

THE SHETLAND ABATTOIR OPENS



Lamb, pork and beef will be produced to the highest standard with advanced hanging, maturation and butchery techniques adopted. A key priority has been the livestock handling arrangements which have been developed specifically to avoid any stress to the animals.

Chairman of The Shetland Abattoir Cooperative Ltd, John Alex Cromarty, said: "The community has been looking forward to this for some time and it's great to finally have the facility available for the industry to use.

"It's very encouraging to note that although we've only been operating in a commissioning mode to date, we've been able to reach close to 70 per cent capacity, which clearly demonstrates the high demand for the facility.

"When deciding to go ahead with the construction of the new abattoir, our key aim was to improve the services available to Shetland crofters and I believe that we have absolutely delivered on this.

"It's a fantastic development that will enable the agricultural industry to add value to their basic product, and it will also ensure that Shetland meat is more accessible to restaurants, butchers and hotels - both locally and further afield."

There was clearly a lot of enthusiasm and optimism displayed at the ceremony with a collective feeling that the new abattoir will help secure the viability of the industry for years to come.

Shetland's new £437,000 abattoir was officially opened on the 20 October 2011 by Shetland Islands Council's political leader, Josie Simpson. Members from both the Shetland Abattoir Cooperative Ltd and Shetland Livestock Marketing Group attended the ceremony and had a tour around the new facility.

Commenting on the event, Josie Simpson said: "I truly believe that this will be a great asset to Shetland's crofting community. The agricultural industry here in the isles has always been a vital part of our economy so I am very pleased to see

an expansion of services that will facilitate its development for the future."

After several months of testing systems and commissioning equipment the new abattoir is now fully operational and, for the first time in Shetland, the facility exists for sheep, cattle, pigs and goats to be processed from slaughter to a finished butchered product.

It is fully equipped with two large chill rooms, which enable carcasses to be chilled in the most efficient manner and a butchery room, which provides customers with the option of having their meat cut professionally and matured to modern standards. The new facilities will open up new opportunities for farmers and crofters who aspire to develop and grow their own businesses.

SERVICE AND QUALITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN PRICE

Martin Wishart, the Michelin-starred chef based in Edinburgh, only uses the finest and freshest ingredients in his restaurants so it's great to see that, as well as using Shetland lamb regularly in his Leith restaurant, he has included a roast leg of Shetland lamb on his winter menu at his new city centre restaurant, The Honours.

Selecting the right suppliers is very important to Martin and the factors he considers when sourcing ingredients is described in Scotland on Sunday (27 November): "When choosing new suppliers, we look for consistency of delivery and the quality of the product. Price is usually the last thing discussed."

If we are to create the premium for Shetland Lamb that it deserves - and make sure that it appears on the menus of top restaurants - we need to deliver on both quality and service every time. One below par lamb or late delivery and a lucrative order is often lost. Part of native Shetland lamb's attraction is its seasonality - today's customers love its exclusivity, almost as much as they love the taste and provenance, so let's listen to our customers and make sure that the word 'Shetland' before 'lamb' means the absolute best - every time!



Scoop Wholefoods in Lerwick is serious about food and sources as much local produce as possible.

They offer a retail outlet for local producers, so if you're interested in growing your own vegetables, Scoop Wholefoods may be able to sell them for you. Please contact Ann on 01595 695888 for more information.

2011 SALES SEASON OVERVIEW

Auctioneer, Rod Mackenzie rounds up this year's season: "I'm pleased to say that there has been a steady trade from start to finish, with good consistent prices received throughout the sales.

"It is also very encouraging to note that cattle sales are up by £76,116 from 2010. Throughput for both cattle and sheep has also increased by 85 and 68 respectively in comparison to last year."

With the opening of the new abattoir we can all look forward confidently for this growth trend to continue into 2012 and onwards.

STOCKBRIDGE FARMERS MARKET

SLMG has had a real insight into buying trends and people's opinion of native Shetland lamb by taking a stand at Stockbridge Farmers Market on 30 October and again on 27 November.

Growing week on week this exciting new market began trading in September, and already it's attracting in the region of 1,500 people every Sunday and has nearly reached its capacity of 40 stalls.

