

THE COUNTY FARMS ESTATE RECOGNISING SUCCESS AT THE DEVON FARM BUSINESS AWARDS 2017

Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business 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 current and former Estate tenants nominated for the Devon Farm Business Awards 2017, 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 Report BSS/16/12 presented to the County Farms Estate Committee on 15 September 2016 referred to the Estates previous significant earlier successes in 2015 and 2016.

1.6 This report celebrates the most recent success from the 2017 Awards Ceremony.

1.6.1 **Colin Latham of Chapel Farm, Marwood winner in the Best Commercial Farmer Category**

Colin, along with his wife Glenys, have built up a 4.5 million litre dairy unit from almost nothing and impressed the judges with their tenacity and ability to create opportunities out of adversity. Colin worked on his father's farm, but when it was sold, he was left unemployed and with no resources in his early 20's. At their first Devon County Council Farm, Higher Leigh, they built up a dairy herd of 45. With their sons, Geoff and Ian, they now milk 540 cows.

Colin's road to success has not been easy and he has overcome many challenges, turning them into opportunities. Colin has embraced renewable energy along the way with a wind turbine, solar panels and a heat recovery system.

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

In Colin's words: "I love the job and I love the challenge. If I was 24 again, I wouldn't change a day."

Colin is the second Estate tenant in a row to be named 'Devon's Farmer of the Year'. Can the Estate secure the hat-trick in 2018?



1.6.2 Alex Wilson-North of Little Stone Farm, South Molton runner-up in the Best Young Farmer Category

Alex and his wife Claire took over Little Stone Farm in 2016. Little Stone is a starter dairy farm of 100 acres. Prior to taking the tenancy Alex was a successful herdsman and had been able to build up a nucleus of Jersey cows as well as a group of heifers. He also had the backing of Crediton Dairies who agreed to honour an offer of a milk contract for over 12 months at a time when very few companies were recruiting new producers. Alex has started his own dairy business in what must have been one of the most difficult years for the dairy industry for a long time. He moved in with nearly 80 cows and now is milking just over 100. He has invested in the farm and made a respectable profit in his first year.

1.6.3 Stewart & Ann Taylor of New Standon Farm, Bridestowe shortlisted in the Best Dairy Farmer Category

Stewart and Ann began farming in their own right in 2008 moving to Thorndon Farm, a starter dairy farm. They moved to New Standon Farm in 2015 and are now milking 160 cows. Stewart and Ann are a real success story of the Devon County Farms Estate. Their business has grown into a successful dairy enterprise having started from nothing in 2008. They have achieved this at a time of volatile milk prices and without a premium milk contract. Stewart and Ann's progression through the dairy industry has been based on determination and attention to detail throughout. Prior to moving to Devon they were contract milkers but it was clear to see that they wanted to run their own unit so they could put their experience in the dairy industry to better use building a business for themselves. They are model tenants, not only keeping a keen eye on their own assets but also always looking after and looking to improve the Landlord's infrastructure. They are currently investing in additional cow accommodation and are looking to replace the existing parlour at New Standon Farm. Stewart and Ann Taylor are a strong partnership committed to a future in dairying and always considering new ways of improving productivity and efficiency but not at the expense of herd health.

1.7 A number of former Estate tenants were also successful in 2017.

1.7.1 Leonard Bartlett of Hayne Farm, Gittisham (formerly of Markhams Farm, Ide) winner of the CAAV John Neason Diversification Awards

When the Bartlett family took over their 400 acre rented farm in 2009 there was a small farm shop, but in the intervening years the family has developed Bartlett's Farm Shop into a must visit local retail outlet, which employs five full time equivalent members of staff.

Run by Len and Angela's daughters Rebecca and Nicola, with help from their son Daniel, the farm shop sells beef and lamb produced on the farm, their own raw milk bottled on the farm, as well as supporting 30 other local producers (including some County Farms Estate tenants). The family opened a coffee shop in 2012 and during the quieter winter months provide breakfasts to a number of shoots. The business also has expansion prospects and the family is now investigating the possibility of

setting up a small scale dairy processing business to sell more dairy products through the shop.

1.7.2 Rachel Leonard of Northcott Barton Farm, Chumleigh (formerly of New Gulliford Farm, Dawlish) winner of the Best Woman in Farming Category

A first generation tenant farmer, who has built her herd up gradually over the last 13 years. She does all of the work on the 190 acre beef holding on her own, as well as raising her daughter as a single parent. She has an infectious enthusiasm for all that she does and passes this on to others regularly helping to educate guests staying in the farm's holiday cottage.

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, Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support

Electoral Divisions:

All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

None

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