

Taunton Monitor Farm meeting report

Meeting 6: Summer Meeting

Date: 09 July 2019

Location: Manor Farm, Heathfield, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1DL

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



Key messages

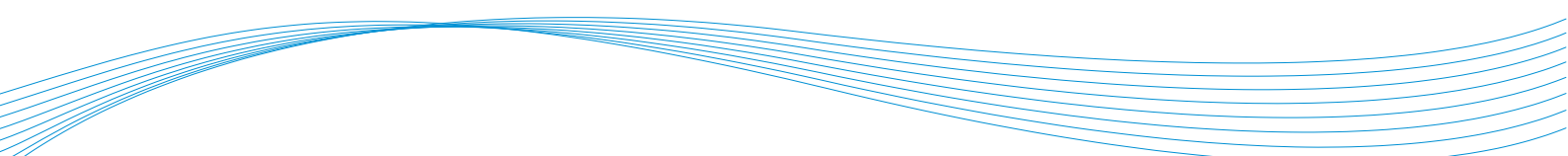
- Benchmarking has been a key part of the year. It has helped take the emotion out of important decisions and helps take you out of your comfort zone
- Not enough attention is being taken to grain marketing including forward selling and risk management
- Use fungicides as a risk management tool rather than a routine
- More ruthless control of black-grass required on farm before it takes a hold. More roguing. Three spring crops in problem areas.
- It is vital to keep engaging with politicians

Diversification

- Diversification needs developing and to be a key part of the business
- Richard has grown cricket bat willow, getting £450-£500 per tree after 13 years
- ELMS needs to be studied (when detail available) to make it 'work for the farm'
- Need to look at return on capital – it's not just all about food production. Should land be sold and reinvested where better return potentially available?

Rotation

- Cover crop management needs more trialling as to what works best on the farm. Type of mix? Destruction method and timing?
- If oilseed rape is to be retained in the rotation, can it be grown with less at risk if failure to CSFB? Established populations anywhere between 15 and 50 are okay. Drill to weather forecast and soil conditions for good seed to soil contact and rapid establishment rather than date. Varieties do not have to be hybrids with more expensive seed costs.
- More has to be done to take growing costs out of the system. When considering varietal choice for this autumn, the first pick will be those with strong agronomic features which may offer scope to reduce inputs, rather than just going for yield
- With experiences on the farm, and the benefit of discussion with Clive Bailie at the earlier winter meeting, the strategy is to swing more to direct drilling. However this will be a process of getting the soil right first rather than buying new specialist machinery. This year some establishment costs have been reduced from £103 to £48 per hectare



Richard is looking at different types of establishment methods using four drills:

- Vaderstad Tempo
- Sky Easydrill
- Sumo trio seeder
- Horsch Sprinter (direct drill)

The spring barley crop being grown on ultra low inputs looks promising but awaits the combine and margin analysis

Ultra low spring barley (right) was using the Horsch spinter directly into ex-stubble turnips, 30 minutes after the sheep were removed.



Benchmarking

- Benchmarking has been a key part of the year. It has helped take the emotion out important decisions
- Mixing with other benchmarking individual and groups, in the area and further afield takes you out of your comfort zone
- There are always going to be challenges in farming, and regardless of what these changes will be we should be running our businesses in the best way.
- Benchmarking using Farmbench allows you to scrutinise and make informed decisions on your fixed costs and variable costs at both enterprise and whole-farm level.

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FARMBENCH

“We all think that we are doing a good job, but benchmarking is a real eye opener. I am guilty of working in my business rather than on it. Benchmarking allows me to focus on where I can save money without compromising performance”

Richard Payne, Taunton monitor farmer

Further information

- [How to count earthworms](#)
- [Recommended lists for cereals and oilseeds](#)
- [Opportunities for cover crops in conventional arable rotations](#)
- [Livestock and the arable rotation](#)
- [Farmbench](#)

Winter meeting dates

Winter meetings will take place at 10 am, The Anchor, Hillfarrance, Taunton TA1 4AW on:

- 07 November 2019
- 12 December 2019
- 13 February 2020
- 12 March 2020
- 24 June 2020 Summer meeting



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