

## FARM FEATURE

The cows and bulls from the Rosemead herd of Aberdeen-Angus are recognised as some of the best in the country. Breeder, salesman and farmer Angus Stovold tells Jane Howard why meticulous detail to a herd health plan has resulted in a sound stream of willing buyers as she meets the man with a 'big plan'.

# Farmer with a mission takes Rosemead herd to the next level

Percy Stovold was not the sort of bloke to take no for an answer. He wanted to introduce some Aberdeen-Angus cows to the family farm in the Surrey hills, but his father was against it. So he went ahead anyway, purchased cattle from Perth, brought them down to the South East and hid them in what is now a local restaurant.

Once he started showing, winning prizes and admiration to boot, his father relented and thus the Rosemead pedigree herd of Angus cattle was established at Lydling Farm, near Guildford.

That was in 1936 and today the farm is run by Percy's grandson Angus Stovold. Not surprisingly, he's another man with a mission.

When, 20 years ago, he arrived back at the family farm, he felt things were not right and together set about doing something about it. The herd was mainly cross-bred cows with only a few pure Aberdeen-Angus, and all the offspring were being sold on as stores. Much of the farm was down to unprofitable arable crops and a 300-sow indoor pig unit was labour intensive. Angus felt the future lay in quality and, like his grandfather, staked that future on the

**“Disease is a growing issue, especially Johne's - education is key”**  
ANGUS STOVOLD

Aberdeen-Angus breed.

“I knew we had to improve everything. Angus is such a good product it made sense to finish the youngstock on the farm and then sell the beef direct to the retailer,” says Angus.

“We approached the local butchers, promised to supply them week in week out with a quality product - albeit at a premium - and provided them with lots of point of sale materials.”

Angus had lots of takers and soon all the cross-bred cows had been replaced by pure-bred and the youngstock were all being finished on the farm with their own maize silage and a bought-in 16 per cent nut.

“But with the demise of the independent local butcher it was obvious we would have to rethink the business yet again and



The calves are kept with their dams for about nine months.

really it was the scale and depth of the BSE crisis in 1996 that made it abundantly clear to me where we should go next.

“I knew instinctively if we could produce top quality cattle each of which would be sold with a gold-plated guarantee of disease-free status there would be willing buyers.”

Now Angus only supplies one local butcher with beef and last year sold more than 120 heifers and bulls for breeding.

“Demand outstrips supply so now the plan is to increase the number of cows on the farm from 140 to 240.”

The farm is part of the BioBest scheme and all the cattle are accredited free of TB, lep-

to, BVD, IBR and Johne's. None (apart from the show team) are vaccinated.

## Wising up

The cows and bulls in the pedigree Rosemead herd are some of the best in the country.

“There are 24 female lines here including some of the originals bought by my grandfather, Percy, and these days we are very careful to ensure we keep enough heifers from each line to ensure continuity,” he says.

“Before I wised up to the importance of maintaining the gene pools we inadvertently 'sold out' three lines - Jewel, Jilt and Lady Ida, it still haunts me, but I did manage to hold on to

and rebuild the Pride line from just one cow.

“We breed to produce animals that meet the Angus standards and are easy calvers but I place emphasis on udders, locomotion, good feet and a good head - Percy always said get a cow with a good head and the rest will follow.”

And with regard to the bulls, Angus is rigorous at rooting out anything with a temperament.

“EBV's are used and when a particular animal catches the eye - my father, Robert Stovold, has a lot of input here - and has the figures to back it up then we'll almost certainly retain it for use in our own herd.”

Given the importance of their

disease-free status - any breakdown would be financially ruinous - Angus admits to having problems sourcing new bulls.

“There are plenty of good bulls out there I'd like to buy but the herd's historical health status often isn't sound enough.”

He will only buy bulls from herds which have never had Johne's disease, are tested free of leptospirosis and vaccinated against BVD. At any time there are four or five stock bulls on the farm and currently being used are Ellin Erroneous, Wedderlie Black Market, Lockerley Profit and McClements Korona, son of Ankonis Elixir.

“I think the Angus is now big enough. I'm not interested in



The bulls are run with the cows for nine weeks.



