



ACTISAF TAKES FOUR WEEKS OFF FINISHING PERIOD...

Beef finishers Jim and Paul Andrew are seeing impressive weight gains on their beef animals following the inclusion of Actisaf live yeast in their ration.

Jim, Paul and nephew Jamie, run a 140-cow suckler herd from their family farm just outside Welshpool in Powys. They also buy in a further 200 weanling calves for finishing. Weanlings are brought on to the farm aged between five and six months and weighing around 250 to 300kgs. The goal is to get the weanlings settled and putting on weight as quickly as possible.

What Jim and Paul found, however, was that youngstock brought on to the farm were typically losing condition during the first month and struggling to maintain their weight, as they settled on to a new diet and into their surroundings.

Keen to find a solution to this problem, they spoke to Phil Rowson, their HJ Lea Oakes feed representative, and LFA's James Ambrose, who recommended that they try adding Actisaf to the ration. That was twelve months ago and the results have been impressive.

"We can't believe the change," Jim said. "We have never seen weanlings settling in so quickly. Intakes are up, cattle are gaining weight from the off and are more contented and settled."

The weanlings are fed a blend from HJ Lea Oakes for the first few days, which is then gradually reduced as barley is added in until the ration is balanced at 50:50. This is supplemented with a farm-mix of bread waste and Trafford Gold, along with grass silage.

"Including Actisaf in the ration has made a real difference," Jim explained. "Cattle are definitely quieter, we are seeing less digestive scour, cattle are in good condition throughout the finishing period and they are killing really well, achieving top grades around 4 weeks earlier than we'd have seen before. Typically we can achieve a 400kg deadweight carcass by 15-18 months old and in our last batch of heifers we achieved 50 per cent E grade, with the others all achieving a U grade, which is great."

"We will definitely continue to use Actisaf in the diet," Paul explained. "The cost of including it is minimal when you compare it to the potential return and we firmly believe it is what's making the difference to the performance of our herd."



The Andrew family

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Phileo

LESAFFRE ANIMAL CARE



ACTISAF REDUCES BEEF FINISHING PERIOD...

Getting bought-in store cattle on to a finishing diet quickly and without digestive upset is a challenge faced by all beef finishers. After all, cattle arriving at a finishing unit have to adapt to new surroundings and social groups, as well as a new ration, and this can take some time.



Johnny Cornes

But the old adage of 'time is money' has never been truer – to achieve optimum daily liveweight gain and minimise the total finishing period, cattle need to be consuming optimal feed intakes as soon as possible after arrival. What's more, digestive upset needs to be minimised to avoid health setbacks, which will further increase the finishing period and may even lead to mortality.

Yet for one Shropshire beef finisher, this issue is now easily addressed. Johnny Cornes farms in partnership with his father, Frank, at Lythwood Farm, Bayston Hill, where they grow around 900 acres of arable crops and finish around 1,500 beef cattle a year, which are supplied to Woodheads.

Cattle are generally bought at market as strong stores around 450kg liveweight, with Johnny trying to achieve a balance of 70 per cent steers and 30 per cent heifers. When it comes to breed, Johnny prefers continental cross cattle, ideally out of a suckler herd, and there are around 600 cattle on the farm at any time, with around 30 arriving each week to replace the 30 that go to slaughter.

Cattle are fed a mixture of home grown wheat and barley, which goes through a hammer mill on the farm, as well as a protein pelleted feed provided by HJ Lea Oakes and big bale grass silage.

"We provide cattle with the cereal/protein mix on an ad lib basis, with typical intakes of around 8kg/head/day delivering a finishing period of less than 120 days," explained Johnny.

"We start new cattle on around 2-4kg/head/day of cereal mix along with grass silage. It always used to take us around 4 weeks to settle them on to the ad lib finishing diet and unfortunately, from time to time, we had a beast go down with acidosis," he continued. "I discussed this with our feed representative, Phil Rowson, from HJ Lea Oakes, and he suggested that we tried adding Actisaf live yeast to our ration to reduce the risk of acidosis and drive feed intakes."

And the results have been encouraging. "Since we started using Actisaf the cattle settle much faster on to an ad lib diet – usually in around 2 weeks and sometimes within 10 days," Johnny explained. "We haven't had a beast go down, they get going quicker and we are finishing them faster – they seem to get more out of the feed. Cattle are clean, content, and I think we've reduced total feed use by about 1kg/head/day yet beasts are grading well – I'm very pleased!"

