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Issue 70 | Winter 2023



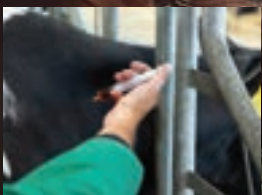
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ANOTHER TURBULENT YEAR FOR AGRICULTURE REMINDS US TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER

After a stop and start harvest, some members have experienced a challenging autumn, with unpredictable weather and very wet conditions. We hope our members affected by the recent storms and flooding are starting to recover, and we will continue to support you as much as possible through 2024.

In this issue, we share our usual staff updates and recap of recent events on the news and events pages. A huge well done to our very own Jessica Frost on winning the 2023 Farm SQP of the Year Award! Read about Jess' role and her latest feature on the new SCOPS podcast on page 5.

On page 7, the crops team shares some advice on grassland inputs, and we welcome two new board members - Tom Halton and Rob Raven - on page 9. An enormous thank you to William Goodwin, who stepped down from the board at the November AGM after nine years of exceptional service, representing our dairy membership and south east members.

The grain marketing team has again delivered an excellent set of crop pool results, beating most commercial pools during a year of unprecedented volatility.

On page 11, our grain procurement manager, Jono Woollatt, shares how Fram Farmers offers numerous options to members looking to market grain through the cooperative.

On pages 12 and 13, we share how Suffolk businesses Dingley Dell Pork

and Direct Meats have worked together to deliver efficiencies with two new building projects, and support from the building materials team.

We are excited to introduce a new function to the basic version of the members portal launched in April this year. You can now import your monthly Fram statement into FarmPlan accountancy software, and we are discussing with other accountancy software to provide a similar facility. You can read about our IT updates on page 15.

We have a whole host of events in the pipeline for 2024, including our Suffolk Farming Conference in February. Discover the 2024 Conference agenda on page 17, alongside a profile on our new membership development manager for the east, Grace Hayward.

Vaccine supply has been sporadic over the past few years, meaning Jessica Frost and Bex White in the livestock team have had a hard time sourcing vaccines for members. On pages 18 and 19, they share an insight into how members can help ease the strain, and how dairy farmer member Barry



Andrew Knowles, Fram Farmers CEO

Connolly plans ahead.

In October, we moved on to a new electricity contract with npower, bringing a shorter and simpler statement in addition to excellent electricity prices. Dan Cox provides an update on our electricity portfolio and explains the Energy Price Benchmark on page 21.

The Fram Farmers business services team has seen a significant increase in enquiries for renewable technologies over the past year as members seek to mitigate against energy market volatility. Discover renewables options for members on page 22.

On behalf of all the Fram team, we wish everyone a very happy Christmas. May 2024 bring calm in the markets and weather, clarity from our leaders on how we use our land resource, and greater tolerance, peace and understanding at home and abroad.

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Every precaution has been taken to ensure that the material published in Farmers First is accurate at the time of printing. For further details about anything featured in this edition please call Fram Farmers on 01728 727700, or Juliette McDaniel at Kendalls PR and Marketing on 07833 777518. If you would like to opt out of receiving Farmers First, please email mail@framfarmers.co.uk

STAFF UPDATES

Fram Farmers is growing, and we are delighted to welcome several new faces to the team and congratulate a few on some well-deserved promotions.

Welcome to **James Aldous**, who joined the team in early December as GFI's new purchasing assistant. James will work closely with Chris Flatt to assist members with their machinery needs.

Ann Cross joined the IT team in late September to take on the role of data and process controller. She will work to maintain the high standard of data quality within the business left by Fiona Mayhew after 20 years of service.

Ben Aldous will join the marketing team, supporting Izzy Farrell, following her promotion to marketing executive in December.

Chessie Aitchinson has progressed into the role of seed specialist as Rachel Cooper moves to pastures new after four years of brilliant service.

Following two years of working in marketing roles at Fram Farmers, overseeing communications and events, **Grace Hayward** is now taking on the role of membership development manager for the eastern region of the UK. We wish our previous membership development manager, Tom Lee, all the best for his new ventures. You can read more about Grace's new role on page 17.

MAIZE TRIAL BREAKFAST MORNING

In September, Corteva held their Maize Trial Breakfast Morning where Jonathan Bellamy shared 30 years of experience with Fram members and agronomists.

Jonathan led a brilliant tour through Corteva's Nantwich trials site, and all of our farmers earned 4 NRoSO and 8 BASIS points from the tour!



LAUGHTON AND CHESHIRE PLOUGHING MATCHES

It was great to be back at Laughton District Ploughing Match and the Cheshire Ploughing Match this year. It was well supported and a good opportunity for Fram Farmers crop specialist David Wilson, and chief executive Andrew Knowles, to catch up with members.

SOUTH OF ENGLAND FARMING CONFERENCE

Fram Farmers is delighted to have sponsored The South of England Farming Conference again this year. It was a brilliant opportunity to hear from industry experts regarding the agricultural impact on the planet and how we can introduce measures to protect the earth.

THE BATH AND WEST DAIRY SHOW

Early October saw the Fram Farmers team attend the Bath and West Dairy Show.

Becky Bower and Rachel Burroughes spent the day meeting members, suppliers, and the next generation of dairy farmers.

NORTH WEST REGEN DAY

The beginning of November saw our second Regen Day of the year in partnership with Agreena. Matt Cornes kindly invited members to Checkley Hall Farm to discuss and learn about his own regenerative farming practices.

