



PEDIGREE PORK PIONEERS

Sue Fildes our new correspondent will be visiting Pedigree Pork producers who have been expanding their businesses to find out the secrets of their success.

In the latest of the series she reports on a farm shop success in Northern Ireland



started in earnest in 1974 when, at just 17 years of age, he started buying farmland for his own enterprises. In 1992 when his older brother 'emigrated' to Scotland he took over the family farm. This was also the year that he married Jennifer. Although she is not from a farming background, she now loves everything about it. She shares his enthusiasm and passion for horses and traditional breeds of cattle and pigs and was the driving force behind their conversion to farming these traditional breeds of animals. Long before it became as fashionable as it is today, Kenny and Jenny decided to sell some of their

County Armagh. Trade gradually built up in a sustainable fashion, the number of sows that they ran kept increasing year on year until they realised they had too much custom for 'back door sales' and they needed to make the big step to open a the farm shop. This took one or two years of thought to bring to fruition.

The farm shop: For the actual shop building, which is situated adjacent to the family home, they chose a 1500 square foot log cabin. Kenny sourced this via the Internet from Lithuania – four men brought it over and worked for three weeks erecting it and fitting it out.



Kenny Gracey felt 'right proud' walking his first pigs home when he was just 12 years old. He'd spotted some British Saddlebacks whilst doing a school cross-country run and fancied keeping some. He found out who the owner was and bought 6 gilts using his own cheque book. He served the gilts with a York boar (now known as Large White), the gilts from the resulting litters were known as 'Blue-greys' and they were put back to a Landrace and sold in pig. He topped sales with £220-£250 then, around 1970, which was terrific money.

History: Buying pigs at such a young age is perhaps unsurprising as the Gracey family's farming roots at Forthill farm on the outskirts of Tandragee, Co Armagh, Northern Ireland go back to the 1700's. Kenny had learnt fast from his father who was a farmer/dealer and for Kenny it

produce direct to the consumer. Kenny says 'I took the decision that I needed to take control over what I rear, what I breed and what I have to sell, and use that. Why give it to someone else to sell. Why make millionaires out of supermarkets and meat plants. One animal sold by yourself makes more economic sense than selling it to a meat plant'. Initially the Graceys chose very distinctive traditional breeds for their novelty value; Belted Galloways and Longhorn cattle, British Saddleback and Gloucester Old Spot pigs are all breeds that are unmistakable for any other. They began selling the meat from their home in 1998 and soon earned a reputation spread by word of mouth that reached far beyond

It was run by just one butcher, with 1 assistant, whilst Kenny and Jennifer continued to do what they do best – run the farm. Jenny looks after the breeding sows and the paperwork whilst Kenny does the fatteners and the cattle. The shop ethos is 'Traditional beef and pork as nature intended. Reared on our farm, sold in our farm shop'. Their aim is to educate their customers on the healthier natural methods of



producing free range pigs and cows and to provide them with this quality meat at an affordable price.

The abattoir trip is a 4.30 start every Monday, 55 miles each way, the meat being delivered back to the farm shop two days later. Customers are drawn from across the border in Southern Ireland (no check points and no passports required!) and to make the long journey worthwhile the customers buy enough to fill their freezers and pantry shelves as the shop also sells bought-in from local farm businesses: lamb, chicken, vegetables, ice-cream, jam, chutney etc.

The pigs: They are the largest British Saddleback breeders in NI, exporting to England, Wales and Southern Ireland.



They believe that pedigree breeding gives provenance and assurance to their customers and currently have 11 female lines and 5 boar lines of Saddlebacks with just a few Gloucester Old Spots.

All non-farrowing adults are outside in summer. Farrowing is indoors or out, but even the indoor mums and their litters have access to the great outdoors in the daytime. Heavy outdoor ground conditions mean that the fattening stock are deep littered on straw inside to finishing.