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ACTISAF HELPS BEEF FARMER IMPROVE FEED UTILISATION AND FINISHING TIMES

Staffordshire beef farmer Rob Cliff runs a simple, but efficient indoor finishing unit at Pinewood Farm in Loggerheads, with the help of his sons, Callum (pictured) and Kieran, and wife Liz. Finished cattle are supplied to nearby food processor ABP in Shrewsbury.

As well as managing the farm's 110 beef animals, Rob also runs a nearby dairy enterprise, necessitating a straightforward and smoothly run beef setup to make the best use of his limited time on site.

"We usually buy in continental-cross calves at three weeks of age," stated Rob, "and aim to have them finished and ready for slaughter before 16 months. We look to hit finished deadweights between 350-400kg within this time frame and are obviously pushing to achieve top end grading results."

To meet these targets, feed intakes need to remain high from day one, and Rob believes that his choice of feed plays a key role in achieving this. All cattle are fed ad lib with HJ Lea Oakes Prime Stock Beef Nuts, which contain Actisaf live yeast.

"I used to use a different feed, but switched about four and a half years ago, having consulted with farm adviser Philip Jackson from HJ Lea Oakes," explained Rob. "The other nuts had poor consistency and would break down to powder very easily, limiting intakes. Now, the consistency of feed is better and I have noticed real improvements in the amount cattle get through."

With cattle feeding ad lib, a lot of strain is placed on rumen function due to large intakes of high energy, high starch feed. However, thanks to the inclusion of Actisaf in the cattle's diet, rumen pH remains stable, ensuring maximum feed utilisation and efficient digestion. As a result, weight gains are good, with Rob regularly achieving top end finishing weights before his 16-month target.

"The feed must be doing something right and hitting the spot, as we are getting through a lot of it," continued Rob. "Currently we need an 24 tonne delivery coming on farm every month to keep up with consumption rates."

Rob has also noticed a number of other benefits that the addition of Actisaf can bring to a beef enterprise.

"As well as helping me finish cattle faster, since switching to the feed containing Actisaf, animals seem more content, look in really good condition and have great body conformation," concluded Rob. "We also haven't had any problems with lameness and don't seem to have to treat as many animals for disease, which helps us minimise running costs."



GOOD GROWTH RATES WITH GOOD HEALTH...

For British Blue breeder, Philip Halhead (pictured), it is essential that his beef animals achieve good growth rates whilst maintaining functionality and health.

Philip runs the reputed Norbreck Genetics company from his farm near Cockerham in Lancashire, and he is proud that his bulls consistently sire more show winners and high priced animals than any other company.

Philip started the business when he was just 14 after buying a Belgian Blue embryo from a pedigree herd in Cheshire. That embryo turned out to be a prize-winning heifer and from that Philip moved into other genetics, breeding a number of successful bulls. Initially these were marketed through Scottish Livestock Services, but today the business markets sires for the dairy farmer through SEMEX UK, whilst bulls suitable for pedigree breeders are marketed directly, resulting in livestock, embryos and semen being sold to customers across the globe.

"We breed cattle with great conformation, focussing on mobility, vitality and growth," Philip explained. "15-20 years ago the Belgian Blue did not have the greatest reputation for locomotion but that is changing now and the British Blue we breed is recognised for easy calving, functionality and performance."

The breeding programme at Norbreck focuses on six brood cows that are flushed for embryos, which are then implanted into around 30 beef x heifers each year. Some of these are sold pregnant, whilst around 15-20 are kept, with the calves then being reared.

Philip's aim is to produce calves that have good genetic merit and rapid growth rates rather than looking exclusively at muscling. And his feeding system reflects these aims. "We feed young heifers and bulls from 12 weeks old on Carrs Billington's Taurus Beef mix, supplemented with coarse hay or big bale silage," he explained. "They get fed twice a day with 1.5kg/head - we push them but they are not on ad lib concentrates as we want them to maintain good functionality, so we want the frame to grow as well as flesh to develop."

At 12 months of age bulls and show heifers then get transferred to Carr's Champion Bull mix to help achieve perfect fleshing and condition.

And it is no coincidence that both of these diets contain Actisaf Sc 47 live yeast, something that Philip has included in his feed from the very beginning. He believes this is critical to maximise intakes, feed conversion efficiency and growth rates, whilst ensuring that rumen health is good.

"We don't get any problems with acidosis and the feed is very balanced," Philip said. "We don't have any real health issues and the animals grow well - something that is important when we are marketing stock to others."

"British Blues make up 75-80 per cent of AI beef sales on the UK dairy market and they are the only breed that can consistently produce an easy calving animal and that will put muscling on a Holstein cross," Philip concluded. "We are confident that Norbreck animals will deliver maximum growth, vitality and mobility and Actisaf Sc 47 plays an important part in helping us to achieve that."



