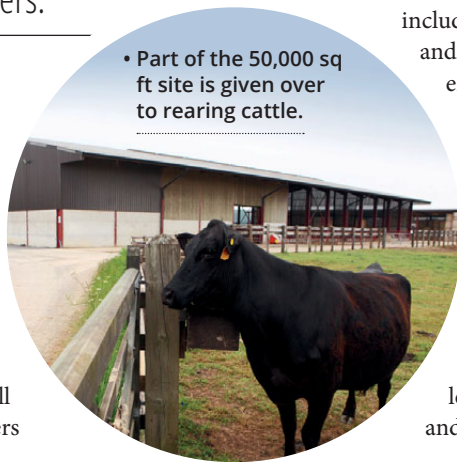


Meat from God's own country

Turning adversity into opportunity, Yorkshire Dales Meat Company came into being as a consequence of the foot and mouth outbreak, as Ron Alalouff discovers.

Farming in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales for more than 100 years, the Knox family are the proud owners of Yorkshire Dales Meat Company. And rightly so, as the business supplies some of the major supermarkets in the north of England, as well as restaurants, hotels, caterers and event venues.

The company was founded in 2004 on the back of a century worth of farming. During the foot and mouth outbreak, Stephen Knox started selling meat at local markets and, realising the value of selling local products to local people, progressed to supplying local shops and then gradually widened his customer base across northern England.

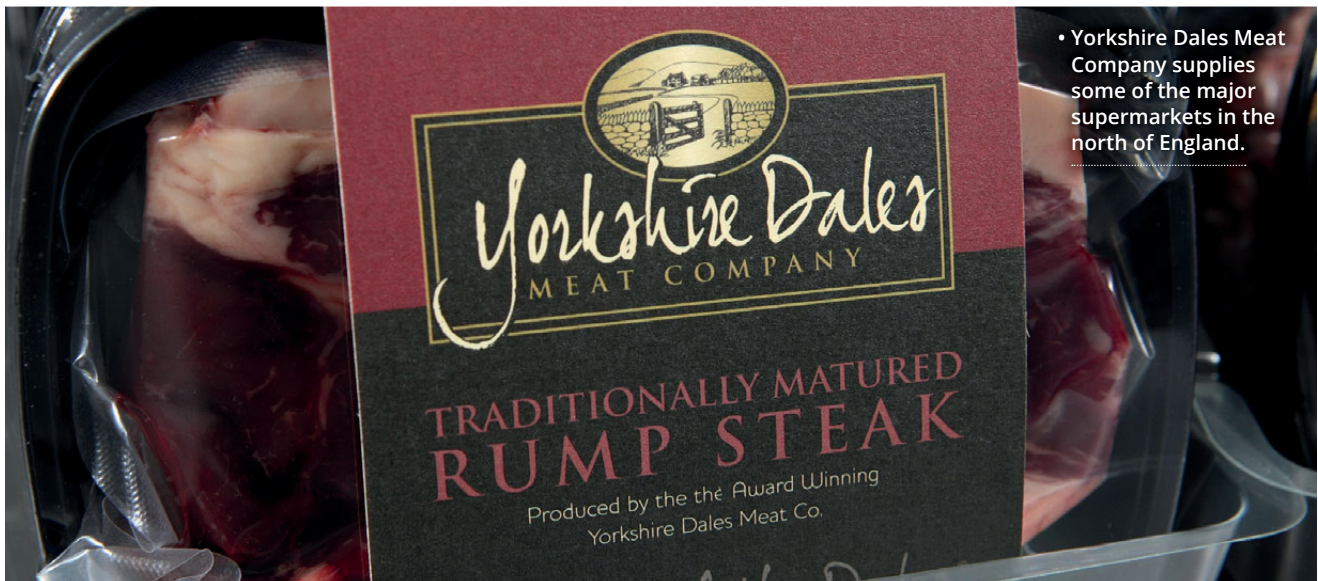


• Part of the 50,000 sq ft site is given over to rearing cattle.

The 50,000 sq ft site near Patrick Brompton in Wensleydale includes a 9,000 sq ft production facility where beef, lamb, pork and poultry is cut and prepared, and where sausage and burger production takes place. The rest of the site is given over to rearing cattle, including a newly developed herd of Aberdeen Angus, and to industrial storage. Currently the business employs 31 staff.

The company values its environmental credentials which include:

- Gravel from its land having been used in the construction of a state-of-the-art cutting plant
- Water used in the factory is sourced from an underground borehole on site; waste water leaves the factory via a reed bed which treats and purifies the water
- All waste cardboard, glass and metal is recycled
- The site has a 50kWp roof-mounted solar voltaic system, resulting in an annual displacement of 14.45 tonnes
- The planting of a two-and-a-half acre broadleaved woodland area



• Yorkshire Dales Meat Company supplies some of the major supermarkets in the north of England.

