

Contract Heifer

Gari and Elaine Jones

Fron Bella Farm, Pentrefoelas, Betws y Coed



July 2011



How it started

Discussions arose with a local dairy unit and the opportunity evolved to rear heifers at Fron Bella. They believed this was a suitable option for the business and that they could deliver what the heifer owner needed.

Both agreed that the idea could work and set up a heifer rearing contract detailing each parties' roles and responsibilities. This included a herd health plan setting out treatment responsibilities.

In May 2010 a group of 80 weaned calves arrived at Fron Bella.

Background

Fron Bella, Pentrefoelas, is a tenanted farm and the home of Gari and Elaine Jones. They farm 900 acres in total and this includes 370 acres of mountainous land, 280 acres of upland and 250 acres of lowland ground on Anglesey. The business is a mixed enterprise with 45 suckler cows and their followers, 750 breeding ewes and 450 breeding yearlings which are sold annually. The business aims to maximise profitability and to reduce dependency on the Single Farm Payment.

"We want to ensure that we have a mix of enterprises here at Fron Bella to reduce the risk of market vulnerability," Gari explains. "We needed to change from buying in store cattle."

With this in mind Gari and Elaine actively looked for alternative joint ventures.



Elaine says the venture allows the couple to run another enterprise that is simple and needs very little investment.

The fact that the heifers are sourced from one farm reduces the health risk status which is positive from an animal welfare aspect.



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What Happens Now

The venture is now in its second year and Gari and Elaine are rearing another 100 calves. The calves arrived after they had been weaned at between 10 and 12 weeks and will remain there for a further 18 months. The Jones' out-winter the heifers on big bale silage and kale. They are closely monitored and weighed every month. The Jones' are paid monthly for every kilogramme the heifers gain. The owners are involved in the monthly weigh-in and this presents an ideal opportunity for discussion.

"The monthly weights are very valuable because they give both parties the peace of mind that we are on target," Gari added. "Communication is very strong so any issues are addressed quickly and dealt with accordingly."



An electronic weigh-cell that is linked up to the cattle crush

There are weekly discussions and an annual meeting facilitated by a business consultant.

The venture has allowed the business at Fron Bella to improve its cashflow through a monthly income. This has reduced the dependency on the beef and sheep enterprises and on the Single Farm Payment.



Key areas

Gari and Elaine say the joint venture has allowed them to achieve the following:

- to be open to changes within the business and to take on new challenges.
- adopt a simple system to facilitate a reasonable work/life balance.
- improved cashflow and maximise profitability.

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