

Tales from Whyle House

The home of Whyle House Lamb

December 2008



You know you have a special sort of wife when you go to market to buy a few more sheep (10 or so) and return in a lorry with 65 – and she smiles!

This all started because we had loads of extra hay from some rented grass this year. We sold some to horse owners because non rain damaged hay is in very short supply this year which paid for the grass rent but still had nearly 500 bales in the barn. So now that I've left full time work and have a bit more time, I decided we should have a few more sheep – just a few to make better use of our barn and our time at lambing.....



Well that was the theory but the prices were good and if I bought the extra batch, they'd deliver them for me – and we really should have a few more, and... they were (are) some nice looking sheep! Anyway – the net result is that we've now got 90 ewes.

We borrowed three tupes this year and I reckon most of the ewes are now in lamb - we'll scan them in January but I'll be disappointed if we don't get 160 lambs next April. The abattoir have said they'll take as many as I can produce as they are impressed with the standard of those going through for our meat business. This is great as it means I can keep the meat business at a manageable size (probably about 60 lambs per year) and have an assured market for the rest – without have to put them through the stresses of a live auction mart – and me through the stresses of not knowing what price I'll get!

We took on two pieces of extra grazing, about 12 acres in all and if we'd had a warm dry Autumn we'd have been OK – but of course we didn't – so we're now struggling a bit with a lot of mouths to feed and we're having to buy in extra hay as we've been getting through our stocks at an alarming rate! Yes that's right – we sold hay earlier in the year and are now buying it back in!

A good thing which has come out of this is that the bought in hay is in big bales (at about half the price per tonne of our small baled hay so I don't feel too bad) and we've bought a couple of new feeders. This is so much easier that I think I might get some of our own hay big baled next year – although we'll still need the small ones as well.



We also bought some standing straw this summer to reduce the costs of buying it in and baled that on the last dry day at the end of August. We

were rushing round carting and stacking it when the tractor broke but we managed to get most of it home or covered in the field before the rains came. We also sold some straw to pay for the rent and could have sold more if we'd had enough. Maybe we'll do some more next year as it's quite profitable.

In my annual quest to keep the vintage (i.e. clapped out) machinery market buoyant, I've invested in a bale handling system – which cost me forty quid. Plus £70 to have it adapted and repaired – but it works! It's '60s technology for those who remember it but it saves a lot of time and hard work and means I can cart hay or straw on my own now.



I've finally finished our cutting room and installed a cold room so we can now hang and butcher our lamb at our convenience and provide exactly what our increasingly discerning customers require.



We passed our Environmental Health checks with flying colours which was pleasing after all the hard work. The cold room is actually an old fridge box – literally off the back of a lorry – which looked like a bargain at the time but has proved to be less than ideal. It cost far more than planned to get it working properly and it's too noisy to install in the garden, next to the cutting room as we hoped. The plan is to sell it after the last of this season's lambs are done in January and revert to the original idea which was to install a prefabricated cold

room in the garage, next to the cutting room. An expensive lesson that one – but we should get our money back.

We've been working hard on advertising this year and have now finished the web site – www.whylehouse.co.uk – which we're very proud of. We also tried a lamb roast at a charity event in Worcester to see if this would generate business. It was hard work but we sold out by mid afternoon and got at least two new customers as a result. We'll do more of these but the roaster is expensive to hire (£160 a day) so we'll look into different ways of cooking it!



We've got lots of lovely lamb in our freezers so as soon as you want some more do let me know. We've also got a few left to process so if you want special cuts then let me know before it's too late! We're keeping back some whole shoulders and legs this year for the Easter market as we think there's an opportunity for bigger family meals. If you'd like to reserve one – again let me know!

So we come to the end of another year – a very difficult year weather wise but rewarding to see some of our projects coming to fruition. We'll bring all the ewes in from mid January – assuming I finish the extra pens by then - and lambing is going to be fun with all these extra ewes. I'll let you know how we get on!



Thanks to everyone who has helped again this year – especially Ian and Ben carting bales and Ian and Katy for the 'photos.

Have a great Christmas.

Andy and Frances