

Phepson Angus Newsletter 004

January 2023

Grass fed – no fuss – maximising meat from forage

2023 Bulls Now Available For Sale!



This Edition - South America Focus

Welcome to the latest edition of the Phepson Angus newsletter...What is your Why? One of the most satisfying things about running a small business is the relationships you build with your customers and suppliers to your business. This year we have more enquiries from repeat customers than ever before. It's the most gratifying feedback we can get when people decide to come back and buy from us when they have purchased from us before. We get to know our customers better and this helps us make sure we are meeting their requirements and can adjust what we are doing according to their needs. So what is it that our customers want and what is it that we are trying to do here at **Phepson Angus. What is our WHY?**

At Phepson, we breed cattle that work for you



“We bought a bull from Phepson Angus as we wanted to shift our maternal line to a smaller more efficient cow, high fertility and easy calving. The bull we bought has delivered on everything we wanted. We will certainly be a repeat customer.”

Silas Hedley-Lawrence
FAI Farms

WHAT IS OUR WHY?

Simply put - **We want to breed cattle that work for family farms, particularly those managing in grass based, regenerative systems.** Early on I realised that cattle genetics were just as important as grass species/genetics when it comes to these management systems. You wouldn't tell an arable farmer that their crop variety didn't have an impact on their yield and margin and the same is obviously true for regenerative cattle systems. In the long term we want to see cattle available across the country that can thrive in regenerative systems.

Working with other people on this is the only way we can do this. We work with 3 other breeders in the UK producing breeding stock for sale and have had Embryos from the USA implanted last August at a farm in Scotland - we also buy back weaned bull calves from previous customers so we never really lose access to genetics when we sell cows. This allows us to work with other like minded people and means we can sell good cows without worrying that we'll never be able to use their offspring again. We have some more carefully chosen embryo's coming from grass-fed ranches in the USA and Argentina next year. It's going to be exciting to see how these genetics perform in our environment.

Straws Available from our Senior Herdsire KAISER
Contact us for more information and to talk about your requirements

KAISER



Starter Herd Available -
Would you like to join our group of breeders using grass based genetics?
Contact us for more information

“We bought a starter herd from Rob at Phepson Angus and we couldn’t be happier with them. They have settled into our outwintered grass fed system perfectly, calved really well and Rob has already been back to buy youngstock to sell as breeding bulls.”

Ian Horsley

Baston Hall Farm

(It’s well worth following Ian on twitter @IanDHorsley)



Read on for ...
South America Ranch Focus

Could they be 50 years ahead?



I will be writing in more detail about this trip in my Nuffield report - here are some takeaways from my first visits:

In October I traveled to Argentina and Uruguay to see how their production systems and cattle compared to ours and to see what we might learn from some very large businesses that have to run without subsidy or government support.

Everything is outwintered!

In an environment where there is no government support it was interesting to see that everything was outwintered. No matter what system they ran, or whether the focus was on fertility or growth rate, everything was outwintered. They couldn't understand how you could pay for that. I wonder if we could pay for it with cows alone if it wasn't for the UK subsidy or the legacy of buildings already on farm.

ZERO farm subsidy changes the appetite for risk



It was interesting talking to ranchers over there how aware they were that we received subsidy in the UK/EU. They saw this as a big advantage but could also see how it changed our approach. One rancher told me - paraphrased - "In the EU or USA, if $\frac{1}{3}$ of your income comes from subsidies then the profitability of the cattle enterprise every year is less important. (I didn't tell him that there is probably another $\frac{1}{3}$ of farm income from environmental subsidies as well). It changes your approach to business because you can soak up a bad weather year and have confidence to invest in infrastructure. In Argentina we have to run a profit every year and so that determines our system and the kind of cow we choose to run."



So what kind of cow do they choose to run?

