. It was great promotion for Barwise."

These days Carolyn keeps 54 poll Hereford breeding females alongside 21 Belted Galloways females. Overall cattle headage is down as the Angus herd has been sold she says, and at the time of visiting there were 160 cattle on-farm.

Two farms are run spanning 121 hectares (300 acres) in total with Carolyn and

husband Frank living at Barwise Hall and Carolyn's 'right hand man' Matt Taylor at Hoff Row. The Galloways are employed to graze the harder areas of the farm after the decision was made not to reintroduce sheep following foot and mouth.

All females are home-bred and Carolyn says it is important to produce cattle that breed for you, rather than buying them in. She likes to have a good stock bull but also enjoys experimenting with AI sires.

Carolyn says: "I don't use popular AI bulls, preferring to use new boys on the block. As such, I have imported a lot of semen from Danish-based Henrik Andersen of Moeskaer poll Herefords."

Carolyn also had a flush of embryos from Canada which she says bred fantastically well and produced the tremendous cows, Barwise 1 Grace, Barwise 1 Graceful and Barwise 1 Amazing Grace, which she comments are all good breeders.

Three particularly prevalent cow families at Barwise are the Roses, the Anns and the Graces. The imported embryos from Quilmes PH Rosemary 6855 gave very good cows she says, which were the beginnings of Carolyn's Rose family. Leo's Pride 1 Anni-Frid was the foundation cow for all females in the herd with names beginning with the letter A.

She says: "Wellington-bred cows are so strong that they too are having a large influence on the calves too, and not just the sire. You need a bull which will influence and dominate the cows and have qualities that stamp onto the female. Such bulls are hard to find.

"I think every breeder is never quite satisfied with what they have, but this fuels the continual strive for improvement. Last time I needed a bull, I drove my husband to distraction because I just could not find anything I considered to be quite what I needed. For me, a bull has to look good, but EBVs are also really important."

Carolyn sells through the two main society sales in Hereford and three official sales in Carlisle. Some females are sold from home which may increase in the future, but as a rule she keeps the best.

Barwise beef

Named as one of Rick Stein's food heroes, Barwise is also home to a meat processing facility, for home-bred carcasses which are killed by Jewitts of Spennymoor, County Durham and hung for at least three weeks before being cut by a local butcher who visits as and when required. When available, Carolyn's Hereford Beef is sold as cuts as people request or in mixed selection boxes.

All meat sold in this way is vacuum packed fresh, put in chiller boxes and delivered over night.



Carolyn Fletcher runs 54 pedigree cows

Farm facts

- ◆ 54 Hereford cows
- ◆ 9 recipients
- ◆ 4 Angus females
- ◆ 160 cattle on farm
- ◆ 44 head of Belted Galloways
- ◆ 21 breeding females
- ◆ 50.6 hectares (125 acres) pit silage made in one cut
- ◆ 121.4ha (300 ac) are run between Barwise Hall and Hoff Row

A huge percentage of the bulls which leave Barwise are destined for commercial and dairy homes, quite often travelling away from the farm's surrounding area, although Carolyn says she is hoping the more local market will develop over time.

She adds: "It is a great pleasure when they are sold into good pedigree herds and there is then also the chance to see the progeny they breed."

Barwise-bred bulls have been purchased by the Irish National Breeding Centre. Genus also stock Belted Galloway semen from Barwise and owns Barwise 1 Proteus, a Wellington son.

Bulls which don't make the grade for breeding are finished at 16 months, weighing 600kg. If males are considered not to be good enough at the time of being a calf, they are castrated and sold as stores.

Although the herd calves all year round, March is the busiest time of the year for Carolyn and she says capacity becomes a problem when there are young calves about.

Carolyn also produces what she calls a 'Belford', which is a Hereford cross Belted



Spring 2019-born calves at Barwise

Galloway, which she says are good cattle and she likes to use as recipients.

In the late part of the summer, calves are creep fed prior to weaning. Once weaned, they are supplemented a 16 per cent crude protein mix, which Carolyn favours over nuts.

Through the drought of summer 2018, while much of the country's grass struggled to grow, Carolyn says Barwise was a green island, which didn't lose its colour all summer.

Three stock bulls are currently run at Barwise:

Moeskaer Online - a Remitall Online 122L son

Moeskaer Patriarch - by Remitall Patriot 13P

Moeskaer Ultra - a HR4L Beyond son

Both pit and baled silage are made with the latter saved for bulls and 'special cases'. One cut of pit silage is taken off 50.6ha (125ac) and an amount of small bale hay is also made.

Carolyn says: "2019 was magic because we managed to make all three – hay, pit and baled silage with no stress."

All feed and straw is bought in to Carolyn's area of Cumbria, potentially leading to large costs. With this in mind, the main cattle sheds have been built with a dairying mentality, with rubber flooring and automatic scrapers which although Carolyn says she was not too keen on to start with, cattle don't seem to mind at all and are not any dirtier than if kept on straw.

Although Carolyn is a keen show lady with the ring playing a large role in the promotion of the business, she is also keen to stay true to her commercial roots.

She says: "We must never lose sight that the Hereford is a beef breed and that we are not just here to breed pretty cattle. Breeds are ruined through doing this. Perhaps a bull doesn't have a white neck, but it can bring so many other things to a herd."

Carolyn has a clear passion for the breed and hugely enjoys breeding Herefords and talking to likeminded people. In November, Carolyn was elected vice-president of the Society for 2020.

She says: "The Hereford breed has allowed us to have friends all over the world who all have a common passion and are open and sharing of information. It's like a brotherhood."



Moeskaer Ultra, at two years old