

FARMEXCELLENCE

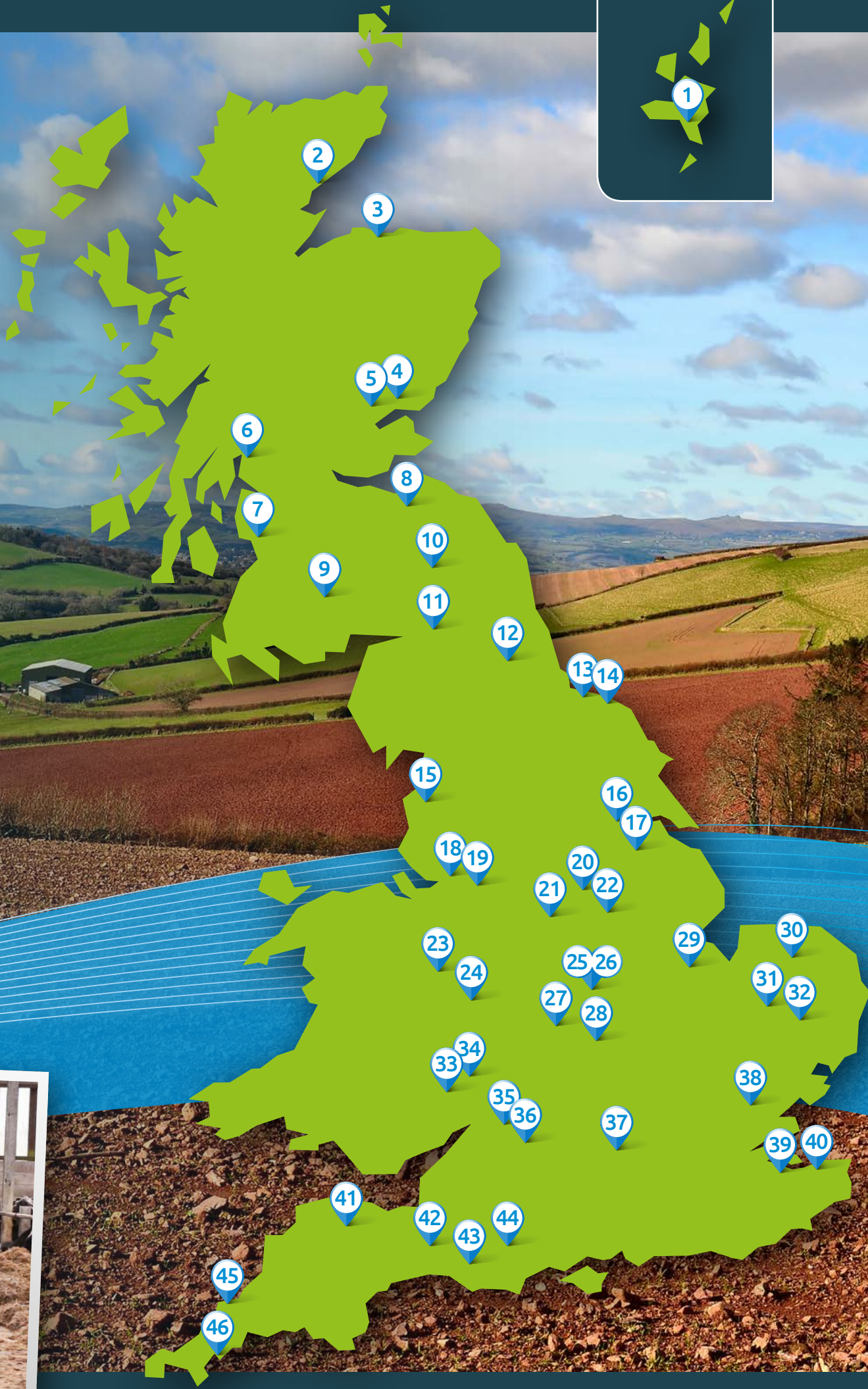
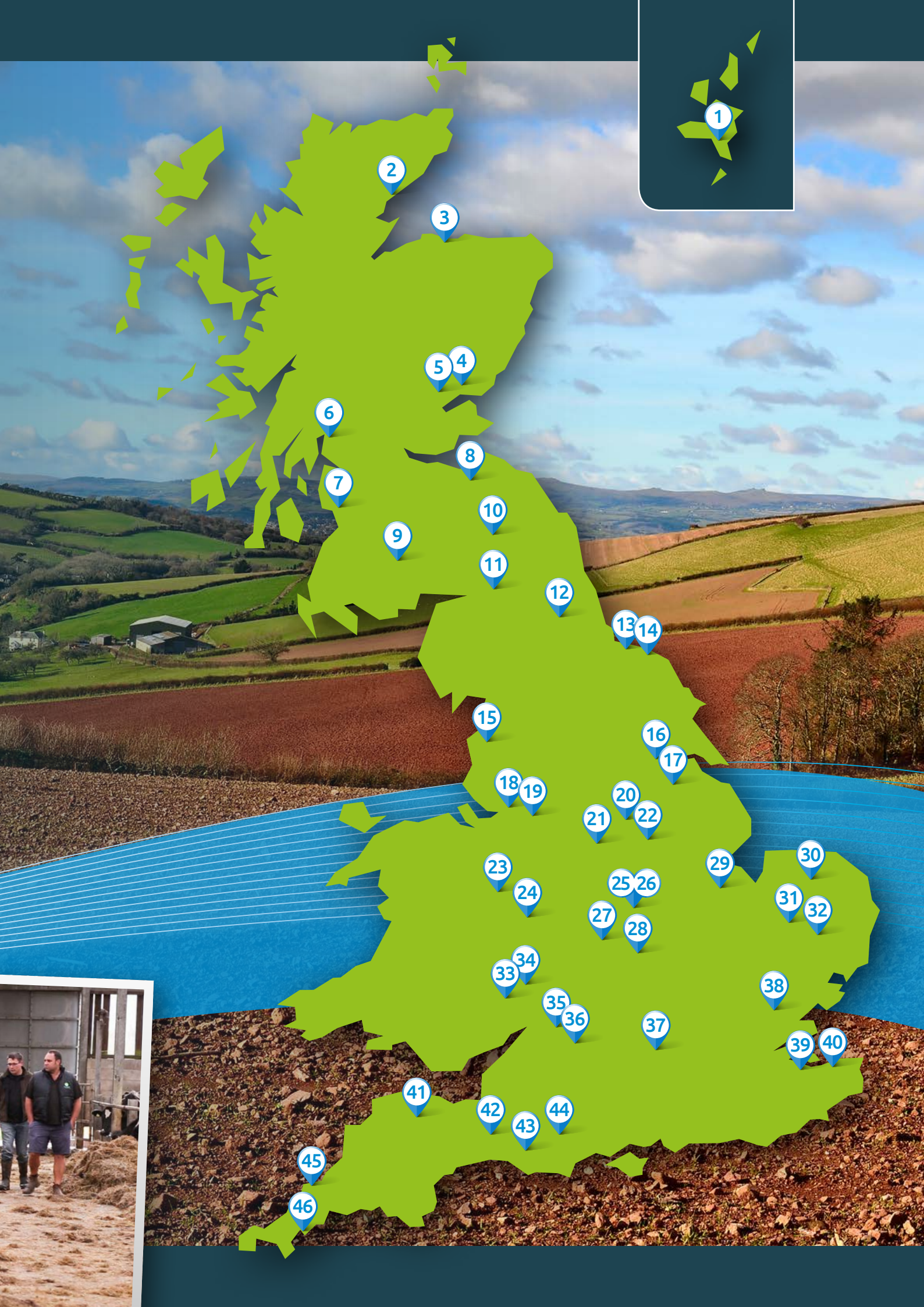
AHDB



