



The Farm Consultancy Group

Issue 91 -
May 2018



Welcome to our 91st edition of the newsletter. Included in this months newsletter are articles on commodities and maize seed updates, benchmarking, beef discussion group, sward repairs, first cut silage, the future of British farming and data protection regulations.

Your feedback and comments are most welcome. If clarification is required, please contact the article contributor or for more articles and news visit www.fcqagric.com.

Edited by Gerard Finnan of David Bardgett Ltd and The Farm Consultancy Group Tel: 07976 426420.

Commodities Update - Andrew Jones

In the last month the pound has weakened slightly against the dollar while maintaining its level against the euro. The GDT Milk Price Index has increased by 2.7%, with all categories up (as at 01/05/2018).

Milk Powder - This has again remained static in price.

Feed - Soya prices have strengthened again over the last month, back again to around £390/t on farm, both for the summer and next winter. Rape has increased slightly in price over the last month with spot prices around £230/t and next winter at £210/t.

Wheat and Barley prices currently remain high and on parity with some people changing their planting options due to the late spring, i.e. more maize being grown this year.

Fertiliser - Nitrogen prices have dropped slightly on the news that CF are looking to cut their prices slightly for an aftercut campaign, before cutting prices dramatically in early summer for a new season campaign like last year. This has already seen prices drop with Nitram & Urea down £15/t in just the last few days.

I am already taking orders for new season Nitram & Urea, to take advantage of the price drop. If you are interested on being on the list, please contact Andrew Jones on 07717 442889.

Maize Seed Update - Andrew Jones

Inside this issue:

With maize planting season upon us, if you are looking to grow maize this year, have you already ordered your seed? If not, we still have stocks of our most popular varieties available.

Benchmarking

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As this is the last year that mesurool will be available, seed suppliers are reluctant to make further stocks of sold out varieties, but we still have the following available;

Beef Discussion Group

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- **Picker**, maturity class 11, very early grain maturity for late drilling or marginal sites.
- **Lovely**, maturity class 9, 100% yield good quality big plant for an ultra-early variety.
- **Ballard**, maturity class 8, robust and reliable variety grown for many seasons for good sites.

Sward Repair

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First Cut Silage

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- **Absalon**, maturity class 8, very high quality particularly digestibility. 104% yield.
- **Marco**, maturity class 7, high starch on good sites. Also suitable for drilling under Samco plastic. Good drought tolerance for sandy soils.

British Farming - Your Future!

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GDPR

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All are competitively priced, so if you have maize seed to buy please contact Andrew Jones on 07717 442889.



Benchmarking - Phil Cooper

We have now passed the financial year end for a number of farm businesses, so the financial data for the last 12 months is there to be analysed and used to identify areas of strength and areas where there is opportunity for improvement.

Every year we collect data for a large number of dairy farmers within the Wessex Area to produce pence per litre cost of production figures, to allow businesses to benchmark themselves against similar farms. These figures are jointly produced with Old Mill Accountants to gain a broad range of businesses within the pool of data. This enables us to produce figures for the top 10% of dairy herds in different systems, e.g. all year round, high yield, autumn block calving and spring block calving.

Last year, (2017 year ends), the data showed up some significant differences between the top and bottom herds on average, as the table below shows:

Pence Per Litre	Top 10%	Bottom 10%
Milk price	24.99	25.76
Non Milk Income	3.99	0.80
Purchased Feed	4.07	8.73
Variable Costs	4.50	8.55
Labour (paid and unpaid)	5.05	9.48
Power and Machinery	5.07	8.83
Administration	1.01	2.04
Property repairs	0.34	1.99
Cost of Production	20.04	39.62
Comparable Farm Profit	8.94	-13.06

Clearly there is a massive difference between these two sets of data with significant opportunity to make improvements for the bottom 10%.

Do you know where your business would be, if analysed using this data? If you are interested, please contact Phil Cooper at pcooper@fcgagric.com and we can arrange for your farm to be benchmarked in this way.

Beef Discussion Group - Ed Warren

I recently attended our beef discussion group meeting on farm. It was a well attended meeting with good points raised through the day which lasted from 11.00 a.m. - 2.30 p.m.

We looked at the farm buildings, grassland and off lying land and building. It was evident from the figures produced that I was talking to farmers who are looking to be in the top 10% of Beef Producers. They are well on their way to improving the systems they use to get the best out of the calves they are rearing. It was very evident that the farms in the group are all very different, but the sharing of information and knowledge was invaluable.

On the day we looked at the host farm's systems and their performance. The discussions were very open and inclusive. It was a wet day, but we did look at grass growth and the paddock system in use. Our next meeting will look much more closely at grassland management growing and using double the national Beef Average forage per hectare, and of course walk and discuss the host farm system.

