

THE BLACK VEN HERD



In 1997, we bought four pedigree Sussex cattle with heifer calves at foot. We, as a family, were stepping into an exciting, rewarding farming enterprise. In our naive initial steps we were enormously supported and encouraged by Steve Comber and John Hancorn, and a little later by the wonderful friendship and advice of Mick and Nima Reid. Since then we have enjoyed much help from many other good Society friends.

Apart from buying in one special Darkey cow with calf at foot from Mick Reid's sale, all our cattle our descendants of the original four cows. We had to make one exception last year buying in four heifers from Isfield Place, but they are the daughters of our former stock bull that we sold to Isfield Place, Trottenden Major 9th. In our continuing drive to improve our herd, we have used a variety of bulls over the years, including the famous Holm Place Major. We think none have been better than our current sire Trottenden Formidable 5th who has thrown some fantastic calves in this his first season.



In 1998, we decided to convert to an organic system. This meant a significant change in our method of farming and it is a decision we have never regretted. The benefits are to be seen across the farm, from the increase in wildlife to the health of the herd, the spread of clover and the resilience of the soil, let alone our ability to sell beef cattle at a premium. To control worms, we move cattle regularly and follow them with sheep. We also have a significant amount of yarrow in our swards, which is a natural antihelminthic. We home produce all our silage from the 250 acres we farm or rent, but we do have to buy in straw.

We have been members of Signet for many years and use the breed value statistics to improve the stock. As a result we only have cows that are in the top 10 per cent breed value of the national herd.

With the support of our previous stockman, Ralph Sheppard, we used shows as a shop window for our herd with considerable success. Sadly, this year we will not be showing as Ralph has retired due to health problems, but we hope very much he will be able to help us again next year. We will be back!

