



# HIGH QUALITY BEEF AND EASE OF MANAGEMENT IS KEY FOR THE WITLEY HERD

For the Goodman family of Great Witley, Worcester quality and quantity go hand in hand. The family are well known for their long-established poultry business Goodman's Geese, rearing 4500 free range geese alongside 5000 free range Bronze turkeys for the Christmas market.

These top end quality birds supply 50 butchers across the UK, as well as being sold to discerning local customers. Such is the standard of the family's birds that business has been recognised nationally on television by Jamie Oliver, Rick Stein, The Two Fat Ladies and Delia Smith.

Farming a total of 500 acres, Andrew Goodman, his brother Michael and their parents Geoff and Judy, along with Andrew's wife Ruth and sons James and Henry, as well as Michael's wife Kathy, felt a herd of easily managed, milky cows, capable of producing high quality beef, would run the undulating Worcestershire hills of Walsgrove Farm with ease.

It was obvious to Andrew that the Longhorn was the breed to do just this. "In 2004 we were milking 180 dairy cows and wanted a change of direction into beef. It was at this point we bought our first Longhorn and haven't looked back," says Andrew.

In 2006 the family ceased milking and Longhorn numbers began to increase with the purchase of 12 heifers from the long-established Stoke herd. "We chose the Stoke herd for our foundation females as the longevity of the bloodlines was something we wanted to base our herd on. In fact, we still have cows within our herd from these original Stoke bloodlines today," highlights Andrew.

Over the next four years the herd gradually increased to 50 pedigree cows and when asked what he looks for in the cows he purchased Andrew has solid reasoning. "We buy cows that we like. A good all-rounder with a straight topline, good width, correct in her legs and feet with an udder that is in good shape. We also prefer a dark Longhorn, just for uniformity in the herd."

"Once we started with Longhorns we never looked back. Their lovely temperament makes them a joy to work with and even first calved heifers are calm and placid at calving, which makes a huge difference to daily management," explains Andrew. "This is particularly important as overall herd size and businesses get bigger and workforce numbers get smaller."

In order to fly the flag for the adaptability of the Longhorn, the Goodman family have enrolled Walsgrove Farm, which is situated on the outskirts of Worcester, on the Sustainable Farming Initiative pilot. This three-year scheme aims to assist during the period of reduction in the Single Farm Payment and Andrew hopes the family's involvement will help showcase the breed's suitability to extensive beef systems in the changing agricultural climate.

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All spring calving, the Witley herd calves from February through to May with calves creep fed from the end of September. "The kindness of the mid loam soil allows mid-December housing, after we're through the Christmas rush with the poultry.

"We house cows in two groups with in-calf heifers kept together. We first calve heifers at three years of age as this allows them to mature and grow without being pushed," says Andrew.



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Spring-born calves are weaned at eight and a half months old, with breeding heifers selected at this point and 10 females entering the herd each year. “Any later born calves stay with the cows through the winter and are weaned in February ahead of turn-out in March,” he adds.

For ease of management and with a view towards later commercial sales, all steers and heifers chosen not to breed from are dehorned. “Although not everyone’s cup of tea, dehorning is vital to us. Bonnet horns you hardly notice, but straight horns are disliked by commercial breeders or finishers, massively narrowing your market,” Andrew admits.

In fact, he feels that if he were to start again, it is likely the whole herd would be dehorned, purely for ease of management on this scale.

“Historically, we have been finishing all our cattle, but with the store trade so strong we have been sending bunches to Worcester Livestock Market at 20-24 months of age, with a repeat purchaser from Gloucester buying every time,” comments Andrew. Last year, 25-month-old steers were sold at 500kg to £1150.00 and 24-month-old heifers at £1000.

“We have also sold breeding heifers at Society sales and we are likely to have another draft for the May sale at Worcester,” he adds.

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The herd currently runs two stock bulls, the first of which is Blackbrook Zulu, a bull with his second crop of calves currently on the ground. “Sired by Blackbrook Uruk-Hai and out of Blackbrook Vixen EX91, Zulu is a dark, long bull who carries a good solid back end along with a cracking width to his frame.

“The second herd sire here is Fishwick Phoenix, who was bought via the Society’s online sale. He’s by Fishwick Macavity and is out of Fishwick Firefly. His first crop of calves are due later this spring.

Andrew explains that the ultimate plan is to sell the beef alongside the poultry as the quality of the end product is exceptional. “The marbling and flavour are second to none and that coupled with provenance, creates the unique selling point required for marketing at a premium level.

“There is good money to be made from a carcass at 320kg deadweight and when selling a quality product you can charge a premium price, much like a vineyard wine or a single malt, it really is something special,” adds Andrew.