Promoting their goods:

They don't believe in advertising in the press but prefer to 'go out there to be seen' with their pigs and products. About 8 times per year they do talks to Church groups,



Young Farmers Clubs, WIs, schools – taking samples for the audience to taste. Twelve times a year (every second or third week in the season) they go to Food Fayres and Festivals with a chiller full of meat. The pigs go to the six county shows in NI

plus the Great Yorkshire Show, where they had the reserve Champion Pig of the Year in 2008 which was subsequently exported to England.

Travel: Kenny has his Type 2 transporter authorisation which enables him to travel his pigs over 8 hours. When the 'Certificate

of Competence' became necessary for drivers of animals on journeys over 65km, in 2008, Kenny organised for an examiner to come over from the Scottish borders and 10 people took the exam at a cost of approx £150 each. Plus his trailer has been 'inspected and authorised' for the longer journeys at additional expense. But now he can travel anywhere, importing and exporting pigs, subject to journey logs and the nor-

mal movement forms.

Other interests: Kenny is Vice Chairman of NI RBST. He was elected to this position for his enthusiasm and commitment to the breeds. He is also Chairman of the new regional group 'Northern Ireland Pedigree Pig Breeders Association' whose aim is to promote both traditional and modern pedigree pigs.

They still compete with their cobs at the famous Northern Ireland competition 'The Mullahead Ploughing Match' of which Kenny is Vice-Chairman and chief organiser. People and horses travel from as far away as Dorset and the Isle of Bute for this February event which has ploughing classes for tractors as well as horses.

TV Forthill was featured in Gary Lineker's series on BBC's 'Northern Exposure' and will be on UTV in September in the 'Fabulous Food Adventures' series. Find him easily on videos on YouTube.

Current shop situation: What began as a hobby is now a thriving business with 40 – 50 sows and gilts totalling 280 pigs, selling 6-8 pigs per week through the farm shop which employs 2 full time butchers plus 1 part-time assistant. Half the meat is sold as fresh pork, the rest is sold as sausages with natural hog skins or as dry cured hams or bacon.

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PEDIGREE PORK IN SCOTLAND

Linda Macdonald Brown visits Caron Stewart of the Pedigree Pork Committee
the first elected Scottish representative since 2003



It's not often I can say I would like to change places with a pig, but after visiting the Clash herd of Saddlebacks in Port Logan, I would definitely change places any day. Not only are they living in the most stunning of locations, with the Irish Sea only yards away on one side, and the wild Scottish countryside on the other, but if their glossy coats and contented grunts are anything to go by, they lead a pretty stress free life as well.



Caron Stewart and her husband Robert are relatively new at keeping pigs, having started only a few years ago in 2005. Robert jokes they only ended up with Saddlebacks because he was given the choice by Caron, of either keeping spotty pigs or stripy pigs, and he chose stripy. In reality though, Saddlebacks were chosen because they are a hardy breed, therefore ideal for the wind-swept area around Port Logan, and they are renowned for their superb bacon and succulent pork.

Despite being relatively new to the pig world, they have already made quite an impact. Caron has not only established herself as a Saddleback breeder of quality stock but her reputation as a traditional breed pork producer, has led her to be voted onto the British Pig Association Pork Committee earlier this month.

Clash Farm currently has around 60 pigs on its 180 acre farm, made up of 13 sows, 2 boars and 45 youngstock and similar to any other pig breeder, costs have to be watched with an eagle eye. Caron and Robert reckon it costs approximately £5 a week to keep a pig. This covers food, bedding and incidentals; it doesn't however take into account the cost of labour, abattoir and butchery costs, nor does it take into account fuel, and unfortunately for Clash Farm, its isolated situation means fuel costs each month can be quite substantial, especially as their nearest abattoir at Lockerbie is 90 miles away, a trip Robert carries out 2 or 3 times a month. Even further away, is the butcher, Asker-ton Castle in Cumbria, who carries out the processing. It costs £1 a kilo for the pig to be processed, but this does include vacuum packing, labelling and delivery back to the abattoir for Robert to pick up.

