

# News from Hall Farm

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At long last it feels as though spring is on its way, after a grey and cold winter. Due to the cold weather, the fields have not really greened up yet, everything is still looking very drab. We have had a lot of rain this week, which has been welcome as the winter has been so dry – my newly planted trees were in urgent need of some serious watering.

We didn't have much snow, just one worrying day when the milk tanker was slithering around the yard trying to reverse up to the dairy and Ian had to pull him out up the lane with the tractor once he had loaded the milk.



## Sheep

We started lambing just this week, the ewes have been housed for a couple of months now. A visit to the stack yard is met with the shrill bleating of new-born lambs and the throaty snicker of their mothers. We have lambed a little later this year to ensure that the spring grass is at its best for feeding the ewes when they are producing the most milk and the lambs are also starting to graze.

Young lambs really do burst with energy and within hours are ganging up together to run races and play 'king of the castle', taking advantage of any higher ground, or in the absence of alternatives, Mum's back as she lies down, to survey the world from a loftier viewpoint.

We have now sold the last of last year's lamb and are already taking orders for new season lamb, which will be ready by the end of May or early June.

## Dairy

We have a handful of cows still to calve, it has been a long, drawn-out business this year. We are delighted with the way that they have milked – so well that we have had to invest in larger (7-gallon) jars in the milking parlour as quite a few cows were filling them to overflowing. The heifers and cows that calved first in August have peaked and their yields are falling.

Beefy Boy the Angus bull went in with the cows on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Even though I am not able to spend time with the cows every day due to my off-farm work, I usually know when there is one 'bulling' (i.e. in season); I can hear Beefy bellowing, proclaiming his dominance to anyone who is around to listen.

## Beef cattle and youngstock

The fat cattle in the yard are looking a picture and we have a run of cattle available for butchering. Some of the others from the same batch were sold as calves and reared on another farm before selling on for final fattening. With the use of cattle passports, there is a fully traceable trail so that any owner of the cattle can see where they have come from. We have had phone calls from their most recent purchasers asking for the sire's name; as we have been able to assure them that as they are by a Pedigree Aberdeen Angus bull (these were Entertainer's last calves), they can be sold to Waitrose on the premium Angus scheme. It's nice to know that someone else is making the most of the excellent Angus genetics.

All of last year's calves are weaned and now tucking into silage. At this age – they are between 3 and 7 months old – they are long-legged and gangly with an ugly hairiness in their thick winter coats. By July when they have been turned out for a few months, they will look sleek and shiny in their summer coats and will be ready to start fluttering their eyelashes at Beefy when housed again in autumn.

### Arable and grassland

There's not much happening in the fields at the moment; as they all had an application of farmyard manure there is no need to spread early nitrogen fertiliser to encourage growth as the weather warms up. Crops are looking very well and will soon shoot away with some spring sunshine.

### Wildlife and Stewardship

The hedge-laying was all completed in January and I have been busy 'gapping up'. On our farm the predominant hedge species are hawthorn and blackthorn with some dogwood and hazel, with field maple and ash as the hedgerow trees. We also have some old elm hedges.

I have recently been on a training course to help me improve my farm walks offer, which was very useful and it was great to meet other farmers involved in this activity to swap ideas. The farmland has so much to offer, including history, science, geography and art – there are some wonderful patterns and textures in features such as the ridge and furrow.

We still have a lot of our overwintering fieldfares and redwings and have sighted plenty of lapwing, which are still on the move along the river valley.

Ian's doves are laying again in the dovecote – doves were once an important source of protein from their meat and eggs, hence most manors and major farms had a dovecote of some sort. Ours just strut around looking pretty, especially on our lovely lichen-encrusted barn roof on a crisp winter day. We leave them to pick up grain around the yards and take great pleasure in just having them around, just selling some on if they get a bit overcrowded.



We are planning to have a stand at the Leicestershire County Show, near Melton Mowbray on April 30<sup>th</sup>/May 1<sup>st</sup> – in the Countryside Marquee – so if you are local, we hope to see you there!

We now have fresh beef available – some for later in **MARCH** and then again (subject to demand) at the **end of APRIL**. Please contact us if you wish to purchase, as we need to plan ahead with the butcher.

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