

Pig herd performance lifts by 37% thanks to Menter Moch Cymru support

A pig producer calculates that his 25-sow herd is producing 150 more piglets a year, an increase in performance of over 37%, as a direct result of knowledge he gained on breeding and animal health through Menter Moch Cymru training.

Performance in Kyle Holford and Lauren Smith's herd of Large Black x Duroc sows sits in the top 20% for outdoor herds which is all the more remarkable because they run a rare breed cross pig.

"Through the training we have received from Menter Moch Cymru, specifically around the timing of service, the body condition of the sow and farrowing and weaning management, we have become so much more efficient," says Kyle. "I reckon we are producing an extra 150 piglets a year."

Kyle and Lauren had no background in farming when they moved from London to Forest Coalpit Farm, near Abergavenny, in 2014 to establish a pig herd, selling the meat to family and friends.

They now have 25 breeding sows producing around 550 pigs a year, with the meat marketed directly to butchers locally and in London.

From the launch of Menter Moch Cymru in 2017, the couple tapped into the support available. **"We have benefited so much from the programme; it has supported us throughout our journey,"** says Kyle.

Kyle and Lauren have attended 32 training sessions, ranging from practical sessions on administering artificial insemination to butchery and processing, the latter of which they have put to good use on their on-farming cutting unit.

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"I can pinpoint every single talk and how we have improved on this and that aspect of the business as a result of it," says Kyle.

Their on-farm processing unit opened in April 2017.

"We bring the whole carcass back and butcher it here which not only saves on cost but we are able to produce a really good product precisely how we want to," Kyle explains.

Involvement with the Menter Moch Cymru programme has not only provided Kyle and Lauren with extensive knowledge on pig production but with one of the most valuable resources of all – contacts in the industry.

"The webinars and training have put us in contact with experts, some of the best in the industry, people we would never have known had it not been for Menter Moch Cymru," Kyle points out.

Menter Moch Cymru has also put the couple in touch with local pig farmers, through a Producer Group.

"It is nice to have that network of farmers in the area," says Kyle.

The couple have also had the opportunity to be involved in valuable research. A recent on-farm research trial, run by Menter Moch Cymru and Farming Connect, investigating the role of grazing pigs in diverse grasses on the fatty acid profile of pigmeat, showed a significant

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"We are in such a better place with a very efficient herd because of all the training and support. We are incredibly lucky to have Menter Moch Cymru in Wales"

increase in a-Linolenic acid (ALA).

There are known to be multiple benefits to humans from eating products containing ALA, including preventing heart attacks, lowering high blood pressure and cholesterol and reversing hardening in blood vessels. Kyle says the results could allow the business to add value by offering a unique selling point.

Kyle and Lauren have also taken advantage of Menter Moch Cymru study tours, to Cornwall in 2018 and to Devon earlier this year.

"The farmers we met were really inspirational about what is possible and the importance of using the story of the product in the marketing. That fed through to those of us taking part in the visits, providing that spark of inspiration," says Kyle.

The business also received funding from Menter Moch Cymru for a Herd Health Plan. As a direct result, the feed conversion efficiency ratio increased by 0.2.

Without the support of Menter Moch Cymru, Kyle believes the business would be in a different position to the one it is in today.