

Basingstoke Monitor Farm

Meeting title: Experiences and strategies for arable cropping robustness

Date: 10 December 2019

Speakers: Julian Gold (former Wantage Monitor Farm host), Rob Addicott (former Bath Monitor Farm host)



Conventional cultivations at Rob's farm

Tenant farming 478ha in Somerset, divided between his home farm, shared land with a neighbour, and contracted land. The farm grows winter wheat, barley and OSR for feed, as well as beans for human consumption, on a six-year rotation and shares all of his machinery and some other investment costs with a neighbour. Although the farm is predominantly arable, he also runs a beef and sheep enterprise. Rob is an enthusiastic member of LEAF and was one of the pioneering LEAF demonstration farms, promoting how IFM can be utilised to develop economical sustainability. Along with this, Rob also manages an on-farm office complex.

Take-home messages

- Know your costs and benchmark your operations (if you can't measure it you can't manage it)
- Know your skills – what you are good at and what you're not (consider joint ventures or contractors)
- Identify the value of your time (is it better used in the office on business strategy or sitting in a tractor?)
- Bring your staff with you with regards to ideas
- Take the chance to allow the public to learn and understand what you are doing as public perception is key to the ag. industries future
- The environment and its biodiversity should be seen as an asset and not a liability
- Utilise grants and schemes to achieve your strategies.

No-till at Julian's farm

Farm manager in East Hendred, Oxfordshire. He farms 800ha on a five-year rotation of oilseed rape, winter wheat, spring beans, winter wheat and second wheat, winter or spring barley on highly alkaline, silty clay loam soil over chalk, with 679mm average yearly rainfall. There are also sheep and shoot enterprises on farm. Julian is passionate about sustainable intensification using holistic farming strategies that integrate cover cropping, minimal tillage and controlled traffic farming. By using this husbandry, he has been able to promote his soil health together with the environment he farms in. Julian's farming practices were recently recognised by the Farm Cutting Carbon Toolkit (FCCT) & Innovation for Agriculture (IFA) who awarded him the 2019 Soil Farmer of the Year.

- Soils are key to your business

- Make time to analyse your fixed costs and question whether machinery is an asset or a liability
- CTF – Staff co-operation is crucial so ensure you bring them with you on the journey
- Benchmark your operation costs against contractor costs
- Look for opportunities; joint ventures, share farming etc. as collaboration is a sure way to reduce your costs
- Learn from others – attend farmer group meetings, whatsapp groups etc.
- Be open and promote what you do – it's a hidden economic benefit

Take-home messages

- Focus on detail
- Collaborate where possible
- Know what your operations are costing you and benchmark these against others to identify your business strengths and opportunities
- Utilise grants and schemes wherever possible to help achieve future business robustness
- There is not one system that suits all

Further information

- [Testing soil health](#)
- GREATsoils research and publications can be found at ahdb.org.uk/greatsoils
- Machinery cost calculator

AHDB resources

- Understand your business costs with AHDB's benchmarking tool Farmbench at ahdb.org.uk/farmbench
- Monitoring tools are available at ahdb.org.uk/tools
- Sign up to market information and research newsletters at ahdb.org.uk/keeping-in-touch
- Find out what's going on at other Monitor Farms and Strategic Farms at ahdb.org.uk/farm-excellence
- All AHDB events can be found at ahdb.org.uk/events
- For guidance on how Brexit will impact your business, see ahdb.org.uk/brexit

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