

2016 / 2017

AGRICULTURE

The Parliamentary Review

A YEAR IN PERSPECTIVE

■ FOREWORDS

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

George Eustice MP

■ REPRESENTATIVES

AH Worth

Dovecote Park

Southalls of Norchard

Fridlington Farms

Hall Hunter Partnership

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Mastergen

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Taylor Organic Farms

W E Phillips and Sons

Brian Robinson Machinery

■ FEATURES

Review of the Year

Review of Parliament



The Rt Hon Theresa May MP

Prime Minister

This year's *Parliamentary Review* follows a significant year in British politics. It was a year in which our economy continued to grow, as the Government followed its balanced plan to keep the public finances under control while investing to build a stronger economy. It was a year in which we began to deliver on the result of the EU referendum by triggering Article 50 and publishing the Repeal Bill, which will allow for a smooth and orderly transition as the UK leaves the EU, maximising certainty for individuals and businesses.

And, of course, it was a year in which the General Election showed that parts of our country remain divided and laid a fresh challenge to all of us involved in politics to resolve our differences, deal with injustices and take, not shirk, the big decisions.

That is why our programme for government for the coming year is about recognising and grasping the opportunities that lie ahead for the United Kingdom as we leave the EU. The referendum vote last year was not just a vote to leave the EU – it was a profound and justified expression that our country often does not work the way it should for millions of ordinary working families. So we need to deliver a Brexit deal that works for all parts of the UK, while continuing to build a stronger, fairer country by strengthening our economy, tackling injustice and promoting opportunity and aspiration.

In the year ahead we will continue to bring down the deficit so that young people do not spend most of their working lives paying for our failure to live within our means. We will take action to build a stronger economy so that we can improve people's living standards and fund the public services on which we all depend. We will continue with our modern Industrial Strategy,

deliver the next phase of high-speed rail, improve our energy infrastructure and support the development of automated vehicles and satellite technology, building a modern economy which creates the high-skill jobs of the future.

At the same time, work needs to be done to build a fairer society – where people can go as far as their talents will take them and no one is held back because of their background. So we will continue to work to ensure every child has the opportunity to attend a good school. We will continue to invest in the NHS and reform mental health legislation, making this a priority. And we will work to address the challenges of social care for our ageing population, bringing forward proposals for consultation to build widespread support.

So this is a Government determined to deliver the best Brexit deal, intent on building a stronger economy and a fairer society, committed to keeping our country safe, enhancing our standing in the wider world, and bringing our United Kingdom closer together. We will continue to put ourselves at the service of millions of ordinary working people for whom we will work every day in the national interest.

“This year's *Parliamentary Review* follows a significant year in British politics”

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs



We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to reshape our relationship with our land, our rivers and our seas. By delivering a Green Brexit we can reform how we manage agriculture and fisheries, and how we protect our natural environment.

I want Britain to be a global champion for sustainable development, a world leader in environmental science, and a setter of gold standards in protecting and growing natural capital.

That is my Department's driving ambition – and it should be central in the next five years of our national mission.

The first step is our 25-year Environment Plan – setting out how we manage our natural assets to create a lasting legacy for future generations. Laying the ground for this, I have asked the Natural Capital Committee's advice on what the plan should aim to achieve, where improvements are most urgent and where the benefits are greatest.

This work will help shape the upcoming Agriculture and Fisheries Bills and how we use public money to reward environmentally-responsible practices. These bills will provide stability for farmers as we leave the EU and make sure we can continue to protect and enhance our environment and, as an independent coastal state, do more with conservation.

The Common Agricultural Policy will be replaced. Our new agricultural policy will recognise the importance of improving production as well as protecting our strong food and animal welfare standards and it will ensure farmers are rewarded for providing environmental goods – whether that's protecting or enhancing habitats for biodiversity or planting more trees to combat soil erosion.

We will also no longer be wedded to the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The CFP has encouraged fishing at a rate more than 50% above scientific advice. Our new approach will put the best interests of UK fishermen at its heart along with the highest standards of marine conservation.

In reshaping both of these policies, our central aim is the enhancement of our environment. Building on existing European standards, we can make Britain a global leader – creating, new institutions, mechanisms and gold standards for protecting our environment. We also have an opportunity to be global leaders in the fight against climate change, the struggle against the illegal wildlife trade and in the promotion and enhancement of animal welfare.

I hope that in years to come people can look back and say our generation lived up to the challenge and handed on a greener, cleaner, better, richer planet to the next generation.

“By delivering a Green Brexit we can reform how we manage agriculture and fisheries”



George Eustice MP

Minister of State for Agriculture,
Fisheries and Food

The decision to leave the EU is the biggest decision this country has taken for half a century and it presents huge opportunities to do things differently and better on policies like agriculture as we regain control. In June, the Queen's Speech included a commitment to a new Agriculture Bill in this session, the first such Bill since we joined the EU.

I spent ten years working in the farming industry and I am passionate about the chance we now have to think about policy from first principles and to put in place new thinking and innovative ideas. Over the last year I have been meeting farmers up and down the country to discuss what the future might look like.

Almost three quarters of the UK is agricultural land and we need to make sure we have the right policies in place to deliver both for farming and our countryside. That is why the Government has committed to keep the budget for farm support the same in cash terms for the lifetime of this Parliament. We will also start a transition to something better, where funds are targeted towards developing farm profitability, environmental improvement and high standards of animal welfare. There have been many interesting ideas put forward and in the months ahead we will be developing our thinking further.

If we want to make farming more profitable then we need to help farmers invest in new technology to improve productivity and reduce costs. We need to ensure that research and development features more prominently in the future. We need to support farmers to come together and collaborate to ensure they get a fairer share of the value chain and we need to help them manage the risks that are inherent in agriculture.

We also have an opportunity to do things differently when it comes to the environment with support delivering improved soil husbandry and habitats for wildlife. We can have schemes that are tailored to local needs but also systems that are simpler, more effective and which rely far less on a complex and arbitrary rule book. Finally, we can pursue policies that will build further on our international reputation for high standards of animal welfare.

There is much to do over the next year but I am confident that by working together, we will ensure our farmers have a bright and prosperous future ahead.

“We have an opportunity to do things differently when it comes to the environment”

Return of the Two Party System

The BBC's Andrew Neil gives his take on the state of Parliament following the June 2017 general election.

It was a year in which politicians learned not only of the power of a referendum to overrule the will of Parliament – but of its power to change the party system in which they operate. Nobody saw this coming. But, in retrospect, perhaps we should have, since we had the fallout from the Scottish referendum to guide us.

In the autumn of 2014 the Scots voted 55%-45% to remain part of the United Kingdom. That was supposed to settle the matter of Scottish independence for a generation, until some Scottish Nationalists began regarding a generation as no more than a couple of years. But in post-referendum elections to Holyrood and Westminster, it also recast the Scottish party system.

Remember, Scotland had been one of the first parts of the UK to throw off the British two-party system and replace it with a multi-party choice of SNP, Labour, Tory, Green, Lib Dem and even UKIP. But as the constitutional issue took centre-stage – and remained there even after the referendum – Scottish voters coalesced round a binary choice: for or against independence.

Thus was a new two-party system born of a centre-left Nationalist party (the SNP) and a centre-right Unionist party (the Scottish Tories). The other parties have not been completely obliterated, especially in Holyrood with its peculiar voting system. But by the general election of 2017 Scotland had become a battle between a dominant

Nationalist party and a resurgent Tory party representing the Union. Two-party politics was back north of the border.

So we should have been prepared for something similar when Britain voted 52% to 48% to leave the European Union in the June 2016 referendum. At the time, we remarked on the power of referenda to overrule both the Commons (where MPs were 65% pro-EU) and the Lords (probably 80% pro-EU). What we did not see was how the Brexit referendum would reconfigure English politics just as the Scottish referendum had redrawn Scottish politics.

So we were taken by surprise for a second time. In this year's general election – perhaps the single biggest act of self-harm a sitting government has ever inflicted on itself – almost 85% in England voted either Conservative or Labour. The English had not voted in such numbers for both major parties since 1970, when the post-war two-party system began to wane – and declined in subsequent elections to a point where barely 65% voted Tory or Labour, encouraging some commentators to think the decline terminal.

The referendum, however, reversed the decline. The Brexit vote ended the schism on the Eurosceptic Right as UKIP voters returned to the Tory fold; and those on the Left of the Greens and the Lib Dems flocked to Jeremy Corbyn's more 'Red Flag' Labour offering. So, as in Scotland previously, two-party politics was back with a vengeance in England too.

But without one crucial element. Our historic two-party system regularly produced one-party government for the life of a Parliament. But our new two-party system has produced a hung Parliament with no party having an overall majority. This knife-edge parliamentary arithmetic means the smaller parties may be down – but they are not out.

The Conservatives need an alliance with one small party (Ulster's DUP) to be sure of a majority. Even then, with the Tories and Labour divided over Brexit, no majority on any issue will be certain and on many votes the smaller parties will be pivotal in determining many outcomes.

So politicians return from their summer recess to a great parliamentary paradox: the two-party system has resurrected itself but rather than bringing with it the stability and certainty of the two-party politics of old, almost every major vote in the months ahead will be uncertain and unpredictable – and politics will be peculiarly unstable. Power will rest in Parliament. Government will be able to take nothing for granted. No vote will be in the bag until all the votes are counted. Westminster will have a new lease of life – perhaps even a spring in its step. Our democracy might be all the better for it.



Neil believes two referendums have redrawn the map of British politics.

Common agricultural policy



Andrea Leadsom believes Brexit can lead to a better deal for British agriculture

Since the late 1950s, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been a cornerstone of the European project. Today, it accounts for almost half of the European Union's annual budget.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a key area of the Brexit negotiations. Introduced in 1962, it was designed to ensure food security. Since then it has gone through a series of reforms, focusing more and more on the environmental protection and stewardship of the continent's landscapes.

Government data showed that CAP payments accounted for 55% of UK farmers' income in 2014. The decision to leave the EU meant that UK farmers would no longer have access to this funding after 2019. For many, this was a massive concern and it could make them consider whether or not to remain in the sector. A mass exodus from farming raised a number of concerns for policymakers, such as food security, environmental management, wealth generation and employment.

The concerns were also echoed in the Commons in January, with Rachael Maskell, Labour MP for York Central, voicing a common worry about those in the rural economy 'With subsidies accounting for over half the income and investment resources of farmers, they need to know what will take its place.'

There was a fear among MPs with constituencies in Scotland that, as funds from CAP are not subject to the Barnett Formula, which proportionally divides funds among England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, that the Scottish rural economy would suffer as a result because they would not receive the same level of funding from the Government in Westminster as they currently did from Brussels.

The then-Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom tried to allay those fears by saying that leaving the EU presented 'huge opportunities' for the farming and fisheries sectors. She added 'It is vital that we provide the industry with as much continuity and certainty as we can. That is why we have already provided reassurance to all farmers across the UK that they will receive the same level of financial support under pillar one until 2020.'

For MPs with constituencies that are in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, she stated 'The Government will also ensure that the devolved administrations are funded to meet the commitments they have made under current EU budget allocations.'

Speaking at the Oxford Farming Conference in January, Farming Minister George Eustice said the Government would introduce policies that would work for all farmers in

the UK. Commenting on replacing CAP payments to farmers, he added 'If subsidies equal direct payments, of course we want to move away from that.'

'We want support to help farmers improve productivity, and target the support at active farmers. We can design a system which does that.'

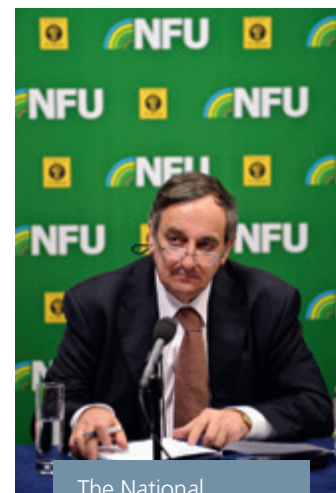
The former Environment Secretary, Owen Paterson, outlined how leaving the UK was something to be embraced, not feared. In a report he had authored, he said that leaving the EU would result in food prices falling by 10%, rather than increasing.

He said that leaving the CAP would be beneficial to UK farmers as the universal one-size-fits-all structure of the policy across the vast and diverse landmass of Europe was failing.

He observed 'The great tragedy is that the CAP has failed not only as a policy for food production – the UK's self-sufficiency rate of 61% in 2015 was 1% lower than in 2014, but 13% lower than 20 years ago – and is now also failing as an environmental policy.'

The National Farmers' Union, who adopted a neutral position during the EU referendum campaign, said Brexit did present an opportunity to deliver 'a regulatory framework suited for UK farmers'.

However, it added 'Government must not ignore the economic importance of the farming sector. It's the bedrock of the UK's largest manufacturing industry – food and drink – which is worth £108 billion and employs 3.9 million people.'



The National Farmers' Union adopted a neutral position during the EU referendum

Rural tourism

With increasing pressure on farm incomes from traditional sources, there has been ongoing advice for farmers to diversify. Farmers could follow the route of adding value and selling the resulting products, such as cheese or cider. Alternatively, they could diversify into the services sector, such as play parks or camping sites.

The push for farmers to widen their horizons was part of the drive to expand the rural tourism sector and boost the national coffers.

Before the dissolution of Parliament, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee had launched an inquiry into the rural economy and some of the challenges of helping it expand and grow.

The Committee said rural tourism contributed about £17 million to the English economy each year. However things like transport connections,

seasonal employment and poor internet speeds were holding back its ability to expand.

It quoted figures from Visit England that showed that in 2014 'just 18% of domestic overnight trips were taken to rural areas, down from 22% in 2012'. It added that more than 50% of 'international spend' was in London.

National Farmers' Union (NFU) Deputy President, Minette Batters, welcomed the Efra Select Committee's report, and speaking ahead of giving evidence to the MPs, she said 'Farms are... the foundations of our rural economy, farmers manage the countryside that millions visit every year and maintain the 200,000km of public footpaths they use to enjoy our great British countryside.'

'We need to add value to the rural economy and supporting farm businesses diversification efforts is critical to that.'



Minette Batters, Deputy President of the National Farmers' Union



Former Prime Minister David Cameron previously announced a five-point plan to boost tourism across the UK

But, she added 'As part of the expanding rural economy, the infrastructure must be in place for farms to further their contribution. A significant part of this is access to broadband in rural areas so we can provide visitors with a standard of service that ensures they return for years to come.'

The landowners' organisation, the Country, Land and Business Association (CLA), submitted evidence to the Committee calling for a bespoke plan to address the challenges, such as poor broadband and lack of investment.

Former Prime Minister, David Cameron, had launched a five-point plan to boost tourism across the UK and beyond London's city limits.

While the pan-government initiative, headed by the Culture Secretary, dealt with trying to rebalance the growth in the tourism sector to the countryside, it did not deal with the issues such as transport links and rural internet connections, observed critics.

Ofcom, in its written evidence to the Efra Committee, said that 22% of premises in rural areas were unable

to receive high-speed broadband, compared with just 2% in urban areas.

It explained 'Lower population density and more challenging terrain make the rollout of superfast broadband a significant challenge across many rural areas. These conditions make it difficult for companies to provide a service at a reasonable cost per connection.'

The issue of improving the road infrastructure was raised in the Commons by Conservative MP Chris Davies, whose constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire is in rural Wales.

He asked when would 'world-class countryside [be] accessible via a world-class road network'.

Former Transport Minister Andrew Jones replied that he understood the need for improved road networks in rural areas.

As part of the Government's efforts to boost rural tourism and to address the need to provide the supporting infrastructure, it launched the Rural Tourism Infrastructure grant programme.

The scheme was to 'help fund the cost of capital expenditure on tourism infrastructure'.

Some of the examples that the Government provided to prospective projects included setting up local cycle paths and expanding a local museum.

The issue of Brexit also featured frequently in debates following the referendum decision. A number of MPs voiced concern that leaving the EU would present problems for rural businesses, such as fewer seasonal workers coming in from EU nations and that the uncertainty surrounding Brexit was being felt more keenly by rural tourism operations that often had to close their doors during the winter months.

Flood prevention

During this Parliamentary session, there was no widespread flooding across the UK. Instead, it was time for the politicians to take stock of flood defence infrastructure and the policies that governed and controlled flood policy.

One of the first to report was the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee. Having taken evidence from across a wide range of witnesses; from landowners and farmers to policymakers and politicians, the MPs called for an overhaul of flood management.

Committee Chairman Conservative MP, Neil Parish, said 'Some five million people in England are at risk of flooding. Winter 2015–16 broke rainfall records. Storms Desmond, Eva and Frank disrupted communities across northern parts of the UK, with Desmond alone costing the UK more than £5 billion.

