



THE  
ABERDEEN-ANGUS  
CATTLE SOCIETY

A close-up photograph of a dark-colored cow's face, looking directly at the camera. It has two yellow ear tags. The background is blurred, showing other cows.

— THE —  
**ANGUS**  
— 2022 —

Beef Fit For The Future



## Why Aberdeen-Angus is the breed of choice for consumers

Beef from Aberdeen-Angus cattle is a hit at Michael Shannon's farm shop, and the breed also fits with his grass-based system at Thankerton Camp Farm. From forage-only, farm to fork, the Aberdeen-Angus breed ticks all boxes.

Mr. Shannon finishes between 150 and 200 cattle a year. Every animal is raised exclusively on forage, and sold through his farm shop, Damn Delicious. Bought in as stores, the cattle need to thrive on this simple system, and produce a carcass that meets the demands of the customer.

### Sourcing Cattle

The majority of cattle are bought direct, arranged through farmer co-operative Farmstock.

"80 to 90% of our cattle come direct from other farms," explains Mr. Shannon. "We buy from roughly the same people every year."

"There are farms out there with similar systems to ours, running rotational grazing, and they are the type we're trying to join up with. We buy from Aberdeen-Angus breeders who produce top quality cattle, and the proof is in the pudding because we go back to them and buy more."

### Grass

The cattle at Thankerton eat no concentrates, and the majority live out all year. The system pleases the farm shop customers who are after a quality product and have heard of the benefits of grass-fed beef. Not all beef breeds would suit this approach, but the Aberdeen-Angus breed is ideal.

"As a farmer I know that my Aberdeen-Angus cattle are going to perform on an all-forage diet," says Mr. Shannon.

Cattle are purchased at a year old, weighing 350 to 400kg. They are finished between 26 and 28 months of age, and show a daily liveweight gain of 2-3kg through the spring and early summer. This is maintained at half a kilo per day for the rest of the year.

“ Aberdeen-Angus beef is synonymous with a brilliant taste experience. ”

"The whole farm revolves around grass," Mr. Shannon explains.

"I'm trying to run my grassland like a dairy farmer. All my cattle are rotationally grazed on a paddock system. There are three or four groups at any one time and we're trying to graze grass at the optimum quality to give us maximum performance."

"Rather than measuring dry matter we aim to graze grass at 10-15cm height. In the spring we graze really hard and get the residual very low as we're trying to stop the seed heads appearing later in the year."

"Our target is a 21-day rotation but that will drop right down to 18 days when we take some paddocks out for cutting."

Silage is made for any cattle housed over winter, but the majority are overwintered on kale, swedes, and silage bales. The production of winter forage is part of the farm's strict reseeding policy, which ensures that all swards are seven years old or younger.

Fields due to be re-seeded are grown for silage, with the crop sprayed off a few days before cutting. The ground is then disced, and seeds for the winter crop are spun on and rolled in. After winter grazing, the field is sown with peas, barley, and oats and undersown with ryegrass and white clover. The cereal crop acts as a nurse crop for the grass and is wholecropped.

"We lime on a regular basis and all the fields are soil sampled with the results informing our nutrient strategy," says Mr. Shannon.

### Farm Shop

Alongside the shop Mr. Shannon also sells meat online, which has taken off since the coronavirus lockdown.

"Aberdeen-Angus beef is synonymous with a brilliant taste experience. As soon as customers see the breed, they know they're going to have quality, fantastic flavour, and really good eating quality," says Mr. Shannon.

Finishing the cattle slightly later works for us and suits the shop as customers want meat that has a good flavour. The farm and the shop, Damn Delicious are run separately with the former selling meat to the latter at a price based on the weekly Quality Meat Scotland report. This means that they have to stand alone as commercially viable businesses.

Mr. Shannon's ambition has always been that every cow produces a margin of over a £1/day for each day they are on farm. That target is now being revised upwards to £1.50/day in light of the current market. On the farm shop side, most marketing is covered by the breed. Aberdeen-Angus beef sells itself by reputation alone.

Being grass fed is an additional attraction, and Mr. Shannon perceives that if people want to cut back on meat quantity and focus on quality, then it is his product that will command attention.

