

Goffsland Farm

Farming History

Records show that a lady called Ann Goff lived here at Goffsland Farm in 1604, hence the name 'Goffsland Farm'. In those days the farm was on the main track east to west across Sussex. The green lane which leads down through the farm is the original track. Visitors to the farm who have, in the past, been metal detecting have found Elizabethan hammered silver coins, roman coins and thimbles, which are used by the women for gleaning – picking up the last ears of the corn.

Our family became the tenants of the farm in 1954, when David's father, Cecil Liverton took on the tenancy. The farm and surrounding land is owned by the Burrell family at Knepp Castle, West Grinstead, where they have lived for several generations. In 1954 there was a milking herd of 15 cows which was gradually increased to 90 cows, changing from Ayreshire to Fresian. Under EEC scheme in 1980 the milking herd was sold and the farming policy change to arable crops and rearing beef cattle.

David Liverton took on the tenancy from his father in 1985 and in 1990 returned to a dairy herd of 85 Fresian cows. Due to a milk price collapse by 1999, where it was costing more to produce the milk than we were being paid for it we decided to sell the milk herd and to continue with the arable crops, sheep and beef cattle.

In 2003 it was decided to start a pedigree herd of Sussex cattle, providing prime beef to the local butchers and farmers markets, and with all the lamb produced on the farm being sold locally to pubs and private customers.

The farm, having been involved for ten years now with the Countryside Stewardship scheme, is now in the Higher Level Scheme, with much of the grassland managed in a traditional way with hay, haylage and silage being made at a time which will enhance the variety of wildlife and vegetation rather than inhibit it. Hedges are allowed to grow to 2 metres and are cut less frequently, and 800 metres of new hedgerow has been planted. There are uncultivated margins on all the arable fields for wildlife habitat and some of the grassland is being managed with the use of organic fertiliser only and no chemical weed sprays.

A RSPB Volunteer and Farmer Alliance survey was carried out in 2005 and again in 2010. In 2010 the survey showed 39 species of birds, 15 of which are on the at risk list, were on the farm.

Both of our sons now work on the farm and have built up a large customer base with contracting work and haylage sales. They are also increasing the number of cattle we have on the farm, and are very involved with the family farm in Norfolk.

Today's farms have to diversify, and in this direction we have improved the caravan club 5 C.L. site by putting in more electric hook-ups and providing visitors with a shower block complete with shower, toilet and washing up facilities. The site is open all year (weather dependant) and is very busy.

The farmhouse has been providing bed and breakfast since 1990, and now provides 2 rooms with en-suite facilities. We have been members of Farmstay UK since 1990 and are inspected by the tourist board every year. We are graded four stars with a silver award, and in 2010 we were presented with a breakfast award

A Brief Outline of A Year On The Farm

All the cattle are housed throughout the winter, with the ewes coming indoors usually about one month before lambing, but this is subject to the weather. We start lambing at the end of March with the ewes and lambs going out into the fields when the lambs are about 2 to 3 weeks old, but this is again dependant on the weather.

The pedigree cattle also go out to grass in April/May, and will have started calving from the end of March. The pedigree Sussex bull will join the cows and calves from June till mid-August.

The lambs are weaned in September when some females are kept as replacements, and others are sold locally for meat. With the beef cattle, some of the young stock are sold when they reach 18 to 24 months old, and this usually takes place in the autumn or May.

The cattle come back into yards during October or November and the calves are weaned off their mothers early in the coming year. The female Sussex calves are kept for breeding and the males are fattened and sold to local butchers.

During November and December we purchase approximately 45 to 50 dairy cross calves which are bucket reared with milk until weaned at 10 weeks old. They are then grown on as store cattle and are sold usually at market for other farmers to fatten and finish.

As soon as the weather improves for the spring some drilling of crops is carried out, with haylage being made in May and June followed by haymaking. All of this is of course subject to our British weather. The crops which have been drilled either in the previous autumn or the spring of this year are harvested in August. Immediately after harvest ploughing starts, ready for drilling and the whole cycle starts again.