

‘Adapting to the changing priorities’

Andrew Robinson – Farms Manager

Heathcote Farms Ltd



BUSINESS OVERVIEW - 2022

- 1223ha (3,022 acres) in Bedfordshire, (94% owned 6% FBT)
- **BEDFORDSHIRE -**
- 3 farms – Stretched over 18 miles north to south
- 930ha (2,298 acres) Toddington (Heavy Land)
- 220ha (544 acres) Lidlington (Light Land) 9 miles north of Toddington
- 73ha (180 acres) Totternhoe (Chalk) 9 miles south of Toddington
- Other Enterprises on the farms – Residential and Commercial Properties portfolio, other diversification in the pipeline
- 2 Excellent fully engaged full time staff.
- Do our own agronomy with strategic advice from Jock Willmott of CERES.
- Large scale on farm trials, some in conjunction with CERES and OPENFIELD

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT – 2004 – PRESENT DAY

- July 2004 – Farmed area 2190 acres, compost enterprise and some residential and property properties, Potential was huge as business had strong financial credentials. As soon as I started I separated all the enterprises to ensure they were standing on their own credentials. Separate enterprise accounts.
- January 2005 – Developed business strategy in conjunction with owners. Also presented to the directors a financial paper which necessitated the purchase of more land to (a) grow the business and (b) reduce the large fixed costs the business had.
- October 2008 – Purchased Boughton End Farm 544 acres plus property and buildings, 31% funded directly from profits of the business over since July 2004, balance from a directors loan with a 10 year repayment plan. We managed to pay the directors back in just over 4 years purely through arable profits. Properties refurbished and all let out.
- February 2011 – Directors meeting, presented to the board that I felt at some point subsidy payments would be removed and that we should ensure the business was set up to be profitable post subsidy payments. They agreed and from that day onwards I set about ensuring the business was not reliant on subs, consequently since 2011, the business has not been reliant on any subsidies.
- March 2020 – Compost enterprise ceased due to significantly increasing costs resulting from contamination issues, council not prepared to increase gate fee.
- October 2020 – Bare Land Purchased at Totternhoe from cash within business, chalk soils, extremely productive land

FARM PERFORMANCE -

- **2000-2004** - Milling Wheat 8.62t/ha, Soft Wheat 9.03t/ha, OSR 3.48t/ha, S Beans – 4.20t/ha – **AVE PROFIT - 38.49%**
- **2005-2012** - Milling Wheat 10.26t/ha, Soft Wheat 10.28t/ha, OSR 4.26t/ha, S Beans – 4.85t/ha, W barley – 8.23t/ha **AVE PROFIT – 59.73%**
- **2013-2021** - Milling Wheat 11.44t/ha, Soft Wheat 11.74t/ha, OSR 4.11t/ha, S Beans – 4.76t/ha, W Barley – 10.48t/ha **AVE PROFIT - 84.61%**
- **2022** - Milling Wheat 11.20t/ha, Soft Wheat 11.92t/ha, OSR 4.12t/ha, S Beans – 3.44t/ha, Peas 5.81t/ha, W Oats – 7.55t/ha, W Barley 9.94t/ha, S Barley 7.69t/ha, W Beans -5.61t/ha **AVE PROFIT - 97.04%**
- Milling Wheat since from 2004- 2.58t/ha INCREASE
- Soft Wheat since from 2004 - 2.89t/ha INCREASE
- OSR since 2004 - 0.64t/ha INCREASE although variable
- S Beans since 2004 - 0.76t/ha DECREASE these have now been dropped in favour of Winter beans

Farming Business Challenge - 1. Food Security in the UK

- 1. Maintain profitability – non profitable business cannot add to food security.
- 2. Invest in R and D – for us our own trials – over 100 in 2023
- 3. Use of new technology (early adopters)
- 4. Increase yields/become more efficient
- 5. Continue our work on staff training - BASIS/FACTS etc
- 6. Establish closer links with our customers – difficult!
- 7. “consumers are predominately price led, they want relatively cheap food combined with the security of supply which are subsequently farmed in a environmentally responsible manor.....not an easy ask” – *Andrew Robinson (Dec 2012)*

Farming Business Challenge – 2. Biodiversity (Resilience, risk management)

- 1. Genetic diversity of crops – ww, sw, wbl, wo, so, sb, wb, osr, peas
- 2. Within these crops we choose disease resistant varieties where we can to reduce reliance on pesticides.
- 3. An area of SSSI which is managed to preserve these remarkable plants.
- 4. After assessing GM on the farm 27ha in 16 different areas of the farm are in mid tier schemes, generally flower and nectar mixes creating a diverse area for insects.
- 5. Looking at other options with CERES to join the SFI in the summer.
- 6. Working with a new beekeeper who has brought more hives onto the farms.

Farming Business Challenge – 3. Climate change and Environment

- 1. Efficiency – ‘less waste and more from less’
- 2. Trials - for the 2nd year a product which extracts ‘free nitrogen’ from the atmosphere and takes it into the plant helping to reduce the reliance on artificial fertilisers, (M&S) there are many new products/varieties which are being developed to reduce their carbon footprints so we will continue to trial many of these products.
- 3. use of FYM and Sewage sludge to replace inorganic fertilisers, sludge and FYM are not going away, responsible use in agriculture is a positive way for them to be used.

SUMMARY – HOW TO MEET THESE CHALLENGES

1. BUSINESS NEEDS TO BE PROFITABLE.
2. LONG AND SHORT TERM BUSINESS STRATEGY REQUIRED – STAFF, SOIL, STRATEGY BRINGS SUCCESS
3. CONTINUE WITH ON FARM TRIALS – KNOWLEDGE, DRIVE THE BUSINESS FORWARD, EFFICIENCY.
4. COLABORATE WITH ALL SECTORS – OTHER GROWERS, MERCHANTS, CONSULTANTS, END USERS
5. STAFF – KEEP INFORMED, MOTIVATED, PART OF THE BUSINESS
6. ATTENTION TO DETAIL - ABSOLUTELY KEY!
7. IN FARMING – ‘NEVER PUT OFF TOMORROW WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY’

‘There are 40,000 edible species on the planet, however just 12 make up 75% of our food, Wheat, Maize and rice account for 66%’

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING – ANY QUESTIONS?

