

# PASSIONATE ABOUT PIGS

An impressive unit with a unique and extremely successful approach is how the judges described the winner of this year's Pig Producer of the Year award – I A Naughton & Co

**C**ameron and Muriel Naughton, from Devizes in Wiltshire, are this year's winners of Pig & Poultry Marketing Pig Producer of the Year award.

They manage a herd of 600 sows, with all offspring taken through to about 95kg live weight, with help from their dedicated team of eight full-time and three regular part-time staff. "We all work hard to ensure that, although there are nearly 6,000 pigs on farm at any one time, they are all looked after properly at all times and promptly treated if any problems occur," says Cameron.

This year's judging panel was particularly impressed by the financial performance of this herd. Turnover for the pig enterprise was £1.4 million in 2014, rising from £1.1m in 2013 – an increase of 25%. This represents an investment of more than £250,000 during the past 12 months on pig accommodation and equipment.

But it was the Naughtons' passion for their pigs – and the environment – that set them apart for the judges as a clear winner in this fiercely fought award category, sponsored by Boehringer Ingelheim. "Investments are constantly made in staff training and the herd's environment to ensure that they have the best, healthiest and most productive life possible and, therefore, produce a finished product that is sustainable and profitable," said the judges. "They are doing something that's slightly different from other pig producers and the resulting pork is exceptional," they added.

## FAMILY PRINCIPLES

Cameron says that their own particular way of keeping pigs is built on long-standing family principles of outdoor high-welfare production combined with a love of the landscape and the beautiful environment that they are privileged to care for. "These principles also inform our enthusiasm to communicate what we do and why we do it to our customers and the general public, directly through

farms visits, or through talking to local and national media," he says.

The Naughton family has been keeping pigs since 1958. Cameron's father, Andrew Naughton, was a first-generation producer, and pioneer of outdoor pig production. In 1970 Andrew and Crystal Naughton moved to West End Farm, at Bishops Cannings, which is a 740-acre farm in the Wiltshire Downs, which they rented from the Crown Estate. And, of course, the pigs came too.

This love of high-welfare pig production was passed on to his son, Cameron, who came into the family partnership in 1991 and took over the business in 2004 with his wife, Muriel.

"Since 1958 our pigs have had to compete for market share with more intensively reared animals. Only during the past five years has a meaningful premium been obtained between our pigs and those that never see the sun or a piece of straw," says Cameron. "We have spent the past 25 years trying to build a long-term business relationship with customers, but it has been a slow process.

**"It was the Naughtons' passion for their pigs – and the environment – that really set them apart for the judges as a clear winner..."**

"During the past few years, pigs have gone to Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Marks and Spencer premium, high-welfare ranges, but none of these contracts has provided the long-term viability the business has needed."

Frustration with short-term contracts led to a determination to market as many pigs as possible to customers who actively value animal welfare as much as the Naughtons do.

To achieve this, the business has



Cameron and Muriel Naughton

been supported by TVCambac, the UK's largest pig marketing co-operative (of which Cameron is currently a director).

"The first meaningful food-chain was developed in 2002 with Walter Rose and Son, a high-class local butcher. From this emerged our blueprint to provide customers with an outdoor-reared, straw-based West Country pig.

"Our aim has always been to let our customers come and see for themselves what we do. Often our customers will then want to bring their customers to the farm to see how pork is produced." Local butchers currently take about 10% of pigs produced, with 90% of pigs going through Poole-based DB Foods, under its flagship range of Brookfield Farm, which we are the sole supplier to.

"From here our pork goes into many outlets including food service, independent butchers, restaurants and even Saga cruise ships. We have worked closely with DB Foods for five years and it has proved extremely supportive as we have expanded to meet its increasing demand for our high-welfare Freedom Foods-approved pork."

## EVOLVING HUSBANDRY

The past 25 years has also seen a number of changes in the way pigs have been kept at West End Farm, but the emphasis has always been as much on making the lives better for the pigs and also for the staff who care for them, as it has been on making the business more efficient and profitable.

"Recognising the simple truth that healthy, stress-free animals grow better, and retaining good staff is essential to looking after animals properly," says Cameron.

The pig herd has been 'closed' since 2007, to minimise the risks of any disease entering the unit. All replacement breeding stock is home-bred using AI to ensure that new bloodlines can be introduced safely. The sows are a Landrace/Duroc cross, which has been found to be an ideal outdoor mother.

Hampshire boars are used, which produce very robust piglets with excellent viability outdoors, according to the Naughtons: "An additional bonus of the Hampshire boar is the high level of marbling, or intra-muscular fat, that leads to an excellent eating experience without excess visual fat, which consumers can find off-putting."

All piglets are born outside in insulated huts in grassy farrowing paddocks. The paddocks have sows and litters in for five weeks and are then rested for at least five months. "This means that the sows always have grass, which they love eating and rooting in. It is a massive undertaking to move all the huts and fenders to fresh ground every three weeks for a new batch, but we feel it is worth it as it reduces the build-up of parasites and means that we no longer have to routinely medicate piglets for coccidiosis," explains Cameron.

"The rested paddocks also develop a very diverse flora, providing wonderful feeding and nesting sites for pollinating insects and bird-life," he adds.

Mortality continues to be below the national average – at just 0.7% for the 12 months ending 13th December, 2014. The unit has a large number of individual hospital pens and recovery pens that, through the efforts of a dedicated workforce, ensure that the recovery rates of sick pigs are exceptional. Total pigs reared per sow per year continues to show a pleasing upwards trend.

"The system that currently operates has evolved across many years and will continue to do so," says Cameron.