

continued From page 19

farmers are getting paid to do nothing but rip out hedges.” Being a Taurus, I jumped at that too. I talked about zero set-aside, entry level schemes, beetle banks and hedges until my partner politely kicked me under the table.

By now, I was in Formula One “Go, Go, Go!” mode and further asked all guests for their guestimates on the quantities of wheat languishing in intervention stores. Apparently millions still, which must be costing taxpayers a fortune! Lowering my sights and broadening it out a little, I asked how much fat there was in normal silver-top milk. Apparently up to 35%! The price of wheat? Still double last year’s price!

When they go to the supermarket to buy meat, what do they look for? The cheapest, they answered, before adding that any animal must have lived to the highest welfare standards and preferably be free range. I guess it must have listened to the birds twittering in the trees next to a babbling brook with a horse and cart in it too.

Before I finished, I suggested that having chomped our way through 2000 calories of non-seasonal produce from around the world on plates the size of Lincolnshire, we had a choice to make. Either we should pay for strategic food stores to protect against shortages in an eve-changing market. Or we should accept more volatile markets – and prices – resulting from food shortages. Following a deathly hush, we moved onto the most recent episode of Dr Who.

Yet if “educated” people in this country have really no idea about the realities of agriculture in its broadest sense, how can we begin to get the message across to the masses? Even the next generation of consumers stop studying geography and biology at 14 and sit glued to next episode of Big Brother instead. Now that’s reality.

Jeremy Cole, Bsc Agri Econ (Reading), runs Agricole – an independent grain brokering and marketing service for farmers. For a weekly grain market report, call 01954 719452 or visit www.agricole.co.uk

Keeping it in

Winning the South Suffolk Crop Competition is a family tradition for LA Cornell & Son, writes Judith Tooth.

Richard Cornell, supreme champion of this year’s South Suffolk Crop Competition, is regularly reminded by his father of the time he won three years on the trot. “I don’t know if he ever did, but Father always did enter the competition and I like to carry on the tradition – and it’s a bit of fun,” he says.

LA Cornell and Son – the son refers to Father, now retired, and Richard calls himself the “and” – farm 227ha (560 acres) of clay loam either side of the Bury St Edmunds to Sudbury road at Windsor Green. It started as a tenancy of 73ha (180 acres), rented by Richard’s great-grandfather in 1902, who then bought the farm as a sitting tenant in 1917. Various bits of land have been bought over the years to make Rookery Farm what it is today.

The farm is mostly arable, with 24ha (60 acres) of small, traditional meadows that add character to the landscape. “Father’s decision to keep the meadows when a lot of other farmers were ploughing theirs up was maybe unusual, but I’m glad he kept them.”

While the meadows are used to fatten 50 head of beef in the summer, the rest of the farm is down to wheat, oilseed rape, spring barley grown for seed, malting winter barley, sugar beet and spring beans. A further 40ha (100 acres) are farmed on contract.

Having finally harvested the last of the spring beans, this month will see the start of sugar beet crop lifting. Richard employs one full-time member of staff, Peter Green, who has worked on the farm for the past 25 years. They make a good team: in the summer Richard drives the combine and Peter carts the grain; during the winter Peter takes charge of the sugar beet harvester and Richard is alongside in the tractor.

“Lifting our own beet on this sort of acreage is unusual,” says Richard, “but we always have done.” He prefers to do everything on the farm, rather than relying on contractors. Timeliness is very important – a philosophy inherited from his father – and to which he attributes his success as a farmer. “I am fussy, but attention to detail does matter. There’s a fine line between average and something better.”

Being timely depends on knowing when the time is right – and help from agronomist Tony Giles. “He won’t thank me for saying it but he is 80,” says Richard. “He’s still busy and active with several clients. I do most of the crop walking now but if I have a question or a query he’s there to help.”

Training has helped too. Richard completed BASIS and FACTS three years ago, which has given him confidence in making fertiliser and crop protection decisions. “Before I might have thought that a crop looked just right for a particular treatment but wanted to wait for Tony to advise me. Now I can get on with the job right away.”

Richard is also an associate member of TAG Morley so he can keep up to date with research into crop varieties and chemicals. The South Suffolk Crop Competition shows it is paying off. In a year of strong competition, he was a clear winner with two first prizes, for sugar beet and winter oil seed rape, and four second prizes, for spring barley, malting winter barley and two for wheat.

Asked which prize he was most pleased with, Richard doesn’t hesitate to choose oilseed rape because he hasn’t been growing it long. “Until recently sugar beet was the mainstay of the farm. Now I’m growing more sugar beet on less land and have introduced oilseed rape as another break crop. It’s a frustrating one to grow as it’s hard to get established.”

This year saw more than 50 entrants to the South Suffolk Crop Competition. Together, they farm more than 14,000ha (35,000 acres). Richard’s plans for the future are to expand the farm when possible and maybe to look at more contract work.

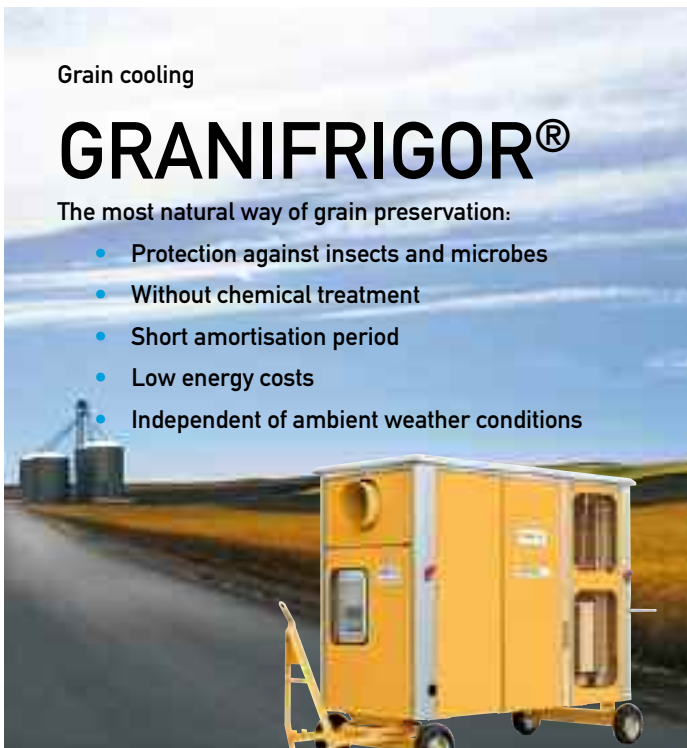
In the meantime, he’ll keep supporting the competition too. Not content with being supreme champion, he wants first prize for wheat. “The wheat cup is the one to win – it’s highly fought after and there’s a lot of competition for it.”

Grain cooling

GRANIFRIGOR®

The most natural way of grain preservation:

- Protection against insects and microbes
- Without chemical treatment
- Short amortisation period
- Low energy costs
- Independent of ambient weather conditions



FRIGOR TEC

FrigorTec GmbH • Hummelau 1 • 88279 Amtzell/Germany
 Tel.: +49 7520/91482-0 • Fax: +49 7520/91482-22 • E-Mail: info@frigortec.de
www.frigortec.com