



The functional suckler cow
The breed for you

Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society

www.beefshorthorn.org

The functional suckler cow

Managing efficient, productive suckler cows that thrive within the farm's unique environment has never been more vital as the beef industry starts to plan for a new period of economic, political and environmental change. These cows also need to make the most of the unit's available resources.

Most factors that affect suckler cow performance are influenced by their genes, so breeding the right type of heifer for the herd is the best way to secure a more profitable future.

Selecting a bull that will deliver good maternal traits such as milk and ease of calving, as well as carcase output, is increasingly important.

Using tools such as Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs), take some of the guesswork out of breeding decisions, helping deliver female replacements that will, in turn, be fit for purpose for many years to come.

Breeding strategies such as crossbreeding can also help produce robust cows that will produce strong and healthy offspring.

Sam Boon

AHDB Breeding Consultant



Beef Shorthorn - the functional suckler cow

Beef Shorthorn is providing a solution for suckler producers who are seeking a functional cow following the demise of quality replacements sourced for many years from the dairy sector. Furthermore, with trends towards developing closed herds for biosecurity and health reasons, Beef Shorthorn fits well into herd replacement strategies.

Beef Shorthorn combines its natural maternal characteristics with performance and ease of management.

Beef Shorthorn females excel at

- **Quiet temperament**
- **Calving ease – low birth weight**
- **Milkiness plus fertility**
- **Easy care**
- **Hardiness – ability to winter outdoors**
- **Feed efficiency, they've excellent foraging ability**
- **And they are suited to low input systems**

It's also worth remembering that introducing pedigree genetics enables greater consistency in outcome of the cross.

Whilst Beef Shorthorn cross heifers are retained for replacement purposes, steers – previously a by-product are now in demand for Morrisons Shorthorn Beef Scheme.

Beef Shorthorn is able to deliver since breeders have modernised the breed; they've introduced new genetics and carefully selected within the breed. Those selection strategies are on-going with the help of Breedplan, the society's performance recording register.



Setting breeding goals

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Maternal breeding strategies are complex. The ideal genetic makeup of a suckler cow depends on more traits than cattle destined for slaughter.

Profitable suckler cows need to

- Reach puberty at the desired age and calve without difficulty
- Wean a calf annually which fits market requirements
- Adapt to the resources on the farm – its management and environment
- Have low annual maintenance costs
- Have a long, productive life

Retaining home-bred replacement females should not be a reaction to high heifer or cow prices, or low calf prices. It should be a planned approach to ensure productive heifers enter the herd which are of the right breed or cross, with the desired breeding potential and health status.

Suckler producers considering breeding their own replacements must

- Assess the financial implications of keeping home-bred females
- Establish performance-based breeding goals
- Select stock sires based on EBVs to improve economically important traits
- Capitalise on hybrid vigour
- Set up simple recording systems to identify animals to keep or cull

It is essential to

- Plan a breeding strategy which will deliver females that are more productive
- Avoid 'negative selection' by keeping poor performing, less saleable females for breeding

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Selecting heifers for breeding suckler replacements

By the time a heifer calf is born, its genetic merit is fixed. All that can be done to enhance its performance is to manage it in a way that enables these genes, however good or bad, to be expressed in the best way.

However, suckler producers can still generate some genetic change within their herds, when deciding which heifers to retain for breeding and which to cull.

Productive heifers should be

- Produced by parents with a track record of high performance
- Well grown for their age so they breed easily
- Structurally sound, with good feet, jaw, and teat placement
- Quiet in temperament
- Not twinned to a bull calf – a free martin, as this will probably make them infertile



Beef Shorthorn - type classification

Beef Shorthorn breeders are now using type classification to enable them to more readily identify females with the strongest maternal traits within their respective herds, along with good conformation and structural soundness.

The breed society launched the type classification scheme in 2015 as an additional tool for members to enable them to accelerate progress within their breeding programmes and offer an improved functional suckler cow.

The initiative which is believed to be the most comprehensive of its kind offered by any beef breed society, is delivered by independent professional classifiers in two parts. Firstly a 14-trait linear classification followed by a composite classification in four categories – body confirmation, beef character, legs and feet and mammary. The linear classification is an objective assessment of how the animal compares to breed average for each of the 14 traits. The composite classification is a more subjective assessment with higher scores given to more desirable attributes. The composite scores are then given a weighting before being added together to give a final score.

When buying a bull at a sale it is usually not possible to see his dam so seeing how she has been classified is a good indication of how good she is and what maternal traits will be passed on to his offspring.

Look out for the final score and ranking – from Poor to Excellent which is appended to the animal's name and made visible on pedigree certificates, Breedplan records and sales catalogues.



