

## Beef from Grass

### Steve Thorne – out-wintering suckler cows

Steve Thorne is one of the mentors in the AHDB Beef & Lamb Beef from Grass project. He farms 235 ha in Dartmoor, which consists of 24 ha of cereals, 77 ha of permanent pasture and 45 ha of grass leys. The rest is rented out due to a grass surplus resulting from improved grassland management on the farm. The soil type is mainly clay loam.

The suckler herd consists of 88 Limousin-cross Holstein Friesian cows which calve between the middle of April and the beginning of June. Steve out-winters the majority of his suckler cows on kale and round baled silage, the thinner cows are kept indoors. This year, 68 cows will graze on 3.8 ha of kale, which Steve has calculated will last them until the 16th March. The kale is direct drilled at the end of June. Previously Steve ploughed the land before drilling, however he found it made the land too soft to out-winter the cows on.

Steve often uses the less productive land to graze the cattle, but has found it is important that the field isn't too steep or too wet. If the field contains damp patches he will start strip grazing at the driest part of the field, with the intention that cattle will reach the wetter parts by February when the land is starting to dry out.

The cows start grazing the kale at the end of October, which corresponds with weaning. Using a feed face of 250 metres, he strip grazes the field and moves the electric fence back by around 2.5 metres every day. Steve uses two electric fences in case the cows break through the first, preventing them from accessing the rest of the field. In March the cows are removed from the field and brought into a wood bark corral and paddock where they will calve. Normally the field will then be drilled with spring oats followed by grass in the autumn, however this year the field will be drilled with a herbal ley.

Steve sees a number of benefits from out-wintering, the first being that it has allowed him to increase his stocking numbers. Steve rears around 150 Holstein Friesian and beef cross-bred calves, which occupy most of the shed space throughout the winter months. He finds the system suits his cows, commenting that they calve much easier because they are not over-fat. Out-wintering is also an effective way of reducing costs per head as less bedding is used and machinery costs are spread over more animals.



*Steve Thorne*

More information about the project can be found in the  
[Grazing Club Beef from Grass special](#)