Fieldwise
AGRONOMY NEWS FROM HUTCHINSONS
Crop Production Specialists
DECEMBER 2023

Joss Spilman (A J Spilman & Son)

Making the most of the Sustainable Farming Incentive 2023

*As the details of the **2023 Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)** are now released, we look at how one Yorkshire farm is engaging with the scheme.*

A J Spilman & Son is a diverse farming business, in Helperby, just outside York.

Whilst profit is always crucial, farming with the environment in mind, as well as ensuring that less productive land is used in 'other' ways has always been behind the ethos of the third-generation family farming business.

Soils across the 283 ha farm, which sits in the Vale of York, range from blow-away sand to clay and often all in one field! Joss Spilman points out this means there are often awkward areas or corners of fields that don't generally perform, so are opted out of traditional cropping, but still need to contribute to the overall margin in some way.

The farmed environment or stewardship has also been a key part of the family's approach to farming - Joss remembers helping his father filling in the relevant paperwork when he was still at school. This approach continues today and is reflected across several areas of the farm enrolled in Countryside Stewardship (CS) options such as cover crops, winter bird food, wildflower margins, hedgerows, and low input grassland.

However, with the loss of BPS and to ensure that the business was looking at all the ways it could optimise the 2023 SFI offers, alongside its CS agreements, **Mathew Powell**, environmental advisor for Hutchinsons was approached for his advice.

Fieldwise ViewPoint

85 YEARS

Our grandfather, Herbert Hutchinson, who fought through the First World War receiving the Military Medal for bravery, founded Hutchinsons in 1938.

The next few years saw a critical need for UK food production to increase very significantly as the opportunity to import food was severely compromised by World War Two.

Today UK agriculture is required to provide our society with a broader range of contributions: nutritious and affordable food, countryside management, biodiversity, recreational access, an improvement in soil health and a reduction in the carbon cost per tonne of production.

This is a demanding set of requirements but, compared with grandfather's time, we have a far wider range of technologies, research, expertise, software and products that can help farmers, advisors and suppliers to meet these challenges, ensuring that we have a profitable and sustainable farming sector in the UK.

This November marks the 85th anniversary of the establishment of the Hutchinsons business and, whilst we do reflect for a moment on that, our key focus is on the future and what we need to do to be able to provide to our customers to maximise our contribution to their businesses and thereby ensure that the Hutchinsons business continues to be relevant and successful.

We are committed investors in the future of British agriculture - in research and development through our Helix Farms network, in people through our Advanced Agronomy Training for qualified agronomists, with our Foundation programme training the next generation of agronomists and in delivering a broad range of services including Agroecology, Environmental Services, Farm Business Consultancy and Soil Health advice.

We also now have an extensive range of digital solutions under the collective Omnia brand. The precision with which we can now measure key factors and apply inputs variably and accurately is impressive and both improves farm profitability and input use efficiency.

Core to long term success for growers is our role working with R & D suppliers who continue to develop technology and innovation. Our joint commitment to develop products for British growers that are sustainable from both a farm profitability and environmental perspective remains an essential role.

Hutchinsons believes that UK agriculture has a very positive future, and we are committed to continuing to invest in our business so that we can play our part in supporting British farmers for at least the next 85 years.

I would like to wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas and a successful 2024.

David Hutchinson

Matt Powell *(Hutchinsons Environmental Specialist)*

"Initially we drew up an application for the 2022 SFI Soils, but at the eleventh hour this was frustratingly withdrawn by the RPA. This meant we had to start again and redraw the scheme with 2023 SFI options," explains Mr Powell.

"It's not possible to double-claim for options already in CS so that took out hedgerows, wildflower mixes etc that were already covered."

"Most of the requirements for the 2023 Soils option were already being carried out such as testing for organic matter and producing a soil management plan using Omnia, particularly for the horticultural soils which tied in with Red Tractor requirements."

"This earns £5.80/ha and an additional £95 agreement sum (SAM1). There's also a £20/ha management payment in SFI 2023, effectively making this £25.80/ha for the first 50 ha."

"We entered 11 ha of multi species cover cropping that was not covered in the CS agreement, earning £129/ha under SAM2. Alongside this, there was some grassland that needed freshening up, as well as fields that already contained clover, so these were entered as herbal leys at £382/ha (SAM3)."