Inspiring Farm Excellence
2018 Directory

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Foreword from the CEO

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first AHDB Inspiring Farm Excellence Directory.

What makes me so proud is that farmers and growers are at the heart of everything we do.

This directory sets out the wide range of partnerships we have with farm businesses across the country, the unique stories and challenges they are tackling and how we are working collectively in an open, honest environment to drive productivity.

Across AHDB we have so many brilliant relationships with forward-thinking, innovative farmers and growers who share best practice and drive pioneering changes in agriculture and horticulture.

This is where Inspiring Farm Excellence comes in, encouraging farmer-to-farmer learning, with the guidance and support provided by enthusiastic AHDB Knowledge Exchange staff.

The pace of change in the industry seems only to increase each year and all businesses must adapt if they are to address the challenges – and seek the opportunities – arising from disruptive innovation.

Although Inspiring Farm Excellence is a national network, we maintain a local focus and are responsive to region-specific topics and issues, using familiar on-farm settings to demonstrate technical messages and help raise standards.

It is integral to our sense of purpose as an organisation to make sure that what we do has a positive impact. After all, the AHDB style and culture is strongly shaped by our partner spirit, which includes a sense of shared responsibility.

What I hope to see over the next 12 months are more farmers and growers engaged with Inspiring Farm Excellence and bringing a change in practice thanks to this engagement.

My sincere thanks to everyone who took the time to contribute their valuable input to the development of this directory.

I hope that you enjoy reading it.

Jane King

Chief Executive and Accounting Officer



“ Inspiring our farmers and growers and industry to succeed in a rapidly changing world ”



Introduction to Inspiring Farm Excellence

Inspiring Farm Excellence builds on a body of research that has revealed farmers learn best from those they trust and are more likely to make beneficial changes and adopt best practice if they see it in action on-farm, in their own region.

It also taps into a recognised source of innovation and development: the farmers themselves. It is a channel for integrating farmers and their businesses into the wider AHDB Research and Knowledge Exchange (KE) programmes.

In this directory we introduce you to the network of farms that form the core of our new programme. Most importantly we introduce you to the farmers themselves, with whom we have the privilege of working to accelerate the uptake of innovation and good business management on farm.

Monitor Farms

Monitor Farms are about driving business improvement through benchmarking and bringing together groups of like-minded farmers, who wish to develop their

enterprises, in an environment that encourages them to share critical performance information. This information is evaluated and discussed by the group. This in turn encourages and facilitates business improvement through the adoption of new technology and practices.

The host farmer provides the case study and focus for events, supported by a steering group and facilitator, and the group of local farmers, who form themselves into a business group, linked to the Monitor Farm by benchmarking the performance of their own businesses. A key output of the Monitor Farm is to develop local and regional farmer champions proficient in business management, who act as ambassadors.

Strategic Farms

Strategic Farms drive the technical and strategic development of the industry by showcasing and testing outputs of research or best practice in a commercial environment. The farmers and growers test and demonstrate research solutions or aspects of best practice as defined by AHDB, in agreement with the host, to meet the needs of farmers in that sector and region.

The farms are engaged in participatory research projects and demonstrations. Collaboration in the projects on the farm with regional research institutes and/or local businesses is key. Strategic Farms aim to become a national focus of excellence linking research and practice in a commercial environment.



Richard Laverick
AHDB Chief Technical Officer

Susannah Bolton
AHDB Director of Knowledge Exchange

Our new approach to research and knowledge exchange

AHDB is the major funder of applied agricultural and horticultural research and knowledge exchange (KE) in the UK. About 50% of the levy collected is invested in our technical programme.

AHDB research and KE programmes have been re-aligned to address the new AHDB strategy, set out in the document 'AHDB Strategy 2017-2020: Inspiring Success'. This identifies four high level strategic priorities which will be delivered via sector specific activities covering the full range of AHDB's operations.

AHDB KE builds on the fact that we are unique in being able to blend farm economics and skills development with technical advances and innovation. The six action-driven themes combine research and KE so that outputs are targeted and delivered through the two new delivery platforms (see below).

Feedback on industry priorities from the four new KE programmes will inform the direction of future research and KE programmes within the context of the AHDB strategy.



“Engaging directly on farm gives us an exciting opportunity to encourage farmer-to farmer learning, discovering innovation in a new way to accelerate the uptake of new technology and inform our research. We have a bold ambition to expand this farm network to improve productivity and competitiveness.”