Our stall has, on both occasions, attracted a lot of interest with many visitors keen to give Shetland lamb a try. The rarity of the breed, its size, natural lifestyle and diet, its provenance and PDO were all key selling points for customers on the first day. Second market day and those factors were still very relevant - but we were also pleased to see many repeat customers who had come along especially

to buy Shetland lamb again - they were so impressed that they wanted more. We were also delighted to count chefs, food writers and a supplier of top London restaurants amongst our customers.

Attending the market has been a great way of hearing, first hand, what people think of Shetland lamb. It has not only given us a real insight into how it should be marketed, we have managed to obtain a number of very good contacts and potential long-term customers along the way.

To find out more about the farmers market visit www.stockbridgemarket.com



SHETLAND FOOD FESTIVAL

This year's food festival was a great success, a real celebration of local produce. SLMG was a proud sponsor of the event, supplying native Shetland lamb and beef which featured heavily on the weekend's menu at the food theatre.

Scottish Chef of the Year, Neil Forbes from Café St Honoré in Edinburgh was this year's celebrity chef and, as an avid promoter of Scottish seasonal produce, he was very keen to try out Native Shetland lamb. Neil prepared Loin of Shetland lamb with Crushed Potatoes and Salsa Verde, a simple dish which is the best way to retain its fantastic flavour. He said: "It's sweet, tender and just falls apart in your mouth - native Shetland lamb is clearly a high quality product with such character".

Eunice Henderson and Glynn Wright also prepared some delicious dishes using local meat during their food demonstrations; you can find a copy of all the recipes at www.shetlandfoodfestival.co.uk

JANUARY'S RAM SALE

SLMG are holding a ram sale on Saturday 28 January 2012 at the Lerwick marts, with cattle and all types of sheep also getting auctioned off. If you are interested in selling your stock at this event please contact Hazel Mackenzie on 01595 696300 or email hazel@tasteshetland.com.

There is also material left over following the construction of the new abattoir and mart upgrades which will be auctioned off after the livestock sale. A full list of all items will be displayed on our website www.slmg.co.uk prior to the sale.

CHAIRMAN'S WORDS by Ronnie Eunson

The abattoir has had an impressive first season. By the end of this calendar year, after only four months of operation, 100 head of cattle and 80 pigs will have been processed.

Pig numbers in Shetland were always guesswork, but we have already had around 50 through the plant so far. A dark cloud in the form of new pig regulations with strange tagging requirements will hopefully not put folk off keeping pigs for their own use.

Technically, the whole process system has offered only a few problems, none of which have proved too intractable. The arrangement whereby stock is received into the mart lairage has proved helpful for consignors from the isles and further parts.

Stock are penned up with feeding and water in a clean, secure situation. Ante-mortem checks by the vet can then take place prior to entry to the abattoir, from which stock cannot be removed back to the croft or farm. Any issues detected at this stage can then be addressed without causing irretrievable losses for owners.

Many folk are particularly concerned about the slaughtering. If this is performed poorly then the resulting stress can have a detrimental impact

on the meat quality. The many very positive comments that we have received about the meat produced, gives a clear indication that the abattoir is operating to a very professional standard.

The abattoir itself must physically be capable of doing the business, but equally, without skilled staff the whole job would not work. The workforce has shown a kind of determined effort and pride to maintain standards, which will ensure that the facility has a decent future.

Only one of the two chills is running permanently - the first one is for the newly slaughtered stock to cool in. Carcasses enter this chill at 37 degrees and are slowly cooled down to around 16 degrees before being moved into the second chill where they will stabilise at around three degrees. Chilling too rapidly results in 'fore-shortening' and therefore tough meat. A gradual lowering of temperatures means the fibres relax.

Many producers have been using the butchery room where a trained butcher can break down the meat into primal cuts, slice, mince and package into portions tailored to individual needs. This means folk can get whatever job they want done without any hassle. Put simply, a beast can be delivered, then later boxed meat can be uplifted, truly a first class service.

RECIPE IDEAS

SLMG are looking for a selection of recipes using lamb. We'd like to gather ideas using a variety of different cuts, particularly those that are less commonly used, for example belly flanks and neck fillets. If you have a favourite dish which you would like to share with us, whether it is traditional or a more modern approach, please email through your recipe to kirsty.halcrow@shaw-online.com

SEASONS GREETINGS

Ronnie, Hazel, Peter, Lauraine and all the staff at SLMG would like to take this opportunity to wish their members a very Merry Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

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