Angus Stovold

## Lydling's farm facts

- 243ha (600 acres) on sandy soil; 121ha (300 acres) of grass; 53ha (130 acres) of maize, 40ha (100 acres) of outdoor pigs; 28ha (70 acres) of turf
- Grassland all left as permanent pasture, no sprays of fertilisers are used
- Much of the farm is under Countryside Stewardship or HSE. This year 600m of hedging have been added, reed beds planted to control run-off and a

considerable amount of coppicing carried out to regenerate woodland

- A further 242ha (600 acres) is rented or used free of charge as part of a local council conservation grazing scheme. Much of this is water meadow where the youngstock are grazed
- Outdoor pig unit has 12 breeding sows and three boars including a few rare breed saddlebacks

buying extreme bulls, if you want that scale then there's a continental to do the job, and I think if we get them too big we will lose the hardy characteristics that allows them to thrive on less than perfect pasture.”

## IT savvy

Whether it is bulls or heifers, a website has been created which provides an efficient shop window, although this year there is no push to sell the stock as Angus has a 'big plan' for 2011.

“Go to Australia or America and many of the larger breeders have an annual on-farm bull sale, but it's an idea that hasn't really taken off here,” he says. “As we're selling cattle with a High Health Status the livestock auctions present problems so we're going to go it alone in 2011 and have an on-farm sale to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the first Rosemead Aberdeen-Angus registrations.”

The event will be held at the farm on Saturday, May 7, 2011 and Angus hopes to have 80 females and 30 bulls going through the ring.

“I'm especially pleased that David Leggett of United Auctions has agreed to come down as our auctioneer. All stock will carry a guarantee for temperament and fertility and,



The corral is made of a crushed chalk base surrounded by posts and rails to a height of two metres.

of course, their own High Health Status certification.”

## New plans

The farm is managed by Angus and his full-time stockman Tom Beadle, who has been with him for four years. The cows are kept outside all year, possibly as the farm is on sandy soil. They calve in three blocks, early spring, summer and autumn and usually this has been problem-free. Last year, however, the farm was under three foot of snow for some weeks in the early part of the year and, as a result, six calves were lost.

With this in mind, Angus looked north to Scotland where breeders regularly deal with such inclement conditions and many use outdoor corrals for greater control and management. As a result he is now building one at the farm, attached to a building which has a water and power supply.

The corral is made up of a crushed chalk base about 75m x 25m, surrounded by post and rail fencing with windbreak material to a height of about two metres and then a fast growing coniferous hedge (which can be flailed). It will

easily contain 40 cows and the calves will have access to the building which can also be used should there be any need for intervention - unusual in this native herd.

The calves are kept with their dams for nine months with limited creep feed from about five months. At weaning, all are weighted and wormed, with heifers separated from the bull calves. Both are overwintered inside on ad-lib maize silage and 16 per cent bought-in beef nuts. The heifers get a 'taste' and the bull calves 2kg a day.

## Results of LASER project

- LASER (Livestock Accreditation South East Region) is a project to improve the health status of breeding stock across the region
- At the outset, Angus Stovold surveyed 63 beef farmers to test awareness
- Almost half, 43 per cent, did not have a health plan but more than 80 per cent claimed to know their health status. This was surprising as 82 per cent went on to claim they would like to join a scheme that would establish their health status.

Angus says in reality only 31 per cent know their status

- The disparity is due to a worrying lack of understanding which came up time and again. For example, 55 per cent said they operated closed herds yet 80 per cent said they bought in stock. When buying in stock 15 per cent did not isolate and 60 per cent did not blood test
- At the very least, Stovold stressed buyers of breeding stock must insist on blood tests and ask sellers for health certificates

## Herd health

When asked about his vision for the future, Angus unsurprisingly returns to the subject of health and accreditation.

“In the recent past, things were different. Farming was local, bulls were shared between neighbouring farms, stock got traded at Guildford market and this area was disease-free.

“Today, the business is very different, we have customers from all over Europe and whether or not we like it disease is a growing issue, especially Johne's. Education is key.”

True to his word, Angus be-

came involved in setting up a project here in the South East, called LASER (Livestock Accreditation South East Region), to encourage farmers to acknowledge the status of their own herd and is now chairman of the newly established Aberdeen-Angus Health Committee.

“We will be doing everything we can to educate breeders, and buyers, about the importance of only buying stock with known health status and have some very forward thinking ideas. So make sure you watch this space...”