Richard Laverick

AHDB Technical Framework			
Themes	Programmes	Platforms	Communications Reach
Realising genetic potential	Network building	Farm excellence platform	
Building sustainable plant and animal health			
Managing resources efficiently and sustainably	Supply chain integration		
Driving precision technology into practice	Business development	Digital platform	
Facilitating trusted food in the supply chain	Intelligence gathering		
Honing business and technical skills			
Focus	Coordinate	Accelerate	

24 Apley Estate

Bridgnorth Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Adrian Joynt	Shropshire	Arable and beef

“I hope the meetings will allow me to look at new techniques in more detail. In particular, by the end of the three-year Monitor Farm scheme, I hope to have looked thoroughly at our cropping and maybe pick up another spring break crop.

“I think farmers are, in general, not as good as they should be at sharing knowledge, but we have so much to learn from each other. Nobody does it the right way and nobody does it the wrong way – we all do what suits us and there’s a lot to learn from each other. This is why I wanted to get involved in the Monitor Farm programme.

“Our biggest challenge is the same as that of any other farm at the moment: prices. We need to explore the facts behind the figures, which is why benchmarking will be a really useful tool for us.”



13 Barns Farm

Saltburn Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
John Aynsley	North Yorkshire	Arable, beef and sheep



“I’d been to a few Monitor Farm meetings before and they’re very good at making you think outside the box. We can learn a lot from being a Monitor Farm: it concentrates the mind a lot more and this will be a big bonus for us and for the staff.

“On the arable side, I hope we can investigate rotations, cover crops and the use of precision farming in that. If we can do that in the three years of the programme, we’ll have done well.

“We really need to understand and improve the soils. We’re trying to build the estate as a whole. Improving the soil involves the livestock as well as the arable parts of the farm.”



27 Bedding and Pot Plant Centre

BUSINESS NAME Baginton Nurseries	LOCATION Warwickshire	FARM TYPE Ornamentals – Bedding and Pot Plant
MAIN OBJECTIVE Demonstrate new market opportunities and technical developments		

What does the Bedding and Pot Plant Centre (BPPC) do?

The centre addresses the needs of the industry through a series of trials that demonstrate new market opportunities and technical developments, with the aim of providing practical solutions to problems encountered on small- to medium-sized nurseries, and to provide a forum for dialogue between growers, breeders, retailers and researchers.

By working under typical commercial conditions, growers can have confidence that the results achieved can be recreated in their own businesses.

How does the centre work?

The centre has an industry-led steering group, with growers from multiple commercial businesses providing input on compatibility of trials and taking ideas forward into the commercial environment. The centre is funded by AHDB and run by an ADAS team led by Dr Jill England.

What has the project achieved?

The work so far has focused on a number of topics including improving the success rate of cuttings, overwintered perennials and cold-treated hellebores for season extension, spectral filters, verbena nutrition, evaluation of PGRs and evaluation of shelf life in hellebores.

So far, this has resulted in recommendations for pre-sticking quick-dip treatments for geraniums to improve cutting success, recommended glass coatings and recommended spectral filters for glasshouses to diffuse light, reduce light intensity, and hold plants to meet specific marketing dates.

How do growers take home the knowledge?

A key part of the BPPC is knowledge exchange achieved through open days hosted on site such as the Summer Open Day, held to coincide with the HTA National Plant Show. Videos of ongoing trials, posters and ADAS notes are also produced for growers. Furthermore, the centre is regularly featured in articles providing guidance and solutions that fit with current practice.

1 Bigton Farm

Shetland Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Aimee and Kirsty Budge	Shetland	Arable, beef and sheep

“Shetland is a beautiful place to live and work; it has a wonderful farming community. People here are incredibly friendly and supportive and we really hope that the local farmers will get involved and make the project successful.

“Bigton Farm is one of just a handful of farms on the island which is suited to growing barley. We harvested approximately 60t barley this year, and are keen to increase this as there is a strong market opportunity to sell it on the islands.

“Another area we will be working on is lamb weaning percentage; although our scanning numbers are high, the number of actual lambs on the ground could be higher.”



45 Carruan Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Clare Parnell and Philip Kent	Cornwall	Arable, beef and sheep



“We are a family partnership in North Cornwall looking to make improvements to the way we run our farm. It’s our focus to ensure we are running an efficient and economically viable business without reliance on unpaid family labour. On-farm, there are currently 1,000 ewes outdoors in April on a forage-only system and we also take 200 British Blue x Friesian calves through from two weeks of age to slaughter. Learning from other farmers, we hope we are able to make changes that allow us to successfully manage the imminent amendments to farm subsidy systems.”



Challenge Sheep

Launched in 2017, Challenge Sheep is an AHDB Beef & Lamb-funded project that aims to understand the consequences of the rearing phase on the lifetime performance of ewes.

Covering both sheep bred as ewe lambs and shearlings, the project will track 9,000 replacements from 13 English sheep farms over seven years to understand how flock performance can be improved.

The project aims to generate new knowledge and highlight existing information on managing ewe replacements. The 13 farms taking part in the project use a variety of systems and are located as far north as Northumberland and as far south as Devon. Each will be required to collect data via EID – weights, body condition score, lambing data and lamb performance.

They will also be involved in several events over the years, where findings will be communicated to other producers. Challenge Sheep farms will receive regular feedback and help with monitoring changes to their businesses.

The project has stemmed from feedback from both research and producers that shows there are improvements to be made in the management of replacements entering the national flock. Currently, up to 10 per cent are not retained after their first breeding season due to premature culling or death.

The data that is generated by the project will assist in developing new guidance to help manage ewe replacements in the future.



5 Bruce Farms

Strategic Potato Farm Scotland

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Kerr Howatson, Farm Manager	Perthshire	Potatoes

How did you first become involved in the AHDB Strategic Farm initiative?

We were asked if we would be interested in becoming a SPot Farm by our packer at Bartletts before we met with AHDB Potatoes Knowledge Exchange Manager Claire Hodge and then Chair of the Seed and Export Committee Alistair Melrose. We discussed whether the farm was the right fit, what we wanted from the programme, and we were keen to be involved.

We have participated in trials programmes before but it's always been small plots. We were attracted by the fact we could do field-scale trials, which would give us meaningful results at the end of the day.

