

Chelmsford Monitor Farm Meeting Report

Meeting 1 – Monitor Farm Launch

23 June 2017

Parklands Farm, Galleywood



For more information, visit:
cereals.ahdb.org.uk/Chelmsford

Christy and Hew Willett,
Chelmsford Monitor Farmers

Chelmsford Monitor Farm Introduction

The Howard and Daughter farm business is run by the mother-and-son team Christy and Hew Willett, who farm 478ha arable cropping near Chelmsford in Essex. This land is made up of a mixture of owned, rented and contracted land.

Farm facts

- Total farm hectareage: 490ha
- 478ha arable (milling wheat, spring beans, OSR, spring barley and spring oats)
- 12ha grassland (used for horse grazing)
- Average rainfall: 617mm
- Mean temperature annual average: ~ 9.7C
- Soil type: London clay and chalky boulder clay
- Diversification: Horse liveryes, off-road riding scheme and business lets

Labour: Christy and Hew are full-time on the farm and temporary staff are employed at harvest.

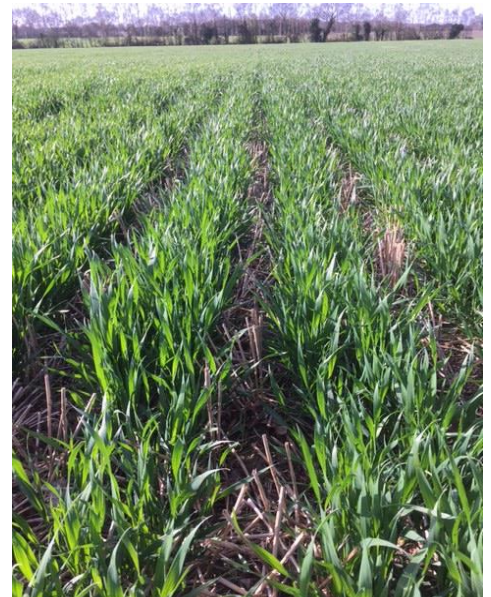
Rotation: W. Wheat – W. Wheat – Spring beans/OSR. Can also include spring barley, spring oats and millet.

Machinery: 9 metre cut combine (445HP), three tractors (360HP, 185 HP and 170HP), a 4000 litre, 24m, self-propelled sprayer, a granular fertiliser spreader, a 4m strip till drill, 6m cultivator drill, 6m tine drill, a 4m cultivator, an 8 furrow plough and an extensive machinery back catalogue.

Grain storage: 3,000t of on-farm storage and a continuous flow drier.

Monitor Farm Ambition:

“To keep our cost of production as low as possible without sacrificing yield and improving their soils and the environment.”



Chelmsford Monitor Farm steering group

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



Tom Marsh



Rob Metson



Philip Spencer



James Stacey

Launch Farm Walk

The farm walk at the Monitor Farm launch included a background to the Howard and Daughter farm business and a tour of the cropping and wider business at Parklands Farm.

Move to reduced tillage

Due to the desire to see improved soil structure, reduce fixed costs and manage the grass-weed challenges on the farm, Christy and Hew have moved from traditional establishment practices to low disturbance tillage, with a Mzuri strip-till drill. Drilling is done on a 20° angle across the field and results have shown that this system is working well for the farm so far, with particular successes such as the bean stubble in the autumn working well with the Mzuri. The Mzuri establishment costs are thought to be £60-70/ha compared to the old farm standard of £120/ha. Christy and Hew would like to look further into controlled traffic farming (CTF) in the future.

Rotation

Following the 2012 year, a change was made to the traditional W. Wheat/W. Wheat/OSR or Spring Beans rotation, with the addition of spring wheat and spring barley into the rotation. Spring oats and millet have also been added into the rotation this year and Christy and Hew are looking at other options to incorporate in the future, for example grass, linseed and soya. Christy and Hew are also looking at replacing 2nd wheats with spring barley for malting, if a yield of over 6t/ha can be achieved, especially as this has the added bonus of blackgrass control. The focus of the farm is to not have a fixed rotation but to be able to choose the most appropriate crop and establishment technique that suit the conditions at the time.

Environmental Stewardship

The farm is currently under an ELS agreement which runs until 2018. The agreement includes the management of margins, low-input grassland, hedgerow and ditch management, wild bird covers and field corners. The Monitor Farm group is interested in discussing the options available under Countryside Stewardship as part of a winter meeting.

Wider Business and Diversification

A bunded pesticide filling area and biobed was installed with a Capital Grant Scheme grant to contain and treat pesticide washings. Rainwater harvesting from the grain stores is used for spraying. The industrial lets, off-road riding scheme and horse livery all provide additional income for the farm business. The farm also works closely with The Environment Group (TEG) who are based in the farm yard and do a lot of voluntary work around the farm, for example footpath maintenance.



SWOT Analysis

The group conducted a SWOT analysis of Christy and Hew's farm business and the wider industry at the Summer Open Day. This, alongside a look at key issues and topics that the group would like to cover, will help to guide the Monitor Farm programme of meetings over the term and provide a focus for business improvements for the Howard and Daughter farm business.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Christy/Hew working relationship	Rotation – future of OSR?	Location	Loss of active ingredients
Diversification – cash flow and location	Machinery depreciation	Producer to consumer link	Peas/beans as EFA
Open to new ideas	Spread of land	More diversification	Corbyn!
Willingness to analyse/adopt	Workforce	Agri-environment	Currency fluctuations
Grain storage	New system mistakes	Speciality crops	Restricted access
Owned land	Reliance on non-farm income	New buildings	Brexit
Family labour	Milling wheat only	Capacity for more land	Weather/climate change
Flexible machinery		Joint ventures/share farming	Public liability
		Green gym	Grass weeds

Further Information

Winter meetings will begin at 9am at Galleywood Heritage Centre, The Common, Galleywood, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 8TR on:

- Friday 10 November 2017
- Friday 12 January 2018
- Friday 15 December 2017
- Friday 9 February 2018

For more information contact: Teresa Meadows, AHDB Cereals and Oilseeds Knowledge Exchange Manager, East Anglia by e-mail at: teresa.meadows@ahdb.org.uk or call 07387 015465.

To find out more about Farmbench, AHDB's benchmarking tool, contact: Holly Howsam, Regional Benchmarking Officer by e-mail at: holly.howsam@ahdb.org.uk or call 07767 001543.

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