CUTTING DOWN ON FINISHING TIMES AND ACIDOSIS...

Beef herd manager, Chris Wright, has noticed impressive weight gains, as well as a reduction in cases of laminitis and acidosis since switching to a beef feed containing Actisaf.

Based on the Mainwaring's Oteley estate, in Shropshire, Chris Wright manages a large beef-finishing unit and suckler herd at Oteley where he has worked for more than 14 years. The farm consists of 1,600 acres, with 1,000 acres dedicated to arable production with the rest being used for forage.



Chris Wright

The beef unit aims to finish more than 400 cattle a year, bringing in batches of 35-40 Holstein-Friesian weanling bulls every month, at four months of age. Cattle are sold on for slaughter at 12-14 months or sooner, having achieved finishing weights of 480-520 kg.

Cattle are fed ad lib using a 50:50 mix of homegrown barley and Prime Stock Beef Nuts, which are supplied by HJ Lea Oakes and include Actisaf protected live yeast.

"When weanlings come in, we just feed the beef nuts before introducing barley, as we don't want to push their rumens too hard too soon in terms of starch loading," explained Chris. "However, having consulted with Philip Jackson from HJ Lea Oakes, we have been using the new beef nuts for about two years and in this time

the transition to a more starchy diet seems to be smoother, with fewer incidents of acidosis amongst new cattle."

"Feed intakes have also increased and once cattle get going, they are consuming more than 15 kg of feed a day each, which is helping improve weight gains and reduce finishing times," stated Chris.

Chris is now finding that he is sending more cattle off for slaughter before 12 months of age, having already achieved desired finishing weights. Over the last year, only one animal has stayed on farm for more than 14 months.

"We also used to have problems with laminitis," continued Chris "with four or five animals in each batch coming on to the unit being affected. It was ruining our profits, but now, the problem has all but disappeared."

As well as the finishing unit, Chris runs a 350-strong suckler herd, comprising of Beef Shorthorns, which calve between September and October. All bull calves are taken for fattening and will go for slaughter between 12-14 months of age. Heifers are reared as replacements or sold on at 18 months.

"Weaning takes place from six months," explained Chris, "with bull calves moving on to our 50:50 barley-beef nut mix. Heifer calves are gradually introduced to a forage based TMR as well as a barley and protein blend."

"Since changing feed two years ago to include Actisaf, the bull calves now go on to the barley really easily after weaning and they don't suffer from acidosis like they used to," concluded Chris. "This means performance isn't compromised and calves are getting off to the best possible start. I'm really pleased with the feed and with Actisaf."



CUMBRIAN BEEF FARMER GETS RESULTS WITH ACTISAF

Achieving good performance on an upland farm takes attention to detail and dedication, something that David Lawton (pictured) has in spades. He has managed the 2,300 acre Greystoke Castle Farm for more than 20 years in partnership with the owners, the Howard family, and has a clear focus on profitability.

The farm lies just to the north of the Lake District National Park in Cumbria and rises to 1200 ft above sea level. The land is permanent pasture and the farm takes part in both the entry level and higher level environmental schemes.

Stocking includes 250 suckler cows with 40 heifer followers as well as 2500 breeding ewes. Cows are calved in the spring with the aim of selling calves from the mother as strong stores in October. To ensure herd performance is maximised, David is careful to choose his genetics to ensure that good growth rates are achieved whilst retaining enough hardiness to cope with life on an upland farm.

“My ideal cow is a Limousin Friesian first cross as they are strong, have plenty of milk to support the calf, and throw calves with good conformation,” David explains. “But it is getting harder and harder to buy good stock as TB becomes more prevalent, so we also run a small number of Belgian Blue crosses.”

David’s priority is to get maximum growth from calves early in their lives from their mother’s milk. Yet to achieve the overall growth rates he is after, he recognises the benefit of creep feeding, so calves are fed creep at a rate of around 3kg/head from August onwards.

In recent years, however, this has not always gone smoothly. David has struggled with calf health when creep is being fed, with some calves scouring and in extreme circumstances getting stomach ulcers. This has added cost and reduced growth rates on affected animals, to the detriment of profitability.

Having discussed this problem with his feed adviser, David was advised to try a compound feed that had Actisaf live yeast added.

“Since we switched to the feed incorporating Actisaf we don’t really have those problems any more,” David explains. “Calves seem to stay healthier and I wouldn’t use a creep feed now unless it contained Actisaf.”