In the field, Paul Cawood, Matt's agronomist, introduced the farm's key practices and how they support the regenerative approach to farming. Alex Hammond presented CCM's increasingly sustainable practices and how their fertilisers have a carbon footprint 90% smaller than mineral alternatives. Ian Gould, from Oakbank Game and Conservation, highlighted the powerful effects cover and companion crops can have in a regenerative system.

Back in the barn, Matt Smith of Amazone gave a presentation on how their drills are evolving to support farmer's regenerative needs. Allie Hesketh from ADM, looked further than the field and suggested that regenerative farming practices and carbon consciousness is not only the responsibility of farmers, but the wider supply chain too. Ollie Clarke presented on the advantages of regenerative farming, and how Agreena can support and supply farmers with expert advice, imperative to succeeding



on their regenerative journey, whether they are already established or keen to begin.

If you are interested in learning more about how Agreena can help you on your regenerative journey, please contact katharine.grubb@agreena.com



NORTH WEST ARRIVE AND DRIVE DAY

In November, Fram Farmers held their first ever Arrive and Drive Day in the north at the Royal Cheshire Showground. It was an amazing opportunity for members and non-members to get involved with the latest technologies that Case IH's tractors have to offer!



SOUTH EAST ARRIVE AND DRIVE DAY

The last event of the season was one to remember! Case IH, Ernest Doe, and Ashbrook put on a brilliant display at the South East Arrive and Drive Day held at the South of England Showground. The event offered the opportunity to learn about and experience the new Case IH technology, AFS connect, first hand, as members had the chance to get behind the wheel and test drive the tractors.



JESS FROST FEATURES IN NEW SCOPS PODCAST AND WINS BIG AT SQP AWARDS

Fram Farmers' very own animal health buyer and livestock manager Jess Frost, featured in the new podcast series from the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group. In addition to this, she was also awarded Farm SQP of the Year at the 2023 SQP Awards that took place in November.

Jess has been part of the Fram Farmers team for almost ten years and has spent nine of those as a Registered Animal Medicines Advisor, also known as a RAMA, or Suitably Qualified Person.

In late October, SCOPS released the first two episodes of their new podcast series, offering another tool to the UK sheep industry. Jess was invited to talk in the first episode named 'The SCOPS Principles in Action on Farms', which discussed how we can use less parasiticides and what this

means on a practical level when treating parasites in sheep.

In addition to her feature on the SCOPS podcast, Jess won the Farm SQP of the Year Award at the National SQP Awards, organised by OvertheCounter. The Farm SQP of the Year recognises a professional, knowledgeable, and experienced SQP who has excelled at supporting and working with farmers to advise them on animal welfare.

Jess has formed strong working relationships with an array of suppliers, and is looking forward to continuing her work in supporting members as a 2023 SQP Award winner. Congratulations Jess!

To listen to Jess' episode of the SCOPS podcast, you can scan the QR code.



2024 DAIRY DATES

January (date TBC)

NRoSO Training

February (date TBC)

Agreena Regen Day

February (date TBC)

Fertiliser Industry Update

February (date TBC)

Spring Technical Briefing

29 February

The Suffolk Farming Conference



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TREATING GRASS AS A CROP

The Fram Farmers crops team supplies inputs for a wide range of crops. With a growing membership of livestock producers across the country, fertiliser specialist India Gibbons reminds members to treat grassland as a crop when it comes to nutrition.



India Gibbons

Working alongside independent technical agronomists, as well as a network of suppliers, many of which are members of the British Grassland Society, the crops team can deliver savings and value to members for any crop, including grassland.

GRASSLAND NUTRITION

“Despite continued volatility in the markets, we are continuing to bring savings to members and provide access to the latest products,” says India.

“When it comes to grassland, whether for grazing or to be cut for forage, it’s important to strike the balance between nutritional value and grass growth.”

“We work with members to highlight active ingredients in fertiliser products, and steer them in the right direction to match the development of swards across the country,” she adds.

“It’s not just about applying nitrogen – it’s about quality and understanding how certain products can improve nitrogen uptake. For those taking multiple cuts of grass, this can make a huge difference.”

GRASS SEED

As well as fertiliser, the crops team can procure seed for a wide range of purposes – from clover mixes to rye grass blends – suitable not only for livestock grazing or silage, but also for equine paddocks or alternative diversification projects such as polo pitches, or even garden lawns.

ORGANICS AND SPECIALIST PRODUCTS

Organic seed and crop protection products can also be sourced through the cooperative, including specifics outlined in milk or supply contracts. For example, earlier this year, Marks & Spencer announced that the 27 English and Welsh

farms in its dedicated milk pool will use an innovative next-generation green fertiliser from spring 2024.

Known as Impact Zero, the fertiliser range is manufactured by Fertilberia using green hydrogen. For Fram Farmers members who are in the M&S milk pool, or perhaps those who are looking to operate more sustainably, Fram can source this product.

CROP PROTECTION

The crop protection team has access to a vast range of inputs, from herbicides for treating problem weeds, to products for improving soil health. The team can also arrange for soil and slurry samples to be taken, to help maximise members’ grassland potential.

For more information on inputs for your grassland, please contact the crops team:

crop.protection@framfarmers.co.uk |

01728 727712

seed@framfarmers.co.uk |

01728 727717

fertiliser@framfarmers.co.uk |

01728 727715

MEMBER FOCUS

Jack Fletcher runs *Grasslands*, a specialist in contract managing dairy farms on behalf of landowners, alongside his father Andrew in Cheshire. A relatively recent member, they joined Fram Farmers around a year ago due to volatility in the fertiliser market.