“ If we can get bigger yields, if we can get better quality, if we can reduce our costs without compromising quality or yield, then that's what we are looking for ”



“ These trials demonstrate that zero bed-tilling and reduced de-stoning return the lowest planting costs and the highest packed yield, which have a very positive effect on the bottom line. ”

What is your role and responsibility in the management of the Strategic Farm?

My role at Bruce Farms is Farm Manager for potatoes. We grow about 700 acres of packing and salad potatoes.

We manage the SPot Farm along with a team of people, which includes me, Geoff Bruce (Director, Bruce Farms), Claire Hodge (pictured on the right), Alistair Melrose and Mike Inglis from Bartletts. We're all quite practical, open-minded people and we work well together.

We manage the planting and the harvesting for SPot, and have a consultant, Daan Keizebrink, who comes in to monitor the trials at least once a week in the summer.

What are the main outcomes you hope to achieve?

If we can get bigger yields, if we can get better quality, if we can reduce our costs without compromising quality or yield, then that's what we are looking for.

There are quite few areas of potato growing which don't get looked into and if someone suggests something we can try out here as part of the SPot Farm programme, then we are happy to do it.

What on-farm changes do you hope to make?

The first big thing we looked at was cultivations. In the first year, we successfully demonstrated that through reducing your cultivation depths, you can get a higher yield and a higher pack-out, which is a significant result. It's little things really – if we can change five or six little things over the three years that improve quality or profits, then this can result in a big change for our business.

What areas of research are most important to the industry and your business?

I think the key areas are some things we are currently trialling on-farm: cultivations, nutrition, cover crops and seed spacing and handling.

Nutrition is a big thing; there's a lot of money spent on inputs like fertiliser and blight chemicals every year, so finding a way of trimming that successfully without increasing the risk would be helpful.

Potatoes are an expensive crop to grow so any research that demonstrates where we can trim costs without compromising yield is important.



Cover crops are still quite a hot topic, which is why we have been trialling them on-farm. We've put bigger plots in this year, which we will be monitoring closely because we need more information to be able to say whether we think they are a worthwhile investment.

Which biggest challenges are you looking to tackle?

It's really all about reducing costs; there are lots of areas where you can trim those but we want to do so without compromising yield or quality. The key thing for us is taking the whole project through right back to the pack-out figures at the end of the line. There's a lot of work before that point, planting them, looking after them all summer, harvesting them, storing them right, but it all comes down to how much we get back from the crop, and if we can take it right through to pack-out figures, then that's as good as we can get.

Warrington Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Robert Cross	Cheshire	Arable

Robert Cross, Warrington Monitor Farm host, regularly includes oats in his rotation. They follow wheat, two years after beans and particularly help with brome control.

In 2017, he grew 32ha RGT Lineout, destined 75 per cent for human consumption to Mornflake and 25 per cent as C1 seed for a local company.

During the 2017 harvest, the oat crop cost £300/ha in variable costs. This is similar to Robert’s farm average, although a falling nitrogen price has helped reduce his outgoings slightly.

Usually, oats are a very consistent crop for Robert.

“With at least a 7.5t/ha yield and more than £140/t price, there is normally a healthy margin. I’ve found they consistently yield well and therefore are profitable.”

This year his oats yielded around 8t/ha, with a bushel weight of 55kg/hl.

“I was pleased with my oats this year, although I did have reasonably high screenings and relatively high bushel weights, which is a bit of an odd combination. I never have huge quality issues but all the oats are cleaned through the drier nevertheless, to boost the bushel weight.

“The oats had laid a bit but they hadn’t gone too close to the floor so combining wasn’t too difficult.”

Nitrogen

The AHDB Nutrient Management Guide, formerly known as RB209, gives a broad range of nitrogen rates for oats, so Robert was keen to test the impact of different rates on his own farm.

In the new AHDB manual, the N rate for all SNS indices was increased by 40kg/ha.

This year, he tried applying three different rates of N to three 1ha blocks of oats: his usual 125kg/ha, as well as 150kg/ha and 175kg/ha.

Early in the season, there was no visible difference between the oats treated with different N rates when Robert surveyed the crop with a drone. However, once through the yield monitor, the crop treated with 150kg/ha N had marginally higher yields – only around 0.1t/ha different.

“I wouldn’t say the results are overly conclusive, and I didn’t see any particular difference in bushel weights between the three.”



The low rainfall in 2016–2017 meant that there was some debate over whether all the N had been taken up by the plants.

Robert plans to try the on-farm experiment again next year, sharing the findings with the Monitor Farm group.

Judith Stafford, AHDB Knowledge Exchange Manager, says: “The purpose of these on-farm experiments is to generate discussion. Although it’s not a scientific, replicated trial, we can still have some very valuable debate about nitrogen rates for oats and other crops.”

Seed rates

Usually sown at a rate of 125kg/ha, Robert plans to attempt higher seed rates next year to combat brackling.

He will try areas of up to 5ha with three different seed rates, based on getting 250–350 plants/m². Robert will compare his usual 125kg/ha with 150kg/ha and possibly a higher rate, depending on how his drill copes.

Robert says: “This year, they were the flattest oats I’ve had in four or five years, but I think straw strength has been weak this season around here. I don’t think they went down due to excess nitrogen.

“I think there are some fields where higher seed rates would benefit the oats. But drilling conditions will determine how far we actually push them or slacken back.”

Variety choice

Next year, Robert plans to grow 16ha Gerald oats as well as 34ha RGT Lineout, to minimise the risk of any screening issues.

Robert says: "I chose Gerald because I've found it to be a reliable performer that consistently meets milling standards here. I've grown it for more than 20 years.

"Some other people around here do grow Gerald, although most seem to focus on Mascani."

The Monitor Farm programme

For Robert, the most useful aspect of the Monitor Farm experience so far has been meeting fellow farmers and sharing ideas. Next year, he would like to look at improving his yields and soil health across the farm.



“ I was pleased with my oats this year, although I did have reasonably high screenings and relatively high bushel weights, which is a bit of an odd combination. ”

9 Clonhie Farm

Nithsdale Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME

Andrew and Aileen Marchant

LOCATION

Dumfries

FARM TYPE

Beef and sheep

“So far, we have focused on building the business and the number of sheep in particular. Now we need to concentrate on improving the technical efficiency of the whole-farm business, so becoming monitor farmers is perfect timing for us. We also hope many more farmers will share the benefits of what we learn along the way.

