

Mark Amesbury Axbridge, Somerset



When Mark Amesbury decided to finish dairying on his 240 acre mixed farm on the edge of the Mendips he needed to find an alternative livestock enterprise. His first choice was to go into intensive bull production on a forward price contract with Blade Farming. He explains that having gone out of dairy four years ago it was difficult to judge how many cattle the farm could support. "We have a farm here that grows good crops and potentially has a long grazing season. This last year cattle grazed from April through to early December and whilst I liked the bull system it didn't make the most of the farms potential. We had to look for a system that was simple, but at the same time didn't rely so heavily on purchased feeds." Quite a significant acreage of the farm is in Stewardship schemes, and the nature of the ground in the area lends itself to cattle grazing. The farm also grows a good crop of maize and a small acreage of barley.

The Blade Farming Aberdeen Angus system appeared to be just what they needed as it requires good grazing and grassland management and also requires cattle to be finished on a forage and cereal based diet. Ironically as it turns out, the disciplined approach needed to make the most of the Blade contract has rubbed off onto the other beef enterprise on the farm making it much more efficient as well.

Mark orders reared calves from Blade in bunches of up to 50 at a time, and will take both steers and heifers. When the calves arrive on farm, he introduces them their new ration over a period of about two weeks to allow their rumens to adapt to the new diet. The diet is formulated by Adam May at MVF Feed Solutions and is a Maize / Grass silage mix with 2 – 3 Kgs per head of crimped grain, up to 1 Kg per head of MVF SR40 protein pellets and MVF Blade minerals. The mix is fed through a Keenan feeder and this year the Amesbury's maize silage analysis showed a starch level of 36%. The crimped grain level is increased up to 3 Kgs in the finishing ration as and when it is required.



Mark feeds his cattle during the grazing season as well. "I like to see the cattle growing frame whilst they area at grass and I find that they listen to me better if I feed them! It also means that when we move the cattle they follow us rather than us having to drive them, and that is much less stressful all round." The cattle that Mark sold finished just before Christmas had reaped the benefits of his good grazing management, and as a result achieved good weights and finish within the 20 month target age of the Blade contract. In this last bunch of 37 cattle, which was made up of steers and heifers, 16 cattle made R grades and the average carcass weight was 289 Kgs dwt.

Alongside the Blade Angus cattle mark runs other beef cattle, predominantly British Blue crosses which he sources from local dairy farms. He rears these calves himself

and manages them on a very similar system to the Blade cattle and again the basis of their ration is the maize and grass silage mix. Taking pride in the way that he finishes his cattle, Mark explains “that the two different beef enterprises work well here because we grow most of the inputs ourselves and we turn the cattle around quickly. I aim to finish my Blues at over 300 Kgs deadweight, at about 22 – 24 months old, and it then suits me to sell them in the local market as they come fit.”

It seems likely that the Blade Angus cattle will continue to be a feature on the Amesbury’s farm. Mark is maximising the potential of his farm, and the cattle are being finished to meet the customer’s requirements. As a result, his business is able to take advantage of being part of a premium priced scheme which is driven by the knowledge that the meat he produces will meet all the consumers’ expectations of consistency, tenderness and succulence.

For more information on feeding cattle please ring Adam May on 07818 017116, and for information on Blade Farming and forward price contracts ring Richard Jones on 07748 180748.

Richard Jones
3rd February 2010