"SAM3 is a great option for improving soil health, reducing nitrogen fertiliser inputs, whilst

Diversification has been key to the success of the Spilman's farming enterprise. Soft fruits, both for wholesale and PYO, asparagus is sold wholesale throughout the UK. Wildflower turf is grown on contract.

The 162 ha of combinable cropping is driven by first wheats, rotations determined by varying soil type and can include winter wheat, winter barley, spring barley, oilseed rape, fodder beet or spring beans and vining peas. Cover crops are used preceding spring beans and fodder beet. Stubble turnips follow winter barley prior to fodder beet drilling.

Some wheat is grown on contract for seed for Wynnstay (KWS Zealum), and last year the soft group 4 Skyscraper was grown for a small biscuit premium. "We are happy with yields about 4t/acre, this year they were slightly down on that to 3.8t/acre."

The farm grows 150 Wagyu cross Holstein cattle from 6 months to 18 months for Warrendale Wagyu, and 120 breeding ewes.

This autumn sees the farm host its very own Pumpkin Festival, followed by Christmas and spring lambing events.

https://www.spilmans.co.uk/

retaining productive value of livestock," he adds.

"This farm is already carrying out Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as part of the service from its Hutchinsons agronomist, Sam Hugill, so it makes sense to utilise the IPM plan (IPM1) giving an annual payment just shy of £1,000."

"Flower rich grass margins, or blocks that are part of the IPM2 were already in CS, companion cropping IPM3 is being considered, but this does not have to be a rushed decision as this scheme can be reviewed every 12 months and additional options added."

"Companion cropping is something to be looked at for the future should there be a role for it alongside the OSR cropping, if we continue with OSR."

IMP4 has been parked for now, as the high risk and low reward just doesn't make it quite so appealing, explains Mr Powell. "There are scenarios where it can be applied more easily, for example to some spring crops. Committing winter cereals to this option is risky and needs thorough consideration, for example if BYDV was to take hold.

Nutrient management actions applied for are NUM1 as nutrient management plans are easily created within Omnia, says Mr Powell.

"We have also entered NUM2 for legumes on improved grassland, giving us £102/ha as this is a great option for short term grass leys that can be rotated every 1-2 years, which effectively covers the cost of a reseed if you add in some clover. Legume fallow is already covered in the CS."

"Actions for farmed wildlife (AHL2) allowed us to take some poorer parts of fields out of traditional production – for example one field that was already ploughed and we were part way through drilling, with 2 acres left to do we decided it was not in the best condition for a crop, so entered it for winter bird food at £732/ha," adds Mr Spilman.

SFI success

- Start with what you know you can easily deliver
- Identify marginal or low performing areas of the farm, (full or part field)
- Identify options for rotational breaks, rejuvenating soil health or to take them out of production
- Flexibility to increase or decrease options every 12 months - polar opposite of CS mid tiers upfront approach.

What is important is that our approach to the SFI offers is very much about fitting the scheme around what we are already doing on the farm, so tweaking, not making massive changes and being realistic about what we can achieve.

Taking this approach means the SFI will contribute about £10,000 to our income next year, that goes nowhere near filling the loss of BPS, but everything counts.

Joss Spilman

For advice on making the most from the SFI offer on your own farm, contact our environmental specialists: enviro@hlhltd.co.uk

Spring crop establishment

...we must get this opportunity right!

Dick Neale *(Hutchinsons Technical Manager)*

For many the opportunity to establish spring crops cannot come soon enough and getting it right will be critical for many businesses, as these crops will represent a large proportion of the farm's cropping for harvest '24, says ***Dick Neale****, Hutchinsons Technical Manager.*

First step is to assess the current, overall situation - what is the condition of the autumn sown crop, are fields complete, or can fields be practically divided up between good winter crop and spring crop in the failed areas?

Why have crops failed? Seems like an obvious answer to that one …they drowned, but we need to establish why that was the case beyond the fact we had very high rainfall over a very short period.

"Waterlogged, saturated and never seen it so wet" have been regular statements since the deluge from the 18th – 20th October. However, it is worth standing back and analysing the real impact.