Mr Parish added 'Our proposals will deliver a far more holistic approach to flooding and water supply management, looking at catchments as a whole. Flood management must include much wider use of natural measures such as leaky dams, tree planting and improved soil management. And some areas of farmland should be used to store flood water.'

The Committee called for a new post to be created, a National Flood Commissioner, who would be responsible for flood management throughout England, and would work with Government and its agencies on flood management strategies. They would also be the person to be held accountable for their implementation and execution.

One of the long-standing controversies regarding flood management is funding. While the Government has

said that it has made more funding available, some critics have disagreed with Government figures. Mr Parish and the Committee said that it would be unrealistic to expect the Government to protect all the at-risk properties, but they added that a change in funding would mean that individual households and businesses could receive financial support from ministers to protect their own properties.

The Committee also called for building regulations to be tightened, including making homes more 'flood proof'. The environment agency has identified two approaches for homeowners. One is flood resistance, which involved erecting temporary barriers to prevent the water from entering the property. The other is flood resilience, which involves building in features such as stone floors and higher electricity sockets to allow families to move back into their homes more quickly after a flooding event.

The MPs said that developers should be required to flood-proof properties that are built in at-risk areas, and failure to do so would result in them being penalised.

In its response to the Committee's report, the Government said that it was



Neil Parish, Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

MPs felt developers should be required to flood proof properties in high risk areas



pleased that the inquiry had broadened the debate surrounding the best approach to managing flood risk.

It wrote 'We will continue to develop our approach on how we intervene and invest to effectively manage flood risk in the light of emerging evidence such as that on climate change and flooding events.'

In September, Andrea Leadsom made a statement to the Commons saying that the extreme flooding of recent years meant that there was an immediate need to understand the level of risk facing the nation in times of flooding events.

She told MPs that, as part of the national review's modelling of plausible

extreme rainfall scenarios, it was possible to assess necessary planning and management strategies.

She said 'The results showed around 530 facilities were vulnerable to river and coastal flooding which could impact significantly on local communities. Working with the relevant utilities, regulators and Government Departments, a number of areas have been identified to improve resilience planning for this infrastructure.

'Better understanding the risk helps us better prepare and protect infrastructure, an effective response when flooding occurs is essential to minimise impact and protect lives.'

Food exports



Ministers were keen to stress the worldwide potential of food exports following Brexit

With Brexit set for March 2019 prompting an unnerving level of uncertainty among business leaders, ministers were keen to highlight the fact that there was a big world of opportunities out there.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs established the Great British Food Unit in January 2016, launching it with considerable fanfare and ambitious claims that manufactured food exports would increase by £6 billion by 2020. They also forecasted that it would create thousands of new jobs in the sector.

Nine months later, the then-Environment Secretary, Andrea Leadsom, revised the target, down from £6 billion to £2.9 billion, of which about 75% would be coming from countries outside of the EU.

Mrs Leadsom's Department said the figure was revised because the new target of £2.9 billion was a more detailed assessment of nine priority markets that offered the best growth.

These markets included China, Japan, India and the US. Only Germany and France were EU countries identified as priority areas.

Ministers suggested that food manufacturers could expect to raise an additional £400 million a year by selling beer, pork and potatoes to China. Tea, biscuits and jam were identified as products that would do well in the Japanese market.

Outlining the Government's International Action Plan for Food and Drink, Mrs Leadsom said 'Our food and drink is renowned for having the very best standards of animal welfare, quality and safety and I want even more of the world to enjoy what we have to offer.'

Within Government, there was a feeling that there was room for growth when it came to food and drink exports.'

She added 'Scottish salmon, Welsh beef, Northern Irish whiskey and English cheese are already well known globally and I want us to build on

this success by helping even more companies send their top-quality food and drink abroad.'

According to *The Financial Times*, the UK exported £18 billion of food and drink products in 2016. Yet France's and Germany's export figures were both more than double the UK's. It added that only 20% of UK-based food businesses exported its products.

Ian Wright, Director General of the Food and Drink Federation, was supportive of the initiative, saying 'Export growth is hugely important to our sector. We hope that the International Action Plan for Food and Drink will open more channels and provide direct support to new and existing food and drink exporters.'

In February, it seemed as if the early signs of boosting exports were positive. Government data suggested that exports had increased by 10% during 2016. Defra added that the growth showed 'no sign of slowing', even amid the uncertainty of Brexit.

Speaking ahead of the National Farmers Union Conference, Mrs Leadsom declared 'As we prepare to leave the EU, there has never been a better time to become more outward looking – developing new trading relationships and establishing our place as a truly Global Britain.'

However, Labour MP for York Central, Rachael Maskell, used a Commons debate to say that while focusing on the long-term exports, the Government was failing the farming community by not offering clarity.

'Let's not get away from the fact that it is tough out there: incomes are falling and debts are rising. Incomes were down by a shocking 29% last year, and a fifth of farmers are struggling just to pay their bills,' she told MPs.

'The average debt for a farming business is now £188,500, and too many have gone out of business altogether, including more than 1,000 dairy farmers in the last three years. Not all farmers are thriving, or even surviving.'



Ian Wright, Director General of the Food and Drink Federation

Soil health

Farm productivity is shaped by the soil. A handful of the stuff can contain billions of microorganisms, and it takes more than 1,000 years to form just a centimetre of topsoil. We abuse it or ignore it at our peril. Without soil, we do not eat and lose vital ecosystem services that underpin our economic, social and environmental wellbeing.

MPs on the Environmental Audit Committee recognised the value of the ground under our feet and decided to investigate the health of the UK's soil, and whether public policy was helping or hindering it. During the course of their inquiry into soil health, the Committee heard that about 300,000 hectares of soil was believed to be



Approximately 300,000 hectares of soil is believed to be contaminated with toxic elements



Rebecca Pow MP

contaminated with 'toxic elements – such as cadmium, arsenic and lead', as a legacy of the nation's industrial past.

The MPs were critical of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) because, they said, the Department had withdrawn capital grant funding for local authorities to clean up this contamination. Without this funding, resource-squeezed local councils were unlikely to address the problems linked to contaminated soil, such as poor health, they added.

The Committee's report said untreated contamination may harm water quality, as well as public health. 'Our industrial heritage means that hundreds of thousands of sites across the country are contaminated by chemicals, heavy metals, tar, asbestos and landfill,' observed Committee Chairwoman, Mary Creagh.

'Often materials were disposed of on site and buildings demolished without the environmental safety regulations we take for granted today.'

She added that she considered that Defra's 'complacent decision' to withdraw grants had 'undermined the ability of councils to identify and clean up polluted brownfield sites not dealt with through the planning system'.

She concluded 'This presents a real danger that contaminated sites are being left unidentified with consequential public health impacts.'

In November 2016, in what was considered to be the first debate on soil health in Parliament's history, Defra Minister, Thérèse Coffey, acknowledged that soil was a valuable and finite resource, and its health was something that was on the Whitehall radar.

'The benefits derived from healthy soil are many and they have a very important role to play,' she said.

'It is for those reasons that the protection and sustainable management of our soils is integral to our thinking in the 25-year environment plan and the 25-year food, farming and fisheries plan.'

The health of soil on agricultural land was too loosely regulated, warned the MPs on the Efra Committee. They said that the Government relied too much on subsidies that attempted to limit damage to the soil, rather than focusing on improving the robustness and health of the land.

In the Commons debate, Conservative MP, Rebecca Pow, described soil as the 'stuff of life'.

She explained 'It is as important as the water we drink and the air we breathe – they are all inextricably linked. Without healthy soils, we cannot produce healthy, sustainable food.'

As well as highlighting the important role healthy soil can play in extreme flooding events by absorbing more water and slowing the flow of water reaching river systems, she also highlighted the role of soil in combatting climate change by mitigating atmospheric carbon by sequestering the molecules and locking them underground.

'[Many people] were unaware... that soil stores three times as much carbon as is held in the atmosphere, with peat being especially significant,' she said.

'Taking more care of the land around us would have a cost effect on the economy, because it would save us money.'

Return of Michael Gove

When Theresa May announced her first cabinet in July 2016, many pundits thought it signalled the end of Michael Gove's ministerial career. The former Education Secretary, Lord Chancellor and chief Brexiteer had never had the cosiest of relationships with his party's new leader.

When May was at the Home Office and Gove at Education, the pair clashed on more than one occasion, most memorably in the summer of 2014. The 'Trojan Horse' affair, involving the alleged 'Islamification' of secular schools in Birmingham, saw the two ministers trading accusations against one another.

The fallout saw David Cameron demanding apologies from both parties, May losing a key advisor and Gove losing his role as Education Secretary altogether.

Two years later, with Gove comprehensively defeated by May in the Conservative leadership contest, it was reasonable to suspect he had no chance of ever appearing in her Government. To no one's surprise, he was sacked from his role as Lord Chancellor and dumped onto the backbenches.

And yet, just one year on, he's back.

Humbled by the loss of seats in the 2017 snap general election, and the new reality of running a minority government, May is aware of the importance of keeping her party together. Gove's appointment as Environment Secretary was the headline of her post-election reshuffle and the



Michael Gove,
Secretary of State for
Environment, Food and
Rural Affairs

early signs indicate that her former adversary is growing rapidly into the role.

On the 21 July, he gave his first major speech in the role at the WWF's Living Planet Centre. He expressed his disappointment at President Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the Paris Climate Agreement, adding that 'the world's second biggest generator of carbon emissions cannot simply walk out of the room when the heat is on.'

He described leaving the EU, the Common Agricultural Policy and the Common Fisheries Policy as an 'unfrozen moment' where new possibilities occur.

By the time next year's *Parliamentary Review* is published, we should have a greater idea of how these new possibilities are being explored.

AH Worth



Potato planting



Duncan Worth, CEO

AH Worth is a company making a positive impact on the UK farming and food produce sectors through its subsidiaries. By adhering to strong values about the environment and supplier relationships, the business is looking to capitalise on a new period of growth.

With well over 100 years of history, Lincolnshire-headquartered AH Worth has long been a fixture of the UK's agriculture industry. Overseen by Duncan Worth, Chief Executive Officer of the fourth-generation family business founded by his great-grandfather in 1895, the group wholly owns QV Foods and Worth Farms and is a major shareholder in Holbeach Marsh Co-operative and Manor Fresh.

A farming core

It started out more than a century ago as a single farm, before growing into a four-farm operation by the mid-1930s. Worth says the entrepreneurial spirit of his great-grandfather and his successors ultimately helped make the company what it is today: a multi-business group farming over 5,000 acres of land. 'The farming side of the business very much remains our core component, although today the rest of the business has grown significantly larger than the farm,' Worth says.

This is because a high proportion of the product produced by Worth Farms from its Holbeach Marsh site is packed and made consumer-ready at its main turnover subsidiary, QV Foods. Starting as the result of a co-operative between 14 like-minded local growers in 1968, QV Foods has, throughout its history, brought to market potatoes grown by Worth Farms while also supplying sweetcorn, garlic, brassicas and leafy salads. AH Worth's Manor Fresh business is in a 50–50 joint venture with

FACTS ABOUT AH WORTH

- » Fourth generation family business involved in four companies (wholly owned packing business QV Foods and Worth Farms, joint venture Manor Fresh and Holbeach Marsh Co-operative)
- » QV Foods supplies a range of vegetables to customers in the retail, foodservice, wholesale and food manufacturing sectors
- » Registered in Spalding, Lincolnshire
- » Founded in 1895
- » Employs around 550 people across the four businesses
- » Winner of Farm Business of the Year in 2015



Marsh Harrier coming in to land

“60% of our labour speaks English as a second language”

Fresca, specifically set up to supply potatoes, speciality vegetables and organics to its major retail customers.

Yet, the vast majority of potatoes handled by QV Foods are sourced from outside of AH Worth's farming subsidiary, from farms ranging from Yorkshire to Cornwall and Herefordshire to Suffolk. 'As a farming business, we grow about 15,000 tonnes of potatoes annually, however QV Foods handles in the region of 200,000 potatoes, with a high proportion procured from third parties across the country,' Worth explains. He says that their farming business benefits from being able to farm on high-quality and fertile land, which is a big factor in the company's success, giving it a competitive advantage over some other parts of the country.



Environmental pond

Challenges

However, despite being able to draw on its natural resources, selling this produce into retail is a task that Worth concedes can be difficult. 'There is a constant pressure to supply what the consumer and customer wants and, therefore, constant change through improvements in variety, taste, quality and availability is an ongoing challenge,' he says. He also cites market competition, particularly from overseas, and product seasonality as a concern.

Uncertainty also pervades around the UK's decision to leave the European Union. 'Whether that [Brexit] is related to exchange rates or access to labour – 60% of our labour speaks English as a second language – then the implications remain to be seen,' he says. In the period since the vote, Worth says the company has already seen difficulties in accessing enough labour, a factor that could impact on the business long-term due to the industry still being manual intensive.

To counter the labour reliance in the packing business, the company is actively investing in ways to employ more automation in the form of camera-operated sorters and robotics.

Environmental and sustainability credentials

At the heart of AH Worth's sustainability principles is a commitment to working with its local communities to achieve a common good, improve the day-to-day working environment and enhance natural resources. Worth says it achieves these commitments in many forms, including an on-site 1.5MW Anaerobic Digester (AD) plant, operating since early 2014, along with 250kw of solar panels also located on site which together supply 95% of the company's electricity needs.



Anaerobic Digester on
Open Farm Sunday

‘Because our demand varies from day to night, I don’t think we will reach 100% but the 95% mark is nevertheless very impressive,’ he says. On top of this, around two thirds of water used on site emanates from recycled water. Worth also highlights the fact that the liquid by-product stemming from the AD plant is a nutrient-rich fertiliser which it applies to growing wheat crops, with the solid part then used as a soil conditioner. The addition of the natural fertiliser reduces the need to apply petroleum-based fertilisers.

The farm has been a designated Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) demonstration farm since 1997, a status given by the environmental organisation entrusted to audit farms. ‘Having the LEAF Marque accredited status on our farming products is a demonstration of our strong credentials,’ Worth says. These credentials led to further recognition in 2015, when Worth Farms won the Farming Business of the Year award. ‘We are confident that we are as good

as anybody in this area,’ Worth says. ‘Having a packing business situated within such a large block of land, helps us focus on our environmental and sustainability credentials.’

The next generation

Rapid growth occurred between 2004 to 2012, but the following years saw a slight downturn due to a major customer deciding to pack their own potatoes. However, Worth says the group is now back in a period of growth and well poised to capitalise.

‘The farming side gives us a robust base to grow from,’ he says. ‘If opportunities arise, then we’d look to farm more land but this is strictly dependent on whether this is sustainable and justified.’ Adding value to the packing business is also a possibility. ‘There are big opportunities to providing a more convenient food product to the customer, perhaps in areas such as reducing cooking times for potatoes,’ he says.

“Having LEAF Marque accredited status on our farming products is a demonstration of our strong credentials”

Dovecote Park



Andrew McAllister, Managing Director



Aberdeen Angus cattle grazing with Hereford calves

FACTS ABOUT DOVECOTE PARK

- » Privately-owned British family business
- » Established in 1997
- » Employs 750 people
- » Turnover £160 million
- » Dedicated supplier to Waitrose supermarkets
- » East Riding College Training Champion Award 2017

Dovecote Park is the exclusive beef supplier to Waitrose, the food shops of the John Lewis Partnership. Every pack of beef, veal or venison sold by Waitrose is sourced through the Dovecote Park supply chain, including the raw material for pies, ready meals and sandwiches. The company is one of a handful of privately-owned fully-integrated meat processors in the UK.

The Waitrose relationship is at the heart of the Dovecote Park story but, increasingly, reputable restaurant chains such as Hawksmoor and Gourmet Burger Kitchen have joined the customer profile, seeing real value in the provenance and product integrity from farm through to plate that Dovecote Park can provide.

The company will celebrate its 20th anniversary in October 2017. It started life in 1997 as a private company with three shareholding families, creating an independent beef-processing business dedicated to supplying Waitrose. From small beginnings, with 34 employees on a site near Pontefract in Yorkshire, the company has grown substantially to the point where it now employs 750 people both there and at a secondary site at Skellingthorpe in Lincolnshire.

Capital investment over this 20-year period, including two major expansions, has seen around £38 million put back into the development of the business, creating a world-class processing, boning and packaging facility. The expansion of Waitrose stores over this time has taken the company's turnover to £160 million.