In the UK many of the top EBV/Growth genetic cows will be 700 kg + - some will be up to 1000 kg. In my opinion that is far too big for a grass based cow. Sat in a Parilla, Argentinian BBQ house, it was interesting to hear two ranchers discuss cow size. One wanted to keep small cows and the other was using EBV/EPD data to increase cow size. The discussion went on and we got down to what the ideal cow size was and the punchline is that the “bigger cow” turned out to be 550 kg instead of 450 kg. Nowhere near as big as the average cow in the UK national suckler herd. It was interesting to hear that despite selecting for a “bigger” cow, one rancher had some management filters to make sure his cows didn’t get too big. First of all he had a maximum hip height for all his cows and he culled on that basis and second of all he culled ruthlessly on fertility. He even had a copy of Dr Jan Bonsma’s “Livestock Production” in his Hilux. Every rancher I visited had a focus on fertility and this, in my opinion, was the real determining factor in selecting for smaller cows.

**Fertility was the number one selection criteria
- they are 50 years ahead**

On all but one ranch I visited, fertility was the number one selection criteria. Short calving duration over no more than 3 cycles and performance WITHIN the environment. This is the first time I've seen grass genetics managed for fertility over the long term - we are talking over 50 years in some cases. We are lucky in the UK to have some old genetics available that have not been "improved" with selection for growth. However, the reality is that not many of these lines have been tested to perform for fertility WITHIN the limits of what the environment can provide. The interesting thing about this trip was the fact that they have been using very similar genetics over there but really challenging them over time to bring a calf every year no matter what.



Innovation in fertility selection

This search for fertility while calving at two years old has led to some real innovation in fertility selection. One rancher fertility tested all bull calves at 10 months old, looking for specific attributes in the semen to determine which bulls were reaching early maturity sooner and only the best used in service. All heifers were put to the bull at 15 months and only first cycle breeders were chosen as replacements. 1000 heifers were put to 60 x fifteen month old young bulls and the calves were DNA tested.

Approximately 80% of calves came from 20% of the Bulls and these Bulls went on to be senior herd sires or were sold for breeding. Unfortunately these cattle were not registered despite being pure blood with good records. However, It may be possible to bring some of these genetics into the UK if there is enough interest.

A reservoir of UK Genetics proven within their environment

It was fascinating to see the passion for UK breeds over there with Angus dominating the cattle in Argentina but there were also some old Hereford breeding lines doing well. Many of these old lines are rare in the UK but in South America they are not only numerous but are being tested in commercial, outwintered, grass-fed systems. It seems an incredible opportunity to bring some of these genetics back to the UK and we will be doing this over the next few years. Get in contact if you are interested in getting involved in bringing these genetics back to use in our UK regenerative systems!



- Fertile
- Maternal
- Long lived
- Large rumen capacity
- Perfect udders
- Strong feet and legs
- Good temperament
- PROFITABLE

OUR COWS



- Fertile
- Long lived
- Moderate frame size of high quality
- Excellent forage converters
- PROFITABLE

OUR BULLS

“After visiting Rob and seeing how he manages his grass and testing his genetics, I was very keen to purchase some of his cattle. I didn’t need to see them, I just put an order in of what I wanted, and Rob did the rest. It’s very reassuring when you find a breeder who really knows his cattle and can be trusted to send you exactly what you want. We will be purchasing more in the future.”

~ Geraint Powell, Nuffield Scholar - after purchasing 15 in calf breeding cows and a bull ~

We bought 2 bulls from Rob because we wanted easy calving, fertile, hardy bulls. Very happy with initial results on 62 heifers with 100% in calf, 73% bred in the 1st cycle. Bulls didn't go lame or lose condition while working.

Oliver Chedgey
2022 Organic Dairy Farmer of the Year



**We have PHEPSON ANGUS bulls available from January 2023
Please get in touch if you would like more information about available
bulls. We have sold out for the last 3 years so please get in early to secure
your breeding bull.**

Free Consultancy

We often get requests for consultancy on both grassland and cattle management in holistic management systems. While we do take on some advisory work in limited situations we do tend to try and sign-post to other advisers in the regenerative agriculture sector. However, ALL PHEPSON ANGUS CUSTOMERS receive a FREE consultation with their purchase and for our customers we are always available on the phone. So if you are interested in saving money through your grazing systems and would like to add some proven fertility genetics to your herd then get in touch.

rob@phepsonfarm.co.uk

07973771832

Check out our website [→](#)