Rain was very heavy and seemed relentless, falling on ground freshly drilled in the previous 3 days, ground that was therefore uncovered for the most part, already in a moist state, and loose from the recent 'fine' cultivation from the drill.

With ferocious rainfall, these situations capped quickly and most water ran off the fields rather than infiltrating. Subsequent inspection has revealed that many situations considered to be saturated, are in fact only saturated in the seeding zone. As run off was the main outcome of the heavy rain, water never actually infiltrated to the lower soil levels, and these remain in stable condition and able to take further wetting.

Where fields are patchy and incomplete and cannot sensibly be retained as an autumn sown crop, do not be too hasty in spraying off. It is likely that the odd spraying day will be more frequent than any opportunity to get drills into a field. Think about how drying will occur …a growing crop will stabilise and dry soil better than any other option, so treat poor, patchy crops as covers now, rather than spray off - see the positives where you can.

If soils are saturated to depth, then being realistic regarding spring cropping is vitally important. Profitable yields of beans or spring barley only come from early establishment into good growing seedbeds …beans at emergence will tolerate poorer seedbeds, but if wet and cold the result will be fusarium foot rot and a worthless crop come April or May.

Barley will only perform with appropriate seed-rate for the conditions. In the traditional malting crop sandy soils, 300 sown seeds will be fine but in wetter, clay-based situations, 500 is more appropriate as losses of 50% can realistically be expected. Do you have enough seed to achieve a viable crop?

High seed rates are appropriate across a range of drilling dates, as for earlier sowings where field conditions allow access, the seedbed losses will be high, while in later drilling losses will be less but time for tillering will be short, so more plants are needed to achieve head numbers.

Where soil may never actually dry sufficiently for a viable spring cash crop to be established, a summer cover crop should be considered in readiness for autumn sowing with winter wheat:

- Wet, heavy soils should never be bare fallowed.
- Little point trying to flush autumn grassweeds during the summer months.
- Establish a cover (e.g. Maxi Intercrop) with multiple species including C4 plants to utilise summer sun.
- Multiple root systems will dry the whole profile and re-establish structure for later in the year.
- Late May, June or even July cover establishment will still see strong growth and significant benefits in soil condition.

For very wet soils, delaying drilling for as long as possible via choice of later sown crops would be more appropriate. It is highly likely that a surface cultivation will be needed to allow drying and breath some air back into the seeding zone so crops like peas, linseed or maize that allow drilling successfully from late April and into May should be considered.

Questions about this article? Please contact us: information @hutchinsons.co.uk

Spring Cropping Options for 2024

Generally, the very wet and unfavourable conditions for autumn sowing will mean a much greater reliance on spring cropping in 2024.

Hutchinsons National Seeds Manager, ***David Bouch****, right, highlights some options to consider.*

Spring barley still offers the best option for rotational suppression of black-grass, whilst wheat is not going to offer the same competitiveness in the field.

Spring Barley

LAUREATE is now the undoubted number one in the marketplace, outselling its competitors whilst offering dual purpose end markets, as does **LG DIABLO** but not as widely grown. **RGT PLANET** has seemingly had its day as its market share starts to decline. It will still have support from growers who have seen very consistent performance.

SKYWAY offers potential brewing ability and is under test at time of writing by MBC, but is a very competent offer. **FLORENCE** offers potential for the spring of 2025 as does **KWS CURTIS**.

Feed varieties – **WESTMINSTER** and **KELIM** still sells well for this market, but arguably the malting varieties offer better yield.

Spring Wheat

MULIKA, **KWS HARSUM** and **KWS LADUM** are the group 1 offer with the former now under significant yield disadvantage. **KWS LADUM** has no major disease weaknesses, with high resistance to mildew, brown rust and Septoria tritici. It will be a major consideration for next spring.

KWS COCHISE, and to a lesser extent **KWS CHILHAM** provide alternatives in the group 2 sector which is little changed. **KWS ALICIUM** is the new kid on the block showing potential.

WPB ESCAPE has the largest market share with **KWS FIXUM** since its arrival within the sector.

It is a relatively late-maturing variety (which will be a limitation to some). Again it appears that **KWS FIXUM** has no major disease weaknesses, with high resistance to yellow rust, mildew and brown rust.