Brand integrity

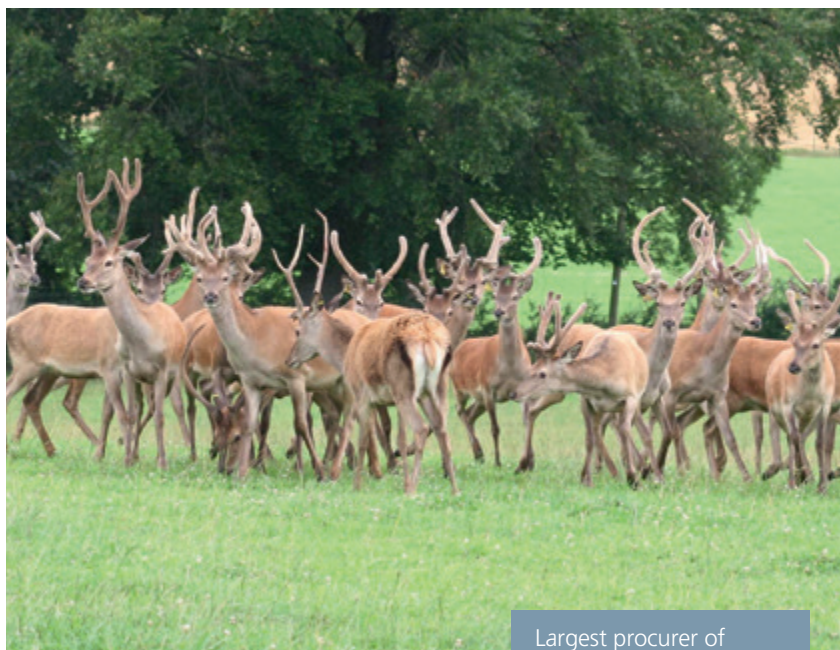
Waitrose only sell beef slaughtered in the UK and therefore depend on Dovecote Park to source cattle from a known and trusted nationwide network of 700 beef

farmers who are fully committed to the principles of best practice in husbandry and animal welfare. Dovecote Park's livestock team enjoys a close relationship with the farmer supply base, communicating industry developments through their fieldsmen, meetings and collaboratively working to form the essential bridge between the retail customer and the farmer.

This end-to-end relationship is unique to the Waitrose supply chain. Waitrose were pioneers in the renaissance of traditional British beef breeds. The brand integrity and full farm assurance for their Aberdeen Angus, Hereford, Welsh Black, West Country and Highland breeds are guaranteed, both by the strength of the farmer relationships and the use of strict verification protocols, including random DNA testing using the latest technology available to reinforce the integrity of the brand.

British beef

British beef now enjoys strong consumer confidence. The UK consumer's preference for a British product provides a solid base for the export opportunities that we are now seeing. This confidence has been achieved through improving the consumer's eating experience by returning to some good old-fashioned practices such as on bone hanging and maturation. No hindquarter is boned until it has had a seven day period of maturation hanging on the bone and a further conditioning period takes place before the product is shipped. At the top of the range, 30 day dry aged Aberdeen Angus beef, as sold at the in-store butchery counters, is enjoying strong growth as consumers, inspired by cookery programmes and increasingly interested in the provenance of food, seek a great tasting experience. Dovecote Park continues to invest and support a roll-out schedule

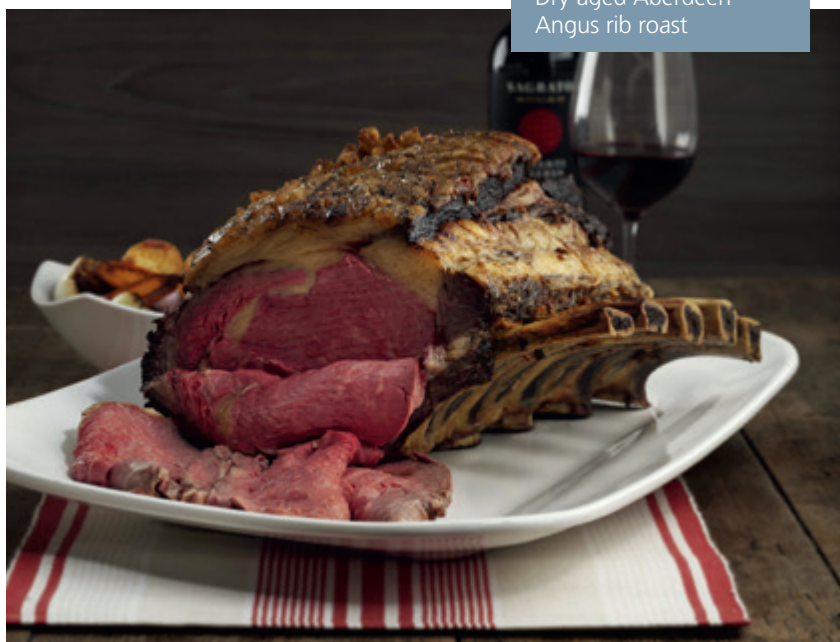


Largest procurer of farmed venison in the UK

that will see purpose-built dry aged cabinets at the forefront of Waitrose service meat counters, creating an artisan feel to a modern supermarket, and offering a strong focal point to attract customers.

However, as part of a farming sector that is going to face significant change as we prepare to leave the European Union and the relative security of the Common Agricultural Policy, it would be naïve to assume that the beef production sector does not face some real challenges. Whatever the outcome of the

“This end-to-end relationship is unique to the Waitrose supply chain”



Dry-aged Aberdeen Angus rib roast



Apprentice Training
in action

“Dovecote Park was extremely proud in March 2017 to receive the award for the East Riding College Training Champion”

upcoming negotiations, it remains a fact that the vast majority of beef imports and exports are to and from the EU. It is also a fact that direct support payments made under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) form a large part of livestock farming's income. These are not necessarily guaranteed post the 2019 exit date. A major readjustment in efficiency will inevitably have to be made if British beef wishes to both retain its primacy in the home market and to take advantage of any opportunities under new trading arrangements. The long-term sustainability of our livestock farmers needs to be fully considered in the negotiation process and the crucial issues around market access and long-term agricultural support must be fully taken into account.

Facing the future

Dovecote Park's beef producer group are all actively and collaboratively engaged in benchmarking best practice in every area that concerns the consumer; in sustainable farming, both commercially and environmentally, in best animal and employee welfare and in research work that improves animal health, wellbeing and performance.

Dovecote Park and Waitrose's strong collaborative relationship will be a sound base for continued development of direct, short, sustainable supply chains which offer efficient farmers stable, consistent and predictable returns, that allow for reinvestment.

British industry is often criticised for low productivity and inadequate investment in training. While it is a concern, in common with other food industry employers, that access to labour may become more restricted as we leave the EU. Dovecote Park is looking to the future; it has invested in developing a bespoke Apprenticeship Scheme. Starting in 2015, the company has put young people, both male and female, through an intensive butchery apprentice course to help them develop skills. Traditionally these would be taught in local butcher's shops, which have been in decline since the mid 1970s. This course is operated in conjunction with East Riding College and provides learners with excellent on- and off-the-job training, including additional in-house and external qualifications alongside their apprenticeship. Dovecote Park was extremely proud in March 2017 to receive the award for the East Riding College Training Champion, but the most gratifying part has been the fact that the majority of individuals who have completed the programme have remained with the business, going on to become ambassadors to promote and attract new entrants to the scheme at shows and events.

Dovecote Park will mark its 20th anniversary by further expansion, adding a world-class farmed venison-slaughter facility to the Pontefract site, improving the process for this growing market sector and continuing to demonstrate its commitment to continuous investment and improvement.

Southalls of Norchard



Packing beans



Paul and Michael Southall

Southalls of Norchard wants to connect its customers with the produce that we grow and pack. We are striving to inform them about seasonality, the farm environment of which we are a part and to share the buzz of growing great crops for demanding supermarket customers.

Our weekly blogs reflect the flow of the farm year. The winter purple sprouting broccoli overlapping in April with the first of the asparagus harvest. June, dominated by peas and broad beans, giving way to the July surge of runner, dwarf French and fine beans with courgettes and continental onions. October, ending with a frantic push on pumpkins and squashes ahead of Halloween, before settling into the autumn and winter planning and preparation period.

Business development

Situated in the heart of Worcestershire, Norchard Farm was bought in 1907 by Black Country greengrocer, Matthew Southall. He set his son Arthur to grow the vegetables that could, at this stage, be transported from the recently-opened railway station at Hartlebury.

In the early 80s Paul and Michael joined father Don on his traditional mixed farm of 150 acres. Active membership of two co-operatives, sharing knowledge and accessing EU funding, enabled the business to move into growing specialist vegetable crops. We are now growing and packing 12 core lines of vegetables on over 1,150 acres. These are mainly sold to UK supermarkets through marketing agents.

The closure of the Kidderminster sugar beet factory in 2002 left our farming neighbours with a hole in their rotations that we have helped to fill. Another key

FACTS ABOUT SOUTHALLS OF NORCHARD

- » Southalls of Norchard
- » 4,500+ tonnes of vegetables per year
- » 2,000,000+ pre-packs per year
- » 1,150 acres farmed
- » 250 strong workforce
- » Our new website www.southallsofnorchard.co.uk incorporates regular blogs from partners Paul and Michael Southall

“The wildlife that lives alongside our farming operations has always been important to us. It is exciting to discover species that we have not seen before on the farm, even more so when they are associated with habitats that we have created and maintained”

driver of our expansion came in 1995 when an initial dozen Eastern Europeans were engaged for the season. This has now grown to up to 250 migrant workers at peak times and they are still hardworking and great members of the farm and pack house teams.

Community

As Southalls of Norchard has expanded we have been conscious of the impact we are having on our local community and, where possible, we use local suppliers. We have organised parties to celebrate the Royal Wedding and both Jubilees, providing a chance for our workforce and our Norchard neighbours to meet and break down barriers by socialising together. Our farm football

team play an annual match against the local village team. The match is always well supported by our staff and villagers alike. Prior to Halloween, two classes of Year One primary school pupils visit the farm mainly to marvel at our pumpkins but we also discuss food miles, food security and the benefits of eating fresh vegetables. They all leave the farm clutching a pumpkin.

Environment

The wildlife that lives alongside our farming operations has always been important to us. It is exciting to discover species that we have not seen before on the farm, even more so when they are associated with habitats that we have created and maintained. For instance, 2017 has seen a continuing rise in flowering native orchids which now number over a hundred blooms. Key areas are our three pools and their surroundings, three woodlands including coppiced areas and miles of hedgerows including trees and margins. Our fertile fields sit amongst this landscape as they have done for hundreds of years. Our intention is to continue to monitor the farm wildlife to help us create and maintain habitats which are of benefit for as many species as possible.

Diamond Jubilee Party



Pack house

In 2004 our pack house was erected with the help of Rural Payments Agency (RPA) funding and our expertise at packing developed from there. In early 2014 we extended, doubling the size of our packing area. The RPA grant that aided the cost of building works and new packing equipment was based on 'transformational change' resulting from the implementation of the project.

This has indeed been the case and we are now supplying supermarkets direct to depot. The supply chain has been shortened, giving the final customer a fresher, tastier, more nutritious product. We are planning to extend the pack house again to give more chilled space.

Service provision

An increasingly important part of our business is service provision. In 2016, 74 acres of overwintered carrots were grown on our land, with Southalls of Norchard carrying out the spraying, fertilising and irrigation required on a contract basis. After a successful first year, a similar acreage has been drilled for 2018 harvest. 80 acres of salad onions are also being grown for a customer who will carry out the harvest but requires the crop to be grown for them. The pack house is also being utilised for packing third party produce and we are actively trying to increase this area of the business, particularly with imported produce through the winter months.

Concerns

- » Tightening of the labour supply, already showing up given the weakness of sterling and the perceived antipathy of the British public to migrants. If free movement of labour from the EU is restricted a new Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme will be vital. It will need to be ready and with enough scope



Southern Marsh Orchid

to cover UK horticulture's labour requirement from April 2019

- » Reduction in the amount of pesticides available for use in specialist crops is a major challenge in all areas of horticulture
- » Pressure on profit margins given the squeeze caused by the higher cost of labour following the introduction of the Living Wage, increased input costs and the downward pressure on prices by the UK supermarkets
- » Post-Brexit reduction in financial support for agriculture.

Our strapline is Growing through the Generations and whilst we are keen to use the best practice of previous generations we are also aware of our obligations to future generations. The farm team is led by committed individuals who share the partners' vision of business success achieved by attention to detail, diligence and innovation whilst respecting our customers, fellow workers, the community and the environment. Southalls of Norchard has a story to tell and social media will share it with present, and future, customers.

“Our strapline is Growing through the Generations and whilst we are keen to use the best practice of previous generations we are also aware of our obligations to future generations”

Fridlington Farms



Stuart and Callum Stark
inspecting a crop of Royal
potatoes



Stunning views across
the farm

FACTS ABOUT FRIDLINGTON FARMS

- » Family-owned business managed by founder's grandson, Stuart Stark
- » Farming 1,500 hectares of which 1,200 hectares in hand
- » 700 hectares combinable crops
- » 320 hectares potatoes
- » 8,000 tonnes of potato storage
- » Easycare sheep flock of 3,400 ewes on 390 hectares of grassland
- » Pig unit consisting of 1,000 sows
- » Personnel: six arable, two shepherds, six pig men plus seasonal labour

Fridlington Farms is a family business that has farmed in the Sutton-on-the-Forest area for 75 years and was founded by Jack Fridlington. The land, situated in the Vale of York has a light and sandy nature which gives a good platform for growing root vegetables. The farm consists of circa 1,200 hectares with a suitable six-year rotation including potatoes, wheat, rape, barley and grass leys.

The original homestead of the farm was at Gypsy Wood, Dunnington. The farm's acreage was around 147 acres and was sold in 1953. The farm then moved to its current location and by the late 50s it had grown in size to 2,000 acres and employed 48 full time male staff, 15 female staff and 12 Polish part-timers. The farm owned three combines, a threshing machine, a sugar beet lifter and 18 tractors. Although it was highly mechanised, the horse still had a place on the farm and there were more than 20 kept. It is interesting to compare that to the modern agriculture practices, today we only employ six arable workers.

Potatoes are a key crop for the business. The potato crop is grown for processing with the farm supplying Walkers and McCain's. The farm has an irrigation licence of 60 million gallons. A small amount of the potato crop is marketed at harvest, but the majority is stored in our own state-of-the-art storage facilities, partly powered by roof mounted 200kW solar panels, for marketing later in the season.

Rotation is the key to our success

Fridlington Farms' six-course rotation revolves around potatoes. It is the farm's mission to provide the best field condition for every crop to maximise yield and quality

potential. We treat all land the same, whether it is on rented, contract farmed or land that we own.

Winter wheat and spring/winter barley, along with the use of grass leys are major break crops within our crop rotation. Modern and efficient machinery is used to drill and harvest our good quality cereals. Most of our cereals are to feed to the pig enterprise on the farm. We have enough grain storage for 5,000 tonnes.

Potatoes continue to be the principle crop of our six-year rotation. Up to date, efficient planting and harvesting systems are used to maximise crop quality and yields. The crop is grown to the specification of our customers, then harvested and graded into modern storage facilities. The farm owns three main box stores and one bulk store. Altogether, Fridlington Farms can store 8,000 tonnes of potatoes on site.

Looking after the soil

The fertility and organic content of the soil has been enhanced by the use of five-year grass leys containing a high clover content which is grazed by our sheep flock.



Bee-friendly Phacelia

Soil compaction has been reduced by a move to caterpillar tracked harvesters and rooting development increased by the drainage of wet fields. Shelter belts have been planted and minimum tillage helps with other soil issues.

Livestock

We have always been into pig production, and that has successfully grown into the 1,000 breeding sow unit it is today, sending all their progeny right through to slaughter. The pigs are reared in an indoor stress-free environment with the right qualities to produce excellent pork.

“Capital investment remains the key to our success”



Irrigating potatoes



Land drainage is essential for healthy soils

“We follow a traditional farming strategy incorporating livestock, crops and conservation for a sustainable future”

The farm works closely with Hermitage and JSR genetics which supplies the semen for artificial insemination (AI), which is done on site. This relationship allows Fridlington Farms to choose which breed suits our system to produce the best quality pig that the farm can offer.

We use our wheat and barley to supply our own feed mill. This combines with by-products from the food industry to produce a high-quality liquid feed for our pigs. The unit is powered by a 510kWh solar panel ground-mounted system which was installed in 2013 and this enables us to keep our carbon footprint to a minimum. We also recently put in a 200kWh bio-mass boiler to heat the unit. This is fuelled by wood chippings and reduces the carbon footprint yet further. Management

of our 3,400 ewe sheep flock for the past 12 years has taken on the New Zealand-influenced Easy Care system. We work closely with Innovis to access the very best genetics to improve sheep production and to provide the required quality for today's market.

Working in harmony with the environment

We take our environmental responsibilities seriously. It is our policy to continually improve our farming systems and working standards to meet our environmental, legal and social responsibilities. We have therefore participated in numerous schemes and initiatives.

