

THRIFLOW FARMS LTD

2011

AN EXPANSIVE AND EXPENSIVE YEAR

The year was notable for the expansion of the farm by 100 hectares and dry conditions which reduced our yields by fifteen per cent. The new land, which is in Barrington, is only half a mile from the north end of the farm on the west side of Rowley's Hill but thanks to the village of Foxton, the A10 and a level crossing, it takes at least fifteen minutes to reach it from the grainstore. The soil is heavier than the rest of the farm and suffers from much worse blackgrass but it is level and easy to farm. It consists of a single block of land amounting to ninety five hectares and small chunk of five hectares surrounded by houses which one day might be developed. In about twenty years we should be able to make profit on it, but in the meanwhile we shall have to sit back and forget that this small chunk of land cost more than the entire two thousand acres with fifteen houses and a full range of grainstores did less than twenty years ago.

The drought, which lasted from mid-February until June, meant that our harvest averaged a poor 8 tonnes per hectare. This figure ranged from 4.1 tonnes per acre for a field of wheat which was drilled on very light land after sugar beet to an impressive 11.6 tonnes per hectare which we grew in the Park at Newton. It was fortunate that the price of wheat has increased by £35 this year.

WHEAT

For the first six months of the growing season the wheat looked magnificent. The price was rising and the fertiliser had been paid for when it was still a reasonable cost. At that point the rain ceased and the crops went backwards, so much so that by mid May we wondered whether it would be worth harvesting a few of the last fields which we drilled. The worst field was one which had been drilled by the A505 after the sugar beet had been lifted.

But the rains did come to a limited extent and gave us a harvest which is 15% below our ten year average. The soil types were even more important than normal, with the thin land at the south of the farm doing extremely poorly and the heavier soils at the northern end doing relatively well.

Glasgow, which was sown at the southern end of the farm, did terribly and averaged around 5 tonnes per hectare. Oakley did adequately at 8.2 tonnes per hectare. Santiago, Target and Viscount just about broke the 9 tonnes per hectare.

OILSEED RAPE

The same story as for the wheat. It looked very good until the start of March but from then on it appeared to go backwards. The yield of 3.4 tonnes per hectare was slightly less than our average which was pleasantly surprising. This year we decided to grow more rape and it was drilled in good conditions. It all looked exceptionally well except for the 44 hectares of a variety with the exceptional name of PR46W21 which

we were sold by Dalmark. It was so poor that we eventually complained to the merchant who then paid for it to be replaced with Oakley wheat.

SUGAR BEET

82 tonnes per hectare was the yield in 2010, which was not entirely bad but was not related to the 100 tonnes a hectare which we achieved in 2009. So far this year we have only had 25% of the beet in factory and it too has yielded 82 tonnes per hectare at rather over 20% sugar, which is a record for us. We are growing an extra 24 hectares of beet which we bought the quota for last year.

PEAS

We reduced our pea acreage by 50% since we were fed up with having a quarter of the crop lying on the ground. This year was no exception as we got 3.75 tonnes per hectare, half a tonne below our 5 year average. We shall soon sell both this year's and last years crops as the price had been too small last year.

BEANS

Were neither disastrous nor record breaking, yielding 4.27 tonnes per hectare and leaving us feeling half satisfied and half unhappy. They will be continue to be grown as they outdo the peas seven years out of ten.

LIVESTOCK

The three English bred Simmenthals are all in calf thanks to the efforts of the embryologist who injected them with three frozen Wagyu embryos which had been sent from America. They are due to calve around March 1st. What will happen then remains to be seen but a section of New Barn has been done up and now awaits its customers.

The 2 dozen horses which are kept at the farm continue to do well.

MACHINERY

We took the plunge before the new land appeared on the horizon and bought one new Claas Lexion combine and one new Claas fork lift truck. The combine, with a 35 foot cutterbar, was unbelievably good and made us glad that we will have another 100 hectares to cut. The fork lift truck was even more surprising as it outperformed the JCB with ease.

THE FUTURE

Dick Arbon, who celebrated his 50th birthday this year, is in charge of the farm. David Walston is working full time and is in control of the Wagyu steak production. Tristran Worboys left us this summer and was replaced by Grant Anderson, the son of Lindsay Anderson.

We shall have to be very restrained when it comes to new machinery in the next few years, having bought one combine, three tractors, one fork lift truck, a seven furrough plough and a subsoiler in the past year and a half. A whole new GPS system has been installed at the Grainstore which has made all field work unbelievably simple.

Oliver Walston