“We will be looking at areas such as sheep profitability and ewe management, as well as nutrition and genetics over the course of the programme.

“Improving the quality of our soil and grassland is a real focus too; we want to manage our grass better in order to reduce costs and increase output per hectare on the farm. We are also considering moving towards a winter paddock grazing system and have been measuring grass around the farm every three weeks.”



2 Clynelish Farm

Sutherland Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME

Vic and Jason Ballantyne

LOCATION

Sutherland

FARM TYPE

Beef and sheep



“ I think it is really important to us as farmers to challenge ourselves and look at our businesses and the way we do things. Hopefully by doing this, we can go on to make improvements and enhance our bottom line. ”

“ It’s great to have specialists coming to the area and sharing their knowledge and expertise on how to step up efficiency with us and other local farmers. ”

3 Corskie Farm

Morayshire Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME

Iain, Laura and Jemma Green

LOCATION

Morayshire

FARM TYPE

Arable, beef, sheep and pigs

Why did you decide to get involved in the Monitor Farm programme?

I thought the programme would be good not only for me and the staff, but for my daughters Laura and Jemma as well. It gives them the opportunity to learn from other farmers, see totally new practices and try some of them out. There is no better way to learn.

We thought it would be useful to take the opportunity to try out new innovations and techniques, for example with genetics and varieties.

What are the main outcomes you hope to achieve?

The main aim for us is to make the business more efficient, drive up production and drive down costs. I hope that as a Monitor Farm community, we will learn from each other and then pass on our own ideas.

On the arable side, we are hoping to increase, or at least not compromise, our yield while making savings on fertiliser. We will be trying out new varieties and reviewing our agronomy to see where we can make a difference. Yield is always king, so we need to keep looking at how we can get those incremental increases.

What have been the most effective learning channels?

The best way to learn is from each other, so I think the areas that have worked best are when we run small workshop groups at meetings, or when we discuss and then implement practical trials on-farm. I think that is far easier for farmers to get on board with than wordy scientific documents.

Which big challenges are you looking to tackle?

There are a few different areas we are going to look at through the Monitor Farm Scotland programme. One is the feeding of beef calves, trialling different methods to find the most efficient way of feeding them through to the point of sale. We will be looking at bought-in compound, bought-in blend and home-grown feed and measuring growth rates and input costs.

We are also taking part in a UK-wide trial, which is testing the potential of using biostimulant products as part of a sustainable agronomy programme. Running over three years, the trial will test biostimulants on several combinable crops, including wheat, barley and oilseed rape.



“ The main aim for us is to make the business more efficient, drive up production and drive down costs. ”

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Ian Norbury	Cheshire	Beef

After leaving the family farm for a career in construction, AHDB Beef & Lamb Strategic Farmer Ian Norbury has recently returned to farming to concentrate on making his business more resilient for the future.

Dairy Farm, in Mobberley Cheshire, has been in Ian Norbury’s family since 1963 and was originally run as a dairy unit by his mother and father. After struggling to make enough money from the dairy business, Ian’s father decided to concentrate on finishing his Aberdeen Angus cattle.

Five years ago, after working in construction, building farms and parlours, Ian decided to give up his employment and return to running the farm. Having moved back into the farmhouse where he grew up, Ian now works full-time alongside his father to look after the 250 acres of land, located close to Runway 2 at Manchester Airport.

“Currently, we’re running 45 suckler cows, with 75 per cent of those Angus and the remainder being Simmentals. We also have 25 pedigree Aberdeen Angus cows and sell Mobberley Angus bulls. We are early-spring calving and all animals go out to grass with no creep,” says Ian.

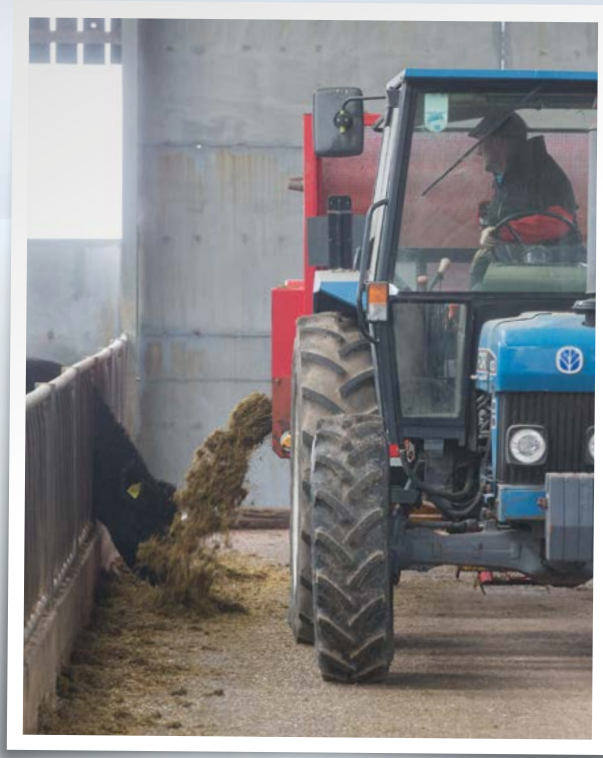
Ian’s calves are weaned at seven months and then wintered into cubicles with grass silage made from high sugar grass, supplemented with a small amount of home-grown barley. In spring, the cattle are back out on grass with the aim of finishing them between 20 and 24 months.

Improvement areas

As one of 13 Strategic Farmers, Ian is now set to work closely with AHDB and industry experts to track improvements in areas including health, nutrition and genetics, with the overall objective of increasing the number of stock meeting target specification.

“I want to be able to push the farm harder to increase profits. Improving our grass growth and quality is also important, because if we can finish more stock on grass, we can save money in other areas,” Ian explains.

Working alongside a consultant, Ian wants to focus on improving breeding as well as looking at using EID more effectively. Each Strategic Farm will also be benchmarked using the AHDB whole-farm benchmarking service Farmbench and appropriate



targets will be set for improving output and performance.

