Getting your business in good shape

Just a year on from the launch of the Monitor Farm at Warrington, we are now preparing for the launch of the next one in June. What a difference a year makes! The world almost seems a different place already.

Whatever is round the corner – and of course we can’t be certain – it makes sense to get your business in good shape. A key focus of the new Monitor Farm at Saltburn is to prepare the business for uncertainty in the years ahead when there is no longer any guarantee of direct payments. The aim is to build this around soil improvement, finding a rotation that is profitable and keeping in mind the importance of controlling fixed costs.

All farms have their own challenges. At the new Monitor Farm some of these will probably be similar to yours. Monitor Farms provide a platform for the exchange of knowledge and ideas between farmers. So we hope that by bringing together such a wide range of expertise, many who attend – as well as the monitor farmer – could be inspired with new and possibly better ways of doing things that they’ve been doing the same way for many years.

For more information on how to become involved with your local Monitor Farm please contact me on the details above.

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The York Monitor Farm group considered the principles of soils and cultivations:

- Don’t underestimate what the plant roots can do – don’t cultivate too deep and ask yourself whether you need to do it at all
- Don’t cause compaction – changing tyre pressures to reduce compaction is worth it, especially in a wet year
- When dealing with compaction, leave it until the conditions allow
- Reduce tillage, but get residue management right as this allows such systems to work better
Meet the new Monitor farm

John Aynsley runs a 1,302 ha mixed farm near Saltburn-by-the-Sea in North East England. Covering 566 ha, he grows a rotation of winter barley, oilseed rape and wheat on light loam to heavy clay. Combinable crops are established using a min-till approach and all grain is dried and stored on farm.

In addition to the arable enterprise John also manages 1,300 breeding ewes and 450 spring-calving suckler cows. The main challenge which John aims to address on the farm is soil management. John is already a member of the Darlington Benchmarking Group and has been benchmarking since it started.

By participating in the Monitor Farm programme, he hopes to prepare his business to be profitable without direct payments.

Feedback corner

Farmers and others have their say on the Monitor Farm programme:

- “Share your experience, good or bad, and others will share theirs.”
- “Join in discussion and you will take home far more information.”
- “I am now more focused on fixed cost control…my machinery policy will possibly change.”
- “The events have helped me to vary the advice I provide to farmers around protection of water in the region against the challenges they face.”
- “I am now taking other people’s experiences into account to help me make better decisions.”

Why should I get involved in the Monitor Farm programme?

More than 300 Monitor Farm attendees responded to our spring survey about the programme in England and Wales, sharing the benefits that they have seen for their own businesses.

The graphic below shows the percentage of farmers who agreed with the statements.

- The project has improved my business decision making: 93%
- I valued the opportunity to share experience and openly discuss issues in a non-commercial environment: 72%
- Attending the monitor farm meetings has been a good use of my time: 89%
- The meeting topics have been relevant to my business: 90%
- The meetings have helped me identify ways to improve my business: 77%
- The project has improved my technical knowledge: 85%

*Data correct as of 19 April 2017
Join in at one of our summer open days:

• Saltburn: 6 June 2017 (launch meeting)
• Berwick-upon-Tweed: 20 June 2017
• Warrington: 27 June 2017
• York: 28 June 2017
• Driffield: 4 July 2017

cereals.ahdb.org.uk/monitorfarms

Variety Open Days

Our Variety Open Days provide the perfect opportunity to speak to some of our top variety specialists. They include tours of on-farm trials of current and new crop varieties grown to the AHDB Recommended Lists protocol.

The field-based events are run each summer as part of our continuing commitment to providing guided access to our evidence-based crop trials.

For the full list of dates and locations visit cereals.ahdb.org.uk/varietydays

Blog in

Visit cereals-blog.ahdb.org.uk to delve into the latest AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds blogs from Monitor Farm hosts, your regional team, Nuffield Scholars and more.

Focused on the underwear-burying craze sweeping the nation, the Monitor Farm debate at Cereals 2017 saw AHDB monitor farmers, Brian Barker and Russell McKenzie, explain how burying pants helped them reveal the impact of management practices on soil health.

Follow the results on twitter using the hashtag #soilmyundies, or contact me for more information.