"We produce a slightly fatter animal than would be seen in supermarkets, but that differentiates us," he explains.

"My customers are looking for marbling and fat cover. They understand that that's where the flavour comes from."

"I don't have to persuade my customers about Aberdeen-Angus being the best beef you can buy; they know that! That's why I want to produce beef that is fit for the future consumer, consumers that understand high quality meat."

"At the end of the day I want them to lean back from the table, put their knife and fork on the plate and say 'that was damn delicious!'"

“ As a farmer I know that my Aberdeen-Angus cattle are going to perform on an all-forage diet. ”





## Low input finishing a game changer for dairy farm

For dairy farmers, the Stephen family, Aberdeen-Angus genetics have been instrumental in building an efficient and simple dairy beef enterprise that complements their dairy herd.

The Stephen family milk 290 Holstein cattle with robots on their Laurencekirk based farm, Inch of Arnhall. The herd is fully housed and most of their diet is grown on the business' 1,000 acres, which also supports an arable enterprise and a herd of beef cattle bred from the dairy herd.

The beef cattle were originally a mixture of continental breeds, but changes in the farm's breeding policy and a desire for an easy calving bull led to Aberdeen-Angus genetics.

### Breeding

"With the improvement of sexed semen, we've been able to be more selective in the cows that we're breeding replacements from," explains family member, Alex Stephen.

"We now buy a set number of Holstein straws every year. The best cows, based on health traits, yield, and general wellbeing, get a maximum of two straws of sexed semen. If they don't hold, they get served with Angus. Any cow that doesn't meet the requirements for sexed also goes to Aberdeen-Angus."

"The heifers get two servings of sexed and then run with an Angus bull."

The Stephen family did not originally set out to use Aberdeen-Angus semen or bulls, but an experience of difficult calving's in the heifers led to them buying an Angus bull. They sell their milk to Tesco, and at the time they were encouraging their suppliers to use Aberdeen-Angus semen to supply cattle into their beef scheme.

“The Aberdeen-Angus breed meets the requirements of our modern market and provides an easy calving option for our dairy herd.”

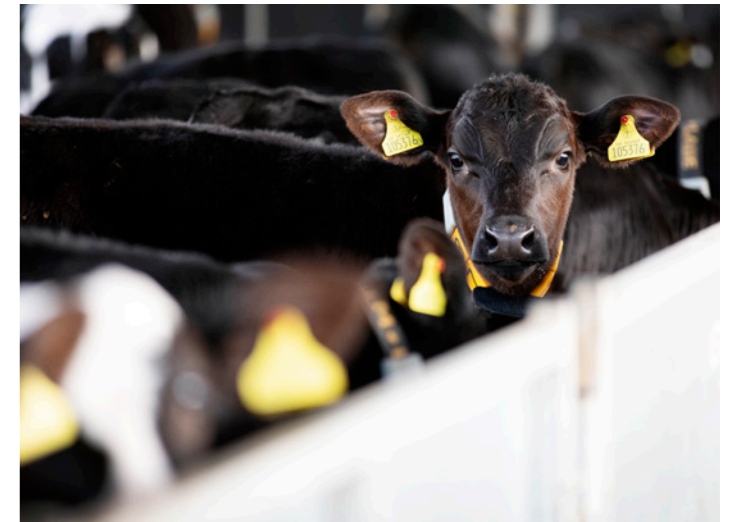
"After we bought the bulls, we found the heifers started calving down a lot easier," says Mr Stephen.

"We weren't using any Aberdeen-Angus semen on the cows at that point, it was mostly continental breeds, but it started to get harder to buy semen that suited our system. We were having difficulties with calving and then transitioning cows into the herd; lots of bother with retained cleansings and general health issues as a knock-on effect."

For a while the farm continued to use continental semen alongside Aberdeen-Angus, but Mr Stephen explains that the family found that it no longer fitted the type of simple system they wanted to manage.

"We were trying to primarily finish the beef animals off grass, but the other breeds didn't excel outside," he says.

"The continental calves weren't as good to rear either, they weren't as quick to go onto the bucket, and they were just a bit dozy whereas the Angus's were keen to suck and didn't take a lot of teaching."