“Benchmarking is not something we’ve really concentrated on in the past and I’m keen to learn where our strengths lie and where our weaknesses are. We’ll then be able pay attention to the improvements needed to make our farm more profitable and resilient to future changes.”

The AHDB Farm Excellence initiative offers the opportunity for the group of Strategic Farms to come together for events and follow each other’s progress. Commenting on the farmer-to-farmer learning opportunity, Ian says: “I wanted to be one of the Strategic Farms as I think it’s a great way for me to learn and also share knowledge with others in a similar position. It’s a network of positive people who look at how we can resolve situations, rather than sit back and complain about the things we cannot do anything about.

“Having met the group, I’ve noticed there is a broad spectrum of farmers, farms, locations and farm sizes. Everyone is willing to share and I really hope this continues. I believe that farmers need to help each other by being honest and sharing knowledge to keep farming at the top of its game.”

“ Benchmarking is not something we’ve really concentrated on in the past and I’m keen to learn where our strengths lie and where our weaknesses are. ”



Consultant's view

As well as working closely with AHDB, Independent Consultant James Hadwin is helping Ian drive improvements. Working with data from Farmbench, James is looking forward to seeing how Ian can ensure he is delivering a product that the market wants, but also helping to get the farm in a strong financial position to stand up on its own.

“Like many beef farmers, Ian is having to take a close look at his business. With Brexit around the corner and uncertainty around farm subsidy, Ian sees Strategic Farms as a way to look into the issues currently facing his business.

“There are key areas that both Ian and I know he needs to look at improving, but seeing it on paper will help to provide focus and generate discussion with the 12 other Strategic Farms,” James explains.

After the initial visit to the farm, James has recommended that they work together to put a solid grazing plan in place and ensure that the grass growth rates are monitored closely. He will be working in partnership with Ian's vet to create health plans to ensure the animals are able to meet their full potential as quickly as possible.



“ As a farmer myself, I am excited to be involved as I feel the beef industry faces specific challenges and it is only by focusing on business performance and pushing to make changes that the industry can move forward in a profitable way. ”

42 Dillington Farms

Strategic Potato Farm South West

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Chris Wilson	Somerset	Mixed

Dillington farm is a 1,000ha estate, which boasts a 370-cow dairy herd and an arable rotation of oilseed rape, maize and potatoes.

Commercially, the farm produces Electra potatoes, which are ideal for the area due to their high-yielding qualities. Melody, Georgina and Lalorma are also grown to meet the demands of their main supplier, Branston, to be packed for Tesco.

The farm was introduced as SPot South West at the beginning of the 2017 season. The SPot South West host's first year trials are looking into the effects of nitrogen and irrigation, which is a useful study for the area due to the high counts of dry matter.



16 East Dale Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Richard Ogg	Lincolnshire	Arable, beef and sheep

"I'm joining Strategic Farms with a 205ha mixed arable and livestock enterprise. The main reason for taking part is to learn more about how to improve the farm business and have more control over the external factors that we face. I'm specifically interested in cattle health and know that planning is essential to improve the performance of my cattle. Having the opportunity to draw on the expert knowledge of AHDB staff will help me to further develop my farm."

40 Elbridge Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
E.H. Holdstock and Son	Kent	Livestock, arable, potato and top fruit

"We are a family farm based in Kent, farming 620ha. Currently, we have 230 Sussex cows plus followers, six Sussex bulls, 100 Romney x Suffolk ewes, 80 Romney ewes and five rams. Our Sussex herd is the second largest herd of this breed in the country and, alongside winter forage, we feed them on waste potatoes and arable by-products. By being involved with Strategic Farms, we want to be able to produce more consistent carcasses, as well as increasing the profitability of the livestock enterprise. We've already made improvements to our silage quality over the last year, so now we would like to focus on getting the best out of the area we have by looking at our grassland management."





31 *Elveden Farms*

Strategic Potato Farm East

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Andrew Francis	Suffolk	Potatoes, onions, carrots and parsnips

“My name is Andrew Francis, I’m Senior Farm Manager at the Elveden Estate. We specialise in vegetable production, particularly potatoes, onions, carrots and parsnips. We grow approximately 12,000 acres of potatoes, which consists of a combination of processing, pre-pack, and our own variety of home-branded salad potatoes.

“Our decision to become SPot Farm hosts was borne out of a quest for knowledge; we have several challenges that come into our business and know local enterprises with light soils who find it difficult to keep moisture and nutrition in. Holding a SPot Farm at Elveden allows us to have a test bed where we can look at best practice and provide an opportunity for innovation.

“Our 22,500-acre estate is located in the East Anglian ‘Brecks’, a name originating from the medieval term for ‘broken land’, referring to the nutrient-deficient, sandy soils.

“With help from The Greater Cambridge/Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership and AHDB funding, SPot Farm East puts potato research into practice in a commercial-scale growing environment, demonstrating cutting-edge techniques that are appropriate to the region and market sector.

“Typically, we grow a crop of potatoes on a given field once every six years, on land where the soil depth is between 10–100cm and mainly made up of sand with flints over a chalky till.

“On an annual basis, we grow 230ha processing potatoes, 130ha salad potatoes and 120ha baking potatoes. During the 2017 growing season, we considered key problems facing growers in our area through field trials at SPot Farm East.”



32 E. J. Barker & Sons

Cereals & Oilseeds Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Brian Barker	Suffolk	Arable

Brian is the first strategic farmer for AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and will continue to build on his impressive record as a Monitor Farmer.

“I want to build on the Monitor Farm project and look at the short- and long-term impact of decisions on my business. Understanding risk management is key, as is financial scrutiny of farm trials. As a host of a Strategic Farm, I want to make decisions that bring the best returns on investment. Most of all, I want to share my journey with others.”



37 Freefolk Farms

Basingstoke Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Hugh Crosbie Dawson	Hampshire	Arable, dairy and sheep

“I wanted to become a Monitor Farm host because I thought it would make us look at our costs and analyse them in more detail. I often think in farming there’s a danger that you carry on doing what you’ve always done as you don’t necessarily have time to sit down and analyse your business. My ambition is to reduce fixed and variable costs, increase efficiency and make further use of precision farming methods. It would be good to have a closer handle on our costs.”

