

THRIPLow FARMS

2010

The year I will try to forget

I suppose it would be more than a bit dishonest of me to claim that my stroke on November 4 was the not the most surprising event which had ever happened to me. It was. And now I am trying to get rid of it. The only really important irritation which I am still trying to get overcome is a failure to memorise people and lists which I should have remembered like peas in a pod. All the other problems of the stroke sufferers have, I am happy to say, have passed me by.

I have to tell you that on January 1st 2010 I started my 28 year old son David off on an eighteen month course during which he would become familiar with the various problems which might crop up during the farming year. Thus whatever he chooses to do, he would be familiar with the current hiccups. It is now a year since he started this and he shows every sign of becoming a full-time farmer. He already has four little pigs and three frozen Japanese Wagyu beef embryos and three English cows into which they will be placed by a vet.

WHEAT

A marginally better yield than last year, which was something of a surprise. If all our land had been the very thin stuff down by the A505 it would not have been possible. We were stricken with a very severe drought but at the time of the cereals event the skies opened and we had enough for the grains to fill to a reasonable level. Harvest began easily and well and I decided that even if it rained a lot we would not use the drier with its very expensive fuel. I managed to keep to my resolution for a pathetic forty eight hours and dried every tonne of wheat which we combined in the month of August.

The thin land produced 8.2 tonnes of Glasgow per hectare, the better land gave us exactly ten tonnes of Viscount and the best land produced 10.2 tonnes of Oakley. This year we are growing primarily Glasgow and Oakley but we will also grow some Solstice, Target and Santiago.

OILSEED RAPE

It looked rather good when the combine went into the field but turned out to be less than our 5 year average of 3.5 tonnes per acre. In fact the average yield was a pathetic 3.2 tonnes per hectare with the Castille managing a disastrous 22 cwt per hectare whilst the Excalibur managed an almost respectable 40 cwt per hectare. This year we shall stick to Excalibur and grow Sesame at the Foxton end of the farm.

PEAS

The opposite reaction to what we enjoyed last year. There were no 80 acre fields with peas standing four feet tall and producing over two tonnes per acre. Instead we were back to depressing reality with most of the fields lying flat on the sod with at least 25% of the crop ready threshed and ready for the pigeons to eat. Our yield of 3.1 tonnes per hectare is over a tonne below our five year average.

BEANS

An slightly better year than for the peas, with our average yield just half a tonne per hectare lower than our five year average. The one point to be gained was that they have still not been sold and thus we shall gain an increase in price which we have failed to do in the wheat market.

SUGAR BEET

It has been an exceptionally wet year and at this stage of the year (Mid January) we have yet to lift 40% of the sugar beet crop. Whilst it has not been comparable to last year's record yield of over 100 tonnes per hectare, it will comfortably beat our five year average. In fact so impressed were we with our sugar beet yield that we purchased an additional 1000 tonnes of quota.

MACHINERY

It was a remarkable year for the machinery business. We decided to go all over to either Claas or to Fendt and after a short price comparison decided on the latter. At an enormous cost we traded in our Claas Challenger and two John Deeres for the latest 360 horsepower Challenger and two Fendts, a 300 horsepower 930 and a 140 horsepower 714. They have joined our existing 200 hp Fendt.

But the arrival of this fleet of hardware was only one side of the hardware invasion. The other invasion was the arrival of a GPS system. We looked into the possibility of joining a group but eventually decided to setup our own RTK base station.

We also decided that we should go on to a 32 metre spraying width and convert to liquid nitrogen. The alterations have now been carried out and two tanks for liquid nitrogen have been installed.

THE FUTURE

The experts, or those who claim to be, are now all predicting that the world is running out of food. And the prices of grains are certainly rising at a speed we have not seen since 2008. So also, by the way, are the price of fuel and fertiliser. It may well be that this is a little jump caused by last year's Russian summer, and for this reason I have been unwilling to sell more than 10% of next year's harvest in advance. The fact is that whenever there is a series recession it seems to help farmers and whenever there is a period of economic prosperity it seems to have the opposite effect. It is still early days yet but I see no reason to doubt this.

P.S. Apologies for the shortness of this article. It should revert to a more normal form next year.