



Organic weave pioneer set to expand

Like many spinners, weavers and craftspeople, Kate Palmer has a childhood experience that provided a platform for her interest in wool.

Her father had a black/grey sheep which she loved and as soon as she had an acre of her own, he gave it to her.

She went on to learn to spin, and then to weave a length of cloth.

By then she had children of her own and taught ceramics and art, but she managed to fund the time to teach creative textiles in Taunton.

The early interest never waned and as her 50th birthday loomed she decided to buy a farm.

This led her to West Yeo which she describes as 'wonderfully diverse'. She farms it organically and has conservation as her main focus.

To breed for wool she brought 25 ewe lambs and six red ruby Devon cows from her small-holding in the Blackdown Hills.

The ewes are Wensleydale/Leicester Longwool crosses. She uses a pedigree Leicester Longwool ram to breed replacement stock, and a Blue Texel ram to produce commercial lambs.

The result is a long-lustre, soft coloured wool and a good carcass. Her partner Robert is a butcher so they have an on-farm licenced cutting room.

For four years Kate used the Natural Fibre Company in Wales to process her wool for spin-

ning and weaving. The weaving wool went on to Curlew Weavers in Lampeter. Both companies were able to process her wool organically, but until 2007 there were no organic finishing mills.

So she paid for a one off inspection in 2005-06 and produced organic throws and double-bed blankets which became the first organic woven items in the UK.

She employs four knitters part-time and uses craft fairs to sell the products. These include everything from baby sheepskins to blankets and stylish clothing some of which were featured at the Soil Association Clothes Show.

After receiving a 'Women in Business' grant, Kate has been able to concentrate on marketing and hopes that a new web site will widen her market.



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