Our early commitment to the mid-tier Country Stewardship Scheme funded by Natural England has positively improved the estate's wildlife habitats. Options adopted in these schemes include: six-metre buffer strips, over winter stubble and pollen and nectar mixes which provide important habitat and additional food sources for birds, insects and bees. Rotational cutting of hedges and mowing of dykes has also improved habitats for nesting birds.

Future agricultural policy

Agricultural businesses in the UK face uncertainty with Brexit on the horizon. For our part, we want to see a return to a production-based policy where capital grants are available for infrastructure schemes, such as: land drainage, livestock buildings, reservoir construction and grain storage.

UK agriculture must be supported to remain competitive in a world market and to ensure security of our own food production. This should not be at the expense of the environment but an over reliance on payments for environmental schemes will be detrimental to agricultural production.

Hall Hunter Partnership



Key crop, blueberries

Hall Hunter Partnership was formed in 1966 when Mark and Mary Hall bought Heathlands Farm covering 111 acres. It is a family business run by their son, Harry, now growing soft fruit on seven farms and nurseries in Berkshire, Surrey, West Sussex and Portugal.

We farm over 2000 acres in the UK and 325 acres in southern Portugal, next to the Atlantic Ocean. We have 65 acres of heated glass adjacent to Chichester. We supply all the major supermarkets and concentrate on top shelf product. Key to our success is the regular introduction of new varieties of soft fruit through a breeding programme that we are very involved with. Their concentration on quality, size and flavour helps us keep at the forefront of the industry.

Key to that growth have been availability of skilled staff through the SAWS scheme and latterly free labour movement within the EU and the massive financial support for capital investment from EU Producer Organisation Funds.

Harry is first and foremost a grower and all our marketing success is due, in no small part, to our collaboration with Berryworld, another family run business.

Staff

We run a very flat management style with each farm/ nursery operating its own profit centre.

Nearly all our staff have come up through the business rather than recruitment. Starting as pickers and ending as farm managers earning 6 figure sums. In addition to the farms we have two packhouses which also handle winter imported soft fruit.



The three partners with Gladys and Marigold

FACTS ABOUT HALL HUNTER PARTNERSHIP

- » Southern England Soft Fruit Growers
- » Started marketing in the 1960s in Covent Garden
- » 1000 acres soft fruit using 70 acres of glass
- » 2300 staff

“The horticultural business of the UK is hugely dependent on staff from abroad as British people no longer wish to do physical work. No staff, no British fruit”

This all means we now employ 320 full time staff whilst our construction, irrigation, crop management, pest and disease control and harvesting teams which tend to be seasonal amount to over 2000. Over 90% of our staff are from Europe. Accommodation is provided with Mobile Homes which create family groups in a pleasant environment. Despite huge efforts to recruit from the local area we find very little interest in, what amounts to manual work despite paying significantly over the Living Wage. Many of our permanent staff have residential qualification to the UK and are buying their own houses local to farms.

Environment

Soft fruit production in the UK is very dependent on the use of crop protection in the form of Polytunnels. Unattractive as they are, it does mean that the crop that used to be harvested in June and July and then imported for the rest of the year can now be grown in the UK from April to October with glasshouses extending the season even more.

We only crop half our land and nearly all the rest is planted with indigenous hedging, beetle banks, tree lines to reduce wind damage. We have also introduced additional footpaths which run through woodlands both existing and newly planted.

Our energy use is reduced significantly as we have many of our building

rooftops covered with Solar Panels whilst waste fruit is recycled through Anaerobic Digesters.

Water supply is key to our production and sources are from boreholes but also rivers and streams. To ensure guaranteed supply we have constructed 12 reservoirs for winter storage whilst several desalination plants are in place to ensure water quality. Several of these reservoirs receive land runoff water to ensure its recycled. Again water plants around lake perimeters encourages wild life.

These environmental investments have a secondary purpose of providing habitats for bugs which we encourage which feed to a large extent on the crops pests such as Red Spider Mite, Spotted Wing Dipsophola and Aphid. Biological control is very much more satisfactory if managed properly as the predator can work right up to the harvest time.

Production

We now harvest over 11,000 tonnes of soft fruit each year. By making huge investment in systems of production we have been able to improve harvest speeds and thus reduce labour by 30% in recent years. harvesting at waist height, harvesting trolleys, hand held computer recording systems, automatic watering and feed schemes, sophisticated construction equipment, dedicated and one off spray equipment whilst our packhouses have the very

Our fruit





Predator



Our woodlands

latest fast cooling plant (reducing product temperature to 5 degrees in 1 hour from harvest) with auto weighing and labeling plant.

Producing soft fruit in the autumn often means winterizing the plants through till mid summer with sophisticated cold stores and we have over twenty spread around the farms.

Although *strawberry* production is key to the business our growth for the future is in *raspberries* using amazing new varieties with superior flavour and size. *Blueberries* which only hit the UK ten years ago in a measurable volume have huge potential growth. We are introducing new varieties all the time and our acreage is growing, both in the UK and Portugal. We have around 40% of the UK blueberry market for home grown fruit.

Sales

The growth of the UK soft fruit consumption over the last 20 years has been phenomenal with 10% growth annually. New varieties, health benefits, cool chain and the availability of farm labour from Europe have all made this possible but none of this would have happened without the drive and

enthusiasm of British Summer Fruits who have promoted the sector so successfully. Funded by all interested parties, with a budget of less than £500,000. it really shows what can be done for the industry.

The Future

We are deeply concerned about the future of our industry with the Brexit issue.

- » Without our *European labour* we will have no soft fruit industry. A scheme needs to be agreed by the spring of 2018 and in place by the autumn 2018 which allows controlled access of seasonal workers from Europe.
- » Support funding for capital investment needs to be continued to encourage food production as well as environmental schemes.
- » Imports and exports (we do export) needs to be frictionless. No custom holdups for perishable products.
- » A level playing field with regard to regulations.

We market our soft fruit under the title/brand of British Fruit Grown by Harry Hall.

“If you can’t feed a country you haven’t got a country”

Ian Wright, Head of The Food and Drinks Federation

Tallis Amos Group



Directors Simon Amos (left) and Ben Tallis: turnover up 1,000%



Professional mower supplied by Tallis Amos preparing the outfield at the Cheltenham Cricket Festival

In 2004 at the age of 28, I left a career in The City to join the family farm machinery business. I'm Ben Tallis and within the next decade, the company which I now run with my business partner, Simon Amos had increased turnover by 1,000%. In 2015 we were selected by the London Stock Exchange to be one of their 1000 Companies to Inspire Britain.

TALLIS AMOS GROUP BY NUMBERS

- » Total turnover: £40 million
- » Machinery sales: £31 million
- » Parts and service sales: £9 million
- » Number of outlets: 5
- » Total staff: 120
- » Customer mix: 45% arable, 30% livestock, 10% contractors, 10% speciality and potatoes, 5% amenity and golf
- » Motto: The Land is Our Field.

Based at Evesham in Worcestershire, Tallis Amos Group is one of the largest dealers in the UK and Ireland for the American farm machinery manufacturer, John Deere. Supplying farm, garden and professional grass-cutting machinery, we employ 120 very talented individuals across the West Midlands, the South West and Wales. Tallis Amos now has an annual turnover of almost £40 million.

John Deere; Dealer of Tomorrow

Many machinery dealers grow in size and diversify over time. However, I believe that what makes Tallis Amos unique in today's marketplace is that we have done in ten years what many take generations to achieve. We were an early adopter of John Deere's Dealer of Tomorrow strategy, which promotes greater stability and customer service through larger-scale, efficient dealers. We work very closely with them to achieve this consistently. For example, as well as holding £2 million of spare parts, we also have a 98% record for supplying any part either the same or the next day. Tallis Amos recently celebrated 50 years of association with John Deere and was one of the few original dealers able to do so.

The birth of our company in 2012 was the fruit of merging two reputable, strong, successful dealerships – Alexander & Duncan and my own family's business, Chris Tallis Farm Machinery – pooling talent and resources to further expand

support to the customer. The ultimate aim of combining the two companies was to streamline operations, enhance profitability and to become leaner and more efficient as market demands increase. At this time we also purchased the assets of two other John Deere dealerships and amalgamated their operations into the company.

DNA and core values

Mission and vision statements can be like Marmite. We, however, believe that with 120 people across several sites in many different counties we need a strong theme and message about the culture and intentions of the way we want to do business. Our mission and our vision define what we do, day-to-day and where we want to be in the future.

Our mission: To supply and support quality products to land-based customers, backed up by local in-house expertise.

And vision: To be the supplier of choice for all agricultural and turf machinery through sustainable business and profitable partnerships.

Varied agricultural customer base

There's an old farmers' adage where I come from: 'Up corn, down horn' – meaning when arable farmers do well, livestock farmers don't and vice versa – and that view has played a significant part in the initial reasoning Simon and I used to create Tallis Amos. With such a diverse geography, from Birmingham to Bristol and Swindon to St David's, our agricultural customers are widespread and varied. They include large arable estates, traditional mixed farms, dairy units of all sizes, as well as growers of vegetables, fruit and potatoes. Although farm incomes across all sectors have suffered in recent times, we believe the variety of our customer base is a key ingredient of our company's success story.

Turf and Isuzu

Sales of John Deere professional grass-cutting and garden machinery, plus the pick-up vehicle brand Isuzu, count for about 15% of our client base. We supply builders, contractors, golf courses, councils, professional maintenance companies, schools, large estates and



Tallis Amos won a coveted award for 'inspiring Britain'

“Customer expectations of a ride-on lawnmower before a summer party can be higher than those of a farmer who has bought a combine harvester for half a million pounds!”

Giant John Deere 9RX delivering 620 horsepower





OUR MISSION

To supply and support quality products to land based customers, backed up by local in-house expertise.



OUR VISION

To be supplier of choice for all agricultural & turf products through sustainable business and profitable partnerships.

- FAIR** - Treating customers, colleagues & suppliers with integrity & respect
- RELIABLE** - Always trustworthy, safe & dependable
- QUALITY** - Supplying superior products & support
- PARTNERSHIP** - Working together
- PROGRESSIVE** - Thinking innovatively & embracing the future

WWW.TALLISAMOSGROUP.CO.UK

even the recent past. Emissions standards, inch-perfect self-driven machinery, satellite-mapped fields and variable application of seed, fertiliser and chemicals, as well as strict animal husbandry standards, feed analysis and water management, mean that our team of highly-skilled, trained and motivated staff need to be both 100% focused on today yet never forgetting the future. Whether it's crop nutritional analysis for bio-digesters producing electricity, drone technology or robotic garden lawnmowers – we will always be at the forefront of future changes and innovations.

The future – strategic goals and Brexit

The impact on agriculture of global markets and techniques, as well as the movement of parts and machinery sales towards online channels, continue to be both the largest threats and the biggest opportunities facing Tallis Amos and all other dealers. However, I believe Brexit will now shape the future of our business quicker than anything else. 90% of the products we supply are manufactured outside of the UK, and the majority of our customer base relies on EU subsidies to some degree.

Market forces, innovation and environmental responsibility have been balanced over many decades by the subsidy system and trade arrangements between the UK and EU. It is essential that this fine harmony isn't destroyed in a matter of months with no regard for the economic and environmental impact of food commodities from international markets that have different production and welfare standards which UK consumers do not understand. Although the impact of Brexit is impossible to fully assess as I write this in July 2017, all we can do is to steer the company towards a more efficient, diverse, secure position to allow us to be prepared for the future – whatever it may bring.

“With such a diverse geography, from Birmingham to Bristol and Swindon to St David's, our agricultural customers are widespread and varied”

home owners, among others. Like many other farming businesses, we are aware that diversification is a necessity in an uncertain world. The fantastic thing about supplying and supporting grass-cutting machinery is that there are so many synergies with the high standards of support we offer for our range of farm machinery products. Customer expectations of a ride-on lawnmower before a summer party can be higher than those of a farmer who has bought a combine harvester for half a million pounds!

Innovation and technology

The demands of a modern farm enterprise are light years away from

Hounslow Hall Estate



My wife, granddaughter and some instructors from Experience the Country



Inside the 15th century tithe barn after conversion to offices

I started farming on my own in 1964 as a tenant of the National Trust, on a 180-acre farm on Dunstable Downs. The farm was clay with flints and had been poorly farmed; it had limited buildings and a milking parlour of two abreast. We had limited capital of £3,000 but, with the support of a guarantee from my parents and an understanding bank manager, I launched myself into a dairy farming project. We purchased a few cows and every time we had enough money we purchased another cow. We kept all heifer calves and sold the bull calves. My wife did supply teaching while rearing all the calves.

Disaster struck in 1978 when tuberculosis (TB) appeared. Within seven months the whole herd of 700 head had been slaughtered. The staff left but, for the first time, we had cash. It took me a while to get over the shock of losing my beloved cattle because we were not allowed to restock for many months. I started to look around at what else we could do.

A 250-acre farm came up for sale in the centre of a neighbouring village. It had a traditional house and buildings which were in a poor condition. We purchased it and looked at what opportunities it could present for a successful venture. The land was in fair condition but not being farmed to its full potential. I had taken the opportunity available to me on the National Trust farm to enhance the soil structure and fertility by using poultry manure from the nearby egg-laying units – it was like dynamite on our hungry ground, enhancing soils and crops.

The new farm had old traditional buildings, cow sheds, cattle yards and a very lovely 15th century tithe barn and moat. We had to do something with these

FACTS ABOUT HOUNSLOW HALL ESTATE

- » Main centre at Newton Longville
- » 1,400 acres in three farms mostly arable crops
- » Nine cottages converted from farm buildings
- » A separate business Experience the Country provides a vast range of leisure activities

“Our first customer was the new Millennium stadium at Cardiff, then the New York Jets and Giants stadium and most Olympic stadiums since”

building in the centre of the village with the school next door. Complaints came in when silage was fed to livestock or there was a barn cleanout. Diversification was the buzz word in farming at the time so I looked hard at this dilemma and came up with the decision to convert the buildings to a use other than farming.

The house was old and needed lots of repairs, so a new one was built with a grain store at the edge of the village. 220 acres were applied with pig and chicken manure and sewage sludge and planted with cereals. I contacted local turf companies to see if they were interested in purchasing the remaining 30 acres of permanent grass. After receiving low offers, I looked at the possibility of retailing the turf myself. We purchased a hand-propelled turf cutter and put an advertisement in the local paper for Tip Top Turf. This was the start of an enormous venture. We became one of the largest turf growers and producers in the country and eventually had influence on sports turf supplies worldwide.

I was always passionate about grass management and became interested in the use of natural turf in sports facilities. The intensive use of sports facilities, particularly stadiums, and the desire to maximise the financial returns for large investments meant

that turfed areas were becoming a liability. The turf could not survive with the restricted light and air available on the pitch.

Artificial plastic surfaces were tried but these caused burns and injuries to the sports participants. Growing lights were employed on the problem areas that were suffering from lack of light. I did some research into the problem. When attending a turf grower's convention in Hawaii I saw a facility where the stands moved on air cushions at the press of a button, changing the shape within a short timescale from that required for American football to that for baseball.

My mind then turned to the possible solution to the turf problem. Could we put natural turf on a pallet? We could but it would only have a short life. Could we make a surface without joints to cause injury? After many hours of design trials I came up with the solution: the turf module. Our first customer was the new Millennium stadium at Cardiff, then the New York Jets and Giants stadium and most Olympic stadiums since.

Whilst doing this I came up with the solution of what to do with our range of older farm buildings. We obtained planning permission to turn the cowsheds into cottages and decided to do the conversion and repair work with the aid of a local bricklayer and carpenter. I had to come up with a solution for the repair of the tithe barn, masonry was falling out between the rotting timbers and the crumbling stone plinth, as well as it having a leaking roof; you might say it was a wreck.

Conversing with a friend who was dealing with the repair of concrete cancer it suddenly came to me; why couldn't we use specially prepared resins to repair rotting timber joints? The resin manufacturer agreed to do just that and produced a pliable resin

With my wife and granddaughter Helen by one of the lakes





View from a mast showing some land and buildings at Cow Pasture Farm with Milton Keynes in the distance

with a delayed curing time, coloured just like timber. This we could carve to look similar to the old wood and we stitched the joint with stainless steel rods to provide it with strength. The repair of the tithe barn has been in place for 30 years now with no deterioration. We went on to use this technique for many listed buildings in the South of England.

At present, every crop on our farm has all inputs monitored closely. Yields are recorded by satellite with the object of increasing margins while at the same time preserving the natural beauty of the countryside. We have diversified by providing an opportunity for the public and schools to visit the countryside and enjoy country pursuits.

As far as the future of agriculture is concerned I think Brexit could provide an opportunity for a big leap forward for British agriculture. It could create a big opportunity to remove the leash around our necks created by subsidies. However, the Basic Farming Scheme (BPS) is holding progressive farming back. Farmers need to be forced to

think outside the box and many are already good at this. It is all too easy to rely on BPS as a main source of income; large land units should be restricted in the amount of subsidy they receive.

