

## **Henderson Family Farm, Kilkeel**

James Henderson farms in partnership with wife Brenda and son Scott. The 60 ha family farm is located along the east coast near Kilkeel, with a clear view of the mountains of Mourne. The farm bought by James's grandfather was previously a World War 2 airfield used by US troops. At the time of purchasing, the farm included around 12 ha of concrete which over their lifetimes James's father and grandfather broke up and used it to build 12,000 metres of concrete walls around the fields.

The farm consists of a dairy-origin beef enterprise and a sheep flock, with 5-6 ha of winter barley grown each year and fed to the livestock.

The dairy-origin beef enterprise was started by James in the last 7-8 years. Approximately 90 Aberdeen Angus/British Blue heifer calves are purchased each year mainly through local marts at 2-3 weeks of age during the autumn. Animals are finished at 2 years of age, predominately off grass with a focus on reducing concentrate input. In the last 3 years total lifetime concentrate usage has fallen from 1100-1300 kg/head to 400 kg/head. This has been achieved through a focus on improved grazing management and making high quality silage.

The cattle are weighed to monitor growth rates with targets of 0.9 – 1.0 kg/d during their first grazing season, 0.6 – 0.7 kg/d during the winter store period and 1.0 – 1.2kg/d during the second grazing season. The target is to finish the cattle at a carcass weight of 320 – 340 kg and a mix of O+/R grades.

Last year the farm grew 9.7 t DM/ha with an average grass utilisation rate of 86%. Growth was down significantly due to drought in May, with 2019 yields at 11.4 t DM/ha. James is a GrassCheck farmer and a keen advocate of measuring swards as he finds it helps manage surpluses of grass, taking out high quality big bale grass during periods of peak growth. Paddock grazing has been in place for the last 4-5 years.

The farm has operated a closed sheep flock for the past 30 years. Rouge x Texel cross ewes are used with Primera rams as a terminal sire. Each year 250 breeding ewes and 70 ewe lambs are put to the rams. Performance recorded rams are used, and all lambs are tagged at birth and weighed at 8 weeks and weaning.

The flock is managed on a rotational grazing system and the farm has focused on improving lamb performance with average days to slaughter reducing by 68 days to 140 days. James attributes these gains to his selective breeding of replacements, use of performance recorded rams and good rotational grazing management. Getting lambs off the farm quicker has also improved grass supply in the autumn for tugging and finishing the remaining cattle and lambs. All lambs are currently sold into the Tesco sustainable lamb group.

Looking forward, the aim is to keep driving efficiency within both the beef and sheep enterprises and to continue to improve output and reduce costs.