

Stowmarket Monitor Farm Meeting Report

Meeting 16 - Summer Open Day

30 June 2017

Lodge Farm, Westhorpe, Suffolk



Brian Barker, Stowmarket Monitor Farmer

For more information, visit: cereals.ahdb.org.uk/Stowmarket

Meeting Summary – key messages

1. Crop benchmarking can be a valuable tool to calculate highest theoretical yield and adjust inputs to expected yields.
2. Do a SWOT analysis for your own farm business to identify areas to focus on and repeat the analysis every 3-5 years to review progress made and re-evaluate.
3. Cover crops provide a good habitat for wildlife biodiversity. Spraying the cover crops off in December has been the best timing at Lodge Farm to create good conditions for establishment of the following crop.

Crop benchmarking

Brian has benchmarked all his growing winter wheat crops this year against the AHDB Wheat Growth Guide to calculate the 'theoretical yield' of each field.

This has allowed him to look for trends through the season and used it to target key areas in the crop growth and development in order to maximise on-farm yield. By using the calculation to rank the wheat crops he has adopted a feed to potential system for fertiliser and fungicide. By reducing the investment appropriately in the lower yielding scenarios and then investing more to push the higher potential crops; it has meant true cost of production has been scrutinized throughout the year.

The crop benchmark that has been used through the season is drawn from the AHDB Wheat Growth Guide and is shown below:

Benchmark	
Early October	375 seed/m ²
Establishment Aim	300 plants/m ²
Over-winter Survival	70% seeds sown (260plants/m ²)
Target Leaves	14 per plant

Early April	1,020 shoots/m ²
Shoots to Tillers	45% (460 tillers/m ²)
GS 31	GAI = 2.0
GS 61	GAI = 6.3
Grains/Ear	48
Theoretical Yield (100%)	<u>11.04t/ha</u> (460 ears/m² x 48 grains x 50mg/grain)

Lessons learnt from the harvest 2017 year:

- There has been a big difference between varieties.
- Add inputs to potential - each field has received a very different spray programme and N applications have varied across the farm between 177kgN/ha to 227kgN/ha.
- Micronutrition applications have been very dependent on biomass – where there has been a big biomass, this has received more inputs.

SWOT Analysis

The group conducted a SWOT analysis of Brian's farm business and the wider industry at the summer open day. This was then compared with the SWOT analysis that was completed at the first meeting in 2014 and the results can be seen below:

SWOT Analysis 2014

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Technical ability & high yields	No retirement plans	Redundant buildings	Distractions from core business
Good PR	No budgeting	Solid base & borrowing capability	Future of stewardship
Enthusiastic & forward looking	High fixed costs	More contract work	Future of BPS

SWOT Analysis 2017

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Attention to detail and knowledge	Information overload	Brexit	Public perception
Excellent staff	Length and diversity of rotation	Research opportunities	Brexit
Capacity	Cultivations restrictive	Currency	Loss of actives
Profile	Crop returns	Environmental credentials	Currency
Willingness to learn	Return on investment	New crops/markets	Decrease in BPS
Technology/Data	Break crop returns	Low blackgrass	Future staff recruitment
Soil health	Politics/currency	Reputation	Resistance
Traceability	Market volatility	Cost savings	Regulation
Standards of UK	Weather flexibility		Climate extremes

A comparison of the two showed that many of the key areas have carried forward, such as the technical expertise in the business, the enthusiasm and willingness to learn and the opportunities to work with others and form new contracts or look at new markets.

Brian has now concentrated on many of the elements identified in the original SWOT analysis and has worked on these over the three years to put together business plans, budgets and there has been a strong concentration on costs through benchmarking.

The politics of farming have now moved on slightly from the future of stewardship and BPS to Brexit – a possible threat but also an opportunity for the future.

Monitor Farm programme feedback

All participants agreed that the Monitor Farm meetings have improved their business decision making and technical knowledge.

When asked what one change have you made to your farm business as a result of attending the Stowmarket Monitor Farm meeting, the attendees said:

- ✓ Working out costs of production
- ✓ Increased planning for the future
- ✓ New contacts and growing new crops
- ✓ Better recording
- ✓ Increased use of cover cropping
- ✓ Approach to black-grass control

What are your take-home messages from the Monitor Farm programme?



Find Out More

Read the AHDB Wheat Growth Guide by clicking here: <https://cereals.ahdb.org.uk/media/185687/g66-wheat-growth-guide.pdf>

Get your business ready for the industry post-Brexit – ensure you have completed the Brext Bucket List:

<https://ahdb.org.uk/brexit/bucketlist.aspx>

Further Information

Brian Barker has been selected as an AHDB Cereals and Oilseeds Strategic Farm – read more about this [here](#) and we will keep you updated on future events.

For more information contact:

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To find out more about Farmbench, AHDB's benchmarking tool, contact:

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