

1985

A year dominated by the weather. We were lucky to finish harvest only a week later than normal, on August 31st. Many other parts of the country - particularly in the north - were still combining in mid-October. After a decade of (relatively) easy harvests, this time it paid to be over-equipped. Our four large combines and a big drier made life simple, albeit very expensive. It was only in November that we began to find unpleasant things going on in the grainstore, with bugs and hot wheat giving us problems we had never experienced before.

The continuous rain during harvest made us pray for a drought, which is precisely what we got in the autumn. Throughout September, October and November it hardly rained at all. Seedbeds were dry and germination was both late and very patchy.

The yield of most crops was good - better than last year but not quite as good as 1983. Profits, however, will be substantially down on last year because not only were prices lower, but costs were higher. Sugar Beet was the success story of the year and peas the big failure. This was the precise opposite of last year.

CEREALS

The barley was disappointing - particularly since it had looked so good throughout the spring and early summer Halcyon, for which we had high hopes that it would succeed Otter, performed particularly poorly. Otter totters on from year to year, and looks as if it will survive long after Tipper, Halcyon and even Igri have left the stage. Panda did better this year and, for reasons which will always be a mystery, the seed trade wanted every grain we could produce. Next year we shall be growing a lot of Pipkin in the hope that it will succeed where Halcyon failed, and also some Vixen, a new barley from the P.B. I.

Our experiment trying low inputs on a field of Panda resulted in a loss of 12 cwt per acre (1.5 tonnes/Ha) compared to the adjacent field which used our traditional high-input system. The loss of income was far greater than the reduction of costs, so the whole experiment showed that (last year at least) low inputs did not pay.

The wheats, with the exception of Moulin, did well. Galahad was outstanding, and Longbow also had a very good year indeed. Brimstone and Avalon were very respectable and maintained its promise of last year. Mission however, was disappointing and Fenman did not sustain its 1984 promise. The big disappointment was Moulin, which had done so well for the past two years on this farm. ~ third year field managed only 42 cwt, and even the two fields we were growing for the first time' produced a very bad sample and a poor yield. We shall, however, persist with this variety as it is clearly the best milling wheat available today. Next year we shall be growing Slejpner, a high yielding feed wheat from Sweden, and a variety called Apollo, another feed wheat

which comes from Germany and looks very exciting indeed. From the PBI we shall be growing Rendezvous and Admiral for the first time.

Durum wheat was, for the second successive year, an unmitigated disaster. Yields of Capdur were slightly up on last year's pathetic 28cwt, but the fact that the resulting crop did not germinate meant that we could not get our seed premium. We shall persist for a third and final year out of loyalty to the Merchant. It has been a most expensive experiment.

The 8 acres of hybrid wheat seed production appeared to be successful. The breeders, Rothwell Plant Breeders, were also happy with our results. This year we shall be growing 25 acres of hybrid seed production.

We were unable to detect any problems arising from our decision to stop straw burning last autumn, and we shall persist with this policy.

HERBAGE SEED

An average year. The Mantilla, after its exceptional performance last year (14cwt/acre), returned to normality at 8cwt. Rathlin, which we also grew for NSDO, did about the same. We were lucky to be able to harvest the complete crop this year because combining conditions were as difficult as they have ever been. Many crops throughout the country were abandoned completely.

OILSEED RAPE

An excellent year. We had taken the gamble of growing the new variety, Mikado, and it appeared to pay off very well indeed. The yield over 200' acres was 28cwt. For the second successive year, we combined directly without either desiccation or swathing. We shall be sticking with Mikado again next year, though the yields will not be as good because germination this autumn has been so uneven.

PEAS

After last year's exceptional performance, it would have been unreasonable to wish for more than an average year. As it is one field of Progreta produced a creditable 30cwt, while the other barely managed 8cwt. The Filby leafless peas were also very disappointing. Fortunately, at £250 per tonne ex farm, the price is better than we had expected. But overall this was a bad year for peas.

SUGAR BEET

The crop of the year. Yields have been as high as we have ever known them, at around 21 tonnes per acre (adjusted to 16% sugar), and sugar contents have broken all previous records by a big margin. As late as the end of November, we were still sending in loads to the Bury Factory with sugar contents of over 20%.

SHEEP

A strangely disappointing year. The numbers are now so large (1100 ewes) that the flock is broken into two separate groups, lambing in January and March. The actual lambing percentage (1.6) was satisfactory and our experiment of weaning the first flock early and feeding Volac Start to Finish seemed to pay off. But it was disappointing that in a wet summer with plenty of grass, we were unable to finish most of our lambs from the second flock.

It was lucky that the trade for store lambs in the autumn was very strong and so we were able to sell them well.

CATTLE

With only twelve Charolais animals left after the expansion of the sheep flock, it hardly seems worth giving them an entry in this report. They decorate the paddocks round the farm and use a bit of straw. Whether they make any economic sense is another matter altogether.

MACHINERY

Most of our capital investment this year went into the grainstore. We installed a 16 metre Avery electronic weighbridge and a 60 tonne per hour Law Denis EAC 600 rotary cleaner. The latter's job will be to bring grain samples up to Intervention standards when these are raised (as they undoubtedly will be). Among the other machinery we bought were two John Deere tractors, a 4240, and a 3140 (replacing three 3140s), and a Kverneland Futura 12 metre cultivator. A second-hand Claas Columbus combine was bought to help with the Hybrid Wheat programme. Our thanks to Manns for restoring it so beautifully. But the most interesting of our new machines was the Volvo BM 420OB loader which replaced a Sanderson 347TC. Its bucket will carry two tonnes of wheat and hence will load 25 tonne lorry in less than ten minutes.

THE FUTURE

Some form of physical control is now staring arable farmers in the face. Whether this will be quotas, production licences or a form of Set Aside programme (where land must be taken out of production) is impossible to say. One thing is certain, however, and that is that a gradual reduction in price will not stop us from producing a surplus of cereals every year.

No matter which form of control is eventually adopted, it will have a very unpleasant effect on this farm. We shall have to manage with less labour, with fewer new machines, maybe even with fewer chemicals and fertiliser too. So the effects will be felt not only by us, but also by machinery dealers, agrochemical salesmen and all the other people we deal with. There will undoubtedly be some bankruptcies. Whether or not we survive depends on many factors beyond our control. Farmers who own their land outright, pay neither rent nor mortgage and do not have an overdraft will survive comfortably. Unfortunately, we are not in that position. We shall have to make the sort of economies which even a year ago would have seemed both extreme and unnecessary.

But we have only ourselves to blame. Over the past decade we have enjoyed unparalleled prosperity as we enjoyed the benefits of the cereal revolution. Yields doubled, prices remained firm and the sun shone on arable farming in every sense of the word. It was good while it lasted, and for that we should all be grateful.