

# A 2020 REFLECTION FROM JAYNE AT JACOBS LADDER FARMS

Jacob's  
Ladder

Traditional farming  
and butchery

Our blog this month is from our main organic beef and sheep farmer Jayne Duveen.

Together with her husband Michael, they raise, butcher and sell organic, grass-fed beef and lamb from a beautiful family farm in East Sussex. Their farming practices seek to respect the ancient Forest environment in which we live, and the Sussex cattle and Romney sheep are raised traditionally on the permanent pastures within the Ashdown Forest.

These breeds have been part of the fauna here for many hundreds of years and their hardy nature and non-intensive rearing make them ideally suited to slow maturity.

Here Jayne reflects on 2020 on the farm, a challenge it was!





Sussex  
Peasant

LOCAL FOOD FARMED WELL

**'As we begin the new year, I want to share with everyone who has supported Jacob's Ladder what 2020 was like for us, as farmers, and what we hope for during the year ahead.**

In March last year, when the country first went into lockdown, our meat sales soared, along with all the other local produce sold through Ed at The Sussex Peasant. During such strange times it was both encouraging and heartening to see so many people wanting to support local food. I heard that many customers in turn appreciated the flavour and richness that comes from the producers that supply Ed.

The increase in meat sales for us was not only a blessing it was a necessity as being small, tenant farmers of just 100 acres (there aren't many of us left!) we also rely on making, cooking and selling our burgers at local events such as Elderflower Fields Festival. Events have been one of the biggest casualties of the lockdown and Government restrictions.

We have not, as yet, been eligible for any Government assistance. We took the 'Bounce-Back' loan but with the recent second, and now third lockdowns, we are now left wondering when we will get the opportunity to 'Bounce-Back' and whether the loan is going to stretch far enough to tide us over until we can start doing events again.

A farm like ours, farmed sustainably, can produce ten finished beef animals a year and 60 lambs, so it doesn't take much imagination to work out that by the time we've paid our costs, without the events income there's very little money left.

# Always Peasant

LOCAL FOOD



The other hit that we weren't expecting last year was the drought. After one of the wettest winters we'd experienced in the seven years we've been here, we then experienced one of the driest summers. Between March and September 2020, we hardly saw a drop of rain. We weren't alone. All of our neighbouring farmers experienced the same.

Last summer, we produced just 20% of the hay that we would normally produce in a year. For the first time since we started farming twenty years ago, we had to buy in hay. We were able to keep this to a minimum of £3,000, and thanks to a local tree surgeon who regularly brings us free woodchips, we avoided buying in straw. This winter, for the first time, we are experimenting with bedding the cattle down on woodchips over the winter months. Farming how we do certainly leads to creative thinking!

The unusual weather conditions and the loss of income from the pandemic have caused us to read up on other farmers who have faced desperate times. One book that we have found to be a particularly good read has been 'Dirt to Soil' by Gabe Brown. After a series of crop failures that threatened his livelihood, he made bold changes that led him and his family on an amazing journey into a type of farming that is now reshaping the future of agriculture and the way farmers, consumers and policy makers think about sustainability.





**"To farm in a way that works with nature rather than trying to control it."**

We took that bold step 17 years ago to become sustainable farmers and to farm in a way that works with nature rather than trying to control it.

So, our vision for this coming year is to continue to have compassion for the animals and the earth that is in our care, to hope and have faith that many more people will support our way of farming, and to have good will towards all the people that we encounter in our daily lives.

— A 2020 reflection from Jayne at Jacobs Ladder Farms'

**A note from Ed of The Sussex Peasant**

I hope you enjoyed this read. In our efforts to further showcase what is going on throughout the year at our farms and for us all to get closer to our food and our producers we will be creating a little series of these reflections in 2021.