Grasslands operates an extensive New Zealand-style grazing system across all farms, with each unit milking a minimum of 300 cows on a block calving pattern – either spring or autumn. Supplying Sainsburys, Arla and Tesco on three different contracts, the system relies on grass growth and accurate measures of food consumption.

In total, they graze around 1000ha, of which 90% is grass. Cattle graze from late February to November, and are predominantly black and white, heavily influenced by NZ and Irish genetics.

The business has grown rapidly over the past ten years, bringing more refined processes and operating efficiencies.

Jack’s role is one of reviewing performance, and monitoring KPIs; grass across the six sites is measured each week, following the southern Ireland and NZ spring grazing model.

Land is paddock grazed, and silage comes off dedicated grassland. Grass seed selection is based on the £PPI – pasture profit index, with future plans to turn most of the grassland into a clover mix to reduce the carbon footprint across the business.

Where fertiliser is concerned, Ammonium Nitrate (AN) is usually applied first, then Sulphur alongside AN, then straight AN. Before joining Fram Farmers, Jack and Andrew were spot-buying fertiliser, but were interested in improving their buying strategy.

“More recently, we have altered how we are purchasing to be more strategic, and becoming a part of Fram Farmers fits that model very effectively,” explains Jack.

“Fertiliser is our largest purchase with



Jack Fletcher

Fram, and we were, of course, hoping to achieve some cost savings due to the buying power of the group. Unexpectedly, the advice and market intelligence have been an excellent additional benefit,” says Jack.

“Having taken advice from India back in July, we bought a lot of fertiliser forward. It was new to us to buy that far ahead, but it goes to show that there are savings to be had with the right trusted advice,” he adds.

“We have been able to make substantial savings, saving from £20 - £40 per tonne!”

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TWO NEW BOARD MEMBERS ANNOUNCED AT AGM

At this year's AGM, which took place on 16 November, arable farmer Rob Raven and dairy farmer Tom Halton were officially voted onto the Fram Farmers board of directors.

The Fram Farmers board of directors are appointed to represent shareholders' interests and ensure that the cooperative's management acts on their behalf. Rob Raven and Tom Halton each bring a wealth of commercial excellence, and Fram Farmers is delighted to welcome them both to the board.



Rob Raven

ROB RAVEN

Rob is an arable farmer based near Beccles on the Norfolk/Suffolk border who, in the early 2000s, began introducing more sustainable, regenerative husbandry approaches to his farming business. Rob now incorporates livestock, cover cropping and reduced inputs into his business model, aiming to stay as close to the principles of regenerative agriculture as possible.

Alongside his own business, Rob provides regenerative contract farming services on several nearby farms and estates, helping them to farm sustainably by adjusting their farming programme to include additional environmental strategies such as cropping, stewardship schemes and carbon payments.

He has been a member of Fram Farmers for ten years, purchasing fuel, crop inputs, and building materials through the cooperative.

Being responsible for crops and livestock across a total of 4,000ha, as well as previous experience at a Durham-based buying group, Rob will be invaluable to Fram Farmers to ensure the cooperative delivers relevant and valued products and services during unprecedented evolution in farming and land management.

"Farming is entering a new era, and I am excited to be a part of that," says Rob.

"I am looking forward to getting a real understanding of how Fram Framers works from the inside, helping farmers to remain profitable in a post BPS era," he adds.

TOM HALTON

Tom has joined the board as former dairy farmer and board member William Goodwin retires after seven years in the role.

Tenant dairy farmer Tom Halton farms alongside his wife Karen in Cheshire. Together, they milk a herd of 530 cows

plus followers, and in 2016, they set up 'The Milkshack', selling raw milk from a vending machine on their farm.

A Fram Farmers member for fifteen years, Tom purchases various livestock inputs, fuel and fertiliser through the cooperative and is keen to help demonstrate and build on the value offered to members through the strong network of supplier relationships.

He not only brings dairy sector knowledge and expertise, but also ensures that Fram's important membership in Cheshire is properly represented within the board. He is also a passionate ambassador and exemplar in attracting, rewarding, and retaining skills and talent on Farm - a key challenge facing the sector.

"I am looking forward to the challenge," says Tom.

"Continuing to represent the dairy sector and Fram Farmers members in the North is important to enable the ongoing success of the group," he adds.

"Rob and Tom bring important knowledge and expertise that will be invaluable as we continue to strengthen and grow the board's capability and leadership," says Andrew Knowles, Fram Farmers Chief Executive.

"It is an honour to have such talent within the Fram Farmers membership, and a privilege that they have chosen to invest their time and expertise to support the board in delivering even more value to our growing membership."

"Fram Farmers extends its thanks to William Goodwin for seven dedicated years of service, and wishes him the best in his retirement."



Tom Halton

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GRAIN MARKETING: WE DON'T JUST OFFER POOLS



Fram Farmers offers a number of options to members looking to market grain through the cooperative. Here, grain procurement manager Jono Woollatt takes us through the pool and non-pool grain marketing options available, and discusses the benefits of each.

In more recent years, the Fram Farmers grain marketing team has developed into a more sophisticated trading desk. Finding the most competitive markets for members' grain through growing its reputation in the trade, and putting more focus on maximizing the value of individual parcels of grain, has led to the grain marketing team achieving their highest market share of all combinable crops in 20-years.

The logistics and admin team also provides the 'personal touch,' pairing reliable local hauliers with members, and building up a knowledge of the individual requirements for each business with regards to movements, paperwork and payment. They are also available at the end of a phone – something quite rare nowadays!

