

Island Girls know their Beef



There can be few butchers' businesses that are run entirely by women but a trip to mainland Orkney reveals a butcher's shop where the ladies get it all their own way. Faced with their jobs evaporating as the store they worked in decided to pull the plug on their butchery operation, Barbara Sinclair and Elaine Venables decided to set up in business on their own just around the corner from the Day Today Store that had supplied their wages for a number of years.



So in October 2004 when David Harrold in the Dounby Store decided that they would cease their instore butchery operation, Elaine noticed the bric a brac shop on the corner was available for rental.

After a month of hard, nail busting work turning the bric a brac shop into a food safe environment, the transformation

was complete. The Dounby Store discontinued its meat preparation and Elaine and Barbara, alias The Dounby Butcher, took up the supply responsibility to the former employers and coupled that steady and existing trade with their own butcher's shop enterprise on St Andrews Day, 30th November 2004.



Sales have been really good but the ladies have worked hard and exploited all their contacts to drive the business forward to a stage where they are ready to address expanding sales off the islands.

Elaine has been in Orkney since coming north from Birmingham 27 years ago. Leaving her bookkeeping job behind to become a shop assistant at Dounby Store some 27 years ago, Elaine had never been on Orkney before but she settled immediately and stayed until now she is equal partner in the Dounby Butcher.

Barbara is born and bred in Orkney and is married to Rognvald. He has just won third prize in the UK contest for the Aberdeen Angus Herd of the Year.

Self appointed Procurement Officer for The Dounby Butcher, Barbara, finds that quality is easily sourced although price negotiations over the kitchen table at Unigarth Farm, Sandwick is likely to be unlike any other.



Barbara explained that price has to outbid that being offered from Scotbeef (on 20th April the price they had to beat for the pick of the crop was 233p per kilo deadweight.) "We have got to match that or he will go for the better price elsewhere. We pay on liveweight and that is the carrot since we pay for everything else."

Once the farmer sold them something they did not like. It never happened again!

The locally produced, Aberdeen Angus beef is hung for four weeks before Torfinn Craigie bones the beef for Dounby Butcher. The Craigie family have farmed at Hall of Yenstay in Orkney for no less than seven generations and the farm is now run by Torfinn who has developed it to include a wholesale butchery and meat processing business.



He is their real darling since he delivers all the beef to Dounby vac packed and boneless except for the Foreribs that are left on the bone. As a consequence pricing is much easier, waste to dispose of is minimal and they have no employment laws or holidays to worry about.



Only lamb is brought in bone in and that has gone really well too. "We never used to be able to sell lamb but we were sold out last week" added Elaine.

Torfinn Craigie wasn't the only person sweet talked to get the business up and running. The Bank of Scotland showed fantastic belief in the two ladies backing them when capital was scarce.

Sales have blossomed but it hardly a surprise because the female sales team of two are full of enthusiasm and tremendous confidence in their product. They command great knowledge of production, can expand in phenomenal detail about breeds, breeding, feeding regimes, maturation and eating quality.



Most of all they sell the finest of Orkney's beef, matured and caringly served.

Great exponents of grass feeding The Dounby Butchers stressed it was important to ask customers what they want and ask how long they want their beef hung.

They believe "Orkney meat has a flavour all of its own; it is the grass that makes the difference."



Elaine and Barbara are no strangers to success. Their first award was in the 2005 Make it With Meat Awards when their Cheese Dream Burger.

The Dounby Butcher is open six days per week from 9.00am until 5.00pm. Starting each day at 7.30am they produce their own sausages and try all the Diamond Awards coming out from the Scottish Federation. Burns Truffles were very successful for them but they still find the Mangoed Pork Loin sells well.

Encouraged by rave reviews and repeat business from customers who travel home to mainland Scotland with beef from Dounby, Barbara and Elaine will take part in the Taste of Grampian event in June 2006.



They are confident, but that is their natural disposition after all, that they can win orders from further afield and who knows with the internet and improved courier services it might well be that the Aberdeen Angus beef from Unigarth will soon be finding its way on to new tables.