

Finishing Charolais sired cattle within spec at Darnford **A blueprint system combining management and nutrition**



The Watson family, Peter, and his sons Adam and David winners, of the Scotch Beef Farm of the Year 2015 use Charolais to great effect to maximise output from both steers and heifers. They have a planned management and nutrition strategy to achieve adequately finished cattle averaging 380kg deadweight within 20 months.

Separating the males and females for feeding and management is a key to the success at Darnford. This allows a tailored programme to be created taking into account the very different requirements of heifers and steers. The diets are all home mixed, giving flexibility to vary starch and protein levels at key stages of development.

Darnford system key features

- Calves: fed a low-starch creep feed to avoid early fat deposition.
- Yearlings: fed a reasonably high protein diet, 15%-17% CP, again with limited starch, to encourage lean growth and frame development.
- Cattle are turned out for a limited grazing season followed by full finishing rations after cattle reach 500kg lwt.
- Steers are fed a low protein, high starch finisher.
- Heifers are fed a higher protein, lower starch finisher
- All animals are allowed to grow to achieve adequate frame size before being intensively finished.
- A tight calving pattern is maintained helping to simplify management with even groups of cattle to work with.

The Darnford results demonstrate Charolais' ability to produce excellent carcass weights in both steers and heifers. The combination of rapid growth and high average slaughter weight maximises output from the cow and ensures maximum production efficiency.

Whilst there is no doubt that the current changes in maximum slaughter weights will lead to a potential reduction in the output of the beef herd, producers must not lose sight of the importance of output from both the steer and heifer. Continental sires, and in particular the Charolais, have an important role to play in efficient beef production - now is not the time to be reducing output.

Harbro's David MacKenzie