The number of members trading grain with the cooperative has increased by 12% over the past year. For the first time since 2005, the team purchased over 200,000 tonnes of grain, pool and non-pool combined.

"We largely put this down to the level of trust we have built up with farmers in our non-biased opinions and advice," explains Jono.

"When it comes grain sale options, our growth in tonnage is proving that Fram

Farmers is competitive through both methods" says Jono.

"Putting myself in the farmer's shoes, I would 100% be splitting my grain sales up in intervals through the season, and I'd use both pool and free market options."

"They're not mutually exclusive options, and a lot of our members don't realise this, which surprises me. With markets as volatile as they are, splitting risk through grain sales is sensible for your farm business."

Whilst there hasn't been any significant issues over the last couple of years, it is worth remembering that Fram Farmers grain sales are covered by credit insurance, and some grain businesses may feel the pressure next year due to the reduced crop size.

If you would like to discuss your grain marketing options, please contact Jono Woollatt: 07583 037577 | 01728 727720 | jonathan.woollatt@framfarmers.co.uk

Don't forget, Fram Farmers also offers a **Grain Marketing Only** membership structure. This is perfectly suited for contract farming agreements where not all parties are full members of Fram Farmers to sell their grain to Fram, as well as potential farmer members looking for alternative grain marketing options.

NON-POOL MARKETING

- Your decision making on your time – you can split sales up how you wish
- Greater control over selling and the responsibility is on you
- Tighter control over cash flow and timing
- Non-biased advice from experienced Fram traders – members can work with the Fram traders to maximise the value of your crop
- Tighter control over premiums
- Fram Farmers has become more competitive in the last four years on spot-market trading
- More members are choosing this route, proving trust in Fram's services

POOL MARKETING

- Excellent risk management in volatile markets
- Ideal for contract farming agreements
- Proactively managed and monitored by expert pool committee
- Access to global market insight
- Members can commit to the produce of an area or a tonnage, which is ideal for riskier crops such as OSR
- Competitive advance payments available
- Top quartile performance - see harvest pool results below:

HARVEST POOL RESULTS:

Feed Wheat	£190.22
(+ Premium for North West Members of £10.00)	
Grp1	£65.00 Premium
Grp4	£4.00 Premium
Soft	£7.50 Premium
Feed Barley	£163.71
(+ Premium for North West Members of £8.00)	
Malting Barley Premium	£70.00
Syrup Barley Premium	£20.00
OSR	£372.12
Beans	£218.60

"We have used the Fram pools for the contract farms we manage for over four years. They have given very good returns on both milling wheat and OSR and have provided us with the flexibility and consistency we require."

Fram Farmers member Rob Duke, A Duke & Son



TWO SUFFOLK BUSINESSES INVEST FOR EFFICIENCY

Producing unique pork products and supplying the food service industry on a global scale - two Fram Farmers members tell us how working together and recent investment is leading to efficiencies, with help and support from the cooperative.



Martin Blackwell

DIRECT MEATS

Founded in 1995 and based in Chappel near Colchester, Essex, Direct Meats is a meat processor specialising in food service. It is owned and run by Martin Blackwell, a third-generation local farmer with a passion for quality meat, who recognised a gap in the market for a specialist meat provider.

Since opening, the business has expanded at a steady level, now supplying restaurants across the UK, with a strong presence in London, wholesale, private retail and delicatessens. The export market has also grown in recent years, exporting to Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the Middle East, recently receiving the first order from India for many years.

Now employing 115 members of staff, and operating out of a one-acre site, Direct Meats supplies an average of 70 tonnes of meat to the food service industry each week. Due to expansion, Martin took the decision to join Fram Farmers 18-months ago under the new 'Rural Enterprise Membership' (REM) structure.

Specially designed for rural businesses supporting or closely linked to agriculture, this structure was launched in October 2020, and enables rural businesses to benefit from the savings and services provided by the cooperative, even if they are not technically 'farming businesses'.

"The main reason for joining was to streamline operations," explains Martin.

"There were opportunities for cost-saving, particularly on utilities such as electricity, gas and phones, and also building materials, but mainly I mean streamlining in the time-saving sense," he adds.

"Streamlining invoices, negating the worry of having to deal with multiple suppliers, and also knowing that Fram Farmers is getting great deals for its members."

"Buying meat is my business, not buying electricity, or building materials, so that's what I believe I should stick to," says Martin.

At Direct Meats, British meat is sourced from producers across the UK, including Creedy Carver ducks from Devon, premium dry aged beef from the Dedham Vale in Suffolk, and lamb from C Humphries in Braintree, Essex. Pork is supplied by Dingley Dell Pork - around 260 pigs per week, some of which is cured and made into gammon and bacon to ensure carcass balance, while a jointly owned charcuterie business produces a range of salamis.

In partnership with Dingley Dell Pork, Martin has worked hard to market his business and product offering across the whole customer base, earning a leading reputation, with a clear point of difference that's visible to the consumer.

With more customers comes more responsibility, and Martin has spent in excess of £750,000 on building work to update the facilities in order to reach a higher food safety standard since 2020. Upgrades to the processing areas and the 'pork paceline' will enable the team to process pigs quicker and more efficiently. Some work has been refurbishment, while planning permission was required for new structures, granted in December 2020.

"Work started in June 2021, and some is still ongoing, proving a challenge in and around a working factory," reveals Martin.

"The new goods-in area is now complete, as is the loading bay and pork processing room. The new refrigerated storage area is left to complete."

70% of the building materials have been sourced through Nick Millar and the Fram Farmers building materials team, from concrete and steel works, to aggregate and drainage.



