



AHDB Beef & Lamb Improved Herd Awards 2012



GOLDSTONE HERD Wins Most Improved Herd Award

The Goldstone Herd owned by Messrs Chandler & Dunn, of Ash near Canterbury in Kent, has been recognised by EBLEX as the Most Improved Herd of Sussex cattle in England for 2012.

The award is presented by the EBLEX Beef Better Returns Programme (Beef 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 11 UK breeds.

Lower Goldstone Farm was bought by Peter Chandler over 200 years ago. In 1922 Roger Dunn's grandfather went into partnership with him and established Chandler & Dunn, a family run company situated between Canterbury and Sandwich.

The business now consists of 590ha (239 acres); around one third is maintained as orchard (mainly apples and pears); one third arable (cereals and potatoes) and 140ha (57 acres) of grassland grazed by cattle and sheep. The farm is situated on marshland and flood plains, and the areas the livestock graze is heavy land, too wet to plough.

Roger Dunn's father established the Goldstone Herd in 1946 with 35-40 purebred Sussex cattle. Twenty years ago Mr Dunn took over from his father and gradually increased numbers to 90 calving cows and followers. In total nearly 300 cattle now run alongside a flock of 500 Romney ewes and a commercial herd of 80 cows.

Ideal breed

The Sussex breed is a good converter of forage that manages well in the harsh winters of Kent on marshland grazing. They have a docile nature and are easy-calvers. Over the past 30-40 years the breed has gradually increased in size and become more commercial.

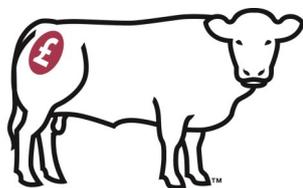
The herd were first performance recorded 40 years ago with the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC). Mr Dunn's father was progressive and was always striving to improve the herd and live weights quickly rose. Now Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) are used to select which animals to breed from and which to sell or cull, along with weight and scan data.

Mr Dunn operates both spring and autumn calving herds. Bull calves not retained for breeding from the autumn calving cows are kept entire and finished at 550kg indoors on an intensive ration.

The top third index heifers are selected for breeding based on their EBVs, size and docility. The rest are finished and retailed through the farm shop.

At weaning the top bulls are selected to keep for breeding or sale based on their weight and conformation. Mr Dunn sells mainly to pedigree breeders through Breed Society Sales, with a few going to commercial producers who seem particularly interested in their performance figures.

Five of the best bulls from the herd run with the cows for as long as possible, swapped around within the herd to maximise their period of use.



**Better Returns
Programme**

Occasionally high index bulls are also brought into the herd, although there is limited choice within the Sussex breed as so few breeders record. However, numbers are starting to increase.

"Figures are now appearing on boards at shows and sales," says Mr. Dunn. "And this has been

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helped by the Sussex Breed Society incentives.

“Producing animals with good overall conformation and solid figures is my aim. When you have an animal that combines both of these it boosts your confidence when selling to buyers.”

At this year’s Heathfield show a young Goldstone bull was awarded overall Native Breed Champion, sired by a bull that has many progeny in the Goldstone show team.



Winner of the Native Breed Champion at the Heathfield Show – Regent 5th of Goldstone of the Goldstone Sussex Herd – EBLEX Improved Herd Award Winners 2012.

“I have also shown at the South of England, Norfolk and Kent Shows,” said Mr. Dunn. “It is good to be able to compare my animals to other pedigree Sussex breeders to see how we are progressing.”

Samuel Boon, EBLEX Breeding Specialist says:

"Roger is to be congratulated on his success. The main way to change the genetic potential of a herd is through careful sire selection, and this farm provides a good example of where it has been done well.

“High EBV sires should be selected in a balanced manner, taking into account not just growth and carcass traits – but also those that influence characteristics such as ease of calving and maternal performance.

“The bull selection decisions made today will still be influencing the herd in ten years’ time – so a little time spent studying performance records now is time well spent. Bearing in mind the long-lasting impact of genetic selection – this year’s win bodes well for the future of the Goldstone Herd.”