

Beef Farmer of the Year

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Paul and Kirsty Westaway have taken on a second farm tenancy and would like to triple their acreage in five years.

Paul and Kirsty Westaway

Gamage Hall Farm, Dymock, Gloucestershire

Britain's livestock sector needs dynamic farmers and in Paul and Kirsty Westaway of Melview Farming it has two of the best.

The county council tenants are both in their thirties and are some of the youngest and most entrepreneurial beef producers in the region. Paul Westaway has used 10 years of experience working with Genus to inform his approach with genetics and he has made major strides in just four years on the farm. "We came here with just a pitch fork, a wheelbarrow and a grasp of the market. We've got a long way to go," he said. "I am interested in profit per head not pence per kilogram and I am 100% consumer led."

One of their two main businesses is to finish 70 Angus cross Holstein heifers on a contract with Blade Farming for Tesco's Finest range and McDonalds. They rear two groups a year of 35 calves that finish every six months to ensure constant cashflow. The calves are on a forward price contract of R4L plus 10p/kg, which allows the Westaways to deliver a workable margin of more than £130 a head before labour.

FARM FACTS

- * Gamage Hall Farm, Dymock, Gloucestershire
- * **Type of enterprise** Breeding pedigree Aberdeen Angus and finishing Angus x Holsteins
- * **Farm size** 135 acres
- * **Herd size** 140
- * **Financials** Turnover £100,000 and profit of £15,000 (2009)

THE JUDGES LIKED

- * Young farmers using precision techniques to produce quality grass, forage, breeding cattle and beef
- * Passionate and enthusiastic about moving his business and the industry forward
- * Resourceful at accessing expertise when needed and exploits opportunities

He needs more cows to achieve his goal of selling 50 breeding bulls a year and he has bought embryos from some of the best cows overseas to help speed up the process. Red Angus embryos were bought from Canada and Paul believes this is a niche market that will grow.

The Angus cross Holstein heifers go into the Angus Finest range for Tesco's and marketing their own Melview Angus brand is an ongoing project through county shows and the website (www.britishangus.com), which the couple manage. They will also feature on television talking about their farm and producing the perfect steak for Jimmy Doherty's *Food Factory* series to be aired this autumn. Later this year, they plan to launch a new concept called The Perfect Night In, which links Angus steaks with red wine delivered direct to the consumer's door. The Westaways have also made the most of their location by diversifying into livery and holiday lets.

John Hoskin

Maiden Castle Farms, Dorset

Family farming is alive and kicking at Maiden Castle Farms, Dorchester.

John Hoskin and his sons, Richard and Mark, have a great working partnership and a progressive attitude as tenants on the Duchy Estate.

Beef production is their main enterprise but they also have sheep and arable on two farms – one in Dorset (1450 acres) and one in Cornwall (380 acres). In total, they have 1000 head of cattle.

John stopped milk production five years ago due to poor profitability and the need to reinvest more than £400,000 on infrastructure and equipment to meet NVZ requirements and enable the business to grow. Faced with this situation, they switched to beef production by converting buildings into housing at a more manageable cost of just £14,000.

The Hoskin family were one of the first to secure a finishing contract with Blade Farming in 2005, which meant a guaranteed contract price for the end product as a Southern Counties Fresh Foods dedicated supplier. The beef business is grouped into three areas – Holstein bulls on Blade contract; traditional beef production by buying in forward stores and finishing on grass and maize; and a 25-cow suckler herd to produce quality beef for finishing

THE FINALISTS

William Ritch
Paul & Kirsty Westaway
John Hoskin



using high EBV bulls.

The Blade system is about following clear protocols for health and feed to finish cattle that hit the carcass specification of 255-300kg deadweight. This guarantees a gross margin of £78 a head based on current input costs. Profits have more than doubled over the past five years since stopping milk production.

The Blade Holstein finishing scheme provides a consistent supply of quality meat from bulls sourced from the UK dairy sector. Calves arrive on farm at 14 weeks old weighing 120kg. The main aim is to average 500kg liveweight or carcass weights of 290-300kg in less than 320 days.

For traditional cattle finishing, forward stores are brought through livestock agent David Gore in Shrewsbury and there is no preference to breed or colour providing they produce the right carcass. The South Devon suckler herd was purchased to make better use of the land when arable profits declined. They hope to expand this enterprise to 40 cows.

John and his wife Hilary share the management of Maiden Castle Farm with their son Richard and his wife Hazel. John's other son Mark and his wife Sharon run the Cornwall operation, which is close to St Austell, and has some fast growing and interesting diversifications,

FARM FACTS

- * Maiden Castle Farms, Dorchester
- * **Type of enterprise** Beef finisher, plus sheep and arable
- * **Farm size** 1450 acres in Dorset and 380 acres in Cornwall
- * **Herd size** 1000 head of beef
- * **Financials** Turnover £800,000 Profit £100,000 (2010)

THE JUDGES LIKED

- * Setting the standard for sustainable beef farming on a large scale
- * Strong focus on positive relationships in the marketplace and working with the supply chain
- * The whole family engaged with making the most of the two locations but also finding time to support the industry as a whole

including a garden nursery and allotments. The whole family are involved in driving the two diverse farms forward.

Just to add to the challenges, the Dorset farm is also home to the oldest Iron Age Fort in Europe and has extensive public access being close to Poundbury and Dorchester. The farm works closely with English Nature and English Heritage and they claim to have one of the highest concentrations of corn buntings and sky larks in the country. The farm is currently in ELS but John is hoping to move into HLS shortly. Daughter-in-law, Hazel, is farm secretary as well as the organiser of school visits on the farm. The family has been involved with McDonald's as one of their "scout with clout" farmers and they will soon feature in the food chain's 2012 Olympics promotion.

John has spent his entire career supporting the UK beef industry as a director of EBLEX and Meat South West. "Improving profitability is number one on the agenda either by adding value or improved marketing," he said. "I would like to see wider use of added information when it comes to buying store cattle for finishing. I'd like to see more auctioneers include the cattle's sire name on the catalogues so we can at least go back and look at EBV's and track cattle performance."



A genuine family affair – John Hoskin (left) with his sons Mark (middle) and Richard (right).

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