

CEO UPDATE



Summer show & sale road trip complete...

At the point of my last report, I was about to embark on the road trip of all road trips around the shows and sales. July was just a blur starting off with the Highland Show and ending up at Carlisle sale at the beginning of August!

BUT! It was such a terrific opportunity to see as many of you as I did and to share a little, in person of what is happening, and we have lots on as you are all aware.

2024 SALES

The sales review committee has met to review the sales for 2024 which were hampered a little in GB by the restrictions on exports with Blue Tongue. We missed our friends from

Northern and Southern Ireland and Europe shopping for new Genetics. With a further outbreak on a farm in Norfolk, as I start to compile this unless some changes to the regulations are forthcoming export is unlikely to resume anytime soon to the EU. The announcement of a new Border Control point at the Hook of Holland will create a new route to the EU and Eastern European countries subject to health status but progress to reopening the export markets is being made. We are however receiving many enquiries from other parts of the world and when one door closes another one opens, and I am collaborating with the various authorities in those countries to make the most of any opportunity that comes to us. Mongolia is ongoing, good dialogue with Uzbekistan and that may open the doors to the other "Stans". Ukraine is still in the background, but things keep moving as has been well documented due to the ongoing conflict.

Council meetings continue at pace with full agendas at every meeting where your elected Council members meet mainly on Zoom now to discuss matters of importance to the breed breeders and membership of the Society. We have a good approachable team and an excellent Chair, Jane Soulsby and Vice Chair Andrew Evans who are both tirelessly involved with the running of the Society as are all your Council members. They are your voice at Council so make sure your voices are heard with ideas and thoughts that will take us forward together, improve what we do and keep the upward trend and renewed enthusiasm in the marketplace for Suffolk Genetics.

FINANCE COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

As we start our new fiscal year for 2024/2025 and close out our year for 2024 its looking like we have turned the finances around from where they were. Many one-off costs were sucking up cash and this year we will hopefully report a small but significant surplus in our year end.

The budget for 2024/25 has been approved by Council and you will be pleased to

hear that fees will not be going up except for the further reduction of support for DNA testing that will now be phased out. I am hoping to report significant work done with our Genotypes by Signet and SRUC on disease resistance particularly MV which because of the data that we have we have been able to fast track our position as a flock and develop testing that will help us identify resistant sheep. This is just one marker with which we have progressed. There are many more that in the longer term will be able to deliver significant benefits to you as members. With some extra training for myself and Anna in the office and the help of the expertise of the finance committee we have tidied up a lot of loose ends, can make much more use of our accounts package and are in much more control of our purse strings than we have been.

There is no place for complacency on my part, increasing income and reducing costs where we can will be very much to the fore for the ensuing financial year.

SALES REVIEW COMMITTEE

The sales review committee has been very functional since its introduction with key people on the committee who understand each of the Society sales in detail and we work on the run up to the sales season to make sure that the sales run smoothly, are a good event and that they maximise the opportunity for you to sell sheep. It's very much an annual process where we review the sales and make suggestions to Council that would perhaps improve the way we run them for maximum impact. We will be reconvening in Spring to start the review process for the 2025 Sales.

NEXTGEN

The NextGen committee has been meeting over the last quarter and we have reviewed the communications and spotted a few anomalies that perhaps were a little ambiguous as to who could attend the events. We have identified these areas and intend to make it clear that NextGen events are open to not just flock holding NextGen members but all family and friends of members who have sheep. The other great thought is that our newer members also form the next generation of Suffolk breeders and the thought is that we open the events up to them too. They crave experience and ideas on how to improve their flocks and investments so what better a platform. Thoughts on timing for a national event are to organise something around Agri Expo in the autumn and this will be run past Council at the October meeting so that planning can start early 2025 for the event. We would encourage clubs and branches to include a Nextgen section at some of their functions to get the groundswell of interest going at grassroots level. Funding for this is available as support by application through the CEO and approval by the finance committee.

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING

Have a look at our new shop on the website – we have extended the choice and range of merchandise available to you. All ordering is now online, so have a look and take the pressure off Christmas shopping this year and fly the Suffolk flag whenever you are out and about! We have seen samples and can recommend the quality of the garments on offer. NextGen, 1886 Heritage Suffolk and Suffolk Sheep Society ranges available.

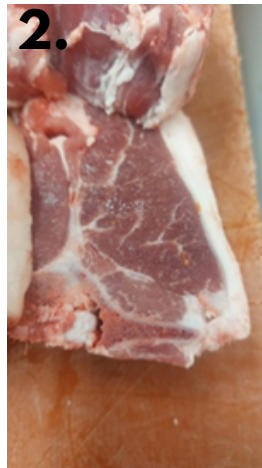
**1886 HERITAGE
SUFFOLK
BRAND**

In the last quarter we have done some development work with some Suffolk lambs and have done a lot of carcass work. It has been amazing and the comments from the two butchers that helped me with that were astounding.

