

## Overall Winner

# John Hoskin

Maiden Castle Farms, Dorset

The 2010 Farmers Weekly Farmer of the Year, the overall winner selected from the 15 category winners, is not just a great tenant farmer – he is setting the standard for a sustainable UK beef industry

★ The one thing that stands out a mile when you meet John on his tenanted farm on the Duchy Estate, Dorset, is that he's a traditional farmer who eats, sleeps and breathes family life and livestock. So if he is pretty ordinary, what is it that sets him apart from other farmers?

First, it is his great skill in combining family with building an outstanding beef business and enthusing his two sons, Richard and Mark. The next generation, including their wives, are completely hooked on farming and carry significant responsibilities in helping drive the farm forward.

Beef production is the main enterprise at Maiden Castle Farm, Dorchester, but they also have sheep and arable on two farms – one in Dorset (587ha) and one in Cornwall (154ha). In total, they have 1000 head of cattle as a result of the family switching from milk to beef production five years ago.

John was one of the first to secure a finishing contract with Blade Farming, which guaranteed him a contract price for the end product as a Southern Counties Fresh Foods supplier. His beef operation is grouped into three – Holstein bulls on a Blade contract; traditional beef

"A brilliant all rounder who captures everything good about British farmers."

Richard Macdonald



production by buying in forward stores and finishing on grass and maize; plus a 25-cow South Devon suckler herd to produce quality beef for finishing using high EBV bulls.

John believes his decision to concentrate on finishing beef is his best guarantee of profit. He has converted yards to dedicated finishing pens, which has allowed him to batch-manage stock coming in for finishing, helping to ease workload and reduce animal stress. Land, buildings and arable crops grown on the farm are used more efficiently and, by following Blade protocols, he can be sure of a gross margin of £78 a head based on current input costs. His profits have almost doubled in the past five years despite investing £120,000 in new buildings and putting up new livestock housing on the Cornish unit.

Exploiting opportunities in the food chain is something John takes very seriously. In recent years he has been involved in the Casterbridge

### WHAT MAKES HIM A WINNER

- ★ Outstanding approach to beef production
- ★ Doubled profits in five years
- ★ Advocate for working with others in the food chain
- ★ Has engaged his entire family and the next generation in the business
- ★ Innovative in diversifying
- ★ Is proactive in communicating to consumers
- ★ A lifetime commitment to supporting other farmers on best practice

grain-fed beef range through Fairfax Meadow.

"This was a way of promoting home grown beef to the food service sector rather than spot priced South American beef and I wanted to show the chefs in London how beautiful our farm was and how the grass based system benefited the flavour of the beef," he said. John also participated in the Somerfield Best Ever range before the retailer's merger with the Co-op.

The family has recently been involved with McDonald's as one of their "scout with clout" farmers, starring in website videos and appearing on restaurant tray liners.

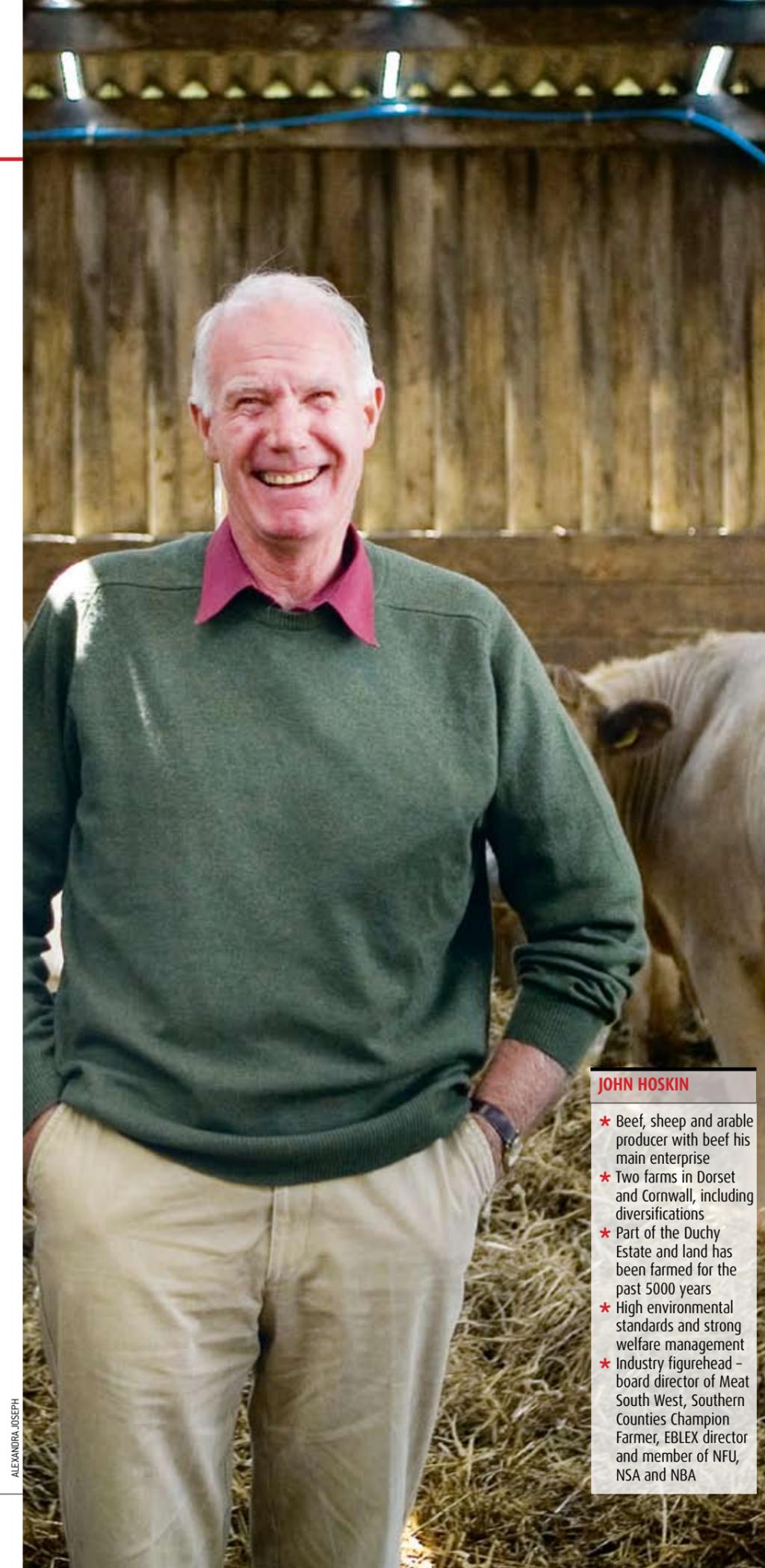
"McDonald's have been to my farm now on a couple of occasions," said John, "and they are even using us as promotional material for the 2012 Olympics so they can showcase where their beef comes from."

