

Welsh hill farm expands direct meat sales with Menter Moch Cymru's help

A Welsh hill farm which adds value to its beef and sheep enterprises with direct sales has expanded its range to include pig meat thanks to an innovative Menter Moch Cymru initiative.

Ethan Williams had never encountered a pig before he entered a pig finishing competition run by Menter Moch Cymru in conjunction with Wales YFC.

"I joked to my brother that we should keep pigs and I then found myself not only entering the competition, but winning," recalls Ethan, who farms with his brother, Ben, their grandmother, Sue Williams, and mother, Karen, at Garth Uchaf Farm near Pentyrch, Cardiff.

His prize was five weaners and advice, guidance and support on pig keeping delivered by Menter Moch Cymru.

He had opted for Welsh pigs to maintain the farm's allegiance to native breeds. **"Our sheep are Welsh Mountains and our cattle Welsh Blacks so it was a natural step to have Welsh pigs,"** says Ethan.

Under the guidance of his Menter Moch Cymru mentor, the gaps in his knowledge about pigs was quickly filled.

"It was a very steep learning curve for me so that support was really important, without that training I would never have gone into pigs," he admits.

"Pig nutrition is completely different from the sheep and cattle I had been used to and I hadn't realised how hard they could be to handle so without the help I received from Menter Moch Cymru I wouldn't have felt confident enough to do the job."

When those five pigs achieved slaughter weight, their meat was sold through the

farm's meat boxes. Menter Moch Cymru again stepped in to help, with training and webinars on marketing, regulation and many other useful topics.

The feedback the Williams' received from their customers to those initial pork sales was so positive that they now fattening batches of around 15 animals in loose housing, buying the animals as seven-week-old piglets from a farm five miles away and taking them through to finishing.

The next step is to have their own breeding sows, to close the 'fork to plate' circle.

Ethan's enthusiasm coupled with the knowledge he gained from Menter Moch Cymru training courses – 11 so far - has meant he was able to instigate changes on the farm quickly to integrate the pigs.

He has also introduced some of the tips and ideas he picked up on a three day Menter Moch Cymru-funded study tour to Devon in March 2022, when he visited some of the most successful and innovative producers in the UK.

"It was one of the best ways to learn, to see how others were doing it," says Ethan. **"It was very insightful, we even had practical sessions about different ways with charcuterie and how to sell it, definitely an area we want to get into in the future."**

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Ethan recently signed up to the Menter Moch Cymru and Farming Connect Measure to Manage online programme.

This, he says, has been invaluable in helping him to manage the data associated with the pig business, as too is an accompanying booklet.

"I had been putting all the numbers into Excel but with Measure to Manage everything is so much more clear and obvious, such as how much weight the stock have gained. It has made everything much more efficient."

The business is currently in the process of developing a butchery facility on the farm, to expand its offering of cuts and products.

Ethan's progress in the pig industry has been remarkable, helped in part by the knowledge he has also gained from being a member of the Menter Moch Cymru Virtual Small Scale Producer Group.

"Entering that competition and the support we have had has helped us get into pigs, to diversify the business further and to add an additional income for the farm," he says.