



Suffolks tick all the boxes for Meredith

WHEN Meredith Dunwoody established his sheep enterprise a lifetime ago he had a very clear objectives in mind.

Maximising profitability was the primary aim and as lamb production was going to run alongside his dairy enterprise the Minterburn farmer needed to ensure that one complimented the other.

The initial thinking behind setting up his flock was to utilise the full potential of excess grass in the cow paddocks during the winter months while ensuring that it had no detrimental effect on the supply of grass for his dairy herd during the spring and summer months.

There were very clearly defined parameters from the outset and Meredith, whose farm is situated near Caledon, between Armagh and Dungannon, needed a breed that would tick all the right boxes in terms of his management system while achieving top grades and maximising profit.

He decided that the Suffolk would provide the foundation on which to build a successful enterprise. It's a decision he has never regretted and a number of decades later he is still benefiting from the numerous attributes of the Suffolk.

“The Suffolk has always worked for me and my aim was to hit the Easter market when prices were obviously at their highest,” said the unassuming Meredith.

“Lambing starts in January and fair percentage of the lambs are killed by Easter. Certainly by the time I'm shearing the ewes in the middle of May, the lambs remaining on the farm you could count on one finger.

“Because we are milking cows it is imperative that we work with a breed of lamb that grows rapidly, achieves target weights and can be finished early. The Suffolk has served our purpose extremely well over the years and continues to do so to this day.”

As well as using the Suffolk as a terminal sire, Meredith also prefers to use a Suffolk X ewe which he insists produces a lamb (see picture) that meets the demands of the current marketplace.

The Easter market was a flier this season and Meredith admits that he had achieved three-figure prices that were unheard of in the past.

“I sell all my lambs in Dungannon Meats and have done for quite a number of years,” he continued. “ I aim to kill out at 21 kilos and the lambs grade either U, R or E. I have never killed a lamb that graded any lower than an R. From that perspective I have no complaints.

“My aim is to get top dollar for lambs but I also like to keep a tight eye on costs. The ewes are only housed for a few days around lambing time and because the lambs are finished early they require little or no worming.”