



BOOTS ON THE GROUND: A YEAR IN THE LIFE ON FARM

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Looking to the future – balancing businesses and diversifications

Rachel Wilks helps manage the 500-acre family farm in Herefordshire, alongside her husband Simon's groundwork business.

The farm is mostly permanent pasture, short term leys, maize, barley or oats to feed stock over winter. Historically a dairy farm, they now have a suckler herd of 60 cows, 450 breeding ewes, as well as a holiday let. Rachel uses Farmplan's Business Manager and Cattle Manager to keep this busy farm running as efficiently as possible.

"September is when we start getting the sheep back to the rams ready for lambing next year. We're lambing in January now as I could see from the analysis within Farmplan's Business Manager that we were benefitting from better prices by selling early.

The bulls have been in with the cows and we are vaccinating and ear notch testing all the calves to become a BVD free herd, which will be a requirement in farm assurance by 2025. Calving is a dangerous time so I record everything through Cattle Manager to ensure that any ageing families aren't being exposed to any unnecessary risks.

We've bought less straw off the field this year as prices have dropped and it should be cheaper off the lorry later on. People didn't have any reserves left in the shed last year because of the weather, which drove the high early prices.

There is much more awareness around environmental issues and farming and there are changes coming to reflect this. We are an environmentally friendly farm;



- ✓ Running a mixed farm enterprise
- ✓ Controlling costs
- ✓ Looking to the future

"There are changes coming and we need to be able to embrace them. Whether that means we keep farming in the same way remains to be seen."

Rachel Wilks
Herefordshire farmer





we use very few sprays or fertilisers. We have a lot of woodland and wildlife-friendly areas so we have a good balance already, but going forward there is going to be more of a requirement to provide evidence of how you are providing solutions to environmental issues.

We have just joined the mid-tier countryside stewardship scheme for 2022 and will then have the option to change to the ELMS scheme in 2 years' time. We had a lot of paperwork to do to work out what land we wanted to include in the scheme and how we can operate within the parameters of what is required, without it affecting us, which was a lengthy and time consuming exercise.

I am managing the family farm together with my own and my husband's businesses, so I use Business Manager which makes it easy to analyse what prices we received, our costs and then to make comparisons.

We recently converted an old barn into a holiday let with the aim of creating more stable cashflow and to take advantage of the current staycation boom. I have been able to closely manage the costs of the project by using the 'searchcode' function within Business Manager. Now the barn is finished all income will also be allocated to the same searchcode so I can easily see how it is performing financially.

I started off using Business Manager purely for VAT purposes, but I've since moved additional businesses across because of MTD. I've got to record the information for MTD purposes, but I'm now also using that detail to look at ways to benefit and improve the businesses."



"My main goal is for the farm to be profitable and that is hard when inputs and outputs fluctuate. There aren't many markets where you just wait to see what someone is prepared to pay for your commodity."

Rachel Wilks
Herefordshire farmer

At the moment there's demand for our products and the prices reflect this, though there is a perception that the price of food is too high. However that seems at odds with the fact that people are prepared to throw away a third of their food.

Find out more at

www.farmplan.co.uk/bootsontheground

About Farmplan



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