Feed is however the largest spend. They are currently going through three tonne a month at a cost of £280 a tonne including delivery. The sow and weaners nuts as well as the growers come from Hi-Peak. It has a high level of linseed added to it, which provides a natural source of Omega 3 and would explain the shiny coats. This level of cost in finishing a pig means it is vital that the finished product for sale is realistically priced both for Clash farm and the customer. Caron's aim therefore is to achieve a profit margin over variable costs of at least a £100 per pig. Both Robert and Caron strongly believe that many people resort to selling rare breed pork cheaply as it has not been finished off properly to achieve the correct ratio of fat to muscle.

Caron's interest in conservation led her to initially choose a saddleback line whose numbers needed improving. The Spot line on the female side is one of the rarest lines in the breed and this was therefore an obvious line to start with. Two more female lines, the Grand Duchess and Rosette have since been added, as have the Prefect and Grand Duke for the male side.

Although primarily, Caron keeps most of the pigs to finish herself, she does have on occasion weaners for sale, and these start at £60 for an 8 week old destined for the freezer and £100 plus for breeding stock. All males unless they are of exceptional quality and therefore suitable for breeding are castrated by the local vet at a cost of £4 per piglet. All weaners whether for fattening or breeding are sold vaccinated against Parvo virus and Erysipelas and of course wormed. Vaccination was brought in, due to the many seagulls that abound in the area. As Erysipelas is a disease often caused by birds, it was felt prevention was better than cure and a vaccination programme was started.

Caron's election onto the BPA pork committee is an exciting opportunity for her. She has long felt that not enough is done to market pork in Scotland and instead there tends to be a bias towards beef and lamb. A lot more has to be done she reckons, to move people away from the bland dry and poor quality pork found in supermarkets and introduce them to the succulent meat of a traditional breed. To this end, Caron is keen to get her pork out there amongst the public and in her opinion one of the best ways is attending relevant shows such as the recent Good Food Show held in Glasgow. This year in particular as a director of Dumfries & Galloway Food Co-operative, Caron plans to share her knowledge of regional grant funding opportunities and assist in forging relationships with relevant bodies in Scotland to get pork out there amongst the Scottish people, an uphill struggle but one that Caron is happy to take on.



PEDIGREE PORK COMMITTEE



The first meeting of the Pedigree Pork Committee, since I took over the Chair, was held on 19th November 2009 at Stoneleigh.

Bryan Card, our former Chair has set a hard act to follow, bearing in mind he had to start the whole initiative from scratch. However, with the strong foundations he has put in place, hopefully with the support, hard work and enthusiasm from the new committee members we can really start to make a difference.

The PPC is there to support all BPA members that have an involvement or interest in Pedigree Pork. Having said that we cannot be all things to all people and so it is important to restrict the energy of the Committee to those areas where we can make a difference.

The strategy of the PPC will focus on four areas: Training and Education, Meat Scheme Initiatives, Competitions and Marketing

Each area will have a Champion from the Committee to drive through the deliverables.

The aim is to help as many members as possible whether they have one pig for the freezer or retail directly to the public. The important message is this is about Pedigree Pork consumption to help preserve our wonderful breeds.

I am conscious that many members will not know who I am or who my Committee members are. So I would like to correct this by giving you all the opportunity to meet us. The Pedigree Pork Committee meetings will be held Regionally and a lunch buffet will be available so you can turn up, meet us and tell us your views or just have a chat or a moan.

We cannot do an effective job unless we know what you think. Sometimes we may not agree but at least we can discuss it so we are clear what the issues are. I will update you after every Pedigree Pork Committee to let you know how we are getting on and what we have achieved. You are welcome to contact me or my Committee members at any time. For me, e-mail is best or my mobile phone. I am truly optimistic about what we can do if we focus and work together.

Chris Coe
Chair

Pedigree Pork Committee Open Meeting - Saturday 15th May 2010. Jubilee Hall, Llanelwedd, Builth Wells.

The Pedigree Pork Committee will be holding an open meeting alongside the Welsh Smallholders Show. Why not take in one of the most popular shows for small scale pig keepers with over 250 live pigs on display and then join us for a discussion on all matters pedigree pork. Refreshments will be served. The meeting starts at 5 pm in the Jubilee Hall which is behind the school beside the showground.

| Chair | Council | Council | Council |
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