

**THE COUNTY FARMS ESTATE
RECOGNISING SUCCESS AT THE DEVON FARM BUSINESS AWARDS 2015 and
2016**

Report of the Head of Business Strategy and Support

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation(s):

1. That on behalf of the Committee, letters be sent to all the Estate tenants nominated for the Devon Farm Business Awards in 2015 and 2016, recognising and congratulating them on their outstanding achievements.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 For approximately the last 25 years the Estate has supported and participated in the John Neason Memorial Awards. John Neason was a former Devon County Land Agent. Over the years the Estate and its tenants have been able to use the annual competition to showcase best practice in terms of their entrepreneurial spirit and achievements. Many previous winners have come from the Estate.
- 1.2 Since 2015, the Award has been linked to the Devon Farm Business Awards which are organised by a partnership of the Addington Fund, the Devon County Agricultural Association, and Stephens Scown Solicitors and as such receives far greater publicity and recognition culminating in a prestigious black tie awards ceremony in the Presidents Pavilion on the eve of the Devon County Show.
- 1.3 The Suite of Awards are:
 - (i) Best Commercial Farmer – Sponsored by Francis Clark Chartered Accountants
 - (ii) Best Dairy Farmer – Sponsored by Crediton Dairy
 - (iii) Best Woman in Farming – Sponsored by Nat West Bank
 - (iv) CAAV John Neason Diversification – Sponsored by the CAAV
 - (v) Farming Champion – Sponsored by the NFU and NFU Mutual
 - (vi) Best Young Farmer – Sponsored by Savills
 - (vii) Lifetime Achievement Award – Sponsored by Cornish Mutual
 - (viii) Devon Farmer of the Year Award – Sponsored by Mole Valley Farmers
- 1.4 The awards are considered to be a very valuable publicity and marketing opportunity for the Estates high quality tenants to promote themselves to other institutional and private sector landlords and their agents.
- 1.5 In 2015 the NPS Land Agents nominated:

1.5.1 Chris Carpenter of Fairfield Farm, Denbury in the CAAV John Neason Diversification Awards

Although runner up in this category the judges feedback was incredibly positive. The judges noted:

'Chris and Louise Carpenter have very recently taken the step of adding value to the very high quality milk produced by their pedigree Guernsey Cows in the form of 'Aunty Moo's' ice cream. As new entrant tenants of a Devon County Council owned farm they have already invested significantly in an on farm processing unit. Although the product is relatively new and only recently sufficiently well established to finance specialist marketing support, the high quality ice cream is selling increasingly well. The ability to produce a consistent quality product available to both wholesale and retail markets combined with the added value premium over the volatile wholesale milk price is beginning to yield attractive financial returns. Although not new, adding value to a raw milk product is becoming much more than a niche market outlet for the dairy industry. Chris and Lou have incredibly exciting plans for developing further added value products. The potential health benefits of the apparent unique proteins found in Guernsey cow milk makes Aunty Moo's a product to watch for the future!'

1.5.2 Marcus Warner of Lower Henland Farm, Kentisbeare in the Best Young Farmer Category

Runners up for this category in 2015 but more successful in an alternative category in 2016 (see below for further details).

1.6 In 2016, the NPS Land Agents nominated:

1.6.1 Marcus Warner of Lower Henland Farm, Kentisbeare in the CAAV John Neason Diversification Awards

Winners of this category. The judges awarded Marcus and Liz Warner, the CAAV John Neason Farm Diversification Award, for their business selling quail eggs and duck eggs.

When taking on the tenancy at Lower Henland Farm (181acres), Marcus & Liz didn't want to farm entirely in the conventional sense, and wanted to find something a little bit different, a bit of a premium product.

That led them to Quail. Having started with 5000 quail at the end of 2012, they have recently expanded and currently have 15,000 quail on site, producing eggs on contract for supermarkets and restaurants including some top London outlets. They produce on average, 9,500 quail eggs/day, approximately 15% of the UK's commercial production.

As a follow on from this business, quail have a limited laying lifespan (10 months). At the end of these 10 months, they kill, chill and freeze the quail and then sell them on as falconry feed.

As well as quail, they also have 2000 ducks whose eggs also go into the same premium market as the quail eggs.

Marcus and Liz Warner have built up a very successful alternative business at Lower Henland Farm. They have only been on the Devon County Farms Estate for 4 years but in that short time have set up and substantially grown the business. Neither Marcus or Liz came from a farming background but they have a passion for agriculture and coupled with boundless energy and enthusiasm they have developed Westcountry Quail alongside the more conventional farming activities.

Marcus and Liz keep a close eye on the performance of the business and monitor the costs and benefits of each enterprise.

The business is very labour intensive so the Warners rely on local employment to assist with the collection of the eggs and mucking out of the birds. Marcus and Liz are also key to the Farmwise Devon educational event running the poultry zone since it was first launched in 2013.

Marcus and Liz are fantastic ambassadors for the Devon County Farms Estate and by thinking outside the box have developed their enterprise to become one of the top quail producers in the Country.

1.6.2 Gordon Davis of Westcott Farm, Burlescombe in the Best Dairy Farmer Category

Winner of this highly competitive category. Gordon farms a total of 340 acres with 130 acres in maize and 210 acres to pasture. He has a herd of 210 high yielding jersey cows averaging 6753 litres at 5.6 % butterfat and 4.01 % protein. Alongside the Jersey herd he trades between 200-300 Holstein and crossbred freshly calved cows and heifers throughout the year through South West livestock centres. The youngstock for the Jersey herd are all reared on the farm. All the beef and dairy calves from the trading enterprise are sold. The business is very much a family concern.

