

RURALREALITY

Nutrient dense farm products

Seaview Farms, Ballybogey, Bushmills, jointly created in 2020 by Shay O'Neill and Susan Chestnutt on their respective family farms, is considered to be one of the first regenerative farms in Northern Ireland with a mission to produce nutrient dense 100 per cent outdoor-raised heritage breed animal products. **Ian Harvey** called at the Chestnutt farm to meet the young couple and find out more about their ambitious plans.

THE Ballybogey Road is a busy main tourist route to Portrush from Ballymoney, leading to the Causeway Coast and the Chestnutt family farm which is only a matter of a mile or two from the fabled Whiterock coastline.

A car was pulling out of the gateway to the farm, which is set well down below and several fields away from the roadway, as I waited for oncoming traffic before turning across to the farm lane.

Arriving at the farmyard I negotiated parked traffic and customers lining up at the popular milk vending machine, which has become a feature of James and Ruth Chestnutt's dairy farm, where the Holstein cattle are now being developed with a three-way ProCross, to include Viking Red and Montbeliarde breeds to produce an even creamier milk.

"Can I help you?" asked a young lady, introducing herself as Alison. Later I discovered that she is married to Susan's brother William, who runs the dairy and they both look after the vending machine.

A quick phone call from Alison and Shay soon appeared in the Seaview Farms delivery van, stepping out to meet me in the yard with a broad smile and welcome. Straight away he offered to take me off to view their outdoor free-range pigs on a hill nearby while we waited for Susan to return from her day's work as an occupational therapist.

Borrowing a farm pickup, he drove me up the lane onto the main road and then up another lane to a hilltop rambling field with views of the sea in the distance.

The field, which is rented, is simply natural grass and whins where the Berkshire pigs and their offspring were nosing through grass and churned up soil.

They were ranging around their large paddock behind a single strand solar powered electric fence, and



SEAVIEW: Susan Chestnutt and Shay O'Neill, of Seaview Farms, Ballybogey, Bushmills, considered to be the first regenerative farm in Northern Ireland producing 100 per cent outdoor-raised heritage breed animal products. FW-1A.

immediately skipped over to see us.

"We have 20 sows, 16 of which are Berkshire with the rest Tamworth and Large Black.

"They overwinter on marshy ground

on my family's land at Derrytresk, near Coalisland in County Tyrone, fed on a special ration made up for us by Irwin's Feed, Eglish, and then after farrowing we move some of them to

this ground with shelter from the whins.

"Depending on the weather, the day before moving them to a fresh paddock we heavily over-sow the ground with a

multi-seed mix (generally 12 different species of plants) which contains, for example, seeds like vetch, turnips, radishes and say a brassica or a cereal like rye.

"The diversity of seed is also good for wildlife.

"The pigs will eat some of the seeds, but because they're well fed with our special feed ration and gain so much from rooting around in the soil, even eating some grass, they trample most of the seed into the ground.

"We call it sowing with the power of the hoof!

"That vacated paddock is then left to grow for anything from 60 to 90 days depending on the weather and growth before we move a good number of the Chestnutt family's beef cattle on to it to graze and naturally manure, moving them off after a day of concentrated cropping and trampling some of the cover crop into the soil.

"We bring the pigs in to graze on the roots and strip leaves off the crops, trampling more into the soil and dunging as they go.

"The circle continues, moving cattle and pigs ahead of each other from paddock to paddock in a mob grazing system.

"Come the autumn we'll place young turkeys into the mob grazing system in moveable units which are shifted more often around each paddock.

"They will help with the soil structure by aerating it to pick out problem insects and, of course, manure as they go, adding their own level of growth to the plants and creating an even more naturally healthy soil.

"A similar system works on the Derrytresk land in Tyrone, grazing our Stabiliser and Angus cows crossed with our Texas Beefmaster bull 'Bubba', who we imported as an embryo in 2018, the first import of the Beefmaster breed to the UK.

"The 26 beef cattle mob graze together with our in-lamb flock of 60 EasyCare ewes, which are then moved on having eaten 30 per cent and trampled 30 per cent, with pigs to follow and then behind them we have chickens being placed on the emptied paddocks, frequently sliding them around in mobile units onto the recently grazed ground.

"During the season we now aim to produce 200 pasture-raised chickens each month fed on a customised meal ration, moving them each day until October.

"Last year we produced 600 birds and they were all processed and sold within two months.

"It's what we call working with nature as opposed to fighting it.

"Evidently there's considerable stock movement, feeding and animal attention involved, so Susan and I rely on support from both of our families; Ruth and James in Susan's case and as far as I'm concerned, my uncle and my mother Siobhan and father Tommy, not to mention my sister Teri, and we couldn't do without that generous help, especially since Susan



HERITAGE: The Berkshire pigs of Seaview Farms, which live outdoors all year round, are heritage pigs, the oldest recorded pedigree pig breed in Britain, with its origins in the 17th century. FW-1B.



OUTDOORS: Bought as day-old chicks, these young chickens are reared and moved every day to a fresh area of grass to aid regeneration, control problem insects, naturally fertilise and aerate the soil. FW-1C.