

VALUE ADDED

Name:	<b>Steve &amp; Joe Hook</b>
Herd size:	<b>80 cows</b>
Location:	<b>Hailsham, East Sussex</b>
Adding value:	<b>Cross-country running</b>



Steve Hook: “We want people to reconnect with farming and the land”

# On-farm ‘muddy’ run

text Rachael Porter

The ‘Mad Marsh Run’ is the latest offering from Hailsham-based dairy business Hook & Son. It’s a physical challenge that allows people to see the beauty of East Sussex’s Pevensey Levels. Milk from the family’s 80-cow organic herd has been processed and sold direct to the public for many years and Steve took a starring role in an award-winning documentary – ‘The Moo Man’ – released in 2012, which put the herd on the map. He says that this is yet another diversification that he hopes will further increase the business’ profile and bring in some additional income. The additional income, he says, will go towards funding work to control floating pennywort on the farm’s extensively managed land. “It’s an invasive species that’s a problem in some of our ditches. We’re in an SSSI and we have to take steps to control it and that’s expensive.” That said, it’s not just about generating additional income for the business:

“We also want to bridge the gap between farming and the countryside, and the public. This event offers people controlled access to our farm.”

He hit on the idea of a farm running event, of sorts, at the Muck & Grassland Event in 2017. “I was in the NFU tent, talking about possible diversifications and ways to give people greater access to our farm so we could showcase what we do,” he says. Someone mentioned the Wolf Run, which is held on a farm in Warwickshire. Steve was intrigued and went away to do some more research. “I decided that we could do something similar, but use the natural obstacles on our unit – rather than building artificial ones.”

We’ve got water features aplenty, including ditches, ponds and bogs: “Just the sort of thing to provide a challenge for cross country runners. But, because we’re in an SSSI, I also knew that I had to get Natural England on board.”

He says that it has been supportive. “It did express some concerns, but we’ve

mitigated them. And this year’s event is a trial ‘run’. We’re allowed to sell a maximum of 800 tickets and, if it goes well for us, and NE is also happy that there’s been no impact on the environment, then we’ll hold a ‘mad marsh run’ every year. We also plan to create a calendar of other running events.”

He and son Joe, who is organising October’s 10K run, envisage organising three two-day events on three weekends each year.

Costs include additional insurance for the event, toilets, and post-run cold showers. “We also have to have marshals and first aiders – we’re hoping most of those will be there in a voluntary capacity,” explains Steve. Each ticket costs £15 if pre-booked online – or £20 on the day – and all participants must sign a carefully worded disclaimer too.

So, will Steve be taking part? “Absolutely not. But Joe will and I’ll be cheering him on,” says Steve.