

Tales from Whyle House

The home of Whyle House Lamb

December 2007



Well, what a year! Quite the best weather ever at lambing followed by an unbelievably wet summer and some quite serious flooding. Just before the worst rain I had replaced some drains and filled in a small gully at the edge of our field which adjoins the road. The following morning, the pipes were still there but about 40 tonnes of gravel and soil weren't! Just gone....

We've had a pretty good summer really - the lambs grew well on the grass although the wet weather did give us a few foot problems which we treated using a foot bath kindly donated by a friend. Putting 19 ewes and 34 lambs through a footbath for the first time is not for the faint hearted – it took us all morning and we had to carry most of them into it and managed to get more of the liquid on ourselves than on the sheep. However we must have got some on them as it cleared up the problems almost overnight.



Our re-seeding job went really well and we had some excellent new grass on mid summer. We made our own hay this year for the first time and you can see Frances here using our 'hay bob' to turn the grass over to help it dry in the sun. We took an early 'first cut' in June – really just to see if the baler would work – which of course it didn't. They are temperamental machines at the best of times and mine is an antique but after a lot of sweat and some fairly choice language I got it to tie both strings on each bale and since then it hasn't missed a knot.



After the first cut it started to rain and it didn't stop for what seemed like weeks but we took a second cut at the end of August and we were so lucky to get it as there is a lot less heat in the sun by then. You can see why most large commercial operations now make silage which is not weather dependent.

Even with two cuts (which is unusual for hay) we haven't got quite enough hay so I'm watching anxiously as the ewes get

through what is left of the grass and we start feeding them a little hay to supplement it. They'll come inside in mid January so that we can feed them properly in the run up to lambing and if we run out we'll just have to buy some more.

I spent some time this summer building a cutting room and cold room so we can have the lambs back and butcher them ourselves. We ran into problems with the cold room which means the whole project is still un-finished which has delayed our marketing plans as well. One of the frustrations of trying to do this sort of thing part time I'm afraid – but we've now decided on a prefabricated cold room which is a much better solution and means we'll have a bigger cutting room as well.

The cutting room took precedence over finishing the barn this summer but I did manage to finish the roadway around the barn which has made moving equipment and animals much easier – I'm getting quite good on these mini excavators!



We've sold about half the lambs so far and have just had some really nice leaflets done to help with our marketing push for the rest. We also need to finish the web site – especially as the leaflets refer to it! There are lots more pictures there if you're interested – at www.whylehouse.co.uk – and very soon there'll be proper content and an order form.

We've also now acquired some clever scales which weigh the joints and print labels – which means we can now legally sell the meat in joints as well as whole and half lambs which some people have said they'd like. And the labels and the leaflets are all branded with the same Whyle House logo so it's coming together. Thanks especially to Clare who did the line drawing you see

at the top of this note – which has formed the basis for the brand.



I took this picture this morning after feeding the ewes and you can see Basil the tup in the foreground. A lovely crisp December day with the mist in the valley behind.

As I always say we try to look after our animals, our customers and our land, all of equal importance to us and we hope that comes across in our approach and in the quality of our product.



Thanks to everyone who has helped us this year – we hope you've enjoyed it as much as we have. We know the product is good – every single customer from last year has come back for more and we've even got a local restaurant interested now. As ever, we're delighted to get feedback – so do let us know if you think we can do things better.

Have a great Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year – from Frances and me and all the team at Whyte House.