Due to the restrictively high capital needed initially, I think the Government should be concerned about helping young people to start farming. More emphasis should be given to encourage and motivate people to be interested where food is produced and to encourage them to want to work in this vibrant industry. My wife and I visited Bedfordshire Young Farmers' Clubs (YFC) rally and we were really impressed by the ingenuity and dedication of these young people. Encouragement should be given to all such youngsters. Indeed, this is true in all walks of life; those with purpose and vision should be encouraged and incentivised.

My belief is that one does not have to look far for opportunities. They just need recognising.

“My belief is that one does not have to look far for opportunities. They just need recognising”

G's Growers



Richard Hirst, Chairman



Skilled migrant workers harvesting iceberg lettuce in Cambridgeshire

As a leading producer of high-quality salad crops in the UK, and across the world, G's has treasured its core beliefs and strengths over generations, while adapting to significant change over the decades; but the challenges the company now faces with the prospect of leaving the European Union will bring extreme pressure on the business and the consumer alike.

ABOUT G'S GROWERS

- » Established in 1952
- » Grows salads and vegetables in Shropshire
- » Employs 7,000 people 3,500 of which are seasonal worker
- » Supplier to major UK, European and US retailers
- » Member of G's Growers Ltd. a 20-grower producer organisation formed in 1984 with fellow members in the UK and Spain

History and scale

The Shropshire family established their farm in the Cambridgeshire Fens in 1952 with just 120 hectares and has grown the business over the last 65 years to become one of the world's leading family-owned, fully-integrated fresh produce farming companies. G's now employs 7,000 staff, half of which are seasonal workers, growing 20,000 hectares of crops and supplying the finest quality salads and vegetables to major UK, European and US retailers. The company's attention to detail, from agronomy to the environment, distribution and marketing has meant it's been able to adapt to change while meeting the needs of retailers and consumers.

However the Shropshire family do not work alone, in 1984 with other likeminded growers, the G's Growers co-operative was founded. Today G's Growers Ltd is an independent producer organisation comprising more than 20 grower members in the UK and Spain. By working together G's Growers members are able to share expertise, experience and knowledge to allow them to take advantage of economies of scale to ensure the efficient supply and year-round availability of quality produce for our customers and consumers across the UK, Europe and North America.

The G's Growers crop range includes wholehead and babyleaf salad, celery, radish, onions, salad onions, beetroot, mushrooms, Chinese leaf and leeks. G's Grower are based in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Kent, West Sussex, Dorset, West Midlands and the Murcia region of southern Spain.

All G's Growers members meet or exceed the rigorously high standards that are demanded by modern consumers, retailers and governments, as well as our own brand expectations, whilst farming with a focus on preserving and enhancing the environment around us for future generations.

G's operations in the UK consist of 6,500 ha of salad. 7,400 ha of wheat, maize, sugar beet and potatoes are grown in rotation. To increase its all-year-round production, G's established farms in Spain, starting with just 50 ha in 1985. With entry into the European Economic Community and the arrival of the EU Single Market, production in Spain has now grown to 6,300 ha of mainly winter-produced fruit and salads. These crops are grown outdoors in the Costa Calida sunshine, supplying throughout Europe and Scandinavia.

G's has stretched its reach eastwards too. Since 2007 it has opened farms in the Czech Republic and three years ago it established a new start-up in Poland. The sunshine of Senegal has also lent itself to G's production of 330 ha of winter radish and salad onions. This project has included a large investment by G's, creating a brand new sustainable farming oasis in the middle of a vast area of semi-arid scrubland, employing up to 850 people and facilitating the large-scale development of many local farms via infrastructure, technical and social support.

In The US, G's established the Love Beets beetroot brand which includes cooked, infused premium products and juices.

Impact of Brexit

It is important to set out the full scale of G's operations across the world, because the impact of leaving the European Union will be unique for a global fresh food producer such as G's. Although the changes will affect every aspect of G's food production, there are three areas which are of specific concern; labour, crop protection and innovation.

Labour

At the moment G's employs 7,000 people, 3,500 of which are seasonal workers. The decision to leave the EU had an immediate impact on our ability to recruit staff for the 2017 picking season in the UK. A weaker Sterling meant seasonal workers pay in the UK was relatively diminished. When offered a choice of coming to the UK, or travelling to other EU countries to be paid in euros, many chose the latter. G's investment in recruitment visits to Romania and Bulgaria was doubled and although the company managed to recruit enough staff this year, their pay had to be adjusted to retain them. Looking forward to future years, labour recruitment is expected to become even more difficult, unless the Government makes a clear commitment to introducing a seasonal workers scheme or the equivalent. Failure to achieve this will have a direct impact on harvesting fresh produce and supplying the majority of retailers across the UK.

“The decision to leave the EU had an immediate impact on our ability to recruit staff for the 2017 picking season in the UK. A weaker Sterling meant seasonal workers pay in the UK was relatively diminished”



Celery transplants being sown in the Fens



Skilled migrant workers from Romania bunching radishes in the field

“The future of G’s, and UK agriculture, outside the EU, will depend on investment in traditional farming and new innovation and technology, producing high-quality food at a reasonable price for consumers”

Crop protection

Growing fresh salad crops demands absolute attention to detail, creating weed- and pest-free food, which can be consumed in complete confidence. To achieve this G’s has managed its crop protection systems to supply the gold standard in salad crops while protecting the environment in which they are grown.

Over the last ten years, a European Union review of all crop protection has led to a reduction in preparations available by 50–60%. New registrations are now based on hazard rather than risk. G’s is specifically concerned about a future ban on neonicotinoids. Seeds are coated with these and they protect lettuces against pests as they grow. Evidence about whether neonicotinoids harm bees is still being assessed, but the latest evidence gathered in field trials by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (published in *Science*, June 2017) across UK, Hungary and Germany, concluded that neonicotinoids have ‘negative effects on honeybees and wild bees’. Syngenta, which co-funded the trial said the data was ‘valuable but variable’. G’s is concerned that companies are reluctant to work on developing a replacement, because they feel it will not pass muster with the EU authorities. Leaving the European Union would give the UK a theoretical option to still use neonicotinoids, but in practice it would be unworkable for trade and environmental reasons. A report by the European Crop Protection Association (ECPA) estimated that the current restrictions on using

neonicotinoids were costing the farming industry €900 million a year.

Innovation

Addressing the serious issues raised above will mean significant investment in new technology and innovative ways of integrating G’s farming, to become even more efficient and with a lighter environmental impact. G’s has already made creative changes to extend the range of its produce, while ensuring the whole farm operation works together.

Innovation is the key to producing higher quality and better tasting food. G’s has spent many years developing its own rig design to smooth automation, improving shelf life and reducing field waste to a minimum. We have been working for the last two to three years with Cranfield and Cambridge Universities and Microsoft, to develop early assessment of crop development; forward planning for targeted cropping enables us to meet daily supply demands and avoid waste.

As a major producer, G’s has the capability of investing significant capital into innovation, but there needs to be a long-term commitment to continued development across the agricultural sector.

The future outside the EU

The future of G’s, and UK agriculture, outside the EU, will depend on investment in traditional farming and new innovation and technology, producing high-quality food at a reasonable price for consumers. Despite the concerns over future labour provision and lack of crop protection availability, there is an opportunity for UK farming to work together, alongside government. As we leave the EU, UK agriculture must develop a world-facing attitude, with the confidence to trade, while ensuring domestic supplies of the highest quality are available at affordable prices to the consumer.

The Lilburn Estate



In balance with nature

The Lilburn Estate was created just under half a century ago, and in that time it has grown from 300 to 30,000 acres, with all but one of its 17 farms now farmed in hand. This massive beef, sheep and arable farm takes in some of the most spectacular scenery of Northern Britain. The Estate Office nestles at the foot of the Cheviot Hills, whilst Lilburn's Stabiliser cattle and Blackface sheep graze the area's namesake, the Cheviot Hill.

The use of cutting edge technology on the one hand, with a landed estate's desire for long-term succession on the other, enables this traditional agricultural business to be both profitable and essential to the local community. 60 families are employed and housed on the Estate, and numerous retired workers remain in their cottages for life. A further 50 part-time workers are employed in the winter months. Like many large estates, particularly those involved in stock farming, it forms a vital part in the rural social fabric and often assumes responsibility for the local community's pastoral care, long after the state and its metropolitan-devised rural policies have stalled.

At a time when those with vested interests seek to demonise the role of agriculture in the uplands, Lilburn demonstrates its necessity, producing products the consumer wants, whilst maintaining and enhancing the upland mosaic, cherished by the thousands of walkers who access the Estate's hills throughout the year. Indeed, a mosaic with increasing bird populations and a diversity of species which debunks the myth surrounding these large farming and shooting estates.

The 2,000 Stabiliser bred suckler herd is the powerhouse of this mixed farm, utilising breeding technology developed 30 years ago in the mountains of Nebraska,

FACTS ABOUT THE LILBURN ESTATE

- » 60 families employed and housed
- » 30,000 acres farmed
- » 15 main steadings
- » 2,000 cows including a 300 Stabiliser cow breeding herd
- » 9,500 ewes
- » 124 estate houses



Commonburn

“This is organic farming in the true sense of the word”

to produce a cow whose hardiness and hybrid vigour puts the herd in the top 1% for productivity nationally and consistently provides beef which is to the consumers' liking. Taste and texture is everything to Lilburn's beef enterprise and such is its reputation for producing top-quality steaks, the cattle receive a premium for every kilo sold. From the field to the fork, Lilburn's cattle have provenance, living outdoors, grazing the heather-rich fells of the Cheviot Hills and finally fattened up on bread soaked in brewery mash.

Hefted sheep flock grazing Cheviot Hills



The sheep enterprise also brings technology to the fore, with rams scientifically chosen that will produce the most vigorous lambs to fatten off clover and meadow hay. This is organic farming in the true sense of the word with the Blackface sheep grazing to the top of Cheviot during the summer months, at a height of 2,674 feet, but removed in the winter to prevent overgrazing. This remote and extensive farming relies on the animal's inherent immunity to disease rather than the use of antibiotics, not least because of the impracticalities of trying to catch a poorly beast on 14,000 acres of the National Park. Half of the Estate sits within the Northumberland National Park and is a haven for Britain's upland birds, often in decline elsewhere, but seemingly increasing year-on-year at Lilburn. The curlew, whose haunting cry heralds the promise of spring, returns annually to the Cheviot Hills on March 5th, and is the emblem for the National Park. Under the Estate's management, numbers are increasing every year. These iconic birds are joined by oyster catchers, skylarks and peewits, and thrive alongside the farming activities at Lilburn.

Lilburn promotes ecocentric management in its arable farming operations too. Grass margins surround all the arable fields and field corners are planted with pollen and nectar-rich flowers, encouraging a cornucopia of insects and wildlife. Winter stubbles are all seeded with forage rye and oil radish to prevent nutrients leaching and maintain fertility in the soil during the wetter winter months. The arable rotation follows more traditional lines with break crops such as peas, kale, clover and lucerne, resulting in tonnes of large pink earthworms, a litmus test for healthy soil.

This sense of sustainability, community and giving back is evidenced by a number of events held in the Show Field on the Estate each year.



Comprehensive management of the Estate showing soils, livestock, walls, trees and buildings

This naturally occurring amphitheatre is the setting for an event which attracts 1,500 North East school children aged 5–9 years old, to learn how their food is produced. Come rain or shine the children, many of whom are from the 'Toon', soak up their new-found knowledge. From shearing sheep, spinning the wool and butchering the lamb carcass, none of the process is sanitised. The children are a blank canvass and delight in learning that milk comes from a cow and not from a plastic carton. It is often observed that their teachers turn up with more preconceptions than their pupils.

August is a month of haymaking and harvest and, despite the Estate being a hive of activity, the Glendale show is annually gifted the use of the show field at the end of August. 12,000 visitors bring the Glendale valley to a standstill and celebrate the very best of rural life and tradition. Sheep, cattle and horse classes are filled with competitors vying for the coveted Champion of Champions, the prize for the best animal on the day of the show. Last year Lilburn won the coveted trophy with a Mule ewe lamb, produced from one of the Estate's Blackface ewes and Bluefaced Leicester rams.

Brexit and the rhetoric surrounding it has created fear and uncertainty to rural businesses the length and breadth of Britain. For many the unfolding events and headlines are overwhelming and for farming businesses, whose ability to alter course is glacial compared to the ever-changing political doctrines and policies, these are uncertain and frightening times. However, Lilburn is optimistic about the future. By adopting good business practice, using the most up-to-date agricultural research and technology, this traditional estate in the wilds of North Northumberland is well placed to continue to provide the nation with food for the body and mind.

“Providing the Nation with food for the body and mind”

Children's Countryside Day



Mastergen



Alison Dunphy, Managing Director



The parent company of Mastergen is Germany's largest farmer co-operative, MASTERRIND

FACTS ABOUT MASTERGEN

- » Founded in 2014 to supply cost-effective bull semen to dairy and beef farmers
- » A subsidiary of MASTERRIND, the largest farmer-owned breeding co-op in Germany
- » A streamlined importing process from Germany has cut bureaucracy and cost
- » Cutting out the traditional sales force helps reduce costs to the farmer further
- » A sophisticated interactive website helps farmers with bull selection
- » Around 90% of semen sold is from highly selected young genomic bulls
- » Customers make rapid progress in their cattle using high quality genetics
- » The right choice of genetics makes a significant contribution to a business' profitability

Breeding cows may sound like the most basic and time-honoured of functions – something that scarcely changes as technology moves on. But nothing could be further from the truth, according to Mastergen, a small but rapidly-growing company from the West Country, who say that computing power and the influence of the internet, an improving knowledge of the bovine genome and semen sexing technology have all contributed to a transformation in the way UK farmers breed their cows.

This transformation has been essential in keeping UK farmers competitive and in business, according to Alison Dunphy, founder and Managing Director of the cattle breeding company. She says she was keen to help establish Mastergen – a subsidiary of the huge German farmer-owned co-operative, MASTERRIND – because she could see that modern farmers needed to have a hi-tech method of selecting bull semen which cost them less than the traditional approach.

'Dairy farmers are our main customers and they have been under intense financial pressure over the past two decades,' she says. 'The price they receive for their milk is little more than it was 20 years ago, which means the industry is struggling to afford person-to-person visits to the farm by traditional salesmen, the cost of which will ultimately be passed back to the farmer.'

Cutting the cost of bull semen

The idea behind Mastergen was to cut out the cost of keeping sales reps and cars on the road and bring the ordering of bull semen onto the internet or phone.

This meant the savings could be passed back to the farmer through better value semen, although the process required skilled telephone operators who knew the breeding industry well, and a sophisticated website which is capable of identifying and ranking dairy bulls for a range of different traits.

‘It also required a certain level of knowledge and confidence amongst our customers who needed to be internet-savvy and happy to use objective performance data when making sire selections,’ she says.

Behind the Mastergen website and sire selection process is a gigantic database from the entire dairy farming industry which today gathers more information about dairy cows than was imaginable 20 years ago.

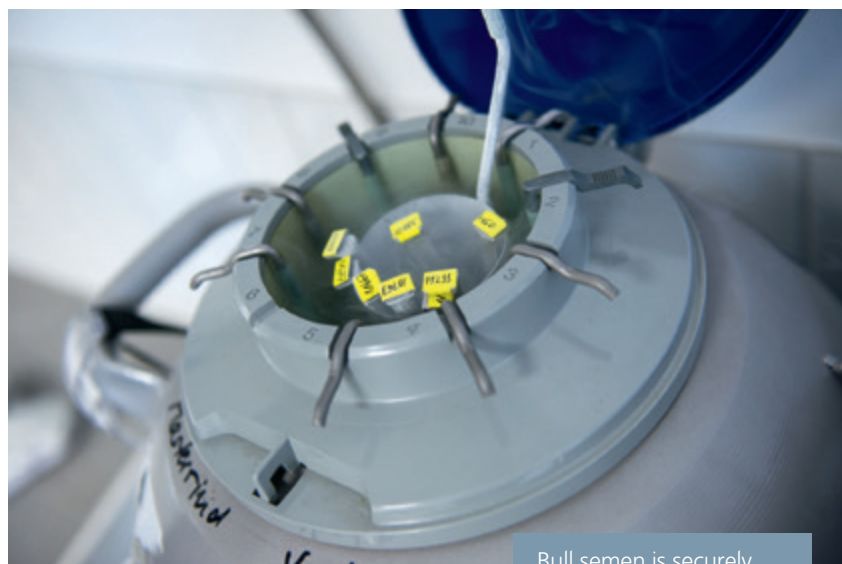
‘This doesn’t just mean information about the cows’ milk quality and production but includes information on their conformation – or the way they are put together – their ability to walk well, to resist disease and even their life expectancy.’