Martin has invested in the business to update facilities

"The building materials team has been invaluable - not only have they saved us a minimum of 5% off everything, but they've also saved me lots of time so I can focus on running the business."

"I speak to Nick, let him know what we're looking for, and through Fram's network of suppliers, they can source the materials at competitive prices - they're very efficient, with quick turnarounds."

Elsewhere, Rural Enterprise Membership (REM), has saved Martin considerable costs when it comes to electricity bills.

"We were paying around £19,000 per year for electricity, and when the contract finished in June this year, the price increase was going to be large. Now sourcing electricity through Fram, I have made significant savings on what I could have been paying."

"It was a straightforward process - I got a great deal without having to phone around multiple electricity providers."

In the future, Martin plans to continue making the most of his Fram Farmers REM membership, potentially looking to source insurance or commercial vehicles through the cooperative, and other core business requirements.



70% of the building materials have been sourced through Fram Farmers



Mark (L) and Paul Hayward (R)

DINGLEY DELL PORK

A major supplier of Direct Meats, Dingley Dell Pork is a third-generation family farming business in east Suffolk.

With nine employees at farm level, the business finishes around 16,000 pigs per year. 260 pigs per week go to Direct Meats, destined for the food service industry, accounting for around 85% of production.

The remainder go through local wholesale butchers Bramfield Meats, and can be found in butchers' shops across Suffolk.

The business operates across two locations – the finishers, together with the main stud of 750 breeding sows, and the weaners and growers a few miles down the road. The focal point of the business is the highly marbled welfare-friendly pork from indoor and outdoor finished pigs.

Paul and Mark started the brand 20-years ago, and pre-Covid, alongside Direct Meats, were beginning to build up remarkable overseas demand. This demand continued post-Covid, with Dingley Dell Pork seen on the menus of some of the most exclusive restaurants and hotels across the globe.

The unique flavour of the high-marbled pork is down to unique genetics; breeding stock is produced on-farm from a herd of pure Red Durocs, which are scanned to assess the level of intramuscular fat (IMF) or marbling. Their sows are then bred solely on the basis of their marbling scores, thus ensuring that in each generation

produced, the marbling is increased.

Paul and Mark have labelled this breed the 'Suffolk Red,' and after 14 years of selective breeding, and 32 generations in, they are on their way to the breed being officially registered. Alongside the marketing power this brings, their aim is to produce pork with maximum flavour, not just for commercial yield, working alongside food scientists to achieve this.

The family-run business has been a traditional farming member of Fram Farmers "since the start" according to Mark Hayward. Raw materials for feed are purchased through the cooperative, and milled by nearby Crown Milling, as well as fuel, electricity, vehicles and machinery. The largest recent area of spend, however, has been building materials.

Like Direct Meats, Dingley Dell Pork is striving for a more efficient operation, choosing to invest in the business to achieve this. As the business has grown, Paul and Mark have made the decision to alter the way they work, applying for planning permission for three new pig sheds to house finishing stock.

More adverse weather in recent years, alongside labour challenges and opportunity for greater efficiency, has driven Mark and Paul to make the decision to move half of the finishing pigs indoors.

Paul designed the sheds himself – two large sheds, and one smaller shed - which can house around 2000 finishing pigs in large strawed pens. Full planning was granted in May 2021, and previous buildings on-site started to be dismantled in early 2022.

The site started to be levelled, and footings dug in early September 2022, shortly followed by concrete. The frame for the first large building went up at the end of September, and the remaining two frames came in October 2022.

Many of the building materials were sourced through Fram Farmers, including the steel from Great Yarmouth, purlings,



roofing, c-sections and sheeting. Steel for internal gates and top decks was sourced from three different suppliers and made up on-site. All drainage materials, both rainwater and wastewater on two separate systems, were sourced through Fram, while concrete was sourced directly from the manufacturer by Paul.



"As I had designed the sheds, I had a good idea of where I planned to source materials," explains Paul.

"In these cases, Nick Millar was able to source items throughout the project, and they were added to our membership account, making it a smooth process."

"For certain areas, I called on Nick to suggest suppliers, which was really helpful. As they're trusted Fram Farmers suppliers, I know I can trust Nick's judgement."

"And when it came to what I call the 'odds and sods' towards the end of the project, which is the most time-consuming part, that's where Fram membership really comes into its own, saving me so much time and enabling me to focus on the pigs," says Paul.

Some minor landscaping work remains, but overall, the project is nearly complete. Paul and Mark started transferring pigs into the new sheds in July this year, filling them up gradually over the following weeks and months.

Now, with demand for Dingley Dell Pork continuing to increase from both the UK and overseas, they can work with Direct Meats to deliver this to customers with greater efficiency.





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MEMBERS PORTAL UPDATE FROM THE IT TEAM

The Fram Farmers IT team has been busy behind the scenes updating the internal IT system and the members portal. IT manager Richard Snelham talks us through these improvements.

“ The members portal now has a simplified, cleaner design with a new homepage set-up, showcasing market trends for wheat/fertiliser prices and inputs, with fuel coming soon. You may have also seen the news and events tab that aims to keep members up-to-date and aware of the opportunities available.

The team has fixed the statement issues and current invoice problems, enhancing these functions for a more straightforward member experience; members can now view their running monthly balance since the last statement run. Once received from the supplier, invoices are added to the system, allowing members to see them between statements, helping keep an eye

on cash flow throughout the month.

The .csv file export from the portal is now compatible for import into Farmplan and Landmark software packages. Discussions with other packages, such as Xero, are in progress, where we will hopefully see similar import solutions from the portal.