Selecting a Beef Shorthorn bull

Bull selection is the most efficient way to create genetic change within a suckler herd.

The best approach to assessing a Beef Shorthorn bull is to use Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) which predict an animal's genetic potential and how his offspring will perform.

Important EBVs to look out for

- Birth weight
- Calving interval
- Calving Ease – maternal/daughters
- Scrotal circumference
- 200 day milk
- Calving Ease – direct
- 200 day growth

Self Replacing Index (SRI)

The Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society has made a commitment to developing the breed as a damline by introducing Self Replacing Index (SRI), an index which evaluates the maternal traits. Previously, the emphasis had been on terminal sire traits – growth rates and carcase characteristics.

To make fast, reliable and more predictable genetic gain in maternal traits, commercial producers should consider widely used bulls, with the right balance of EBVs, with high Accuracy Values.

For further information see Breedplan, the Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society's performance recording register www.breedplan.co.uk





Beef Shorthorn - high health status

The consequences of introducing disease in to a suckler herd is immense. Abortion, infertility, and general unthriftiness, even without large vet bills, have a huge effect on a herd's profitability. The Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society recognises that buying in any stock carries some risk of introducing disease in to a herd, so in order to minimise that risk the society has, for the last five years, insisted on compulsory health testing of all animals at its sales.

Beef Shorthorn buyers can now purchase with confidence in the knowledge that all registered animals offered at official society sales are from herds which are members of a Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS) approved health scheme and have been blood tested for BVD, and IBR, unless the cattle come from herds already accredited by a CHeCS scheme for those diseases.

The Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society regards animal health among its members' priorities and is in fact exemplary in being the first UK breed organisation to insist on the requirement. In addition to details found in sale catalogues, all pedigree breeders are required to confirm their individual animals' status by displaying an official pen card at the point of sale.

Typical example of a Standard Health Certificate

Name:		Ear Number: UK121060501247	
DISEASE	HERD ACCREDITED (YEARS)	INDIVIDUAL TEST RESULT	VACCINATED
BVD	11 YEARS	23-Nov-18	Bovilis 1st Dose 10-Mar-18 2nd Dose/Booster 23-Nov-18
IBR		23-Nov-18	
LEPTO		23-Nov-18	Leptavoid H 1st Dose 10-Mar-18 2nd Dose/Booster 23-Nov-18
TB 4	31/01/2018		
CHeCS TB			Information Applies to 2019 Stirling Feb Sale
NEOSPORAS	RISK LEVEL 2		
JOHNE'S	RISK LEVEL 1 5 YEARS 86 Animals		
Veterinary Provider: <i>George L. Collier</i> 18-Jan-19		<p>KEY TO COLOURS:</p> <p>HERD ACCREDITED FREE OF DISEASE OR INDIVIDUAL ANTI-BODY NEGATIVE</p> <p>IBR and L. HARDJO Antibody Positive</p> <p>BVD ANTI-BODY POSITIVE</p> <p>This animal has tested free of BVD virus or is from a BVD accredited free herd</p>	
Standard Cattle Health Certificate developed by an all industry group facilitated by NFU Scotland		 	

Morrisons Shorthorn Beef scheme

The Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society is working with Morrisons helping to secure those Beef Shorthorn bred steers from the suckler herd - cattle previously regarded as a 'by-product'. Morrisons overall objective is to deliver to its customers a supply of premium branded Beef Shorthorn with guaranteed eating quality.

Productive heifers should be

- Paying a premium on all cattle sired by a registered Beef Shorthorn and supplied to Woodheads from its approved farm assured finishers
- Sourcing Beef Shorthorn animals from farm assured holdings with excellent standards of animal welfare, traceability, and nutrition to produce beef of consistent eating quality

Eating quality

Beef Shorthorn beef has been tested by Morrisons for quality using the latest technology and personal taste at its Meat Quality Centre at Woodheads Spalding. Two measures were applied, for tenderness and bite force. An internal taste panel sampled Beef Shorthorn sired beef against its market competitors and concluded it was well ahead for its tenderness, flavour, and overall eating quality.

Specifications and premiums

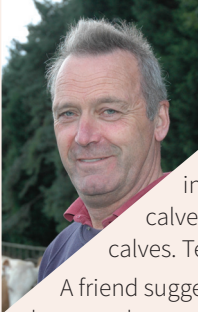
The Morrisons Traditional Beef Scheme applies to cattle supplied by producers who are registered with Woodheads as an approved supplier and all Beef Shorthorn sired cattle receive the premium pence/kilogramme above Woodheads base price according to the grid below. In 2015 97% of Beef Shorthorn sired carcasses killed out within the grade and specification to receive the premium.

