

AHDB Wisbech Monitor Farm Launch

22 June 2021

Wisbech Monitor Farm Introduction

Andrew and Sam Melton’s ambition is to lower their cost of production, without lowering profitability. They are keen to improve their data management, including data capture and use on-farm. Andrew and Sam are keen to increase their soil health and learn how they can use a no-till system, including cover crops. With an increased focus on the environment, the father and son team are interested in finding practices that lower their emissions or increase carbon capture, without reducing yield.



Farm Background

H Melton and Son	
Total farm hectareage	1400ha
Arable area	1400ha, comprising of owned and contract farmed land
Cropping	Current rotation: Winter wheat, barley, OSR, beans, winter linseed

Predominant soil type	Silty clay loam
Labour	5 full time staff on the arable business and 3 full time on the soil sampling business
Machinery	<p>Primary tillage: Vaderstad Topdown, Vaderstad Carrier XL (Crosscutter), Tillso Shallow subsoil cultivator, Tillso 5 leg subsoiler, Gregoire Besson 7f plough.</p> <p>Drilling: 6m JD 750a no-till drill, 6m Vaderstad Rapid, 4m Lemken Solitaire combination drill.</p> <p>Application: JD R4040i & JD R4050i self-propelled sprayers, KRM granular fertiliser spreader.</p> <p>Harvesting: 2 x JD S680i combines</p>
Cultivation policy	Various cultivation techniques, from min till to full inversion. The farm business has now invested in a zero-tillage drill, to add to their armoury.
Grain storage	On farm storage. The farm has two modern grain stores as well as older stores for short term and machinery storage.
Non-arable enterprises	<p>The farm doesn't currently have any non-farming enterprises.</p> <p>The family also run a soil sampling business, which covers from Yorkshire to Suffolk, mainly sampling for PCN but also other nutrients/pests.</p>

Wisbech Monitor Farm Steering Group

Andrew and Sam are joined by the following local farmers and agronomists as Steering Group members, who will help guide the programme over the next three years. If you have questions or suggestions, please feel free to get in touch with the Steering Group members:



Mark Means



Sam Markillie



Matt Ward

Launch meeting

The discussions and farm tour at the launch meeting included an overview of the H Melton and Son farm business, a discussion around the catch crop and establishment try-out, a look at winter wheat and discussion around cropping, fungicide programmes and markets, environmental stewardship, machinery and technology.



A key interest by the audience was the conclusions of the catch crop and establishment try-out and lessons that can be learnt for future years:

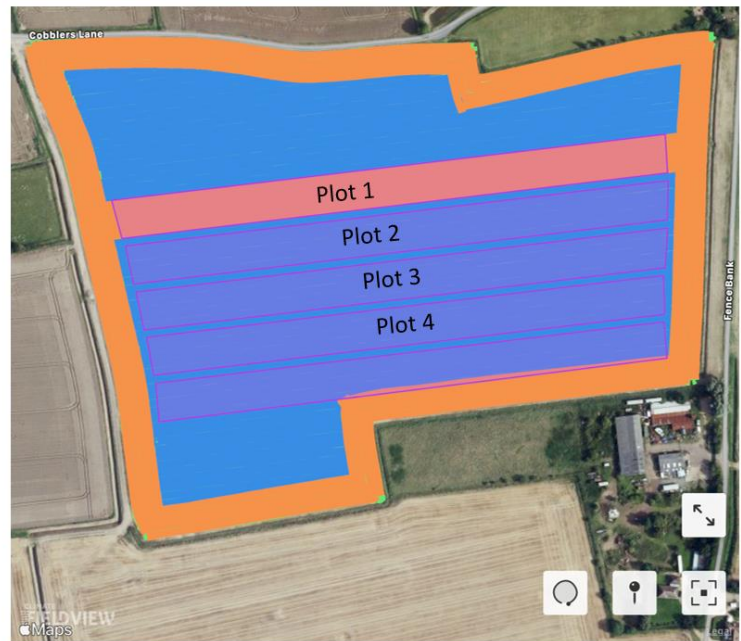
Try-out layout

H Melton & Son (Farmers)
PRECISION FARMING CONTRACTORS



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- Plot 1 – Ploughed, straw
- Plot 2 – Catch crop, direct drilled, no straw
- Plot 3 – No catch crop, direct driller, no straw
- Plot 4 – Maxi catch crop driller, straw



To catch up on the try-out layout and assessments to-date, watch this video summary: <https://youtu.be/lZsKDZC59LI>.

SWOT Analysis

The launch meeting attendees conducted a SWOT analysis of Andrew and Sam’s farm business as part of the session. The conclusions are outlined below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exact cost monitoring • Good use of precision techniques • Flexible approach to rotational changes • Range of machinery • Infrastructure • Attitude • Spreading fixed costs across acreage • Family dynamic • Flexible kit • Close domestic homes – grain export • Fertile land/soil • Technology skills • Forward thinking • Quality improvement – yield/soils etc • Diversity • Open minded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital investment • FBT’s – short term/long term? • Geographic spread • FBT’s – BPS (rents etc) • Storage? • Rotation – cereal reliance • Depreciation
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer led food production changes • Land expansion • Increased use of cover crops • Expansion of direct drilling • Cover more with less (reduced cultivations) • ELMS/SFI • Pea crop? • Grazing cover crops • Better use of data • ELMS • COVID 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future carbon sequestration • Weather – climate change • Loss of chemistry • Government! • Loss of BPS • Reduced cultivations – soil structure? • Loss of actives/pest increase • Currency • Labour • NVZ • Trade deals/world markets • COVID

Monitor Farm programme

The attendees also fed in ideas and requests of topics that could be covered during the Monitor Farm programme – these included:

- Micro/macronutrients – tissue testing => interpretation and understanding
- Use of disease forecasting and diagnostics
- Cover/catch cropping
- Organic matter changes
- Monitoring
- Carbon: monitoring/credits
- Data management
- Water management and retention
- Fixed cost control

Further information



ahdb.org.uk/farm-excellence/Wisbech



Follow Andrew and Sam on Twitter: @andrewjmelton & @H_MeltonSam



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