Predicted breeding indexes

This information on the millions of dairy cows around the world is brought together to create predicted breeding patterns for every single bull. It is from these patterns that genetic indexes are calculated, which are used by modern farmers to help them improve their herds.

‘This means farmers now have a very reliable idea of how a particular bull’s daughters will perform on their own farms, and they can choose the bulls they use on the strength of their daughters’ predicted looks, health and production,’ she explains.

‘Today, it’s more important than ever that they breed cows which can enjoy high standards of welfare so it’s a



Bull semen is securely stored in liquid nitrogen at -196 °C

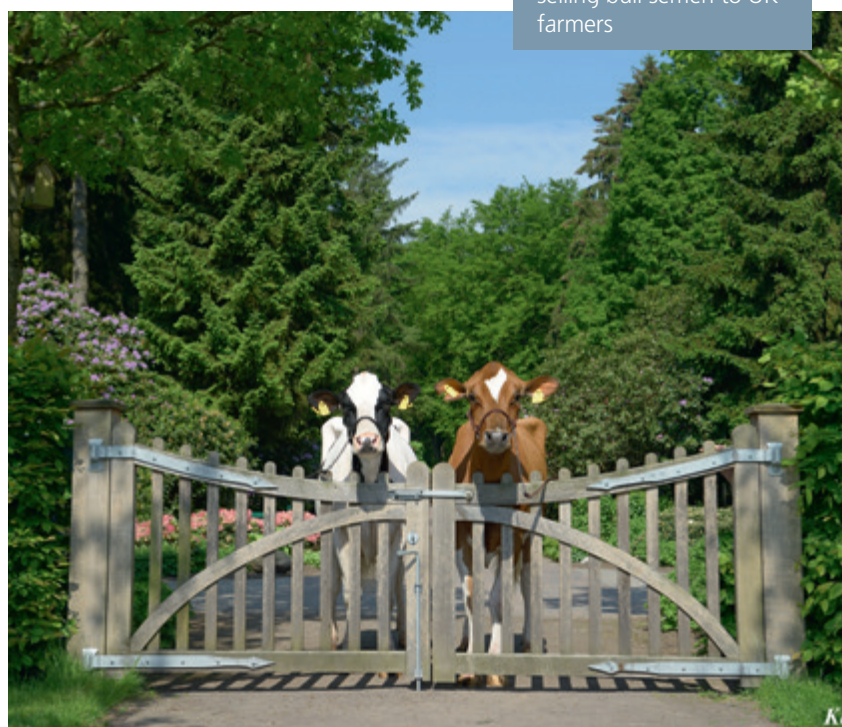
priority for Mastergen to highlight the bulls which transmit good genetics for health, locomotion and lifespan when we advise farmers.’

Indexes based on daughter performance

Genetic indexes based on the performance of bulls’ daughters are colloquially known as ‘daughter proofs’, and – because of the time taken for daughters to mature and start milking – the bull tends to be around five years old when he receives his first daughter proof.

“Today, it’s more important than ever to breed cows which can enjoy high standards of welfare”

Mastergen specialises in selling bull semen to UK farmers





Genomic selection helps farmers make more precise bull selection and speeds up genetic improvement

“We have slashed bureaucracy to keep costs to the farmer low but the only thing we won’t compromise is the quality of our genetics”

Genomic indexes based on DNA

However, since 2012, the UK dairy industry has been calculating genomic indexes for young bulls, which are breeding predictions based on information taken from each bull’s own unique DNA profile.

‘This was an important development for farmers, as it meant they could use much younger bulls with more modern, and potentially better bloodlines, long before they had a daughter proof, with a far greater understanding of how they would breed,’ says Alison. ‘In particular, the early prediction of health traits is much more reliable using DNA profiling than using parent averages based on progeny testing, which means there’s a higher degree of accuracy for young bulls now entering the MASTERRIND stud.

‘At Mastergen, and our parent company, MASTERRIND, we place a lot of store in these genomic indexes and have brought many young sires to the market whose indexes are based on their DNA profile,’ she says. ‘In fact, around 90% of the semen now sold by Mastergen is from young, genomically-tested sires which are too young to have a daughter proof of their own.’

This is a ringing endorsement, not only of Mastergen’s own portfolio, but of the genomic testing process as a method of evaluating the breeding potential of young bulls.

Sexed female semen

Alongside genomic testing, another important technology from the last two or more decades has been that of semen sexing.

‘This gives a mating more than 90% chance of resulting in a female calf, which is the bloodstock for all dairy farmers, representing their next working generation,’ she says.

‘It also allows another group of animals in the herd to be bred to beef semen, which gives the farmer a far more valuable animal commercially than if he had bred a male dairy bull calf.’

The combination of sexed semen and DNA testing has been part of a highly sophisticated cattle breeding industry in which enormous strides have been made in terms of cattle production, conformation, health and welfare.

‘We at Mastergen are extremely proud to have contributed to this revolution, we are particularly privileged to have such a high-quality portfolio of bulls at our disposal, which are sourced by MASTERRIND from the best international cow families, and we’re delighted in the confidence UK farmers have placed in this stud,’ says Alison. ‘Farmers have appreciated our streamlined, no-frills process in a difficult economic climate and, as a result, we have grown rapidly since we began trading in 2014, despite a decline in the number of UK dairy producers.

‘We have slashed the cost of sales and bureaucracy to keep costs to the farmer low but the only thing we won’t compromise is the quality of our genetics.’

Blanchard Enterprises



Oxfordshire harvest evening, August 2016



Tim, James and Edward Blanchard

A farm business must have a range of incomes to survive the turbulence of agricultural markets and now the impending challenges and opportunities of Brexit. Creating a model, modern, mixed family farming business is the motivation of the Blanchard family.

Blanchard Enterprises is a medium-sized, Oxfordshire-based, third generation family farm, of which 60% is owned, the remainder rented. It currently employs 10 full time staff plus family members. The farm was purchased by James Blanchard's grandfather in 1956. Then, it was an arable, sheep and hop farm with indoor pigs introduced from the 1970s. For some 30 years the farm was relatively unchanged and suffered from the vagaries of agricultural markets and the weather. This frequently meant poor cashflow and profitability. Consequently, justifying reinvestment was difficult, and prospects for the next generation challenging. James and his brother, Edward, recently joined their father, Tim, on the farm and it was soon realised that, if the business were to survive then thrive, it must change. In many farming families, it is not uncommon for farmers in their late 70s to be still making the decisions – with the 30 to 40-year olds either governed by their father, or not returning to the family business at all. The result of this poor rate of succession is too often family businesses with no reinvestment, declining or unprofitable.

Fundamentally, this business's strategy is simple – it's all about 'the mix'. While the concept and benefits of traditional mixed farming have been familiar for generations, James believes a mixed farming business is best practice for the 21st century. Farming remains the heart of the business, but managing its exposure to risk is the challenge. For instance, the farm has suffered a swing in farming income of more than 40% in the last year. This meant the business went from profit to loss and back in 18 months. James is confident this cycle can be managed only if the mix of incomes is set up appropriately.

FACTS ABOUT BLANCHARD ENTERPRISES

- » 560 hectares made up of owned and tenanted land
- » Breeding herd of 750 sows
- » Diversified enterprises include:
 - » Residential and commercial let property
 - » Own self storage business
 - » Renewable energy producer and supplier
- » Employs 10 full time staff plus three family members
- » Managed by James (age 32) and Edward Blanchard (age 30) since June 2016



Re-used farm building to create our own rural self storage business

“Fundamentally, this business’s strategy is simple – it’s all about ‘the mix’”



Some outdoor breeding sows and piglets in pasture

Revised pig strategy

Pigs represent around 70% of total output for the farm. The pig market is one of the riskier agricultural sectors with frequent ups and downs. Until recently, pigs were reared in buildings constructed in the 1970s and 80s, which are now not suitable for modern standards and practices. Looking ahead, pigs will be bred outdoors less intensively. Blanchard’s future goals for pig rearing are:

- » Further reduce exposure to the ups and downs of the pig market
- » Add value through the RSPCA Freedom Food movement
- » Enhance animal welfare, health and lessen reliance on antibiotics
- » By stopping using existing buildings, produce less slurry and provide better water and environmental protection
- » Provide better working conditions for staff and attract youth to the workforce.

New arable initiatives

From the 1970s to early 2000s, the arable operation was focused on producing feed and bedding straw and disposing of slurry from the pigs. This cycle, with virtually no crop rotation, was detrimental to yields and soil organic matter. The arable enterprise is now focused on:

- » Financial margin and reducing fixed costs by renting more land and providing contract farming for others
- » Implementing an extended crop rotation enabling soil health improvement
- » Embracing technology such as global positioning system (GPS) satellite tracking and yield mapping to improve efficiency
- » Turning less productive areas of the farm into wildlife and biodiversity habitats
- » Improving the farm’s landscape with tree planting.

Diversification approach

The farm now has:

- » Let out residential and commercial properties
- » Opened its own self-storage business
- » Produced heat and electric from its own solar photovoltaic (PV) and biomass boiler system to be used and sold on the farm.

The key has been to select alternative income streams that:

- » Do not divert attention from, or restrict progress of, core farming enterprises
- » Utilise buildings, machines, skills and seasonal workloads
- » Provide some cohesion, ideally, with at least one other enterprise
- » Produce good cashflow to support the cyclical farming income
- » Provide an attractive return on capital.

Issues where the Government can support this business and UK farming generally are as follows.

The single market and migrant labour:

Europe accounts for 70% of UK pork exports, particularly cuts not suited to UK market e.g. offal, ears and trotters. Free trade with Europe is therefore imperative not least because, without it, a 50% World Trade Organization tariff could be imposed.

While Blanchard’s business uses virtually no migrant labour, any serious restrictions imposed on its numbers in the UK, would mean much greater competition for reliable, willing employees.

The Common Agricultural Policy:

The current format of European subsidies for land ownership should end with Brexit. It should be replaced with more relevant regimes that offer value for money for taxpayers yet enable a level playing field with other nations. James Blanchard suggests a

fresh concept of offering support for 'true active farmers'. He wants the Government to consider:

- » Offering grants or capital allowances for new farm buildings to encourage efficiency, productivity, innovation and diversification.
- » Further encouraging the reuse of buildings in its planning policy and permitted development of new farm buildings.
- » Encouraging peer-to-peer lending (i.e. farmer to farmer) to enable farmers in remote areas, less suitable for diversification, to invest in other agricultural businesses to provide a dividend income.
- » Improving education in agricultural colleges by investing in higher salaries for agricultural lecturers.
- » Encouraging younger farmers and engineers to enter the industry (the average age of farmers is 59 and rising).
- » Subsidising renewable energy production on a farm-scale level. This would offer viable diversification opportunities in most areas and provide green energy. Farm-scale anaerobic digestion (AD) plants would produce carbon-neutral fertiliser (an alternative to artificial) and improve soil organic matter. Farm AD would also help crop rotations and increase yield of food crops.

Cheap imported food and UK biosecurity

Importing meat products from outside Europe (e.g. South America and USA) poses the largest risk to the UK pig industry for two reasons. First, oversupply will drive down prices. While this may hold down food inflation, other countries have far lower standards of animal and staff welfare, using growth hormones and animal husbandry practices which were banned in this country decades ago. Second, moving animals round the world spreads disease. The irreversible risk is that cheap food will not appear

quite so cheap if Foot and Mouth Disease or African Swine Fever were to appear on UK soil.

The conclusion

James Blanchard is optimistic about the farm's future. 'There are always threats and opportunities for any business – especially with Brexit. However, what will be catastrophic for this business, farmers and the countryside is if decisions are made without enough consideration to factors such as national biosecurity and animal welfare which other industries do not have,' he said.

Leaving aside Blanchard Enterprises, James fears that if family farming does not thrive, the countryside could soon be owned by fewer and fewer very wealthy people or foreigners, institutions and investment or pension funds looking to exploit tax advantages, with the result that utilitarian, characterless industrial-scale farming will take over. To avoid that fate, he believes passionately that family farming businesses must remain at the heart of the countryside and rural economy.



200kw Biomass boiler and district heating main provides all heating and hot water for eight properties on and close to the farm. Fuel for the boiler is collected waste wood from the local saw mill and sustainable tree thinnings

“James Blanchard suggests a fresh concept of offering support for 'true active farmers'”

Woodland creation – over 5,000 trees planted in 2016



Taylor Organic Farms



Nick Taylor with an early crop of pre-pack carrots ready for the supermarkets



Our machines work on over 2,000 acres of farmland

Taylor Organic Farms is currently the biggest producer of organic carrots and potatoes in the UK. It is the only commercial grower of organic parsnips and it supplies in bulk to all of the major multiples.

FACTS ABOUT TAYLOR ORGANIC FARMS

- » Organic farm business based in North Shropshire
- » 9 Full time members of staff, led by Nick Taylor and farm manager James Britton
- » 25% expansion in potato and carrot business in last 3 years
- » Produce over 8,000 tonnes of organic packed carrots and organic potatoes per annum
- » A potato store was built this year allowing us to offer year round supply of organic potatoes
- » New cold store to be completed in June 2018

Production of root crops has increased by an average 10% annually over the past decade. The secret to this growth and the success of the business is down to the acute attention to detail by Managing Director, Nick Taylor, supported by the rest of the highly-skilled and specialist team. The business is consistently awarded the accolade of Grower of the Year by RBO, the organic arm of Produce World, and in 2010 Nick won the Progressive Farmer of the Year Award at the Farm Business, Food and Farming Awards in Westminster.

The Taylor family has been farming in North Shropshire for five generations. In the 1990s, the farm was a conventional mixed business producing pigs, potatoes, milk and combinable crops. Nick and his father set up a new business away from the existing family set-up, following organic principles in the production of pigs and a mix of arable and vegetable crops.

The pig herd was highly successful for a number of years but, in 2008 (post credit crunch), following a steep fall in organic pork prices alongside the rising cost in animal feed, it was decided to finish the herd and concentrate on the production of high-quality root vegetables, namely carrots, parsnips and potatoes, which is food everybody could afford.

Today we are farming a total of just over 800 ha (2,000 acres) of land made up of a mix of owned and rented farms. Within this, for the 2017/18 season is 120 ha of potatoes (just over a third of which are salad potatoes), 133 ha of carrots

and 12 of parsnips. Additionally, the farm is producing about 300 ha of combinable crops.

So how has this been achieved?

Quite simply through management and investment. The management of land, with nearly 75% being rented in, has had a key impact. By working alongside landlords and using their knowledge of their land and historical cropping, it has been possible to plan a long-term rotation. The Farm Business Tenancies (FBTs) are generally on five-year rolling contracts, and these relationships are protected through investment, to mitigate damage normally associated with root vegetable cropping, mainly in tracked machines, thereby causing less damage to soil structure and avoiding compaction during winter and allowing early spring harvesting and cultivation.

Being part of the Environmental Stewardship schemes has supported the direction of our business in terms of traditional practices. The protected hedgerows and in field trees, alongside the drilling of wildflower strips and use of overwintered green manures has set the basis for implementation of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) scheme in the fight against pests and diseases. Last year when introducing

ladybirds to a carrot field, it was clear to the naked eye that they were moving across a field and tackling carrot willow aphid.

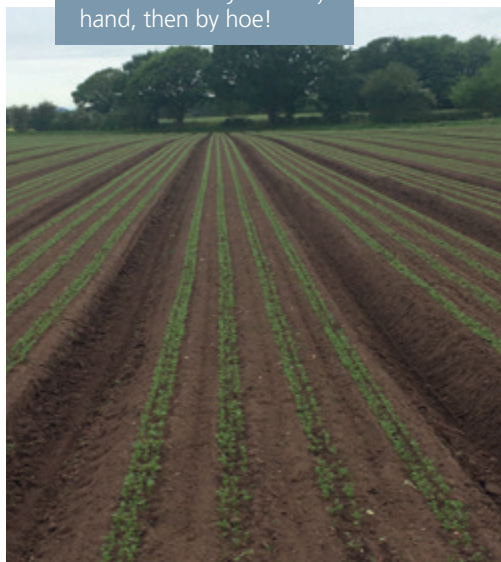
Other effective methods have been to create a stale seedbed in advance of the target crop being drilled. We do this by allowing weeds to germinate first and then flame weed them prior to drilling, allowing the target crop an advantage to establish. Large-scale use of vision guided weeding machinery running in parallel with Real Time Kinetic (RTK) Global Positioning Systems (GPS) has delivered unrivalled accuracy and ability to operate before crops are even visible. Lastly, drone technology has been employed for 2017 for crop surveillance. This allows high-definition pictures to be studied and a database to be built up for the future.

