

VALUE ADDED

Name: **Mair & Glyn Vaughan**

Location: **Boncath, Wales**

Herd size: **120 cows**

Adding value: **Turkey rearing**



Mair Vaughan: “We started small and grew with customer demand”

Seasonal money spinner

text Rachael Porter

What started as a small-scale enterprise 30 years ago, with just six turkeys, has grown to a 550-bird annual operation for Mair and Glyn Vaughan. “We just dabbled in rearing Christmas turkeys back in the late 1980s and then decided to step things up a little, as demand for locally reared turkeys grew,” explains Mair.

She says that the seasonal enterprise sits well alongside managing the family’s 120-cow Holstein herd. “It’s full-on come mid-December, but we’re only rushed off our feet for a few days and the returns are well worth the extra work,” she says, adding that she also enjoys the festive feel that it brings to the farm. “Most customers – between 250 and 300 people – come to the farm to pick up their birds. I enjoy the social side of it and it’s always good to know that people have been pleased with their turkey and come back the following year.”

And that’s what’s been happening for many years now. August sees the arrival of 550 day-old turkey chicks, from a hatchery in Shropshire. “We sell some at a month old – predominantly to small-holders who want to rear and fatten their own bird for Christmas. The rest, typically around 400 birds, are reared on and sold in December.”

The birds are reared in a sheep shed, bedded with deep litter. Twenty years ago the family invested in a plucking machine to help speed up the dressing process.

“As the number of birds we reared grew, it became increasingly difficult to prepare them all completely by hand – even with the help of extra staff. This machine does most of the work at this stage, but it’s still extremely labour intensive from December 18, when we start preparing the birds,” says Mair.

The premises are inspected each year by the local council, who visit while the birds are being plucked and dressed, and Glyn has a slaughter licence.

Some birds are sold at farmers’ markets at Brecon and Lampeter. “We get plenty of regular customers,” adds Mair. “And we have a good feel for what sizes sell the best – typically 12lb and 16lb birds.

“I always like to have between 10 and 20 spares, just in case anyone wants to swap a bird for a larger or smaller one.

“I also like to have a few turkeys for the freezer. We’re usually pretty spot on with number.

Financially it pays: “It’s not a huge money spinner, but it makes a tidy profit that’s enough to compensate for the 2.00am start on dressing day. There are a few days in the run up to Christmas that are long and tiring. But it’s worth it.”

And it certainly doesn’t dampen the family’s enthusiasm for a turkey dinner on Christmas day: “We’re not sick of the sight of it by any means. But, that said, we do have duck at new year.”