17 Gander Farm

Brigg Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Colin Chappell	Lincolnshire	Arable and beef

“I wanted to become a Monitor Farmer to push my business forward. I don’t know where the journey will take me, but I’m looking forward to seeing what we will discover.”

“During the three years of the programme, I hope to look at succession, joint venture farming and how the farm can survive in a post-EU Britain.”

“We all have a lot of challenges on the horizon, so it’s an opportunity for us all to share practical and independent information in order to push our farms in the right direction.”



39 G.H. Dean

Sittingbourne Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Mark Bowsher-Gibbs	Kent	Arable, fruit and sheep



Mark Bowsher-Gibbs, Farm and Estate Manager at G.H. Dean in Kent grew 18ha of the Silverka soya bean variety for the first time in 2017. It was inoculated with a rhizobium to promote nodulation, and dressed with thiram.

Mark says: “We tried soya this year as an alternative to peas for a legume break crop, with around 20 per cent of our normal pea area sown to soya instead.

“Soya needs to be harvested relatively late in the season, but I’m hoping that could be less of a problem for us as we have a warmer microclimate and lighter soils.”

Previously, the land was in a second wheat, which was then sown to feed oats last September as an overwinter catch crop. It was grazed by sheep throughout December and January, and sprayed off in February.

A disc was used to create a tilth when the soils had warmed up during April, and then the new soya crop was established with a Sumo drill in the first week of May. He levelled off and firmed up the seedbed with the Tislo Rake’n’Roll.

Mark says: “We are aware that seeding depth is critical in achieving a uniform establishment.”

The crop grew away well, with favourable soil temperatures at drilling. Mark paid particular attention to pigeon control during the first fortnight of establishment.

Mark and the team harvested the soya with a Claas 770 combine around 5 October, after a couple of false starts.

“We went into the soya a couple of times before we got it right. The first time we went in, although the seed was dry at 14 per cent, the stems were green and wrapping in the combine.

“So then we left it another fortnight and although the moisture content had gone up to about 19 per cent in the seed, just because of the intermittent rain, the hull was drier and it actually combined fairly well.”

The soya yielded as Mark hoped at around 2.4t/ha, giving him a gross margin of £625/ha. This is good enough for him to try soya again next year.

“ Most farmers are curious – they want to adapt and evolve, and I’m the same. Part of the enjoyment of the job is bringing in innovation and seeing how we can farm more cost-effectively without compromising our output. Normally, if I go to a meeting, I come away with one new idea, and that’s all you need really to spark the process of change on your own farm. ”

Mark Bowsher-Gibbs Farm and Estate Manager, G.H. Dean

7 Girtridge Farm

North Ayrshire Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
John Howie	North Ayrshire	Arable, beef and sheep

“Ultimately, I would like to grow the business and expand the farm as efficiently as possible, maximising profit and reducing costs.

“I am really looking forward to learning from other farmers and exploring what we could do at Girtridge to strengthen our business. I think it will be a huge learning curve, but one that I will benefit from, as well as the local farmers who get involved.

“I’m not in favour of the ‘aye done’ approach – I like to be open to new ideas and I’m looking forward to hearing the thoughts of others on what we might look at doing differently.”



23 Heal Farms

Strategic Potato Farm West

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Matthew Wallace, Farm Director	Shropshire	Arable and poultry



“*Heal Farms is an estate of arable crops and poultry, growing about 500ha of potatoes each year.*

With a historic problem with Potato Cyst Nematodes (PCN) and Parasitic Free Living Nematode (FLN), we are keen to develop our understanding of both infestations by hosting SPot Farm West.”

Matthew Wallace Farm Director

Demonstration in the first year focused on:

- The tolerance of resistant varieties
- Trap crops
- Mycorrhizal inoculation
- Biofumigation
- New Bayer nematicide

Farm business improvement – through discussion

Inspiring Farm Excellence is founded on the fact that farmers learn best from each other and a large number of active discussion groups have been operating under that principle for many years. Sharing and exchanging experience and ideas are a great catalyst for improved business performance and innovation.

Business groups are a great example of facilitated group discussions that help farmers and growers work together to identify best practice and focus on issues relevant to the group. Being part of a business group gives supported access to Farmbench, AHDB's web-based benchmarking tool. This provides the initial focus of group meetings and allows participants to make confidential cost comparisons to the group and compare performance with regional and national data.

Whole-farm benchmarking is recognised as a key contributor to building a competitive and resilient industry. Over the last 18 months, Farmbench has been developed by AHDB to replace the applications that were previously used by Cereals & Oilseeds, Potatoes and Beef & Lamb sectors. This brings the significant benefits of the inclusion of international data for comparison, and connection to the development of a suite of additional tools all linked to a common business platform.

Performance groups bring together farmers and growers who are pushing the boundaries of business and technical performance to accelerate innovation and develop new best practice. Harnessing the combined expertise and experience from top performance is key to delivering an industry fit for the future.



Our farmer network

New this year:

- 13 Beef & Lamb Strategic Farms
- Six Monitor Farms and one Cereals & Oilseeds Strategic Farm
- Nine Scottish Monitor Farms (jointly with QMS)
- One Dairy Strategic Farm
- Two Strategic Horticultural Centres
- One Pork Strategic Farm
- Two Strategic Potato (SPot) Farms

Planned for next spring:

- Six new Monitor farms including Wales and Northern Ireland
- Five new Dairy Strategic Farms linked to Optimal Systems
- Two new Pork Strategic Farms



26 Houghton Lodge Farm

Strategic Dairy Farm

FARMER NAME

Tom Rawson, Oliver Hall and Charlie Crotty

LOCATION

Leicestershire

FARM TYPE

Dairy (spring block calving)

Tell us about you

My name is Tom Rawson, I left Harper Adams College in 1999 and have been dairy farming ever since. I became a partner with my parents and wife in 2006 in our tenancy home farm in West Yorkshire. After that, I co-founded Evolution Farming with Oliver Hall and Charlie Crotty.

Houghton Lodge Farm is a joint venture with Farmcare Limited and has brought life back to a redundant dairy unit. The last dairy herd left the estate in 2004 and by reintroducing it, the hope is to increase soil indices and assist in black-grass control. Jack Smith, from Farmcare, oversees the arable operation.



