

Press Release on behalf of the Devon Cattle Breeders' Society: January 27, 2010

Diversifying into Devons proves a winner for ex dairyman

Diversifying from dairying into Devons and farm tourism is proving successful for one Cornish farming family.

The need for major re-investment and battling with premium land rents was good reason enough for Godfrey Hosking to question whether milking the family's Guernseys was still viable on a small farm so far from the market.

"With NVZs around the corner too, it was an opportunity to say hang-on do we change our direction," explains Godfrey who farms 130 acres at Boskenna in West Cornwall with his wife Julia.

"It was a case of how much money do we throw at it to keep standing still or shift the emphasis to farm tourism and change the farm policy to beef."

Both choices are proving successful – Boskenna won the Devon Cattle Breeders Society (DCBS) best small herd 2010 and received the Gold Award by Cornwall Tourism Awards for its 5 star luxury B&B.

"We've always been pedigree breeders and always tried to better ourselves," says Godfrey whose family has farmed for generations and had the best Guernsey herd in the UK, for highest yield and highest type between 2000-2004.

"It was a wrench to see the milkers go but living without cows was not on the agenda. As well as keeping sucklers, in our first year we bought in calves and bucket fed them" but Godfrey admits "we found no interest in that at all."

The decision to purchase Red Ruby Devons was not one the Hosking's took lightly.

"We wanted something that would appeal to the visitors, be docile, pasture based and cheap to keep – the Devon has all of that."

Godfrey points out. "The Devons temperament is very much to the fore – a lot of the continentals spend their life on top of a hedge to see if they can get to the other side but Devons don't look to get out – I know they'll be there when I get home!"

Godfrey, who works as a dairy nutritionist three days a week, says they looked at eight different breeds before making their final choice of Red Ruby Devons and South Devons. "We wanted something to put our pedigree breeding effort into but something that would take less time."

He feels that as a new entrant to the beef industry he has been able to cast a fresh pair of eyes on what he sees as the way forward.

"The modern type of Devon definitely has something to offer the industry. It is fleshier, longer and taller, doing well on grass but not running to fat as easily as the traditional type."

Godfrey is aiming to put his finished Devons to market or direct slaughter but to compete financially with continental types.

“Long-term it’s going to be unsustainable to feed animals on a lot of corn to get them to finish. We want ours to be having a little but mainly to finish on grass maximising the quality of the meat.”

And as for winter keep, the Devons at Boskenna have not seen a bale of straw since their arrival.

“We are in our fourth winter with them and they’ve never been inside yet,” says Godfrey who feeds them on haylage, stubble turnip and Winfred forage brassica.

“They’ve got the back fat to keep them.”

The Devons are Spring calving and Godfrey, who is also an AI technician, is able to use the best genetics.

“We’ve used Thorndale Assarati and Challenge Brigadier 3rd so we’ll see what we get in the spring but the judges of the herd competition were very impressed so far.”

Godfrey is delighted that his 19-year-old son Edward, who has just obtained a distinction in a national diploma Agriculture at Duchy College, has shown a keen interest in breeding and will keep on with the family tradition.

“We’ve got 13 foundation Devon cows and the door is closed now for disease free status. We’ll do it all by AI as we are in no rush,” but, he smiles, “We will be aiming for the DCBS best large herd!”

To find out more about the Red Ruby Devon please call the DCBS on 01837 810942 or visit www.redrubydevon.co.uk <<http://www.redrubydevon.co.uk/>>

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