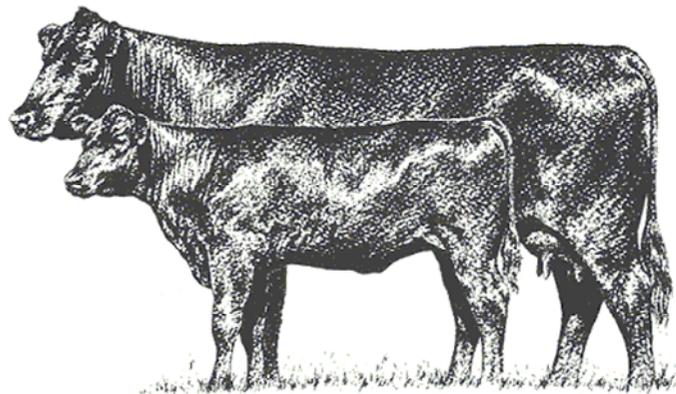


The vast majority of the beef, lamb and venison that we serve in the pub is from our own organic hill farm here in Simonsbath. We run two beef herds – one of purebred pedigree Galloway cattle and the other of crossbreeds produced from Aberdeen Angus or Shorthorn dominant cows. There is a careful programme of cross-breeding using Charolais, Shorthorn and Angus bulls to produce a good, healthy calf with ‘hybrid vigour’ and the right characteristics to flourish as a beef animal on an Exmoor hill farm.

The cows calve in the farm buildings on straw beds in April and May and then live out, eating grass, with their calves until about October, when they come back in to the sheds for the winter. During the winter, they eat (only) the organic silage we produce on the grass fields in the centre of the farm and which we store in the big silage ‘clamps’. In about June, the cows and their calves go out onto the rougher moorland on the north and south sides of the farm to allow the central silage fields to grow for a single silage cut in late July (usually, subject to weather).

We sell a large number of young cattle at Sedgemoor Market as ‘stores’, i.e. young cattle not yet ready to eat that will go on to farmers in the lush grasslands at lower altitudes who will ‘finish’ the cattle, so that they are ready to eat. The beef that we serve here comes from cattle that we finish ourselves, here in Simonsbath, on a combination of organic grass and organic cereal. We finish about 100 cattle a year on the farm, including the surplus heifers (females) and steers (males) from the Galloway herd. At around 28-34 months of age, those cattle go to our tiny, local cottage abattoir in Combe Martin, about 12 miles away, before returning here to the pub for dry-aging and eating.



We think our cattle have a very good life, perhaps the finest of any beef cow in Britain! Organic, grass-fed, traditional and native breed cattle, with very low stocking densities, who are born, raised and eaten on one farm.

Our sheep have a similarly good life. We continue to use traditional breeds that have thrived on this estate for generations. We run a flock of about 1200 Scottish Blackface ewes, half of which are put to Scottish Blackface rams to produce purebred lambs and half of which are put to Blueface Leicester rams to produce a Scotch Mule. When the Worcestershire speculator, John Knight, bought this estate from the Crown in 1818, he let many of the farms to Scottish tenant farmers who drove their cattle and sheep down the drovers’ roads from Scotland, beginning a long association with Scottish breeds (which do well here).



All the ewes are scanned to check what lambs they are carrying. We lamb the hogs (first time mothers) and ewes with double/triple lambs (approx. 750) in the sheds behind the pub in mid-April. The ewes with singles lamb outside at Cornham Farm. The ewes and their lambs are then put out on the best grass in the middle of the farm for their first months and, after that, go to the rougher hillsides in the outlying parts of the farm.

We sell the Scotch Mule ewe lambs at Blackmoor Gate Market on the western edge of the moor to lowland farmers as breeding stock. The purebred Scottish Blackface are retained for breeding. Of the weather (male) lambs, we sell about 60% as ‘stores’ for finishing by others and we finish about 40% here on the farm, some of which we serve in the pub as lamb or hogget (a sheep over a year old). Those animals that we finish also go to the cottage abattoir at Combe Martin and then come back to the farm, resulting in 24 food miles there and back!

From time to time, we also serve venison from the farm. This is from the wild red deer living on the farm. Several hundred deer live here at any one time and you will very likely see them if you walk on the paths around the estate. Exmoor red deer are considerably larger than Scottish red deer. In the spring, the stags shed their antlers (known as horns on Exmoor) and then re-grow new ones, which start off with a furry surface (known as velvet) when the horns are growing. The ‘rut’ is the mating season in October, when the stags fight over the hinds and can be heard roaring loudly as they establish their territory.

The whole estate is run with biodiversity, flora and fauna as the guiding lights. For example, we keep around 300 acres of species-rich grassland and traditional hay meadows. These are managed traditionally, with no cutting until after 1 July, and grazed by native breeds at risk.

The estate has two farms, one at Simonsbath Barton, behind the pub on the edge of the village, and the other at Cornham Farm, a little further west on the Barnstaple road. The cattle at Simonsbath Barton are run by Paul Richards, the Head Herdsman, who has worked on the estate since 1999. Paul is assisted by John Stapleford (joined 2018), who runs the Cornham cattle. Andy Pollard, who has worked here since 1996, is in charge of the sheep, with lots of assistance at lambing time (mid April). The entire operation is managed by Mark de Wynter-Smith, who has himself been here since 1997. We are fortunate to have such an experienced and committed team.

Until 1818, the large area of land surrounding Simonsbath and known as the Exmoor Forest had been the property of the Crown for use as a hunting chase. There were very few trees; the name forest refers to an area where forest law applied. This meant that the deer were the property of the Crown and could only be hunted with Royal permission. The Exmoor Forest was sold by the Crown at auction in 1818 and purchased by John Knight, who set about trying to farm the moorland and mine for metals. Knight immediately started on a vast scheme of improvements (using Irish labour) which included the building of the 3 acre Pinkery Pond and canal, a sawmill, copper and iron mines, about fifteen farmsteads and land improvements, 22 miles of metalled roads and a 29 mile boundary wall.

The pioneering Knight family sold the estate to the Fortescue family of Castle Hill near South Molton in 1886, who bought it originally for the stag hunting. In 1959, there was a major land sale by the Fortescues and the estate was considerably reduced in size, when many of the outlying farms were sold, as was the pub.

The Fortescues sold the estate to John Ewart of Northamptonshire in the 1990s, who also bought it for the stag hunting. Mr Ewart sold to our father, Gilbert Greenall, in 2006 and we reunited the estate with the pub in 2021.

For those interested in reading more about the fascinating history of the estate, we have an excellent book, *The History of the Exmoor Forest Estate*, for sale in the pub. Just ask your server.

We hope you enjoy what we think is the most sustainable and local beef, lamb and venison in England, all beautifully cooked by Head Chef, Ben Ogden, and his team.

Ed, Fred and Alex Greenall



*The Beef, Lamb and Venison
From Our Organic Farm*