The team is working hard to develop a new search function so members can view past invoices on the platform, but until then, links to the old portal are still available for those who would like to view historical invoices.

In other news, the team is exploring and developing online ordering, and we are looking forward to sharing further updates with you soon.

Success of the new online Annual Declaration Form (ADF) process last year means it has been reviewed and



Richard Snelham

enhanced on the members portal. Processing will start early 2024 and will be complete by mid-May. The NEW feature - a confirmation email once you have completed and submitted your form (as requested by members) - is coming soon.

Only 65% of members are using the new portal, and I hope to encourage more to join by ensuring the process of signing up is as simple as possible. All you need to do is head over to the Fram Farmers website and follow the link to the portal to retrieve your login. ”

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SUFFOLK FARMING CONFERENCE RETURNS IN 2024

Fram Farmers is pleased to announce details for the 2024 Farming Conference that will take place on the 29 February with the theme of 'How to Thrive, Not Just Survive'.

Join Fram Farmers at the 2024 Farming Conference at Trinity Park Events Centre near Ipswich, where farmers, agricultural enthusiasts, and industry experts gather to share knowledge and exchange ideas. The event is free to attend and will cover topics to help members plan for the future.

During the Conference, attendees will have the chance to connect with like-minded individuals who share their passion for agriculture. There will be opportunities to build relationships and create lasting connections that are aimed to propel guests' farming endeavours forward.

The Conference will begin at 9:20am with a welcome from Bill Baker, Suffolk Agricultural Association chairman, shortly followed by a talk from headline guest

speaker, Henry Dimbleby MBE, the co-founder and former CEO of Leon restaurants, and a range of other industry specialists.

The event will cover the topic of finance with talks on 'Farming Issues' with Grace O'Dwyer, deputy head of agriculture at HSBC, 'Global Macroeconomics' with Marc Ostwald, chief economist and global strategist at ADM and a conversation on 'Conservative vs Labour' with Jack Deal, partner at Scrutton Bland.

Other topics include talent and training and digital innovations with discussions on 'How to Attract and Retain Staff', 'Solutions to Data Overload', 'Automation on Farm' and much more. Guests will also have the chance to participate in Q&As



after each of the sessions.

Fram Farmers chairman, Wendy Houston will wrap up the day with a short talk, before guests gather for lunch where they can reflect on the day's discussions and go away feeling up to date with the latest advancements in farming.

To register for your free tickets and view the full agenda, scan the QR code or go to the events page on the Fram Farmers website.



MEET GRACE HAYWARD, MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MANAGER (EAST)

Grace has been a part of Fram Farmers since November 2021, in marketing roles overseeing communications and events. A few months ago, in October 2023, she made a move over to the membership development team, covering the eastern region of the UK.

Covering Suffolk, Essex, and Norfolk, totalling approximately 850 members, Grace's role involves building and maintaining relationships with members, ensuring membership is being used to its full potential. She has already hit the ground running, speaking to and meeting many members in the east and getting to know their businesses.

"I am really enjoying being part of the membership development team, and getting to know our members better," says Grace.

"This new chapter presents an exciting opportunity for me to expand my skills by recruiting new members and engaging with existing members to increase participation," she says.

Having grown up and worked on her family's East Anglia based pig farm, Dingley Dell Pork, Grace developed an early enthusiasm for farming, growing her skills and knowledge in livestock management and general farm business operations. She was also involved in the marketing activities, running the online shop, and promoting their charcuterie range to farm shops and delis.

Looking back at her early practical experience within the family business, Grace can relate to the hard work and effort required to remain in the industry, including the importance of access to the latest business trends and market intelligence.

"The most important aspect of this role is



Grace Hayward

understanding the ever-changing, volatile industry of agriculture, and learning new ways to support farmers to overcome these challenges," says Grace.

"I am excited to continue learning from the agricultural community and like-minded individuals. I hope to support our members in every way I can, so please don't hesitate to get in touch!" she concludes.

Fram Farmers can provide members with the right tools to progress. If you're in the eastern region of the UK, and would like to know more about joining Fram Farmers, please get in touch with Grace: 07436 790611 | grace.hayward@framfarmers.co.uk

ORDER AHEAD TO OVERCOME LIVESTOCK VACCINE SUPPLY ISSUES

Vaccine supply has been sporadic over the past few years, meaning Jessica Frost and Bex White in the Fram Farmers livestock team have faced difficulties sourcing vaccines for members. They provide an insight into the challenges faced by the industry and what members can do to help ease the strain.

For two years, vaccines from one specific industry supplier, a manufacturer of a wide range of POM-V and POM-VPS classified medicines, have been delayed, due to quality control and forecast issues. This has caused widespread issues of availability across the industry, affecting those sourcing and prescribing medicines to livestock producers.

Some vaccines have only been allocated to vets, which were given priority, or on some occasions, only smaller pack sizes have been available. Lambivac, Heptavac P Plus, Covexin 10 & Leptavoid H are just a few that the team has struggled to source in all sizes, and lack of availability of some medicines has put further pressure on others, such as Bravoxin.

This has also affected prices, and the team has noticed a trend across the board, with the price of wormer and fly control products increasing.

Jess and Bex, who are both qualified Registered Animal Medicines Advisors, or R-SQPS, have been working hard to source animal medicines from a number of suppliers across the industry – they know who to source products from, and where



Jess Frost



to achieve the most competitive prices, but it has still been a challenge.

The livestock team has also been regularly communicating the supply issues to Fram Farmers members in the Purchasing News, encouraging members to plan ahead with their requirements.

