



AHDB Beef & Lamb Improved Herd Awards 2015



Offham Herd Wins Most Improved Herd Award

The Offham herd, owned by Justin and Susan Harmer, trading as Wakeham-Dawson and Harmer, from Lewes in East Sussex, has been recognised by AHDB Beef & Lamb as the Most Improved Herd of Sussex cattle in England for 2015.

The award is presented by the AHDB Beef & Lamb Better Returns Programme (BRP) to the recorded herd that shows the greatest genetic gain for commercial characteristics over a 12-month period. There is a separate award for each of 10 UK breeds.



The herd of 40 Sussex suckler cows and typically around 60 progeny have been on the 250 hectare (620 acre) mixed family farm since 1991, since the sale of a dairy herd and some crossbred sucklers. The farm has two large Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), with downland turf on the South Downs and river meadows in the Ouse Valley, which are carefully managed to protect their value for wildlife.

“We chose Sussex cattle because they are docile, non-selective grazers which do well on the second class grazing we have,” says Justin. “The cows produce a good sized carcass which we believe has superb quality with good marbling.”

The family are not new to breed improvement awards, having won the sheep award for the Southdown breed in 2014 with their 70-ewe flock, which runs alongside 420 commercial ewes.

They are keen to use performance recording and indexes to help with the selection of breeding replacement females for the herd and for sale to other herds, as well as to identify bulls they wish to sell and buy as stock bulls. “We use the index as a guide, particularly looking for milkiness and growth rates. Alongside performance figures, the cattle have to be pleasing to the eye, conform to breed standards and have good locomotion.” he explains.

The scanning information is valuable to promote muscle depth and the correct level of fatness, which is particularly important to them as most males are reared and finished, primarily on home-grown crops, and sold through their own farm shop.

The most recent stock bull, Regent 1st of Goldstone, bred by Chandler and Dunn, was selected with a very high index to help increase mature cow size, adds Susan. Previously, they have bred and bought bulls with good Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) for Milk and Growth to improve output in the herd.

They plan to continue use performance-recording figures to select high-index sires. With the extra assistance from their son, Edward, coming home to work on the farm shortly, they have plans to increase the number of Sussex cows on the farm.

