

Who put the Wagyu in Wales?

A former City trader has bred the first UK Kobe beef herd. **Andrew Spooner** met them

We all need a purpose, a reason to be, but for David Wynne Finch it was relatively simple - he wanted to have his own herd of cows. But not just any old cows. He wanted the best herd of cows in the land.

'My real interest in cows began when I was about 11 years old,' says Wynne Finch, 'I was given a book called *Cows of the World*.' It was here that the Welsh farmer, whose family has been tending livestock for 500 years, first discovered Wagyu. 'Something about these enigmatic, beer-fed, massaged Japanese cows - a sense of mystique perhaps - grabbed me, even at that young age,' he remembers. 'This image stayed with me until adulthood. I now feel like I'm on a mission to introduce the best beef imaginable to the British public.'

After spending two years working for Dutch banking firm, Agro-Industrial, in South America and then establishing a thoroughly urban, commodity trader's lifestyle in London, Wynne Finch returned to the family farm two years ago and began to fulfil his ambition.

'We imported pure breed fetuses and semen at enormous cost and began to develop the nucleus of the herd,' he says. It's a slow and laborious process and the first British-raised Wagyu meat won't go on sale until the end of this year.



Former City trader turned beef farmer David Wynne Finch (above left) in Wales. Below: his growing Welsh Wagyu herd.

Photographs by Andrew Spooner

At the moment, Britain's sole Wagyu herd is living out its days on 800 acres of lush, rolling pastures, on the far-flung Llyn Peninsula in north-western Wales. With the Gulf Stream wrapping around the entire peninsula like a fuggy blanket, a microclimate is created encouraging wonderful luxuriant grass. These are as close to perfect feeding conditions as possible for what will be a pampered herd.

'I'm in the process of inventing my own massaging machine,' says Wynne Finch as he gives a guided tour of his farm. 'We're yet to decide on a beer. The Japanese usually give them a kind

of rice lager, which would be very hard to get here. So we're looking into using a more available local brew.' An image of cows partaking in a beer tasting session in the Welsh hills begins to take shape.

However, dainty Wagyu cows don't look like beer drinkers. Pretty, slender features and a chocolate brown colouring belie the fatty marbled meat within. As he walks around his farm Wynne Finch introduces Segunda, who is a particularly delicate-looking cow. Segunda has the unenviable honour of being the first Wagyu in line for slaughtering. 'She'll go at the end of this year,' Wynne Finch whispers. 'In fact she'll be the first Wagyu to be slaughtered in the whole of Europe. We can't eat her though as she's too old.'

In the meantime, Wynne Finch is one of the only traders in the country importing Wagyu meat and supplies a number of carefully chosen restaurants around the country - Asia de Cuba at the St Martins Lane Hotel in London being the most notable.

It's safe to say that Sean Gilmore, the chef at Asia de Cuba, can't get enough of the beautifully marbled and succulent Wagyu flesh. 'We can

sell up to 30 plates a night outstripping sales of other beef by about eight to one,' Gilmore says in the bustle of the Starck-designed restaurant. 'People come in purely to eat Wagyu.'

Served on a bed of finely diced mango and cucumber, with a side order of spring onion and boniato mash, drizzled with citrus ponzu sauce, the seared strips of Wagyu almost melt in the mouth. Not as heavily marbled as the usual fare served in Japan it is, nonetheless, a delectable meal (served as Wagyu beef of the day for two people at £39).

'We have to introduce this dish slowly,' says Gilmore. 'We don't think the public are ready for the fully marbled, Japanese meat, with its velvety, fatty texture.'

However, with New York already clamouring for the highly expensive Kobe burger, David Wynne Finch is hoping, that by the end of this year the great British dining public will be ready to indulge in the best beef this land has ever produced. Specialised wholesale arrangements can be made for imported Wagyu with David Wynne Finch. British Wagyu should be available by December 2003

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