“We have given prior warning to members, or suggested alternatives, and warned that they will need boosters if gaps are too long,” says animal health specialist Bex White.



Bex White

“In the long run, if this is the case, and boosters are required, it will cost livestock producers more to keep their stock covered.”

With key dates in the farming calendar approaching, such as lambing season, and spring calving, Jess suggests checking stocks and looking through farm health plans now, bringing order dates forward in preparation.

“We are urging members to order medicines way ahead of the time they’re

required,” says livestock manager Jess Frost.

“Members also need to be prepared to take alternatives, and don’t be surprised if there is no supply option at all. Some supply has improved more recently, but it is very sporadic,” she warns.

“Ordering a week ahead is no longer going to provide enough time for medicines to reach the farm in time; we are currently working one or two months ahead, due to the busy period coming up.”

“Early order season in February/March is also no longer beneficial, as prices have increased earlier, so we recommend ordering in December or January for spring. We understand there will be concerns over expiry dates ordering so far in advance, so we will be on hand to check those,” says Bex.

The Fram livestock team does have members’ usual list of requirements on file, and will be contacting members about ordering supplies, but they ask you to please be proactive and get in touch with the team as soon as possible: 01728 717716 | livestock@framfarmers.co.uk



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Fram Farmers member Barry Connolly, of Dykesfield Farm on the Solway Coast, milks 180 crossbred cows, plus 100 followers. Milk supplied to First Milk on a high protein constituent-based contract is made into cheese and supplied to a large number of major retailers.

Barry runs the farm alongside assistant manager Oksana, who has been a member of the team for around a year, as well as apprentice James, who is studying at Myerscough College for a NVQ in agriculture, and undertaking a dairy management course at Newton Rigg Training Ltd.

Barry has been a member of the cooperative for approximately five years, buying machinery and parts, fencing, building materials, ag chem, seed, utilities and fuel through the cooperative. His largest area of purchase through the group, however, is livestock inputs, from livestock pens, to feed and grass seed, and cattle handling equipment to bedding products.

Across the 300-acre farm, he grows wheat, which is sold, some whole crop, and the rest is down to grass leys, which is cut every five weeks when possible. The leys are bespoke grass seed mixtures for silage, which feature red clover, white clover and rye grasses. Feeding a high-protein grass-silage based TMR, Barry buys in straights, as well as rapeseed expeller NovaPro and protected fats, and purchases minerals through Fram.

Barry's contract requires the cows to graze for 120 days of the year, so fresh cows are housed and go outside in later lactation. He predominantly calves at the back end of autumn through the winter, with British Blue cross calves privately sold for finishing at a month old.

When it comes to herd health, Barry



Barry Connolly

uses herd management software UNIFORM-Agri to keep track of his health plan, working a month ahead of when vaccinations are due. In the run up to the busy autumn calving period, he tends to order two months ahead to ensure he has enough in stock.

"When I know we're approaching calving, I will begin looking ahead at requirements into the new year, which I am doing so now (end of November)," explains Barry.

"If products are long-dated, we know we can buy more and keep it in the fridge, so we constantly have a prescription on back-order to ensure it's out on-farm when we need it," he adds.

At peak times, Barry is in regular contact with Jess and Bex in the livestock team, estimating a phone call at least twice a month, and ensuring that they are aware of his requirements and can begin to

source vaccines with plenty of lead time.

Cows are treated at drying off, with vaccines including Bovivac S and Rotacorna, and all calves are vaccinated before they leave the farm with Bovilis RSP as per the agreement with the buyer. Timings can be tight due to lack of space on farm for calves, which gives Barry even more reason to order in plenty of time.

"For me, it's really key to closely monitor calf health to avoid illnesses like Rotavirus. A sick calf or the loss of a calf is lost income, so good organisation is vital to ensure herd health is on track and vaccinations are done on time."

"Prevention rather than cure is also key - our milk contract closely monitors antibiotic use, with complete transparency on medicines administered to the herd, so closer attention to detail does pay off," he concludes.

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ELECTRICITY PORTFOLIO: A FURTHER UPDATE

Managing the electricity portfolio for members over the past 18-months has been a challenging task for the Fram Farmers business services team. Dan Cox, head of business services, membership and communications, provides an update and explains the Energy Price Benchmark...

Prior to October 2022, Fram Farmers had enjoyed rates of between 9p and 12p/kWh, and regular monthly or quarterly billing. Despite a few usual problems with faulty meters, discrepancies with meter reads and VAT rates, members very rarely had cause to question their electricity bill.

From December 2021, things started to change, as a steep increase in wholesale energy prices, due to a number of global factors, caused large scale concern. This was exacerbated by significant media coverage, and understandable concern from consumers and businesses alike.

