

Menter Moch Cymru support gives farm confidence to diversify into pigs

Menter Moch Cymru has been the catalyst to a new 1000-head pig finishing enterprise in Pembrokeshire.

Aled Thomas says his family is unlikely to have diversified into pig production without the advice, guidance and support of the Menter Moch Cymru initiative, which provides free training, support and information resources to pig keepers in Wales.

“I don’t think we would have gone into this without Menter Moch Cymru because it would just have been too daunting,” admits Aled, who farms the 120 hectare mixed farming operation with his father, Ken, and older brother, Rhydian.

What they have created is the biggest commercial pig finishing business in Pembrokeshire.

The venture started because Aled and Rhydian both wanted to farm but the scale of the existing business, with suckler cows, arable and potatoes, didn’t allow for that.

Aled had gained knowledge about pig farming while studying for his degree in agriculture at Harper Adams University and the family had discussed this as an option for expansion.

They attended an event on setting up a pig enterprise hosted by Menter Moch Cymru in Pembrokeshire.

“We didn’t want go into pigs blindly, to build a shed without knowing anything about it, so we went along to that,” Aled recalls.

“That meeting really inspired us and made us want to look at the idea more closely.”

An advisor from Menter Moch Cymru visited them at their farm, Hill Leys, at Portfield Gate, near Haverfordwest.

“He spent a long time at the farm and pointed us in the right direction of who to speak to for contacts, shed design ideas, costings, the pitfalls to avoid, and snippets from the industry that you might not be aware of as an outsider, and arranged for us to visit established units,” Aled explains.

The family invested £220,000 in a building with capacity to accommodate 1,000 pigs in a straw-based system from an average of 35kg to finishing at around 110kg liveweight.

The business took delivery of its first batch of pigs in August 2021 and is aiming for around 3.5 cycles a year.

They buy the white Landrace weaners from Pilgrims UK, one of the largest meat packers in the world, and also sell the finished pigs to them on contract.

The unit is Red Tractor and Freedom Foods assured. **“Menter Moch Cymru helped us with the audits which was very useful,”** says Aled. **“They also provided signage advising on protocols such as foot dipping.”**

There was also support to produce a herd health plan. Through this Menter Moch Cymru initiative, the Thomas’

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“Menter Moch Cymru is always at the end of the line when we need help and what they can’t help with they know someone who can.”

were able to access 100% funding towards an initial herd health plan, followed by further support for a review in subsequent years.

Aled says the package of support has made all the difference, between his family starting the new business, and not.

“One of the most valuable things is the contacts, I think people underestimate how having contacts helps a business in general.”

Aled divides his time between the business and his London-based job writing reports on the global rice market as well as his new appointment as a county councillor.

“If it hadn’t been for expanding into pigs I would potentially be living and working full time in London and might have lost interest in agriculture, but instead I can make a living from farming.”