

FRANCES SEDGWICK
Pasture Fed Beef from her Pedigree Dexter Cattle
Storrington, West Sussex



Farming in an Economic and Environmentally Sustainable Manner

I am a small-scale lady farmer producing quality grass-fed Dexter beef from within the South Downs National Park.

Following a chronic and debilitating illness in 2007, I established my herd of Greyfriars Dexters in 2010 as a way back to health and to put into practice my passion and beliefs about producing quality food in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way. I had gained a wealth of experience through my long employment with the Goodwood Estate, where I was an integral part of the conception and development of their organic food brands business up until I was disabled by M.E. My passion was further enhanced when I was studying part-time for a degree in Countryside Management at Brighton University and qualified in 2010, gaining the Top Student Award.

After graduating I was looking to form a new work lifestyle that fitted in with my health and so the concept of producing my own quality beef was born. My aim was to establish an efficient and sustainable farming system, producing a quality product raised solely on pasture that would benefit both the environment and human health.

I chose the Dexter not only for its fine, connoisseur beef, but also for their hardy nature, longevity and their use as a grazing tool.

I produced my first beef in 2012 via a box scheme to the local community. I also supplied The Hungry Guest in Petworth who contacted me, keen to form a relationship with a local Dexter beef producer. My Dexter beef continues to be a sought after product in their shop and is sold as a Christmas speciality. Demand for my product has continued to grow and I have since been contacted by other specialist butchers in the locality keen to sell my Dexter beef, including Garlic Wood Farm Butchers in Steyning, who strive to work with farmers with a passion for the preservation of traditional livestock breeds and the conservation of the environment.

I am a member of the South Downs Land Managers Group and at a meeting in 2014 I was approached about using my Dexters for conservation grazing projects in the South Downs National Park. I am now assisting the Steyning Downland Scheme with the restoration of ancient chalk downland following the cessation of grazing many years back. The Steyning Downland Scheme, set up as a charity in 2009, comprises 73 hectares of chalk downland adjacent to Steyning on land

owned by the Wiston Estate. The areas covered by the scheme are all Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNIs), designated for their chalk grassland flora fauna by West Sussex County Council. The main threat to the site's ecological value is unmanaged natural succession and the invasion of the chalk grassland by scrub and coarse grasses. My Dexters play an important role in eradicating this threat.

Sustainability goes beyond being purely an environmental issue and includes economic viability as well as social acceptability. Without a viable outlet for my beef my Dexters would not be grazing this conservation site. Garlic Wood Farm, to whom I supply, is a family-run butchery with their shop in Steyning High Street, dedicated to selling sustainably farmed meat from partner producers farming slow-maturing native and rare-breed livestock. We have formed a perfect partnership, where each party takes pride in the quality of their produce and share the same beliefs that farming and the rearing of livestock can be done in harmony with, and for the benefit of, the natural environment.

Interdependent relationships are key to sustainable farming, not only in economic terms but also in terms of the acceptance and enhancement of the local community. The Steyning Downland Scheme engages the local community with over 120 volunteers involved, including a team of Lookerers who keep a daily check on my cattle. Education plays an important part in the scheme, and the local school uses the site for study purposes. I am very keen to promote environmental education and I am always on hand at the Steyning Downland Scheme's promotional events to talk about my Dexters and conservation grazing. In June 2015 I was invited to talk to the SDNPA's Members about my role in the scheme and the benefits of using Dexter cattle for such purposes as well as the pleasure and benefit they give to the local community.

My cattle live in a natural environment and graze extensively using a rotational system to maintain good soil condition. This, together with the avoidance of chemical inputs, enhances the biodiversity of the chalk grassland of the South Downs National Park in which they graze. The breeding cows are kept on the home grassland, with calves left to suckle for around ten months, and the steers move over to the Steyning Downland on weaning where they stay until they are sent for beef at 30 months of age. A sustainable food system is important to me, involving a close connection between producer and consumer. The localised marketing strategies that I strive for mean shorter distances from the farm to the dinner plate, to the benefit of the environment and the welfare of the animal.

All animals are fed a 100% natural grass diet. Pasture farming takes a natural, holistic approach to food production and is a sustainable system producing healthy animal foods year after year. Scientific research shows that grass-fed beef has many health benefits: it is low in saturated fats and high in omega-3 essential fatty acids, with high levels of CLA, vitamin E and folic acid. Pasture farming is also better for the environment, being a solar-powered food chain transforming sunlight into protein with a positive carbon footprint. Grasslands build up soil organic matter, taking carbon from the atmosphere and locking it below ground.

The way I farm is a sustainable, ecosystem approach to agriculture. What I have created is a rewarding system of livestock production, delivering high standards of animal welfare, enhancing biodiversity and providing a quality product with full traceability from field to fork.

*Frances Sedgwick
Greyfriars Dexters
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