

HOLSTEIN/FRIESIAN

Summary

Originating from Holland, both the Holstein and Friesian cattle breeds and their crosses have a poor reputation in nature conservation grazing. However, dry cows and young stock can effectively maintain grassland sites with gentle terrain. Perhaps more than any other breed or cross, the ability of the Holstein/Friesian and their crosses to graze sites of conservation interest may depend largely upon their upbringing.

Hardiness – not suited to year round extensively grazed situations.

- *Not particularly hardy* – thin-skinned and with soft silky hair, neither breed nor their crosses are suited to out wintering. However, depending on local climate, it may be possible to out winter British Friesian stock on dry land with adequate supplementary feed.

Physical Attributes & Husbandry – large and docile, easy to contain and handle.

- *Handling* – older animals are very docile and easy to handle. Young stock may be a bit more flighty.
- *Fencing* – respect electric fencing.
- *Flies and ticks* – particularly on hot and humid sites New Forest Eye can be a problem.
- *Size* – large breeds; average weight of a Friesian cow around 650kgs, a Holstein around 750kgs+.
- *Appearance* – black and white. The Holstein is a tall, rather skinny dairy animal; the Friesian is shorter, stockier and dual-purpose.
- *Breeding* – a Holstein will have an average productive life of 3 or 4 lactations, a Friesian around 6. Bulls are not usually run with a herd. Dairy bulls in particular do not have a good reputation.
- *General health* – may be more susceptible to foot problems on wet soils than other breeds. New Forest Eye may also be a problem in hot, humid conditions. Summer mastitis may be a problem for dry cows/in calf heifers, due to flies.



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Grazing Characteristics – good maintenance grazers, particularly of semi-improved grasslands.

- *Grazing preferences* – older cows with harder mouths are likely to take a wider range of vegetation than younger individuals. Enjoy lush pastures. Take limited amounts of Flote-grasses, Reed Canary-grass, Couch-grass when soft and succulent, and Purple Moor-grass before flowering. Avoid Tufted Hair-grass. Coarse grasses may tend to become more dominant over a period of time.
- *Sedges & rushes* – generally avoided, although may take young Soft Rush and Common Spike-rush, particularly older cows or in early growth stages. Sedges are eaten as a constituent of hay.
- *Browsing ability* – not suitable for scrub management. Do not browse and will not push into scrub either.
- *Impact of size* – on sites with very thin soils, old dry cows may be too heavy.

Interaction with the Public – suitable for use on public sites, particularly with older stock.

- *Reaction to people* – young stock can be particularly curious, and as these breeds are very used to human contact, can be quite inquisitive.

Marketability – popular and widely available.

- *Fattening* – it is not possible to finish off low quality pastures, although Friesians generally perform better.
- *Milk* – a highly popular dairy breed, widely used throughout England. However, herd numbers are declining with milk quotas.

Sites where Holstein/Friesian cattle are in use & contacts

SITE NAME	HABITAT	DETAILS AVAILABLE	CONTACT
West Sedgemoor Somerset RSPB	Neutral wet grass-land. 500 ha	Arable reversion (over past 10 + years) and some old semi unimproved pasture which is cut for hay & after-math grazed mid June – late October. Flote-grasses and Reed Canary-grass eaten from ditch edges early in season but not once plants mature. Sedges, rushes and Tufted Hair-grass not grazed, especially by young stock. Older cattle (prior to the 30 month rule) took more rush. Sedges as constituent of hay eaten; may be more palatable when wilted. Worms can be a problem if stock not local with no natural immunity. Can suffer with foot problems if not used to wet ground and New Forest Eye in hot, humid conditions.	The Warden 01458 252805
Biggin Dale Derbyshire English Nature	Limestone and mesotrophic grass-lands.	Grazed from July onwards by dry Holstein/Friesian cows (+ sheep). Achieve an average sward height of 1” by end of season. Flat, mesotrophic grasslands at the top and bottom of limestone grassland slopes; average slope of 30 degrees. Cope with the relatively lush tall pastures at the top and bottom of the slopes and also graze over the slopes reasonably well.	Ben Le Bas 01629 815095
Fontmell & Melbury Down Dorset National Trust	Chalk grassland scarp slopes.	Graze May-end October since at least 1984, by around 100 in-calf heifers. Good maintenance grazing; even cover the steepest slopes; though avoid rank grasses along teracettes.	Chris Gingell 01722 716341
Campfield Marsh Cumbria	Salt marsh. 52 ha	Up to 100 heifers grazed May-October. Lay-back land available throughout, but used solely when spring tides high. Good maintenance grazing. Biggest problem has been keeping them on the site; resolved by fencing into the intertidal mud and gating public road. For the first month on site each year, cattle corralled at night on lay back land and let out at 8 am when they will go straight down onto the marsh. Occasional problems with animals stuck in salt marsh creeks.	Norman Holton 01697 351330
Ouse Washes Cambridgeshire RSPB and Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust	Lowland wet neutral grassland. 1000 ha	Much of site flooded in winter with up to 4m of water. Summer grazing (April-end October) practiced for over 300 years. Site split by drains into washes of various sizes from 6-100 acres. Around 2000 cattle, including 45 Friesian steers; grazier pleased with condition stock leave with. Graziers tend to return their stock to the same fields or washes each summer. May be more susceptible to foot problems than the other breeds.	Jon Reeves 01354 680212
Other contacts:		British Friesian Breeders Club.	Mrs Mead 01761 462709
		Holstein UK & Ireland.	Mr David Hewitt 01923 695200

References