Specification: under 30 months; 260-400kg

	1	2	3	4L	4H	5L
E						
U+						
-U			35	35	20	
R			30	30	15	
O+			15	15	-15	
-O						

Commercial producers case studies

Mark Webb, Eyford House Estate farm manager, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire
190 suckler cow enterprise plus followers



We introduced a new strategy, to breed smaller cows and in turn produce a higher number of saleable calves from the unit. Our Continental cross suckler cows were averaging 800kg mature body weight. The issue wasn't just size; we found these cows were losing their maternal traits including milk, motherability – they were literally leaving their calves behind and calving ease – I no longer wanted to pull big calves. Temperament was also becoming a problem.

A friend suggested I should go native and introduce Beef Shorthorn, a breed that was also noted for thriving on low input forage based systems like ours. Seven years on and it's proved to be the case. We are annually retaining a portion of Beef Shorthorn cross heifers for replacement purposes; they calve at 24 months, and go on to mature at 650kg to 700kg which is enabling us to keep 10% more cows on the same area farmed.

They're calving one live calf with as little hassle as possible. I no longer have to deal with difficult calvings and the accompanying cost, and the calves are up on their feet and sucking within minutes.

Five to seven-month old calf weaning weight has remained consistent at an average 350kg for steers and 330kg for heifers, and both steers and surplus heifers go on to realise a similar value to that we achieved for the Continental crosses.

David Monkhouse, Tow Law, County Durham
80 suckler cows



Putting milk back in to our Continental sucklers was amongst the measures we've taken towards improving the unit's efficiency and making more profit.

We deliberately steered away from introducing dairy genetics because they eat, eat, eat and they lose the flesh. However, we were aware of Beef Shorthorn, the breed's maternal traits, hardiness, longevity and a wider pelvic area, so we invested in 27 Continental cross Beef Shorthorn heifers; they were forage reared and from a high health status herd.

Whilst we like the Continentals, seven years on we also like our Beef Shorthorn crosses; they are demonstrating real hybrid vigour, they've reintroduced the milk

we were looking for and they're proving to be the most efficient in terms of overall performance.

Continental cross Beef Shorthorn cows are slightly smaller maturing at 640kg, and they are more efficient in terms of rearing a calf with a higher daily liveweight gain at 200-day weaning - an average 1.35kg.

I prefer to have 100% calves reared, and that's what they have achieved.

Furthermore, 100% have naturally calved without any assistance, the calves are soon up sucking and growing in to a nice shapely animal that finishers want to buy.

Lady Sally Nairn, Balnabroich, Perthshire **116 Beef Shorthorn cross Highland cows**



Balancing the commercial herd, Balnabroich runs 30 pedigree Highland cows, a further 30 Highland cows running with a Beef Shorthorn bull to produce heifer replacements for the cross Highlanders and 27 pedigree Beef Shorthorn cows.

Developing a stratified beef enterprise over the past 10 years was carefully thought out and matched to our upland farm location at 700' to 1,200'. Introducing Beef Shorthorn as part of the plan was not on impulse, but a business decision, and it's one that is working really well. We are breeding a functional suckler cow by crossing the Highland with the Beef Shorthorn.

These cows are demonstrating good hybrid vigour and are perfectly suited to our hill country and to altitude. They retain the Highland's hardiness and natural forging instinct and are easily outwintered on rough grazing just below the heather moorland in near to ranching conditions, In summer they run on a rotational grazing system.

We are aware other hill farmers have introduced Continental breeds to their suckler herds and found these cattle are less efficient - they are too big, make a mess of the country and eat them out of house and home. Our Beef Shorthorn Highland cows are maturing as medium sized averaging 650kg mature weight. They are docile and can be easily moved around.

The herd is spring-calved over a six-week period; cows have sound udders, they're easily calved, very attentive to their calves which aren't too big at birth and they have plenty of milk. The herd is achieving an average of over 95% calves reared and we are expecting 10 to 12 calf crops.

Heifer replacements are run with an Angus bull, while the cows are run with a Simmental bull. Calves are weaned at 250 days at an average 210kg to 240kg and immediately sold off the farm to finishers.



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Where to buy

The Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society holds official sales at the following venues

Stirling, United Auctions - February, May, October
Carlisle, Harrison & Hetherington - May
Worcester, McCartneys - April and September
Skipton, CCM - November

For further details about the Society and for breeders in your area please visit
www.beefshorthorn.org | +44 (0) 1604 698060

For registration and transfer requests please contact
Email: registrations@beefshorthorn.org | +44 (0) 2477 103406

The Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society,
The Old Dairy and Ten Stall, Lamport Manor, Old Road, Lamport, Northamptonshire, NN6 9HF

