

You can always streamline things and tighten up a few of the loose ends. I did try some direct drilling a short time ago to save some costs, but it did not come up with the yield I had hoped for, and I think that this was due to that particular field not being best suited to the method used mainly because of soil type and previous cropping. I increased my oil seed rape acreage from 500 acres to 650 acres after a reasonable performance last year," David told me.

"Our harvest for 2025 was relatively easy as we started on the 9th July and finished on 14th August. Winter barley was the first crop coming in at a fraction under 4 tons/acre, and then the oil seed rape which averaged 1.78 tons/acre. Then we moved into the winter wheats which were a little disappointing (although not unexpected with the lack of rainfall from the end of February to the end of May), running at 3.3 tons/acre, which is lower than our five-year average. Then followed the spring oats and spring beans.

"So, all in all, we had a fairly easy harvest and one without the need to spend money on drying the crop. It also enabled us to get on with our Autumn programme of soil preparation and drilling," said David.

We then discussed the marketing strategy, and what changes there have been over recent years. David felt that the number of traders that he would normally contact had diminished. As some 90% of the farm's produce is put into storage, managing the marketing is key to



establishing what sort of profit can be made. As is happening in other areas of business, the grain trading organisations are becoming larger with the smaller companies either selling up, merging or closing altogether. Where his overheads and annual purchases were concerned, David felt that the increases fell between 10-15% pretty much each year. So much of what he requires for the farm is affected on a global basis, with little means of either control of prices, often with no alternative products to turn to. Then there is that wonderful hindsight which told you that if you had applied less nitrogen in the spring (when the lack of rainfall did not assist the nitrogen to help the crop to grow), you would have saved money! A major concern for David is the extremely high cost of electricity – something that has risen way above his expectations.

We both agreed that our climate is on a changing pattern, and is providing more extremes of weather conditions both sporadically

as well as being unpredictable. David attempts to plan with insurance in mind, and this has, over the years, worked out reasonably well. But even the best plans have a habit of biting back, so there doesn't seem to be any one particular strategy that can be used as a safe option. There is concern, that David expressed, for the health of the soil used to produce crops. Constantly taking out what is required to grow our produce, without checking carefully whether we need to be replacing certain soil components, could damage the soil structure and potentially affect yields. We briefly discussed the 40% Inheritance Tax, but only in so far as many farmers' own domestic properties are valued at over £1 million without adding on any land! So, much food for thought as well as production. I am very grateful to David for his very lucid account of what arable farms are currently facing in a typical year. Maybe no specific answers, but still much determination to continue to deal with so many unknowns and yet produce food for our tables. **Happy Christmas!**