

# Small business of the month

## Pheasants' Hill Farm, Killyleagh

By Amy Leonard



**A**t Christmas time we all have enough on our plates before we even get round to worrying what we'll be putting on our plates.

Luckily sourcing quality meat shouldn't be a hassle because Pheasants' Hill Farm will deliver everything you need to your door, from the bacon for breakfast to the turkey and ham for the grand finale.

Alan Bailey, his wife Janis and daughter Julia are the brains and brawn behind the operation, where all the meat is free range, grass fed and seriously good.

Located just outside Killyleagh, the family-run farm produces free range pigs that are hand-reared naturally, sustainably and in a way that is as good for the environment as it is for their customers.

They run a farm shop on site and sell their wares at St George's Market every Saturday, as well as having an extensive website where you can order online for delivery or collection. Janis and Julia also look

after the outside catering side of things, for everything from small parties to weddings.

Business is good, but it may not have been a business at all had it not been for a fateful sequence of events that led the family in this direction.

Reared in the countryside of Fermanagh, Alan was warned off farming by his father who saw where the industry was headed. He told his sons that with the government sourcing food on the global market at the cheapest price it would not be a viable life for them.

Alan moved to Belfast to study and became a medical electronic engineer. Life in a busy city did not sit well with him. "I just think it's madness to be confined in a concentrated place," he said, a principle he's taken from his own experience and applied to his farm.

Upon moving back to the country he started keeping pigs as hobby, an outlet from the stresses of his day job in a large telecoms company, and decided to see if he could do it all naturally.

"I wanted to use old breeds. I didn't want anything to do with modern food, which is on the edge of genetic modification, so I used the old predecessors that man hadn't intervened in." And so the farm raises Gloucester Old Spots and has the largest herd of Tamworth pigs in Ireland, committing itself to maintaining the genetic diversity of their chemical-free pigs. It was when Janis left her job as marketing consultant for PWC and opened her own B&B that things started to grow. They decided to produce bacon from the pigs for the guests and Alan said it was simply by word of mouth that people heard of the quality and began making requests.

"We'd both decided to do something we like for a change. The whole thing just sort of grew by accident, not by design."

When the internet bubble burst, the telecom company Alan worked for downsized on a huge scale. He took redundancy and used the money to scale up his work with the pigs.

Pheasants' Hill now also produces their own free range chicken and eggs from their rare breed Dorking hens and cockerels, and supply free range products from a small band of like-minded local farmers and breeders.

It is these partnerships that allow them to offer everything from lamb to goose, beef to homemade preserves, atop their own products for your festive feast. They even have packages made up for their customers convenience, be it the lazy breakfast box of bacon, eggs and sausages, or meat and accompanying, perfectly matched chutneys and sauces.

A lot has changed for the Baileys in the last 19 years, and Alan has no regrets of leaving the stresses of the commercial world. "After all that, I didn't mind keeping pigs" he said, "and when you're working for yourself you've only yourself to argue with." ■