Alongside the day to day farming the family takes pride in showing the Rivermead Jersey herd. They have taken the title in three interbreed championships at major agricultural shows and have won breed champion at every show they entered in 2015.

Gordon and his family were nominated for their contribution to the dairy industry. Gordon was a supplier to Cricketer Farms but following their decision to close this year has found himself without a milk contract along with the other Cricketer suppliers. In order to carry on farming he was forced to seek out a new milk contract. After speaking with numerous different processors and manufacturers he has now set up a new company specialising in marketing high quality channel island milk. He has established demand in London and the Midlands from companies manufacturing high end specialist products ranging from Indian desserts to cheese and butter.

This new company has not just saved his own business but he has also been able to include five other farmers who previously supplied Cricketer totalling close to 7 million litres of channel island jersey milk. Without this lifeline these additional producers would also have been forced to sell their herds and leave the industry. In order to deliver the milk to the processors he has employed two HGV drivers and bought two milk tankers. Gordon is confident that there is demand out there for his specialist product and has been enthused meeting factory owners who have a passion for their product.

Gordon and his family have also been instrumental in the development and success of the Farmwise education initiative. The Jerseys have taken place in many milking demonstrations helping to teach children where their milk comes from and to enthuse the next generation of farmers.

As further industry wide recognition of his outstanding achievement Gordon Davis was **selected from all of the nominees and named Devon's Farmer of the Year.**

Chairman of the judges and Addington Fund Chief Executive, Ian Bell OBE, said that Mr Davis was not only an outstandingly efficient dairy farmer, but also a great ambassador for his industry.

"Standards on this farm are second to none", he said. "The Rivermead herd is one of the finest Jersey herds in the country and the farm is a model of tidy efficiency, where attention to detail is everything.

"But over and above that is the work that Gordon does for his fellow farmers, in setting up his own dairy company to provide an outlet for his own and five other dairy farmers' milk, and as an ambassador and educator for the dairy industry. Put all of that together and you have an outstanding Farmer of the Year."

1.6.3 Louise Moorhouse of East Fingle Farm, Drewsteignton in the Best Woman in Farming Category

Runner up in this category. Alongside running a pedigree and commercial ewe flock, Louise has converted part of the farmhouse into a self-contained holiday let, encouraging holiday makers to experience "life on a farm" where they can walk amongst the stock, take part in duties and leave having a life changing fun experience on a farm in Devon.

Louise is a key member of the Beltex Sheep Association organising the South West Regional Beltex Club. She has also for the past three years run the sheep section at the Farmwise Devon education event at Westpoint explaining to children what sheep farming is all about. Before taking on the tenancy Louise was a lecturer at Bicton College and is passionate about promoting agriculture to the next generation. She is a committed exhibitor at all the local and regional agricultural shows and has had much success particularly with the Beltex breed.

Louise's energy and determination to grow her farm business as well as supporting the agricultural industry through education and breed improvement is admirable. She is a fantastic asset to the Devon County Farms Estate.

1.6.4 Chris Creeper of Waterford Farm, Musbury in the Best Young Farmer Category

Runner up in this category. Chris took over the tenancy of the Devon County Farms Estate's Waterford Farm in March 2015 aged just 27 ably supported by his partner Connie. He rents 65 acres from Devon County Council and a further 25 acres rented privately all down to pasture. Currently he is milking 60 primarily Jersey cows averaging 6,500 litres, 4.52 % butterfat, 3.44 % protein, 90 cell count and 17 bactoscan from a simple forage based ration. Within the herd are a small number of elite genetic Ayreshire cows that have been very successful on the national and local show circuit and also have produced bulls sold to AI stud. These cows are flushed and the eggs are implanted into the commercial cows. Alongside the dairy enterprise Chris also has a very successful foot trimming business, he trims on average around 4000 cows a year.

1.6.5 Martyn Mills of Middle Yeo Farm, Down St Mary in the Best Young Farmer Category

Runner up in this category. Martyn and his wife Laura took over the tenancy of Middle Yeo Farm in March 2014 after a swift rise through the dairy industry progressing from being a herdsman then into share farming before moving to the Devon County Farms Estate. They milk a herd of 70-80 British and Irish Friesian cows averaging 7300 litres. Martyn is focused on producing milk from home grown forage and minimal concentrate and tries to add value to every lactation by rearing premium Limousin calves. He regularly achieves top price in Exeter Market for his youngstock. Soon after Martyn took over the tenancy at Middle Yeo he had to reconsider his original business plan to ensure it could cope with the falling milk price. He moved from a high input system to focus on a more grass based enterprise and ensured his cost of production reduced. The business has now grown so that he is able to employ one part time member of staff and is diversifying into sheep and some contracting work.

2.0 Options/Alternatives

2.1 Alternative options have been considered and discounted as they are believed to either be contrary to current Estate policy and/or not in the best financial interests of the Estate.

3.0 Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

3.1 The views and opinions of the Devon Federation of Young Farmers Clubs and the Estate Tenants Association will be presented by the two co-opted members to the committee.

3.2 No other parties have been consulted and no other representations for or against the proposal have been received

3.3 The technical data is believed to be true and accurate.

4.0 Considerations

4.1 The Author is not aware of any financial, sustainability, carbon impact, equality, legal, risk management or public health issues arising from this report

5.0 Summary/Conclusions/Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 The Author has prepared this report in accordance with the findings of the County Farms Estate Strategic Review (April 2010)

Rob Parkhouse, Head of Business Strategy and Support

Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers
None

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