Spring Oats

WPB ELYANN and **WPB ISABEL** are the current market leaders, with **MELRIN** making significant headway. **ISABEL** is still attracting the greatest demand. **CANYON** still has support within the market place. Essentially the key to growing spring oats is rainfall in June (key for all oat crops) and timeliness of harvest.

The end market will dictate the preferred variety in almost all the spring quality cereals.

Spring Pulses

As far as pulses are concerned, beans will be dominated by **LYNX** again. **GHENGIS** will have some followers having joined the list in 2021. **GENIUS** is now highest yielding on the descriptive list but unlikely to be available in any quantity, if at all.

As far as peas are concerned it will be **CARRINGTON** being chased but tonnages will be limited. **BLUETIME** will again be popular and **BUTTERFLY** is new and again showing the strength in depth of the **LSPB** portfolio. **KAMELEON** (Senova) and **ORCHESTRA** (LSPB) are the standout white peas, however, availability is key.

TAKAYAMA is the new addition to the list for Marrowfats and **SAKURA** has shown its consistency and support from the end user. The yield gap is circa 10% but again as with anything that involves a quality premium will be decided by the end user.

The overriding part of this summary and one that is of the greatest significance is that spring seed of all types will be:

- In demand
- In short supply
- Reliant on some imported UK registered varieties (more expensive)
- Key varieties will sell out subject to crop outcomes prior to Christmas (if not already done so)

The key message is: if you know what you want then order early!

If you would like advice on spring cropping choice and seed supply, please speak to your agronomist or contact our dedicated seed team: seed.orders@hlhltd.co.uk

Don't spend more on fixed costs than you need to

Will Foyle (Hutchinsons Farm Business Consultant)

Tim Thomas runs a mixed arable family farm in Yorkshire. For the last 8 years, crop establishment has been based around a plough, or sumo trio, followed by a power harrow drill.

"The weather of the last few autumns has put us under a lot of pressure to get crops established, so we are looking at moving over to a direct drill which would not only improve the efficiency of our cultivations, but also improve soil health, and enable us to access some of the new SFI options."

Mr Thomas asked Will Foyle to look at the potential financial implications of such a change. Using the Machinery Tool he calculated under the current plough-based system, the stubble-to-stubble costs were around £350/ha, which he points out is respectable and below the average.

"There are obviously wider benefits to bringing in a direct drill in this situation to consider, but using the machinery tool has provided a clear understanding of the cost basis on which the decision is being made."

"The plough and power harrow can be kept for a rainy day, as they are bought and paid for anyway."

While a higher wheat yield improves financial output, it is a lower level of fixed costs that makes the greatest difference to the bottom line, so gaining a clear understanding of machinery and labour costs is the first step to improving financial performance. This is the advice of Will Foyle, Hutchinsons farm business consultant.

Will explains his **five top tips** for managing fixed costs

1 Keep an eye on replacement values
Granted your machine might not be depreciating in the truest sense, but the price gap to a replacement is likely increasing.

2 Find the "sweet spot" between repairs and depreciation
A fundamental part of a machinery replacement policy is making informed decisions around escalating repair costs and a replacement machine.

3 Optimise machines and warranty packages
Does 5 years, 5,000 hours sound familiar? The cost of ownership is high so make sure machinery is working for you. Could one machine replace the work of two?

4 Money isn't 'free'
A 400ha farm could easily have £500,000 tied up in machinery assets. Borrowed, or capable of being invested elsewhere, at 4% that's £50/ha.

5 Don't bury your head in the sand
It sounds daunting but it really isn't, get a handle on repair and depreciation, work rates and fuel rates. Don't be afraid to make the hard calls, sometimes short-term hire or the use of contractors is cheaper, but until you know your own cost how can you make this decision?

Fixed costs can be calculated in a simple and straightforward way using the Machinery Tool developed by the Hutchinsons Farm Consultancy team. Users can clearly see all the components of cost related to running a particular piece of machinery to realise the true, not approximate, costs of operation, which can then be updated in the Omnia portal.

If you have questions about managing fixed costs, contact us: farmbusiness@hlhltd.co.uk

For more information on any of our products or services, please contact your local Hutchinsons agronomist, or contact us at:

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2023/24 CPD Points Allocation reference numbers:
NRoSO NO501315f • **BASIS** CP/128684/2324/g