If you want to join our forward thinking discussion group please contact Ed Warren on 07434 723443 or email edwarren@fcgagric.com

Sward Repair - Phil Cooper

With the recent wet and snowy weather behind us now (hopefully), attention needs to focus on repairing damaged swards. Damaged swards can produce >20% less dry matter in a year compared to a sward in good health. Repairing may require a full reseed, but often over seeding or direct drilling can be just as effective.



The type of action required depends on the level of damage. If poaching is only a couple of inches deep, this will fix itself after the next couple of grazings or with a pass of a grass aerator, not a roller. I say not a roller as this will just squash down what is already potentially a compacted top soil and reduce oxygen levels in the soil, reducing soil microbe and earth worm activity, (these two are key to nutrient release in the soil).

Deeper poaching may require a more aggressive approach, but before you jump for the plough consider other options. Ploughing is great for burying trash/weeds and removing top soil compaction. The problem with ploughing is it can also bring up new weed seeds and heavy/infertile subsoil, burying the good quality top soil and organic matter out of reach of the plant. In some cases, ploughing is the only option, but there is often an opportunity to either minimum till the field or direct drill after spraying off.

A number of our clients have moved away from the plough now and use a sward lifter and heavy duty cultivator to make a rough seedbed. They follow this with either direct drill or use a seed box on grass harrows to sow the grass seed. They subsequently roll to gain a good seed to soil contact. This option is around two thirds of the cost of ploughing, is a much quicker operation, doesn't bring up fresh weed seeds and doesn't bury the good quality top soil and organic matter away from the new plants.

If you would like some help planning a reseeding program on how best to establish grass, contact Phil Cooper on 07798 673665. Or contact Andrew Jones on 07717 442888 if you would like to discuss grass seed varieties for your reseeding program.

When Should I Cut My First Silage This Year? - Andrew Jones

Numerous times recently I've had the comment that someone is thinking about delaying their first cut harvest date this year after what has been a challenging spring, particularly if they think they do not have the quantity of grass compared to normal.

Unfortunately, this is the wrong thing to do. It has been a challenging spring this year with many people unable to do their usual ground preparations as we head into the new season, i.e. rolling, or unable to apply their usual applications of fertiliser. Even with this late spring the grass growth is catching up and will still head in its usual seven to ten day period. Once this has happened the quality will decrease.

Therefore, weather dependent, aim to cut your silage as per usual, even if the quantity isn't there, to maintain the quality. Then once this has been ensiled apply your fertiliser quickly to aim for a good second cut.

If you haven't managed your usual field preparations, maybe cut a little higher this time to try and reduce any potential soil contamination. Remember quality silage is the basis for any future cost effective diet.

For your forage fertiliser, seed or silage sheets please contact Andrew Jones on 07717 442889 or email andrew@davidbardgett.co.uk

Your Opportunity For Your Say On Your Future! - Gerard Finnan

Michael Gove's Health and Harmony consultation, setting out his vision for the "future of British Agriculture" is being touted as "a once in a lifetime opportunity to help shape UK government policy".

It can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-for-food-farming-and-the-environment>

The consultation ends on 8th May and you can make your voice heard direct to Defra by emailing agricultureconsultation@defra.gsi.gov.uk

The best option is probably, focusing on one or two key points suggested in the consultation paper and making them succinctly. If you have time you may like to respond online by filling out the consultation survey at consult.defra.gov.uk/farming/future-of-farming

The survey asks for a lot information about the individual business, you have the option to remain anonymous.

The Government Paper is split into three sections:

1. Moving Away From The CAP

The first section sets out what is wrong with the current CAP and outlines the government's thoughts on an "agricultural transition". This transition could last five, seven or ten years and includes the gradual phasing out of direct payments, possibly from 2020. The paper discusses how cuts to payments may be implemented and the criteria farmers should meet to receive these payments. The paper then looks at ways to make farming more productive, highlighting best practice and benchmarking, new technologies, research and development, encouraging new entrants and developing a skilled workforce.

2. Implementing New Policy

This sets out what should replace the CAP, namely a new scheme that delivers "public money for public goods". Five areas for future taxpayer support are looked at including Productivity, Animal & Plant Health, Environment, Access to Countryside and Rural Resilience and Protecting Rural Landscapes. This section relates to risk management "ensuring fairness in the supply chain" – risk management tools, cooperation & collaboration.

3. Policy Framework

This looks at UK single market issues, international trade and proposals for a new Agriculture Bill. The paper also emphasises the government's commitment to "ensuring the maintenance of high standards".

This is your opportunity to have your say. There will be no point complaining on outcome afterwards if you haven't participated in the process beforehand...like exercising your democratic right to vote.

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

All businesses have to comply with this from May 25th 2018!

This is the link which you may find useful to get you started looking at the requirements.

<https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/>

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