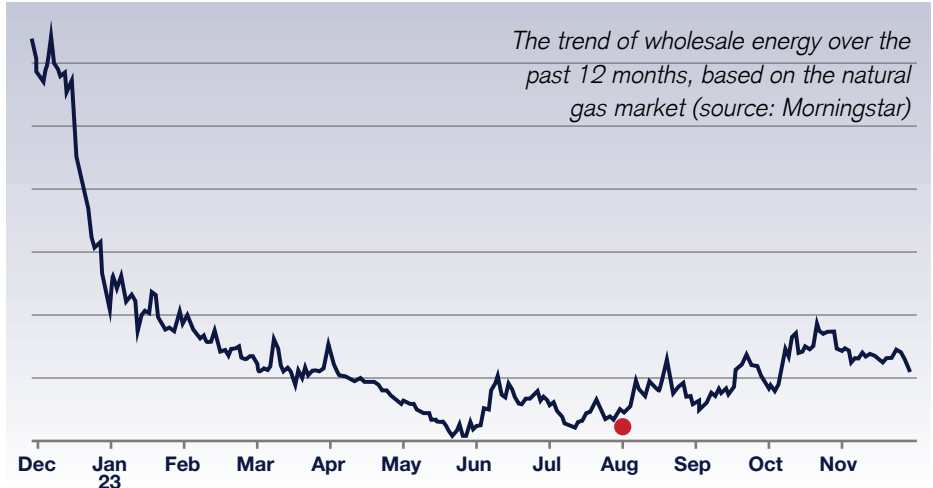
In the Summer Issue of Farmers First, published and sent to members in June 2023, Dan provided a detailed explanation of why the Energy Bill Relief Scheme (EBRS) added additional billing complications due to lack of industry consultation.

“With the Fram Farmers contract renewal coinciding with the launch of the EBRS, this inevitably caused a great deal of concern amongst members,” explains Dan.

“We took the decision not to commit members to a long contract at that time, due to the wholesale energy price being so high. Instead, we purchased energy in small volumes on a monthly basis to get us through the winter,” he adds.

This turned out to be the most cost-effective option, as members benefitted from the EBRS discount with a portfolio average of 38p/kWh (Oct 22 – Apr 23), and were then protected from the industry-wide high rates from April 2023 when EBRS ceased. An average rate of 28p/kWh was then secured for 6-months to October 2023, and the team has now fixed rates even lower up to October 2024.

“While issues and complications with bills, rates and billing delays, have continued long after the EBRS discount ceased, we’re confident that we are very close to returning to some kind of normality in terms of billing, bar a few minor fixes.”



ENERGY PRICE BENCHMARK

Following the energy crisis, and now that the team has secured the energy purchase for the portfolio up to October 2024, the Fram Farmers board asked for a benchmark of the industry to be carried out, in order to establish how the portfolio has performed compared to others in the industry.

In summary, the benchmark has concluded that the Fram Farmers portfolio has not only provided members with a fixed price lower than all others in the industry, but it has also achieved the security of coverage for the longest period of time, with energy purchased up to October 2024.

All other parties in the benchmark have only fixed energy to April 2024, and with the current continued volatility in the Middle East, and an upturn in the price of wholesale energy, they are not only faced with the prospect of purchasing at a higher

rate, but also uncertainty over energy rates during the remainder of 2024.

The graph above illustrates the trend of wholesale energy over the past 12 months, based on the natural gas market (source: Morningstar), which is the closest indicator of electricity pricing.

It shows when Fram Farmers purchased energy for the latest contract (purchased in August to start in October). Since August, the price of energy has continued to increase and remains volatile.

“We continue to monitor the market and will hopefully be in a position to purchase energy for the next contract period after spring 2024, when the market has had more chance to settle,” says Dan.

If you have concerns or questions, or would like to speak to the business services team, please get in touch: 01728 727722 | electricity@framfarmers.co.uk

Earlier this year, the business services team expanded in order to support members through the ongoing challenges. We are delighted to welcome utilities administrators Jenny Cole and Michelle Walker to the team, who joined in June and August respectively. If you have any queries, Jenny and Michelle will be at the end of the phone to help.



Jenny Cole

Michelle Walker

DID YOU KNOW?

Fram Farmers has online accounts with multiple suppliers, making it easy for Fram Farmers members to purchase farm inputs at the click of a button. With access to KRAMP, and the addition of Arco and Amazon earlier this year, thousands of items are available to members 24/7.

Now, a NEW supplier agreement means members can gain direct access to Toolstation's webshop, with an automatic 5% discount. As with all online suppliers, purchases go straight onto your Fram Farmers account, streamlining the billing process and removing the need for additional paperwork.

This service is available now - please contact the Fram Farmers office to create a login, or to find out more: **01728 727700**.



RENEWABLES OPTIONS FOR MEMBERS

The Fram Farmers business services team has seen a significant increase in enquiries for renewable technologies over the past year, as members seek to mitigate against energy market volatility.

Many of these enquiries have progressed to solar installations, with a large number of projects being commissioned over the next few months, just in time for the warmer weather and the best conditions for generating solar energy.

In addition to the range of approved solar suppliers that Fram Farmers has access to, the cooperative has also partnered with a range of companies that are able to trade exported energy on behalf of members, in the form of a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA).

In most cases, the principal benefit of a solar array is to generate electricity for use in the business or household, thus saving money on purchasing electricity from the grid. A PPA allows you to sell any energy that is not used back to the grid, therefore achieving full value from the system.

Fram Farmers is currently achieving rates of around 8p/kWh for members selling unused energy back to the grid so it can work out to be a very worthwhile and lucrative form of income.

An export meter is required, and very small arrays may not work out to be cost-effective, but it is definitely worth looking into.

If you are interested in the prospect of selling your export energy through a PPA or are keen to demonstrate that you are generating green energy through a REGO, please get in touch with the business services team: 01728 727722 | electricity@framfarmers.co.uk.

RENEWABLE ENERGY GUARANTEE OF ORIGIN (REGO)

Another sub-benefit of a solar array is the ability to generate Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin (REGO) certificates to demonstrate that you are generating green energy.

These REGO certificates can be used by your business to offset your own carbon emissions, or they can be traded on the open market.

Again, Fram's suppliers are able to administer this, and members are already starting to benefit. These are not automatically issued, so contracts will need to be set up.



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