I have the meat science and Butchers view now to back up the taste test the Society had the foresight to do in 2018 and it all stacks up!

The Butchery work took two parts, one to look at a boxed lamb option and pull together some regional small processors to cut and supply direct half and whole lamb as well as approaching online retailers with this concept to add to their portfolio under 1886 brand.

The pack sizing project was extraordinarily successful with the 6 lambs being between 21.7 and 23.2 kg they offered a very consistent product. Both butchers commented on the quality of the Suffolk x Scotch mule lamb, and on the fact that the lambs were very young as the joints were an incandescent colour backing up that the lambs had been born in the first week in April – and processed at the weight on the 9th July circa 90 days from birth, no creep just grass and milk. The extra chop was also commented on with extra ribs in the loin as was the presence of marbling, this subject is very in vogue in the beef industry particularly with the advent of Dairy beef but not really spoken about in lamb as it can be absent in the continental cross lambs. The marbling ties up with the 2018 taste panel outcome that was done by Ulster University and backs up why seven out of ten panellists chose the Suffolk cross lamb! A huge story to take to the market that will understand this.

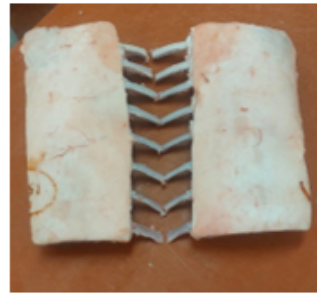


Picture 3 shows a boned and rolled shoulder of lamb from the carcass which when cut in two weighed exactly 1 kg with good evidence of meat quality and the ability to roast or slow cook this because of the marbling. This demonstrates the less double muscled shoulder also like the loin being longer and better distributed meat enabling a consistent shape and size of joint for retail packaging.

Another outcome of the meeting helped with the theory of the gigot. Suffolk gigots from R3L carcasses cut into retail pack sizes and can be presented better with further butchery into fillet end leg of lamb, shank end leg of lamb, a shank and a lamb rump. We also broke up, weighed and presented the individual muscles in the leg to see what the yield was also waste, and trim was weighed. There was about 4 kg of trim which was manufactured into burgers and mince. One comment was that every time a butcher puts a knife into a joint it adds cost so finding the balance and keeping the packs simple for the retailers may be an option.



Loin options were looked at and the possibility of a premium joint as a suggestion below french trimmed 8 rib rack of lamb again consistent from the R3L carcasses. The main thing was the consistency and the extra rib or two that yields more premium cuts for sale as part of the carcass adding value to the lamb carcass.



The chops were cut to a full rib, but these could be cut again to create twice as many packs of four at fixed weight offering consistency in shape and size of pack for fixed pricing and ease of cooking.

With a view to monetising membership and creating an income from this we would form a “Producer Group” under 1886 Heritage Suffolk Lamb where

commercial producers can join at a nominal fee per year. A registration fee per ram lamb to be held by 1886 on a database would be paid of say £10.00. Investigations into the DNA and the creation of a breed assignment model is more complex and would have a cost attached to create. I am looking at DNA profiling all sires on the 1886 Heritage Suffolk database to enable us to sire verify meat from the shelf. When I put this to a couple of commercial ram suppliers at the sheep event, they did not think it would be a bad thing to do and one even said that he would pay the test and registration (£35.00 per ram) on behalf of his customers and use this in his marketing.

It's very much a chicken and egg situation, without a customer to supply at this point. Nothing in the retail meat sector is an instant switch on and 18 months into the 3-to-5-year plan I am comfortable that we are making good progress but as always taking 5 weeks out for shows and sales just hampers progress a bit. I am working with the processors at this stage, and this is going well but just to manage expectations the retailers work a year in advance so Christmas range for 2025 is being developed now so it's not just a case of "Yes we like it" get some tomorrow. In summary I am incredibly happy that another part of the story is complete, and it ties into some of the previous findings that we now have the reasons behind and closes the loop. Consistency is the key driver behind Suffolk Sired lamb in an industry that has no consistency. We do not have a dairy industry to produce critical mass, but we do have a mule flock in the UK that can help us with this. As part of the Stratified Sheep Group and our place in the founders of that group as a terminal sire engaging with NEMSA and the Scotch Mules and others coming on board we are in a good place. Can Suffolk Sired lamb be the "Aberdeen Angus" of the sheep industry? I firmly believe that it can !

The Office Staff are here for you and I and we are very lucky to have such a committed and dedicated team. Anna, Margo and Gill get through a power of work in support of Council, myself and membership for which I am very grateful and fortunate to have them and their individual expertise bespoke to the Suffolk Sheep Society.

The next time I report will be Christmas and the start of the new annual relentless cycle that is sheep farming with our early lambing breed and our pedigree breeders lambing time. I hope that some of the issues for some of you in different regions faced last year do not affect your lambing this year and wish you every success in laying down the foundations of a successful and profitable year for you all.