And the proof of David’s efforts is easy to find. All the calves are sold through Longtown market and buyers look out for his progeny. “We have built up a good following over the years from people who know that our calves will finish well. That reputation is important as it helps us achieve better prices,” David says.

Looking forward, David continues to focus on cost control, genetics and careful feeding to get the best from his animals and maximise profitability. And all the time that creep feeding features in his herd management routine, it is clear that Actisaf will continue to play an important part in helping David achieve his objectives.

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FEEDING FOR BREEDING...

In 2007 Alistair Graham and his cousin, Paul Brown, faced the agonising reality that their beef herd had Brucellosis and would have to be culled. As a result, for several months the farm, near Tandragee in Northern Ireland, carried no stock.

But the cousins were determined to carry on and started again with a completely new herd in late 2007, buying the Tithewer herd from Southern Ireland to get them going. Within four years they had 60 pedigree Limousin cattle, comprising the Rathconville and Madden herds, which were already winning awards far and wide.

The herd calves mostly in the autumn and all the top female calves are retained for breeding, with all the best bull calves being sold for breeding stock at around 16-18 months old.

And all the animals have to earn their keep. "We don't have time for passengers," Alistair explained. "All the cows have to rear their own calves without intervention. We could carry more stock but we prefer to keep fewer, better cattle and our focus is on breeding and growing the very best."

Altogether the cousins farm 210 acres that are all down to grass. All cattle graze in summer and the cows get fed grass silage in the winter with no additional feed supplementation. Around 30 cows are out wintered, with the remainder being housed from November until February.

Calves are creep fed from around 3 months of age and are split into groups when the calves are six weeks old so that the supplementary feeding can be targeted by sex.

When female calves are weaned they are fed meal once a day, starting at 2kg/head and building up from there. Male calves are fed 4kg/head (split into 2 feeds a day) and are built up from that point. And all the feed contains Actisaf Sc 47 farm pack.

"We asked our feed adviser what we could add to the ration to prevent gut problems as we have suffered a bit with this in the past," Alistair explained. "We feed a high quality ration, comprising early grass silage, wheat and a blend, and we have a high feed rate to get the growth we require."

It was recommended that they try Actisaf farm pack top-dressed at feeding and Alistair and Paul have been really pleased with the results.

"Our cattle seem content and have a good appetite. We don't have any trouble with digestive disorders," said Alistair. "We had tried other products in the past but found that they weren't very palatable so they had a negative impact on intakes. The Actisaf farm pack seems to be really palatable and the cattle eat it right away."



ACTISAF HELPS STABILISE HIGH STARCH FINISHING DIET...



Beef farmer, Phil Gore (pictured), houses up to 1,200 cattle at any one time at Lower Newton Farm in Stoney Stretton, near Shrewsbury. His impressive beef-finishing unit sends up to 100 cattle a week to slaughter, and Phil achieves a kill out rate averaging 55%, with dead weights averaging between 330kg and 350kg.

Phil aims to finish all cattle in three-months, and targets a 1.6kg daily live weight gain. Cattle are put straight on to a finishing diet as soon as they arrive on the farm, which consists of maize gluten; maize silage; potato and bread waste products; Loch Lomond Gold, which is a wheat starch syrup from the distillery process; vitamins and minerals and Actisaf Sc47 live yeast.

"We have been working on the diet for a couple of years," Phil explained. "We try to make sure it is as balanced as possible, which can be harder when using waste products as they can be quite variable. We decided to try adding Actisaf yeast to the ration in February 2014, after hearing about it from another farmer who had seen very good results after including it in the diet."

Actisaf Sc47 helps manage rumen function, which is important in a variable diet such as the one Phil is feeding. Actisaf promotes rumen stability, which is especially important when feeding rapidly fermentable sources of starch, such as bread and potatoes. Phil buys his Actisaf farm pack from Phil Rowson, his local HJ Lea Oakes feed representative, and it is included in the diet at a rate of 50g per head per day and is fed to all the cattle on the farm.

"The Actisaf certainly helps," Phil says. "Dung is consistent, the cattle cud well, and we don't have any issues when we have to change the ration, which happened recently over Christmas when



our usual raw materials weren't available. Despite this ration change we found that the animals continued to perform well."

Another benefit of Actisaf is that Phil has no issues with cattle transitioning to the finishing ration when they arrive at the farm. This is sometimes an issue, especially for beasts previously fed on an all forage ration. Actisaf helps keep the rumen functioning well and avoids the potential rumen upset and acidosis that can be associated with a diet change like this.

"The Actisaf is a good supplement to the ration," concluded Phil. "We're pleased with the results we are getting and the general performance of the livestock."

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