John sees lots of opportunities for farming out of the Olympics, particularly as the sailing events will be held on his doorstep at Weymouth. One idea he is exploring is to provide car parking for visitors as his farm is only a couple of miles from where the competition is taking place.

The land at Maiden Castle Farm has been used for agriculture for the past 5000 years and is the home of the oldest Iron Age Fort in Europe. The farm works closely with English Nature and English Heritage; takes part in ELS and is soon to apply for HLS. John cares about protecting the fauna and flora and is proud of

"A great advert for modern farming – emphasis on quality food production while also reaching out to the public with open access, yet retaining traditional values."

Mark Skipworth Executive editor of the Telegraph Media Group



### JOHN HOSKIN

- ★ Beef, sheep and arable producer with beef his main enterprise
- ★ Two farms in Dorset and Cornwall, including diversifications
- ★ Part of the Duchy Estate and land has been farmed for the past 5000 years
- ★ High environmental standards and strong welfare management
- ★ Industry figurehead – board director of Meat South West, Southern Counties Champion Farmer, EBLEX director and member of NFU, NSA and NBA

"John's success confirms that tenant farming is alive and thriving and has a strong future. He has not only built a great business but has contributed in helping drive forward the beef industry. It's rare to see someone this motivated about all aspects of the business. John is an ordinary farmer doing extraordinary things and this recognition is richly deserved."

Jane King Editor, Farmers Weekly



the fact that he has one of the highest concentrations of corn buntings and skylarks in the UK. He has his own borehole on the farm and links up with Wessex Water to ensure water is managed proactively.

Education is taken extremely seriously at Maiden Castle Farm. John's daughter-in-law, Hazel, is trained to host regular visits of school-children. The family has also embraced innovative diversifications including a garden centre and allotments business at the Cornish farm.

It is a diverse and challenging business and yet John still finds time for extensive work within the industry. He has been an EBLEX director since it was established and is heavily focused in supporting the beef industry to improve best practice and move forward. For example, as one of 12 Southern Counties Fresh Foods champion farmers, John gets together with processors to discuss ways of improving profitability and he has a reputation for being a tough and robust negotiator.

John is also a strong believer in letting anyone on to his farm and in working openly with supermarkets. This does not mean he is a pushover on terms within the supply chain. Richard Phelps, Blade's farming manager said: "John has a very open relationship with Blade Farming. He knows his costs of production and is able to demonstrate to us why a better base price is required – the relationship is business focused and we look forward to meeting him on a regular basis. The sheer drive that John has is infectious to all around him."

### JUDGING PANEL

- ★ Peter Kendall NFU
- ★ Mark Skipworth The Telegraph
- ★ Richard Macdonald Red tape tsar
- ★ Nick Padwick 2009 Farmer of the Year
- ★ Debbie Beaton Farmers Weekly
- ★ Jane King Farmers Weekly

## CATEGORY WINNERS

**7**  
**John Goodchild**  
Arable Farmer of the Year

**9**  
**John Hoskin**  
Beef Farmer of the Year

**11**  
**Harry & Lynn Wilson**  
Contractor of the Year

**13**  
**Brian & Patrick Barker**  
Countryside Farmer of the Year

**15**  
**Neil Baker**  
Dairy Farmer of the Year

**17**  
**David & Jayne Newman**  
Diversification Farmer of the Year

**19**  
**Alastair Brooks**  
Farm Manager of the Year

**21**  
**John Adams**  
Farmworker of the Year

**25**  
**Stephen Temple**  
Green Energy Farmer of the Year

**27**  
**Mark Burnell**  
Livestock Adviser of the Year

**29**  
**Peter & Hilary Cochran**  
Local Food Farmer of the Year

**31**  
**Andrew McCrea**  
Pig Farmer of the Year

**33**  
**Elwyn & Gareth Griffiths**  
Poultry Farmer of the Year

**35**  
**William & Carole Ingram**  
Sheep Farmer of the Year

**37**  
**Andrew Rees**  
Young Farmer of the Year

**39**  
**Adam Henson**  
Farming Champion of the Year