Working in partnership with the pack-houses, there is constant trialling of new varieties, finding out which will work best in our soils and with our methods, optimising the Shropshire sands on which we are mainly based.

Success has allowed for constant investment in machinery, training, and also in research. There has been a shift to tracked machinery and we operate RTK GPS in all tractors.

“Large-scale use of vision guided weeding machinery running in parallel with Real Time Kinetic (RTK) Global Positioning Systems (GPS) has delivered unrivalled accuracy and the ability to operate before crops are even visible”

Carrots following two lots of weeding – first by hand, then by hoe!



Investment in the new ASA-self-propelled carrot harvester, designed and developed by ASA-lift and Nick Taylor





As the crop nears harvest, remaining weeds are pulled the old fashioned way!



Early morning harvest

“Our stated objective has long been the aim of making organic produce more accessible to more people over a longer period of time throughout the year, by bringing down the costs of production and extending the seasons”

In 2015 Nick worked with the Danish company Asa-Lift to create a self-propelled, tracked carrot harvester with many innovations to make it suitable for organic production and this put us firmly ahead of our competitors in our ability to harvest quality crops, whatever the weather.

The future of the business is clearly to keep on growing our market. Our stated objective has long been the aim of making organic produce more accessible to more people over a longer period of time throughout the year, by bringing down the costs of production and extending the seasons.

Organic growing presents a myriad of problems on a commercial scale, the key ones being the need to control weeds and diseases without resorting to chemical methods. This is where a lot of management and time has to be dedicated. Over the years, through using best practice and traditional rotational methods, the sustained health of the land being farmed has become the cornerstone of what we do. Once pesticides and herbicides were removed from our arsenal, the health of the soil and environment is the best tool we have for successful growing.

Our planning revolves around the key elements:

- » Timely cultivation – working soils when at their optimum.
- » Precision machinery – minimising disease through managing canopy cover (green foliage) and ‘clean’ harvesting so as to reduce wastage.
- » Availability of water so that crop stress is kept to a minimum, working with the Environment Agency to plan boreholes and irrigation without disturbing the environmental balance.
- » Analysis of nutrition, knowing our soils so as to optimise their capacity. Using green manures and a rotational system where farm animals, usually sheep, graze the ground during breaks from cropping.
- » Having the best team – through training and development, our team is exploiting innovations in machinery. Recently we have taken on an agronomist to help us put more time into analysis of our crops and where we can improve.

British Texel Sheep Society



Texel sheep have enjoyed enormous popularity since arriving in the UK in the early 1970s



Texel Sheep Society Chief Executive, John Yates

The Texel sheep originates from the island of Texel, one of the north-western islands off Holland. The ancient native sheep was crossed with several English breeds, such as the Lincoln Longwool, Leicester Longwool and Wensleydale in an attempt to improve prolificacy, growth rate and size.

Rigorous selection then resulted in the development of a large, prolific and well-muscled sheep. The breed was introduced into the United Kingdom in 1970, with the first significant importations made in 1973 by a group of farmers from Lanarkshire.

Since that time, the breed has grown in the UK to become the most popular breed used by farmers to produce lambs for the table, as well as being a popular choice for producing breeding ewes.

'The British Texel Sheep Society, founded by those early Lanarkshire breeders to help promote and support the breed's development, is now the largest registry of pedigree Texel sheep anywhere in the world,' explains Society Chief Executive, John Yates.

Why pedigree matters

'Pedigree registration remains at the heart of everything the Society does, with farmers seeking out Texels from pedigree flocks due to the assurance of quality which they provide.

'Additionally, an animal's pedigree information is now used extensively to calculate performance and breeding information which is increasingly becoming demanded by farmers. This information on key traits, such as growth rates and muscling, is vital to helping farmers produce lamb more efficiently and to meet consumer expectations.

FACTS ABOUT BRITISH TEXEL SHEEP SOCIETY

- » More than £3 million invested in research and development (R&D) and breed development between 2017 and 2020
- » 10% growth in Society membership in the last eight years
- » 21,000 females registered in 2016
- » 55,000 birth notifications in 2016
- » More than 1.5 million pedigrees provided to support genetic evaluations
- » £23 million estimated annual financial benefits to the industry from 2016 to 2035
- » 2,250 Society members

“In any industry there are developments that irrevocably alter the entire landscape. The introduction and evolution of the Texel breed in UK farming is one such development and it has been proven to have transformed standards”

Traditional elements of the UK sheep industry, such as agricultural shows and auction sales, form an important part of Society members' activities

At a pedigree level, sale averages have consistently risen across the country over the last three years proving the demand for Texels from farmers across the country and delivering increased revenues for Texel breeders.

In any industry there are developments that irrevocably alter the entire landscape. The introduction and evolution of the Texel breed in UK farming is one such development and it has been proven to have transformed standards.

Such has been the success of the breed that Texel genes are now integrated across many breed lines globally. Texel has become more than a game changer; the breed's capabilities to increase productivity and quality from diverse sheep farming systems is unmatched, improving consistency and delivering increased values.

The Society's members now comprise the largest collective breeding group in UK sheep production and breeders are increasingly adopting new technologies to increase genetic improvements in their flocks.

Whole body computed tomography scans (CT) are now being used to assess meat yields in live animals and this has helped identify key traits in the development of new breeding values. This includes both spine length, to help deliver more chops per lamb, as well as

intramuscular fat to increase marbling in meat and enhance taste and flavour.

Youth

The well-documented requirement for well-educated young people to enter the farming industry is something the Society always has had at its heart. In recent years, the Society's Youth Development Programme has become an umbrella for educational awards and knowledge transfer among the Texel breeders, with links being formed with Texel societies in other countries, notably Eire and France, to encourage the exchange of information and knowledge.

Through the Youth Development Programme the Society awards prizes to students at four leading agricultural colleges, encouraging and fostering the study of topics related to the UK sheep industry. The Society also sponsors young members to attend industry conference and events as well as being a hub for the organisation of young members' trips and exchanges. In addition, the Society also sponsors competitions for young shepherds to test and hone their skills at a regional and national level.

'The Society is keen to encourage young people to continue to develop their knowledge and skills to benefit themselves and add value to the sheep industry the in future,' says Mr Yates.



Research and development

Over the last 10 years the Society has actively pursued several research and development projects. These have recently focused on developing genomic tests to establish the influence of specific genomes within an animal's DNA on a number of characteristics within the Texel breed.

Initial work in this area looked at two key health traits with the aim of finding bloodlines more resistant to disease thus, in turn, helping farmers to support the reduction of the use of antimicrobial drugs to treat disease. Antimicrobial resistance is one of the greatest challenges facing both animal and human medicine and anything which can be done to reduce the use of these drugs in farming will help slow the development of resistance.

The most recent range of genomic research is targeting production and meat quality traits to deliver more consistent lamb to the consumer with an increased focus on eating quality.

It is clear that sheep farmers will have to adapt further and faster in the future and the Texel Sheep Society is at the forefront of the industry, driving change and ensuring its members are able to service the needs of their customers, wherever they farm in the UK.

The Society's membership of the Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock and involvement in the Sheep Commission of the European Federation of Animal Science ensure the Society stays in touch with the latest developments in animal science and can help deliver change at a faster rate than many traditional breed societies.

Communications

In the digital age the Society has developed and invested heavily in its communication channels, helping both members and all those with an interest in the breed to access key information more easily and interactively.



Texels have changed the face of the UK sheep industry and deliver more than £23 million benefit every year

The Society's central database for pedigree information is allied with key production and performance data.

This database, which contains the largest dataset of Texel breed information anywhere in the world, is accessible to anyone and allows potential buyers to interrogate animal records in a variety of ways to find animals suited to their individual needs and required performance.

Furthermore, regular communication via the Society's website, social media and email alerts are all aimed at keeping the membership, and those with an interest in the breed, up to speed with the latest developments.

As the Society integrates new technologies, such as genomics, into its everyday systems and communications, the level and quality of information on the Texel breed and the breed's suitability to modern sheep farming will increase.

This will ensure the breed continues to add value at all levels of the supply chain in the future as successfully as it has in the past four decades

Research and innovation

- » Widescale use of performance recording
- » Extensive use of breeding technologies
- » Pioneering genomic technologies in the sheep sector
- » Working with internationally recognised partners
- » Delivering valuable insight for the whole industry

Social and corporate responsibility

- » Actively encouraging youth in farming
- » Funded through membership
- » Providing knowledge exchange

Influencing the industry

- » Supporting Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock
- » Driving research objectives
- » The breed has a £23 million per year positive impact on industry

W E Phillips and Sons



New block of industrial units nearing completion at Bridgewater, Somerset



Julian Phillips, Director

WE Phillips and Sons has been servicing the South West agricultural community for over 65 years. Now in its third generation, they can offer a wealth of experience for all agricultural construction projects. Based in Honiton, they are strategically placed to service the entire West Country farming community.

FACTS ABOUT W E PHILLIPS AND SONS

- » Formed in 1951
- » Third generation family business
- » 14 employees
- » Turnover £2.5 million
- » Covering the whole of the South West

Company history

William Ernest Phillips (Bill) started his own building company in 1951. Based in East Devon it was inevitable that the farming industry would form a large proportion of the customer base. Bill was soon joined by sons Gerald and Brian and W E Phillips and Sons was formed. They very quickly established themselves as specialists in all forms of agricultural construction. The company is now run by Gerald's three sons, Wayne, Julian and Matthew, and although the main core of the business is still in agriculture, recent years have seen them construct industrial units and commercial properties.

Changing times

To service the changing needs of their customers, the company strives to offer a one stop shop. Julian explains 'To give our customers the best experience, we offer them a complete construction package. Based on their needs we can help with the initial design and layout. We can then give them a fixed cost to carry out the full works. Once this has been agreed, we will then submit the plans to the relevant local authority for planning approval if required. If there are any issues arising from the planning process we will deal directly with the local authority to resolve

these, leaving our customers free to concentrate on their core business. When all the approvals are through we can then start the project and this is when the customer will see the benefits of using us.

If the project requires a steel-framed building we will manufacture this in our own fabrication workshop and, with the exception of large earth-works and electrical work, everything is carried out by our own employees and not sub-contracted out to third parties. There will be a site foreman who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the site and he will report directly to either Matthew, Wayne or myself, enabling us to keep up-to-date with progress and resolve as quickly as possible any issues that may arise.'

Case study

The company has recently completed a scheme at Brue Valley Farms, Glastonbury. The project consisted of a new cubicle building to house an additional 375 dairy cows, cattle handling area, covered feed passages and below ground slurry channels.

Meeting new industrial standards

2014 saw a major shake-up in the manufacture of steel framed buildings. Julian continues

'It seems hard to believe but up until July 2014 anybody could design and manufacture a steel portal frame building and erect it without having to conform to any standards. Whilst the majority of manufacturers did build to BS 5502 class 1 or 2 there was no actual legal requirement so to do. You could quite literally fabricate a building without any training, qualifications or experience. I'm glad to say that this is no longer the case; from July 2014 anybody

The nature of our enquiries has remained relatively similar over the past 25 to 30 years 'Farmers still ring enquiring about a new milking parlour, cow cubicle building or slurry store. What has changed over the last two decades is the scale of the project. Previously, they would be looking to accommodate up to 100 head of cattle, nowadays we receive enquiries for anything up to 1,500,' states Company Director, Julian Phillips.

who wants to fabricate a steel-framed structure has to conform to a new standard EN 1090-1

'I have to say the process of obtaining the certification was quite a task; whilst it didn't really change the methods we were using, we had to make sure that there was accountability for every part of the process. This didn't just affect us, it also meant we had to work very closely with our suppliers. We had to ensure that everything we purchased in the fabrication process and met the standards set out in the new legislation: steel, welding wire, gas, general consumables... and when you use somewhere in the region of 15 to 20 suppliers this all takes quite a bit of time to sort out.

“To give our customers the very best experience we offer them a complete construction package. Based on their needs we can help with the initial design and layout.”





You'll be amazed at what we can produce in our relatively small fabrication shop



Everything is fabricated in-house

'Although at the time the qualification process seemed laborious it was undoubtedly a very positive step forward for our industry. It levels the playing field because now we aren't competing against somebody who would previously be quoting on an inferior product.'

Plans

Outlining the company's future plans Julian explains, 'There are no immediate plans to increase the company's size or turnover. Since 2010 we have doubled our turnover to £2.5 million and we are comfortable at that level; to take us to the next level will require some major investment in people and resources.'

'Our priority at the moment is to find new premises; not only have we outgrown our fabrication workshop, but the estate that we are on in

Honiton is earmarked for residential development so our future there is not secure. If we can find a suitable building I would like to invest in more fabrication equipment to enable us to produce our own folded sheet products, which at the moment we outsource; we always feel more comfortable when we are in control and not relying on others. That is why last year we made a significant investment in a software programme that enabled us to produce our own fabrication designs and drawings, rather than rely on external draughtsmen.'

'We have a constant plant and machinery replacement programme and we will continue to invest in our staff to ensure they are trained to the highest standards in all areas but most especially in health and safety best practice.'

Brian Robinson Machinery



Our service team, ranging from our apprentices to those with 30 years in service with BRM



Our main buildings situated within our four acre site

Brian Robinson Machinery Ltd (BRM) is an agricultural engineering success story built on a willingness to work hard, while providing an efficient, adaptable and reliable service to customers. As a young man captivated by agricultural machinery, I worked for one of the most respected and professional agricultural harvesting contractors in North America. As well as learning how to work hard, this taught me the importance of good service, commitment and trust in business.

Returning home to Northallerton in North Yorkshire, I went into business with a Ford Escort van and a passion for farm machinery. Through 35 years of hard work, commitment and trust, the business has grown into a respected 20-person agricultural engineering company, situated on my own four acre site. We have a loyal and dedicated team, including apprentices. We specialise in trading and supporting a range of agricultural and forestry equipment. Our customer base spreads right across the North of England and Scotland, including a very diverse and representative selection of farm business types. These range from the smallest, marginal hill farms through to very productive lowland family farms. It also includes very large and intensely professional farming companies and a diverse selection of agricultural contracting businesses.

For many years we also operated our own agricultural harvesting service, which worked well in parallel with our developing agricultural engineering business and our machinery hire fleet. This gives us an extra appreciation of our customers' needs.

We supply a diverse range of market-leading equipment, produced by manufacturers from all over Western Europe. Imported machinery is very important as, in some cases, it is the best suited to the requirements of our customers and often there

FACTS ABOUT BRIAN ROBINSON MACHINERY LTD

- » Established in 1982
- » £6 million turnover
- » Main Valtra tractor dealer since 1990
- » 20 employees
- » Supplier of agricultural and forestry machinery

“If a job’s worth doing right, do it right first time, everytime”

is simply no comparable machinery now manufactured within the UK. Supporting these major brands, we also offer machinery from respected domestic manufacturers across the UK. Typically, this will be smaller equipment and may often be bespoke to the specific needs of farmers and foresters within our local region.

Our professional and highly-trained service team are provided with a modern fleet of well-equipped service vehicles, together with effective and expanding workshop facilities. During the peak season, we focus on the more urgent tasks of breakdowns and minor accidents. Off-season, we focus heavily on preventative maintenance, machinery inspection and repair. We also offer a fully-accredited testing service, as annual testing is now a legal obligation for some types of farm machinery, such as crop sprayers and fork lifts.

Given the special nature of agriculture, we support our customers on a 24/7 basis every day of the year. Mother Nature does not close for the weekend at 2 pm on a Friday afternoon, as the milking of cows evidences, and neither can the industries that immediately support it. When out in the field, the weather controls everything. A farmer cannot harvest wet wheat and cannot spray crops when it is windy or raining.

Brian holding a gift from all his employees celebrating 35 years in business along with some Industry awards presented to BRM over recent years



If they miss their chance to spray a key fungicide, an entire crop can be lost. Thus, in my view, agriculture rightly enjoys some special provisions allowing some limited flexibility in the use of many farm vehicles on the public roads.

With 35 years at the sharp end of the machinery supply chain, we see directly the challenge of change within agriculture. With the long-term decline in real crop prices, farmers continue to leave the industry, resulting in fewer, but larger farms. As farm numbers decline, the average size, power and complexity of new tractors and trailers increases. To compensate this provides benefits from economies of scale, and represents one of our industries most significant challenges.

In recent years, we have realised the importance of advertising and selling our products using the internet. Our rural location means we do not benefit from passing trade; our main website is automatically updated daily with the new and used machinery we hold in stock. In 2014, we opened an online shop to use e-commerce to sell tools, parts and clothing to customers beyond our local customer base. We saw a steady progress over the next two years and then a boom in 2016, with web sales up by 127%. Social media has become an important selling tool and an instant method to provide news or advertise a certain product.

