

Coldharbour Award Winners

Coldharbour flock wins Eblex “Most Improved Flock Award” for the Charollais breed

The Coldharbour flock, owned by Tony and June Gregory of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, has been recognised by EBLEX as the Most Improved Flock of Charollais sheep in England for 2015. The award is presented by the EBLEX Better Returns Programme (BRP) to the recorded flock that shows the greatest genetic gain for commercial characteristics over a 12-month period.

Coldharbour Farm is a grassland farm comprised of permanent pastures. Tony and June moved there 35 years ago with a flock of Welsh Mules, their first experience of a Charollais was with a ram used to produce finished lamb for the market. They soon concluded that Charollais rams used as a terminal sire provide stress-free lambing, fast-growing lambs, with a good carcass quality and a high killing-out percentage.

Establishing the flock gradually

In 1990 they were keen to establish a pedigree flock and the Charollais seemed the natural choice. They acquired some good stock from notable breeders and built their Coldharbour flock up gradually by keeping their own replacements and buying in a few extra ewes along the way. Investing in a good ram when necessary has improved



Tony and June Gregory with shearling ewes from their award winning Coldharbour Flock.

genetics and changed the breeding line.

They rented more land and expanded by establishing a Lleyn flock alongside the Charollais, at times running up to 400 sheep in total. With the December-lambing Charollais flock and the Lleys crossed with Charollais rams lambing in March, they could breed top quality sheep for breeders and sell high quality meat through their own farm shop. The shop, which opened in 2001, became a successful family business selling up to six lambs a week.

Dedicated recorders and Sire Reference Scheme members

The Gregorys started performance recording their lambs in 1998 and joined the Sire Reference Scheme the following year, with the intention of providing rams with high breeding values to suit both pedigree and commercial farmers.



“I was keen to start recording when it became evident that buyers were looking for crossbred lambs with a combination of length and muscling ability,” said Tony. “Data received from recording, ultrasound and CT scanning has proven very beneficial in being able to quantify progress and promote sheep with good muscle and length.”

In addition to good breeding values and overall index, their breeding stock must have good visual appearance, a well-muscled body, good legs (not with excessive bone), sound feet and mouths and a tight fleece.

Through their involvement with the Sire Reference Scheme, the Coldharbour flock has had a number of homebred rams successfully selected as reference sires and has been able to access genetics from other flocks which offer the right combination of breed characteristics and performance traits.

Over the years, they have built sound relationships with repeat customers, providing quality rams for both pedigree and commercial buyers, and have enjoyed many successes in the show ring.

Focus on genetics

Due to a change of personal circumstances, combined with the devastating effect of the Schmallenberg virus which led to 60 per cent losses during the 2012 lambing season, they decided to reduce overall numbers. They now concentrate on their own 40-acre farm and their pedigree Charollais flock of 50 breeding ewes.

The Gregorys’ December lambing flock is lambed indoors and weaned at eight weeks of age. Around

Easter they start to select animals with good conformation, and true to type. They sell rams for breeding and, although the majority of females will be retained as replacements, they are members of a select few breeders at the in-lamb ewe sale at Builth Wells each autumn.

Making use of artificial insemination has provided them with the opportunity to use a range of different sires over the years. The one with the greatest influence in the flock is Coldharbour Famous Grouse, selected as a Sire Reference Ram in 2006. Famous Grouse was a very correct strong ram, highly rated, and consistently produces stock with good conformation and muscularity.

In order to widen the gene pool they invested in Castellau Grandeur and enjoyed great success with him in the show ring. He too has proven to be a great sire, with progeny displaying his great attribute of style, length, muscle, width and back ends.



Castellau Grandeur



Going outside of the scheme to widen the bloodline led to a fall in their overall figures. However, the use of their two new stock rams, Logiedurno Navigator (shared with Jonathan and Carroll Barber) and homebred Coldharbour Naprose (son of Famous Grouse), have seen figures rise again during the last twelve months. Now the Gregory's watch with renewed excitement as progeny develop from Loanhead Oddson, a new ram purchased last year at the Worcester Premier Sale.

Increased interest in figures

Speaking about the benefits of performance recording, Tony said: "In the last few years, customers are showing increased interest in animals with figures. They are seeking animals with superior muscling and length, and an awareness of the positive correlation between daily liveweight gain and the ability for early finishing. Performance recording helps us satisfy their requirements."

Commenting on the win, Signet Breeding Services Manager Sam Boon said: "Rates of genetic improvement in Signet recorded flocks are at an all-time high. The difference between the best high EBV breeding stock and average animals is increasing year on year.

"This means commercial producers have more to gain when investing in rams with superior genetics. Pedigree breeders can capitalise on these differences too and this is exactly what Tony and June have done. The improvement in the genetic merit of their flock is clear and they are to be congratulated on their achievement."



**LOGIE DURNO
NAVIGATOR
13ZNN0739**

Breed index 434
top 1% - joint
ownership with
The Crogham
Flock

VISITORS ALWAYS WELCOME

**LOANHEAD
ODDS ON
14WNC10006**
Breed index 367
Sire Loanhead Midas
Touch

Dam Royal Welsh
Show Champion of
Champions 2012



FEMALE SALE AT HEREFORD MARKET ON SATURDAY 17TH OCTOBER 2015

Signet Recorded MV Accredited Scrapie Monitored
COLDHARBOUR FARM,
STEWKLEY LANE, MURSLEY, BUCKS. MK17 0JD
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