### Complementary Enterprises

The Stephen family now run about 350 beef cattle, finishing 130 a year, at a 52% kill out and averaging 331.5kg deadweight. Keen to keep the system simple, the young beef animals are managed as one group with the Holstein heifers for their first year.

"The heifers don't get a very hot diet, but we find the Angus' do well on it while the continentals didn't and were always sitting one fat class down. That's how we landed on focusing completely on Angus breeding," says Mr Stephen.

"They finish so well, so easily. This winter we've probably had our best killing out weights, with animals that were out on fodder beet until well into January. They've done great on fodder beet and then we brought them inside and they've had silage and about 1.5kg of barley, and they've just taken off."

Once inside, the cattle grow at a rate of over 1.5kg/day, and finish between 23 and 26 months. The majority are under 25 months when they are finished as that is the farm's target.

"We've been selling a lot to Kepak, where we get a good price for the Aberdeen-Angus cattle as we're on a Tesco scheme. We're averaging over £4.10 per kilo with an average grade of O+ 4L," he adds.

"They're coming to decent money, we averaged £1,358 last year."

### Choosing Bulls

As dairy is the primary enterprise at Inch of Arnhall, bull selection is done mostly to benefit the cows.

"Easy calving is the top trait, the rest doesn't really matter as we're dairy farmers playing at beef cattle," jokes Mr Stephen.

"When we choose a bull, we're not thinking about it giving us a fantastic carcass animal. We're thinking about our cows calving down easily and having a calf that's got a value. Growth is also important. You want them to grow easily without too many high-cost inputs."

The Aberdeen-Angus breed meets the requirements of the modern market and provides an easy calving option for the dairy herd. The outdoor system makes the most of grazing land not utilised by the housed dairy cattle, and utilises cover crops in the arable enterprise, putting nutrients back into the ground.

"It's allowing us to produce beef that is fit for the market while being sustainable for our system."

"The biggest help with the Angus genetics is that you can run them like a Holstein and they'll still grow on a diet that's over 95% forage," Mr. Stephen concludes.



# What does the modern consumer and retailer want from the beef industry?

Beef production in the UK is forecast to increase by 1% in 2022, as more finished cattle come available later in the year. It's expected that 2023 will also see slight production growth, partly as a result of changes to dairy bull calf management<sup>1</sup>.

This has resulted in farmers having to change their practices, and much of this comes down to meeting consumers' needs. This change to producing higher quality cattle across the board can offer a greater financial reward for farmers and means more beef will be produced with the consumer in mind.

## Production Trends

Changes in milk contracts have ultimately resulted in an increased use of beef semen among dairy producers, which is delivering more beef cross dairy cattle with increased meat quality from dairy herds. However, countering this is the expectation of ongoing contraction of both dairy and suckler herds for several reasons, including loss of direct subsidy, increased input costs and associated effects on profitability.

## Consumer Trends

Supply and demand are constantly moving and so are consumers wants and needs. When Covid-19 hit, there was a rise in people cooking from scratch and therefore we saw an increase in people buying all cuts of beef. However, as things return to normal, people are starting to revert to old habits and convenience is a key factor. For example, a rise in the purchase of ready meals has already been seen.

AHDB research with YouGov shows that before the pandemic, those who claimed to be reducing their red meat consumption was slowly increasing with health, cost and environmental impact the three top reasons for this. However, during the pandemic, this dropped to only 17% of consumers saying they were cutting back. Positively in February 2022 the number of people cutting back has still not returned to the levels seen at the start of 2020. (see diagram pie charts below).



## Red meat consumption in February over the last 4 years – proportion of consumers eating less



Further AHDB research highlights that 70% of consumers trust farmers more than any other part of the supply chain and 81% said they believe they are experts in what they do<sup>2</sup>. This data shows that consumers are interested in what farmers are doing and so by producing an end product that meets their demands with transparency in our systems, we can continue to build their trust.

Further insight shows that, although not main drivers, some consumers buying decisions are influenced by whether it's British or local meat, whether its farm assured and what welfare standards have been adhered to. All of these are factors that reflect positively on UK beef farmers.

