



Newsletter – Summer/Autumn 2018

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Focus on soils

Soil management is increasingly becoming the focus on farms. It is not only important in terms of protection of the soil to future proof the farming business but by making the soil more resilient to adverse weather conditions the impact of the weather on yield and quality of the crop is reduced. In turn food production becomes more sustainable.

In this newsletter we highlight the extremes of the weather we have been experiencing, particularly this year and how a change in farming practice can help to safeguard the soil and the crop. For further information please do not hesitate to contact us.

Groundswell

The two day Groundswell conference held recently in Hertfordshire was extremely well attended and was very valuable in continuing the discussion of how Government is shaping the reform of the CAP with the emphasis on funding in Agriculture being based around the environment and the quality of the soil. Speakers from all around the world attended who are ahead of us in their efforts to improve the soils and the biodiversity on the farm and in the soil.

Much of the discussion was about how reducing cultivations improves the resilience of the soil. Some of the UK farming guest speakers showed comparative aerial photographs from June this year, which clearly highlighted the benefits of land which had not been farmed conventionally. It was apparent the crops that had been direct drilled were greener, had much more water available and were not under drought stress.

*“A Nation that
destroys its
soils destroys
itself...”*

*-Franklin D.
Roosevelt*

From flood to dust.....

Who would have thought that in the space of three months the land would have gone from being flooded to drought stressed?

Rainfall 2018

February	24.9 mm
March	58.7 mm
April	75.2 mm
May	45.5 mm
June	10.9 mm
Total: 215.2mm	





Case Study 2018—Soil Resilience

Back in 2008 we were looking for a system to save time with autumn preparation for drilling, reduce the cost of cultivation and improve our soils to make working them easier. For the last 10 years we have not ploughed, instead using a combination of minimum tillage and direct drilling. In 2010 the soil protection review was published which suggested such measures would benefit farming businesses. With research we have continued to develop our practices to make our crops more sustainable, adding to the biodiversity on the farm and in the soil.

The last 10 years has been a learning experience but we have undoubtedly improved the biodiversity, organic matter content and structure of our soil. In 2018 having seen snow, flooding and then a drought in just three months these strategies have been put to the test. The photos below show a timeline of a heavy (Grade 3) fen soil that was coming Linseed (for seed production), following Triticale in 2017. The stubble was over-wintered and coped with most of the winter rainfall, but the last prolonged rainfall in early April caused areas of flooding in the field. With some land drains and surface restoration work the Linseed was drilled in mid May and has now passed the inspection as a seed crop.

Timeline...



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