Key dates:

- **1990** – Ceased milk production and set up a beef herd
- **1999** – Began trading as Yorkshire Dales Beef selling at local markets
- **2003** – Won the Yorkshire Independent Grocers Association local product of the year
- **2004** – Expanded with a 50,000 square foot facility
- **2006** – Jonathan Carter joins the business as general manager
- **2007** – James Knox joins the business as factory manager
- **2007** – First supermarket deal
- **2008** – Won the Deliciously Yorkshire prepared meat award
- **2009** – Won producer of the year at the annual International Business Forum Awards
- **2013** – First products supplied to Asda
- **2015** – First products supplied to Co-op
- **2016** – Acquired Ackroyds Restaurant Meats

Current managing director James Knox — son of founder Stephen — undertook a business studies degree at Lancaster University before working for a meat and seafood importer/exporter. He joined the family firm as factory manager in 2007, and was financial director before assuming the top job in 2015.

“We were all very keen that James didn’t just stride out of school and into Yorkshire Dales Meat Company at a senior level, as it wouldn’t have been right for him or the business,” said Stephen Knox. “Instead, he went away to study and grafted hard elsewhere before coming here to learn the ropes and earn his stripes.”

Stephen and James’s mother are still involved in Yorkshire Dales Meat Company, though they took a backseat role after James took over at the helm.

Personal touch

The firm is very proud of the fact that its deliveries are carried out using its own liveried, refrigerated delivery fleet and by its own staff. With butchers starting work at 4.00am in order to fulfil orders later that day, they deliver six days a week and offer next day delivery in many cases. ▶



• James Knox, Yorkshire Dales Meat Company's managing director.

◀ “Our delivery service reflects the quality edge that we have and I don’t think we would be able to offer such a personal service if we outsourced our deliveries. Many of the drivers have worked for the company for years and have built up good relationships with customers on their routes.”

Much of the meat is prepared to order, though the company keeps a stock of regular products such as steaks and roasting joints, which are produced the day before they are sold. All meat is vacuum packed, while burgers and sausages are tray wrapped, then everything is marked with a code so that it can be traced back to the supplier and date of production.

Orders are then picked and labelled, usually on the day of delivery to customers. Specialist products — such as wild boar sausages — can be produced to order. On the retail side, the company supplies Asda and Co-op stores in Yorkshire while foodservice customers include Leeds Brewery, Sheffield International Venues group and Rockcliffe Hall in Darlington. All products for hotel and restaurant customers and for supermarkets are Yorkshire Dales Meat branded — the company does not supply own label products.

“Our Red Tractor accredited beef is from Yorkshire and we try and source all our meat as close to us as we can. We have close links with a number of suppliers who we have had relationships with for over ten years and they share our commitment to the highest standards of food quality and provenance,” said James.

In addition to regular poultry products, Yorkshire Dales Meat can also supply imported products including black leg chicken, poussin and duck from France, bronze turkey from local farms, dry wax plucked Barbary and Gressingham duck and a wide range of game. Sausage varieties are pork and leek, caramelised onion, chilli, chipotle, black pudding, Cumberland and sage, pork farmhouse, venison and game. Burger options are lamb and mint, pork and apple, chilli, onion and koftas.

“We try and source all our meat as close to us as we can.”

After a tentative few years, the business is growing healthily — revenues were up over 10% during the last year, with annual turnover now approaching £3.5 million and though it currently has no online presence, it is considering launching into e-commerce in 2018. The future is looking nothing but positive. ■■



• The company’s production staff in action.

Here’s the beef! The lowdown on the company’s products

Beef: Although Yorkshire Dales Meat Company raises its own cattle at Mill Close farm, this does not meet the high demand for beef. So the company sources beef from other local farmers who share its values and who supply quality products. Where possible, beef is sourced from the Yorkshire Dales.



Pork: Yorkshire Dales Meat Company offers a range of cuts, including belly, chops, steaks and ribs. To ensure high quality, it has laid down minimum specifications with suppliers. A probing method is used to

measure the levels of fat on a carcass. This should be at least 8mm to ensure succulence, but should not exceed 13mm.

Lamb: This is specially selected for its size and leanness, resulting in minimum wastage. Again, it is sourced, where possible, from the Yorkshire Dales region. In addition, the company sells mutton which, with its fuller flavour and claims of sustainability it says, is becoming more popular as well as representing good value.

Poultry: The company provides a wide range of poultry products. For Sunday lunches, chicken supremes and corn-fed supremes are a popular choice, offering a cost-effective way to deliver a substantial chicken portion to diners. Imported poultry offerings include corn-fed chicken, black leg chicken, poussin and duck.

Game: This offers a premium menu option and, the company says, is becoming increasingly popular due to its succulence and low fat qualities. Products include venison, grouse, pheasant, guinea fowl and partridge.