## Working With Retailers

Beef has the highest dwell time in store at 84 seconds which gives a greater opportunity to influence buyers and so AHDB are working with retailers to optimise the meat aisle, with an aim of increasing consumers to this part of the supermarket<sup>3</sup>.

One thing that's come out of that consumer research is the fact that producers really buy into farmers and by putting a face behind the product on the shelf, it can positively influence consumers' buying decisions.

It is clear that native breeds are a premium product with many retailers calling this out in their higher tier products. This could suit those shoppers who are looking to eat less but higher quality products.

Overall, the beef industry is in a positive place, but it's important as an industry we keep the consumer in mind and do all we can to continue building their trust.



**Grace Randall**  
AHDB Retail Insight Manager

## Footnotes

- 1 - AHDB, 2022. Beef outlook. <https://ahdb.org.uk/beef-market-outlook>
- 2 - AHDB, 2021. Farmers continue to be the most trusted part of the supply chain, but there is continued demand for transparency
- 3 - AHDB, 2021. Improving shopper engagement with the meat aisle

## Auction Marts Information

### Regular society sales are held at:

Auction Mart	Telephone	Website address
United Auctions	www.uagroup.co.uk	01786 473055
Harrison and Hetherington	www.harrisonandhetherington.co.uk	01228 406200
Thainstone Mart	www.anmarts.co.uk	01467 623700
Dungannon Farmers Mart	www.dfm-ni.co.uk	02887 722727
McCartneys - Worcester	www.mccartneys.co.uk	01905 769770
Skipton CCM Marts	www.ccmauctions.com	01756 792375
Melton Mowbray	www.meltonmowbraymarket.com	01664 562971

## Breeders In Your Area:

Find members in your areas here: [www.aberdeen-angus.co.uk/members/members-for-sale](http://www.aberdeen-angus.co.uk/members/members-for-sale)

Your local contact: Find your local council member here: [www.aberdeen-angus.co.uk/the-society/the-council](http://www.aberdeen-angus.co.uk/the-society/the-council)

## Performance Information:

Search for your animals based on EBV trait here: [www.aberdeen-angus.co.uk/members/members-for-sale](http://www.aberdeen-angus.co.uk/members/members-for-sale)

Stock for sale: To see bulls for sale in your area, visit: [www.aberdeen-angus.co.uk/members/members-for-sale](http://www.aberdeen-angus.co.uk/members/members-for-sale)



# Producing Beef Fit For The Future

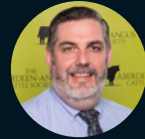
As an industry we're having to think differently and adapt to the ever-changing policy and support landscape. With new support regimes prioritising the environment, farmers are being forced to look at production systems that focus on efficiency and sustainability.

This shift in mindset to farming with an emphasis on more sustainable systems whilst keeping consumer demands in mind is a key reason the Aberdeen-Angus breed made it to the top of the leader board for BCMS registrations in 2021. We are now the breed of choice for many beef and dairy farmers across the UK.

The breed has much to offer the farmer, whether dairy or beef. The maternal traits of Aberdeen-Angus cows are proven to result in easy calving and good calf vigour, a benefit whatever the system. Another positive for the breed is the ability to finish cattle off forage, due to their easy fleshing characteristics. Market demand and the premium available also makes the breed a strong contender from a financial perspective with healthy margins achievable.

From a consumer perspective, price remains the number one influencer. However, meat-eating quality is vital. To ensure they have the best experience eating British beef, and sustainability is fast moving up the list with the rise in conscious consumers. This is why the Aberdeen-Angus breed is requested by retailers to provide premium brand beef on shelves, as it ticks all these boxes.

The Aberdeen-Angus breed provides the farmer, supply chain and consumer exactly what they are looking for and therefore enables us to produce beef that is fit for the future.



**Robert Gilchrist**

Chief Executive Officer

## The Aberdeen-Angus Advantage

Easy calving reduces the potential for empty days thanks to less interventions



Low birthweight and easy calving means greater calf survival, increasing productivity



Suckler cows that are cheaper to keep



Short gestation means more days in production and more milk in the tank



Easy fleshing cattle can be finished from forage reducing expensive concentrates

Up to 25p/kg premium price on offer worth up to £80/head on a 330-kilo carcass

