

Farming Today at Deer Park



Covering 280 acres (113 hectares), Deer Park Farm is a good example of a Westcountry mixed farm, with cattle, sheep and various growing crops.

It is farmed by the Howlett family, who place a strong emphasis on protecting the environment and enabling the public to learn more about British agriculture and the countryside.



The Farming Landscape

Although it may seem natural and unchanging, much of Britain's rural landscape has been shaped by centuries of farming activity.

The Tamar Valley's characteristic patchwork pattern of fields can be seen at Deer Park farm, with walls and hedges following the natural slopes of the land. The layout of our fields, which vary from 1 to 20 acres in size, has remained largely unchanged for 150 years.

However, during this time, there have been huge changes in farming. The increasing size of agricultural machinery brings new challenges in working fields originally laid out

in the days of horse-power. Modern buildings allow stock to be housed over winter meaning that greater numbers of animals can be reared on the same area of land. In contrast, the number of people working on the land has greatly decreased.

Amidst all this change, Environmental Stewardship agreements like that here at Deer Park Farm can help to ensure the preservation of our distinctive rural landscape for future generations.

Livestock

Deer Park Farm runs a "closed" flock of ewes, which means they are home-bred here on the farm.

We have around 300 continental ewes (Texel and Charollais breeds), which are cross-bred with native British Suffolk rams. The ewes lamb each Spring, in February and March.

As on most livestock farms, a Collie dog assists with stock handling - Ross, the sheepdog, is pictured right.



We have a beef suckler herd of continental cross-bred cows (Limousin and Simmental breeds). They are cross-bred with an Aberdeen Angus stock bull to produce good quality beef calves.

We also buy suckled Welsh Black calves from farmers higher up on the moorland to fatten on the richer pastures of Deer Park Farm.

In addition, we also have a "fold" of Highland Cattle, with their distinctive horns. They are primarily used for environmental grazing under the Stewardship scheme.

The meat produced on the farm is sold locally to Jaspers and then on to outlets including Ginsters and Philip Warren, a butcher in Launceston.

Growing Crops

To feed the livestock, the farm aims to be self-sufficient in grain and forage feeds.

Crops grown on the farm include winter-sown barley and oats, spring-sown beans, stubble turnips, forage maize and grass leys (fields planted to grass on a rotation with other crops) for silage, hay and grass production.

Barley and oats are harvested in August, using our combine harvester. We harvest the beans in September and forage maize, by contractors, in October.

Silage production continues throughout the summer. Silage is, in effect, naturally "pickled" grass, and provides a palatable and nutritious foodstuff for our livestock during the winter months.

The remainder of the farmland supports permanent pasture, which provides grazing for our livestock.



Renewable Energy

Most recently, *Miscanthus*, which is commonly known as "Elephant Grass" because it is so tall, has also been grown on the farm.



This is a renewable energy crop, and its fields also provide a good habitat for rabbits, deer, other mammals and a wide range of insects, which are a food source for many birds.

The stems - which, unlike Bamboo, are solid rather than hollow - are harvested each spring when the canes have dried. Currently, there are no power plants which can use this

renewable energy in the local area, so the crop from Deer Park is chopped and the dust is removed so that the cuttings can be used as horse bedding.

Diversification

Like many farm businesses, the Howletts have diversified into other activities.



They provide accommodation for holidaymakers in three self-catering holiday cottages on the farm. In recent years, three authentic tipis - based on North American Sioux design - have also been added, to offer an excitingly different and 'green' stay in the Tamar Valley.



Because the farm formerly lay within the historic royal Deer Park, there are no Public Footpaths across its land. However, access for the public is offered along "Permissive Paths", and through frequent farm walks and open days.

In particular, the family spends time leading educational visits for schools and colleges, as well as farm walks for the general public and special interest groups.

