Crimped grain pushes Wagyu performance beyond expectations

When Rick and Vicky Massey retired from milking Holsteins at Chesham Farm in Chorley, they looked for a replacement enterprise which would meet several needs.

"We wanted it to pay the rent, pay the bills, pay a long-term member of staff, be easier to run and allow us to stay on the farm," says Rick.

They found the answer in rearing Wagyu beef on home-grown crimped cereals – a combination which has ticked every box on their wish list. Such has been its success that the couple have retained their stock for finishing, having initially planned to sell them as stores.

Buying their Wagyu x dairy stock in 2022 through Warrendale Wagyu, they say several aspects of the system have exceeded expectations, not least, the cattle's growth rates.

In fact, he says: "We've asked [independent nutritionist] Lizz Clarke to come to the farm as we want to make sure we're not growing them too fast!"

Lizz provides reassurance that the Wagyu beef will do particularly well on the high starch diet and explains why she's increased the crimp in the finishing ration.

"The longer you feed a high starch diet, the higher the marbling, so feeding it through growing and finishing is ideal," she says.

The finishing ration is therefore formulated with 11kg crimped barley, 12.5kg grass silage, 0.5kg molasses, 1.5kg rapeseed meal and minerals. This analyses with an ME of 12.4MJ/kg DM, protein of 14.1% and starch of 32.2%.

She says: "Crimp is a particularly safe starch product which can be fed in higher quantities than dry cereals, without the risk of rumen acidosis.

"This makes it a valuable feeding resource and perfect for feeding Wagyu cattle," she says.

With Lizz's reassurance, Rick acknowledges that the faster-growing cattle will increase the profits for the farm.

"The sooner we can get them away, the more profit we'll make, as long as we can get the marbling right," he says, remarking that he sells to Warrendale, whose pricing structure for Wagyu rewards more marbling.

Agronomic benefits are also increasing the value of crimp on the Masseys' farm which comprises around 260 acres, of which 30 acres have now been assigned to barley for crimping.

Part of the Wagyu herd at Chesham Farm.

Rick says: "A big advantage of crimp is being able to cut it a couple of weeks earlier than dry grain. We are in a wet area of Lancashire and if we can combine the grain in July and plough and redrill by September we are on to a winner.

"We don't have any dry grain storage on the farm and we're not geared up for drying. So, the fact that we can clamp the higher moisture crimped grain gives us a simple and guaranteed product."

Vicky and Rick Massey

Crimping grain

- Harvest is taken at moisture contents of 25%-40%
- Grain is rolled and has a chemical, salts-based preservative applied
- No drying or specialist storage is required – only a clamp or tube
- Nutrient value, digestibility and dry matter/ha are maximised
- Provides a safer way to feed high starch rations than dry grain
- Improves animal performance over dry-rolled cereals
- Harvest is earlier and less weather dependent
- Reduces grain loss in the field and can help in blackgrass control
- Allows early establishment of follow-on crops