The increasing use of smart phones has seen another change to which we have had to adapt: many of our customers use an increasing number of apps to provide them with anything from data on how to set seed drills in changeable conditions, to building a new tractor to their specifications.

Most of the major brands which we sell are manufactured within the European Union and the market for used farm machinery is driven by European demand and exchange rates. In my opinion, it is of great importance for the United

THE AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY TRADE DEALER EXCELLENCE AWARD

The Agricultural Machinery Trade Dealer Excellence Award for Yorkshire and the North East was presented to Brian Robinson Machinery at the Yorkshire Agricultural Machinery Show (YAMS) on Wednesday 8th February.

The award was kindly sponsored by YAMS and presented to Managing Director, Brian Robinson, by show organiser Richard Tasker.

As our pictures show, Brian was extremely pleased to win the award. He commented 'It means a lot to us as it was voted for by farmers. In the area we operate in, we are up against some big, multi branch dealers, but we do our best and we must be doing a lot right'.



Paul Counce, Awards Organiser and Publisher of *Agri Machinery Trade News*, and sister website, *Agri Machinery News* commented 'Not only did BRM receive votes from their customers, there was also a number from their supply chain too. They are clearly a well-run business and a popular and worthy winner of this award'.

Kingdom to negotiate good trade agreements with the European Union, and the rest of the world, for the agricultural machinery trade to succeed following Britain's exit from the EU.

We have responded by supplying and supporting highly-effective equipment, to achieve the economies of scale and output that our customers seek. Out in the fields, this gives terrific performance. However, as the farms have got larger, it follows that this larger agricultural equipment must also travel much further on public roads to get to and from those fields. Traffic density on Britain's roads has also drastically increased, so many customers also want faster tractors that can pull trailers with significantly higher payloads, so minimising the time spent on the public roads.

While some welcome changes that have recently been made to how the regulatory burdens relating to travel on public roads are drafted, applied and enforced, we firmly believe that further changes by government are still required.

The regulatory burden needs to be proportionate, simple, clear, enforceable and safe. It also needs to be

applied fairly and uniformly. Examples where slight change is needed include the details of the limitations applied to the use of rebated fuels in agricultural vehicles, including when in the hands of our industry. Further changes are needed to the regulations which currently limit the permitted weight on public roads of agricultural motor vehicles and their trailers.

For these trailers, this also extends to the legislation concerning operator licencing and the need to improve the standards of vehicle roadworthiness.

Tied so closely to the fortunes of the agricultural and forestry sectors, we are acutely aware of the great and often-overlooked importance of these businesses to the economy of the UK. More than ever I believe it is vitally important that Britain further develops an efficient, productive and profitable agricultural sector. To support this, we already supply some of the best equipment available globally, but we also need a fair and proportionate regulatory environment within which to operate it properly and efficiently.

“Service
is our
business”

Review of Parliament

A snap election

On the 19th April 2017, having repeatedly insisted that she had no intention of calling a snap election, Prime Minister Theresa May sprung a complete surprise when she summoned the press to Downing Street to announce she would seek a Commons vote to go to the country on June 8th 2017.

The announcement, made as Parliament returned from its Easter break, had the force of a thunderclap in Westminster. Quite unexpectedly, MPs and parties were plunged into election mode.

The immediate effect was to turn what were now the two remaining Prime Minister's Question Times of the Parliament into de facto leader's debates – especially since it was made clear that Theresa May would not take part in the kind of televised debates held in the 2010 and 2015 elections.

The Prime Minister stated her case: 'There are three things that a country needs: a strong economy, strong defence and strong, stable leadership. That is what our plans for Brexit and our plans for a stronger Britain will deliver... The Right Hon. Member for Islington North (The Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn) would bankrupt our economy and weaken our defences and is simply not fit to lead.'

To Conservative jeers, Mr Corbyn counter-attacked: 'She says that it is about leadership, yet she refuses to defend her record in television debates. It is not hard to see why. The Prime Minister says that we have a stronger economy, yet she cannot explain why people's wages are lower today than they were 10 years ago or why more



Prime Minister Theresa May sought to strengthen her position before negotiations with the EU began

households are in debt. Six million people are earning less than the living wage, child poverty is up, and pensioner poverty is up.'

The two leaders traded more accusations with Theresa May warning that ordinary working people would face higher taxes and lost jobs under Labour while Mr Corbyn claimed the Prime Minister's priority was 'tax giveaways to the richest corporations while our children's schools are starved of the resources they need to educate our children for the future'.

Brexit emerged as one of the Prime Minister's main campaign themes: 'every vote for the Conservatives will make me stronger when I negotiate for Britain with the European Union. And every vote for the Conservatives will mean we can stick to our plan for a stronger Britain and take the right long-term decisions for a more secure future for this country.'

Later that afternoon, the Commons voted to call an early election, by 522 votes to 13.

The Queen's Speech



The Queen's Speech announced the government's legislative plan for the coming Parliament

What a difference. Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn's final Commons confrontation before the election had seen the Conservatives limbering up for a triumphal campaign which would culminate in the inevitable smashing of their Labour opponents. When the diminished, battered band of Conservative MPs reassembled, minus their parliamentary majority, for the state opening of Parliament on June 21st, they were chastened and uncertain, while euphoria gripped the occupants of the Labour benches.

When they came to speak in the traditional debate on an address thanking Her Majesty for the Queen's Speech – the new Government's legislative programme – the dynamic between the two main figures had changed completely. Mr Corbyn seemed a far more confident, assertive parliamentary performer, relishing the opportunity to throw back the taunts that had been hurled at him during the campaign.

A Government which had warned that he could only gain power in a 'coalition of chaos' with the SNP and the Lib Dems had been forced

to negotiate for the support of the Northern Ireland Democratic Unionists ... and as the first debate of this new Parliament began, that support had not been secured. Mr Corbyn could not resist the open goal. To triumphant Labour laughter he noted that 'the latest coalition may already be in some chaos'.

'Nothing could emphasise that chaos more than the Queen's Speech we have just heard: a threadbare legislative programme from a Government who have lost their majority and apparently run out of ideas altogether. This would be a thin legislative programme even if it was for one year, but for two years – two years? There is not enough in it to fill up one year.'

That was a reference to the Government's decision to declare a two-year Parliamentary Session – a procedural move intended to ensure ministers could push through vital Brexit legislation in time for the exit date in March 2019. Mr Corbyn mocked the Prime Minister for dropping a series of election promises that had not found favour with the voters: means-testing the winter fuel allowance and replacing the triple lock on pensions among others.

On Brexit, Mr Corbyn stuck to Labour's careful positioning in favour of a deal with the EU 'that puts jobs and the economy first'. He called for full access to the single market and a customs arrangement that provided Britain with the 'exact same benefits' as now. And in his final flourish he warned the Prime Minister that Labour were now 'not merely an Opposition; we are a Government in waiting, with a policy programme that enthused and

engaged millions of people in this election, many for the first time in their political lives. We are ready to

offer real strong and stable leadership in the interests of the many, not the few.'

Grenfell Tower

The fire that destroyed Grenfell Tower, a social housing block in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, seemed to some to crystallise the issues that had driven the 'Corbyn Surge' in the General Election just days earlier.

Accusations about the neglect of social housing tenants, chronic under-investment and official incompetence were flying, even while the pall of smoke still hovered over the capital and the horrific images of the blaze were replayed on TV.

So potent was the symbolism that it became intertwined in the debates on the post-election Queen's Speech - but the Government also committed to keep MPs informed about the aftermath, the efforts to identify casualties in the wreckage of the tower, to re-house and assist those who had lost their homes, and to set up a public inquiry.

So it was that the Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid, came to the Commons on July 3rd to announce £2.5 million had been distributed from the special £5 million fund set up to help the residents. Mr Javid said the public inquiry and the criminal investigation had to be allowed the space to follow the evidence wherever it took them, and everyone should be careful not to prejudice their work. Responding to the Labour MP, David Lammy, who had lost a family friend in the fire, he added that although it was for the judge to determine the scope of the inquiry, he expected it to be 'as broad and wide-ranging as possible'.



Tributes for the Grenfell victims came from across the country

Mr Javid also dealt with the key issue of the authorities' inability to say exactly how many people had died: 'There has been much speculation about who was in Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire, and it is vital that we find out. The Director of Public Prosecutions has made it clear that there will be no prosecution of tenants ... who may have been illegally sub-letting their property, ... There may have been people living in flats that were illegally sub-let who had no idea about the true status of their tenancy. Their families want to know if they perished in the fire. These are their sons, their daughters, their brothers and their sisters. They need closure, and that is the least that they deserve.'

The Government was also taking urgent action to avoid another tragedy in buildings with architectural cladding similar to that which appeared to have been a factor in the Grenfell fire.

Last rites on the Brexit Bill



David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union since July 2016

Back in March, when an election seemed a distant prospect, parliament's main focus was on the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill. This Bill, which would give Theresa May the authority to begin the UK's divorce from the European Union, was forced on the Government after a Supreme Court ruling that Parliamentary approval was required to begin the process.

Despite fears that the Bill could be watered down or even reshaped to reverse the Referendum verdict, it passed through the Commons unscathed. All attempts to amend, or add, to its 136 words were voted down. Predictions of a major rebellion of up to 50 Conservative Remainers proved unfounded, and only a handful defied the party whip.

But when it moved on to the House of Lords, where there is no Government majority and a large concentration of pro-EU peers, the Bill was amended twice.

One change guaranteed the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and the second promised Parliament a 'meaningful vote' on the final Brexit deal. That meant the Bill had to return to the Commons because both Houses of Parliament must agree on the final wording of legislation.

After much debate, MPs rejected both Lords' amendments, the Bill was sent back for immediate consideration in the House of Lords, where David Davis came to watch his Junior Minister, Lord Bridges, call on Peers to drop their opposition. And while the Liberal Democrat, Lord Oates, did urge Peers to continue defying the Government, support for the amendment melted away, and the attempt to throw it back to MPs was once more rejected, as was the attempt to keep the 'meaningful vote'. The final form of the Bill was settled – and it was sent off for the Royal Assent, un-amended.

Article 50 is triggered



Theresa May meets with European Council President Donald Tusk in Downing Street

The passage of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act cleared the way for the Prime Minister to act

on the Referendum verdict and formally trigger Britain's departure talks with the EU.

She was greeted by cheering Conservative MPs when she announced, on the 29th March, that the process had begun: 'A few minutes ago, in Brussels, the United Kingdom's permanent representative to the EU handed a letter to the President of the European Council on my behalf confirming the Government's decision to invoke Article 50 of the treaty on European Union. The Article 50 process is now under way and, in accordance with the wishes of the British people, the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union.'

She added that she wanted to build a close partnership with the EU: 'We want to continue to buy goods and services from the EU, and sell it ours ... Indeed, in an increasingly unstable world, we must continue to forge the closest possible security co-operation to keep our people safe. We face the same global threats from terrorism and extremism.'

Jeremy Corbyn warned against leaving without a trade agreement: 'the Prime Minister says that no deal is better than a bad deal, but the reality is that no deal is a bad deal.'

He said the debate had now moved on to what a post-Brexit Britain would be like: 'There are Conservatives who

want to use Brexit to turn this country into a low-wage tax haven. Labour is determined to invest in a high-skill, high-tech, high-wage future ... Labour will not give this Government a free hand to use Brexit to attack rights and protections and to cut services, or to create a tax dodger's paradise.'

The eurosceptic Conservative, Jacob Rees-Mogg, quoted the Elizabethan hero Sir Francis Drake: "There must be a begynnyng of any great matter, but the conteneuing unto the end untill it be thoroughly ffynysshed yeldes the trew glory' ... I wish my Right Hon. Friend good luck and good fortune in her negotiations until she comes to true glory and is welcomed back to this House as a 21st century Gloriana.'

A terrorist attack on Parliament

On the afternoon of March 22nd, as MPs were engaged in a routine vote of the Pensions Bill, a man drove his car into pedestrians just outside, killing two people and injuring dozens more, before stabbing to death a police officer who was guarding the gates to the Houses of Parliament, and he was then shot dead himself.

The sitting of the Commons was suspended and MPs were held in their Chamber for several hours, before being escorted away. When they returned the next day, they began with a minute of silence. Then the Speaker opened proceedings by expressing 'our heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the victims of this outrage. A police officer, PC Keith Palmer, was killed defending us, defending Parliament and defending parliamentary democracy.'

The Prime Minister was heard in silence as she updated MPs: 'Yesterday, an act of terrorism tried to silence our democracy, but today we meet as



The attack on Westminster was one of several terrorist attacks in the UK during the year

normal, as generations have done before us and as future generations will continue to do, to deliver a simple message: we are not afraid, and our resolve will never waver in the face of terrorism. We meet here, in the oldest of all Parliaments, because we know that democracy, and the values that it entails, will always prevail.'



PC Keith Palmer, who died trying to stop the attacker, was given a full police service funeral, and praised for his heroism

She gave an account of the previous day's events and ended by declaring that the best response to terrorism was to act normally: 'As I speak, millions will be boarding trains and aeroplanes to travel to London and to see for themselves the greatest city on Earth. It is in these actions – millions of acts of normality – that we find the best response to terrorism: a response that denies our enemies their victory, that refuses to let them win, that shows we will never give in; a response driven by that same spirit that drove a husband and father to put himself between us and our

attacker, and to pay the ultimate price; a response that says to the men and women who propagate this hate and evil, "You will not defeat us." Mr Speaker, let this be the message from this House and this nation today: our values will prevail.'

The Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, said people should not allow the voices of hatred to divide or cower them – adding that PC Keith Palmer had given his life defending the public and democracy.

Watching impassively in the crowd of MPs standing at the Bar of the House, in the area across the Chamber facing the Speaker's Chair, was the Foreign Office Minister, Tobias Ellwood. He had tried to save PC Palmer's life by giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Many MPs took a moment to exchange a word with him as they passed or pat him on the arm. And many of those who spoke over the next hour praised his actions.

Tributes and thanks came from all the Party Leaders – the SNP's Westminster Leader, Angus Robertson, the Liberal Democrats, Tim Farron, and the DUP's, Nigel Dodds.

The Conservative MP, James Cleverly, had served with PC Palmer in the army spoke movingly and implored the Prime Minister to 'posthumously recognise his gallantry and sacrifice formally.' Theresa May promised that she would.

President Trump

This year more than most, US politics had a bearing on our own. Not only were many MPs looking across the Atlantic for a trade deal and an enhancement of the 'special relationship', following the decision to leave the EU. But the American people themselves had managed to

outdo the British electorate when it came to delivering the most surprising democratic decision of 2016.

As recently as January 2016, a small number of MPs had gathered in Westminster Hall to debate whether or not Donald Trump should be banned

from entering the UK altogether. His comments about Muslims, among others, had led to an online petition for him to be considered a ‘hate preacher’ and therefore banned from British soil. Even those who supported the motion knew there was little chance of such a ban being implemented. But few would have suspected that, just 13 months later, Parliament would be discussing the appropriateness of a state visit from President Donald Trump.

One of the first acts of the new US President was to order a blanket ban on people from a list of Middle Eastern countries travelling to the US. In the Commons, the former Labour Leader, Ed Miliband, and the Conservative, Nadhim Zahawi, joined forces to ask the Speaker for an emergency debate – and it was held that day.

Mr Zahawi, born in Iraq to Kurdish parents, arrived in the UK as a nine-year-old refugee from Saddam Hussein’s regime. He is now a British citizen, but because he was born in Iraq, he believed he came under the Trump ban.

He told MPs his place of birth already meant he had been required to go through an interview at the US embassy, to secure the right to travel to America, under rules imposed by President Obama. But the new restrictions were much tougher.

The US Government has since clarified that people with British passports will not be affected by the ban, whatever the country of their birth, but Mr Zahawi still thought the ban was ‘wholly counterproductive’. He described how it was already being used by pro-Islamic State social media accounts as ‘clear evidence that the USA is seeking to destroy Islam. They have even called it the “blessed ban”’.



Nadhim Zahawi MP strongly criticised the Trump administration’s travel ban on certain Muslim countries

Labour’s Yvette Cooper, who chairs the Home Affairs Select Committee, was ‘deeply worried’ that the Government had already invited the new President to make a state visit to Britain: ‘It will look like an endorsement of a ban that is so morally wrong and that we should be standing against.’

The Conservative, Sir Simon Burns, disagreed: ‘I think it is absolutely right that the British Government continue the work of the Prime Minister to build bridges with President Trump so that we can, through engagement, seek to persuade him and to minimise or reduce the danger of his more outrageous policies ... I believe that very little would be achieved by cancelling a state visit to which the invitation has already been extended and accepted.’

The emergency debate was on a formal motion that MPs had ‘considered’ Donald Trump’s travel ban, so no call for a policy change was voted on.

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