“ Hitting the numbers is key to making the project a success and being a Strategic Dairy Farm pushes us to get the figures up to date every three months. It’s going to take us three years to get the farm to where we want it to be. ”

Tom Rawson Co-founder, Evolution Farming



“ Being open and honest about the key performance data is a great opportunity for farmers to follow the development of a new dairy farm, while encouraging farmer-to-farmer learning and benchmarking. ”

Izak van Heerden AHDB Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager

Why did you get involved in the AHDB Strategic Farm initiative?

It is a good opportunity to get people involved and see what we are doing. From a selfish point of view, it will push us to be up to date with our facts and figures.

What is your role and responsibility in the management of the Strategic Farm?

My duties are monitoring performance, organising contractors and dealing with stakeholders. Mark Housby, our Herd Manager, is responsible for looking after grazing, fertility and staff management.

What are the main outcomes you hope to achieve?

I would hope to be able to show within the first three years of this project that you can rent a large farm, buy an all-year-round calving herd at a low price and turn it into a profit-making block calving enterprise that can withstand market volatility.

What on-farm changes do you hope to make?

Increasing the herd is one area we need to address. Due to a diverse selection of cows, two calving blocks have been necessary initially to help with cash flow and to get the business going. In the long term, the aim is to be spring block only.

Reducing reliance on cake, drawing water from our new borehole and dedicating a member of staff to get the calf management basics right will help us manage costs.

What areas of research are most important to the industry and your business?

Areas of research most important to me would be practical projects where you can replicate the best ones at farm level, for example out wintering methods.

Which biggest challenges are you looking to tackle?

The biggest challenge is managing a volatile income but delivering results year after year. Therefore, this will centre on high milk from forage per hectare and low costs of production.

What are the key details?

Targets for the year are yields of 4,331 litres/cow with 3,104 litres of forage. Next year we project an increase to 5,505 litres/cow with 3,591 litres from forage. It is hoped 2017 will return a business profit of 2.34p/litre.

The key numbers we will be focusing on for this farm are the return on capital. We feel it is important to provide return to our investors who have put faith in the business and us. In order to achieve good return levels on capital, we will be monitoring fertility because we have to retain and build numbers if we want to grow. Herd health is a big one. Targets such as empty rates and monitoring grass growth level eating and utilising, are also essential.

AHDB Dairy is looking to build its network of Strategic Dairy Farms to complement the work on optimal dairy systems. The new farms will operate either a tight block (autumn or spring) or all-year-round calving system, with a good geographical spread across Scotland, England and Wales.

To find out more and apply, visit dairy.ahdb.org.uk



38 Howard & Daughter

Chelmsford Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Christy and Hew Willett	Essex	Arable

“We wanted to become a Monitor Farm because we felt it would push us to improve. The Monitor Farm makes you think and experiment. We’re keen to learn, and one of the best ways is to get together with other farmers.

“At the end of the three years, we want to have a much better handle on our costs. To do this, we’d like to be much more precise and also use the information from mapping better so that we get the most out of it.

“Our greatest challenge is to keep our cost of production as low as possible without sacrificing yield.”



33 34 Town Farm & Tump Farm

Hereford Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Russell Price and Martin Williams	Herefordshire/Worcestershire	Arable



“ We are prepared to stand up and bare our business souls. We welcome people to come and tell us what they think. ”

Our topic for the three years is: ‘Vision 2020’ – How farmers can prepare their businesses in light of future uncertainties.

“We need to work better as a team, and hopefully our Monitor Farm period will enable local farmers to get together, share their concerns and knowledge, and we aim to come out fitter at the end of it.

“Although we have separate businesses, the challenges we face are broadly the same. Running this as a joint project gives us the opportunity to make direct comparisons in our farming practices to help them move forward.”

11 Kirkhouse

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Edward Dean	Cumbria	Beef and sheep

“I’m joining Strategic Farms to improve the overall efficiency of my farm business. I currently farm 154ha in Cumbria and have a flock of 300 commercial Texel ewes, eight pedigree Dutch Texels and a mix of nine rams. My father used to run the farm as a dairy enterprise until foot and mouth ended dairy production in 2001. We then decided to make the change to focus on meat production. There are currently 130 cows and four Limousin bulls on-farm. I’m looking forward to being able to increase my focus on herd health and start a screening and eradication scheme for Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) and Johne’s disease. With regards to my sheep, I’m going to focus on monitoring body condition score more closely to better control lamb size and improve ease of lambing.”



20 Little Morton Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Joe Howard, RE Howard & Sons	Nottinghamshire	Arable, carrots, potatoes, sugar beet and beef



“My family and I have been farming at Little Morton Farm in north Nottinghamshire since 1887. With our core enterprise in vegetable production and conventional arable cropping, we’ve recently introduced beef into the rotation. We have 400ha of land down to grass and stock 330 Angus suckler cattle, finishing our own progeny from forage, as well as finishing 200 Angus x dairy stores per year. Being part of Strategic Farms will help me to find new techniques to finish animals more consistently and accurately to meet target specifications at a younger age. Currently, we use less than 60kg of nitrogen per ha per year, and I’m keen to grow and utilise a greater tonnage of grass per ha without increasing the use of nitrogen.”

8 Prestonhall & Saughland Farms

Lothians Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME

Bill Gray and Peter Eccles

LOCATION

Lothians

FARM TYPE

Arable, beef and sheep

“ I wanted to be involved because there are many challenges and uncertainties ahead. I wanted to take a fresh look at the business and benefit from the knowledge within the group. With the Monitor Farm, we’ve got the opportunity to have a structured approach to business improvement. I want to know how well we are doing now and what we can do better. ”

Bill Gray

“ I want us to be the best we can be. We aim to build a sustainable business model we can be proud of. Enjoyment is a big factor of what we do too. I’m excited about the future, and feel confident we can overcome the challenges we face. The Monitor Farm process will help us all to find new ways to make our businesses succeed. ”

Peter Eccles



12 *Low Houselop Farm*

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
David Monkhouse	County Durham	Arable, beef, sheep and vegetables

“I currently farm 110ha in County Durham and decided to join AHDB Strategic Farms in order to take advice from experts and peers to get the best of my business. At Low Houselop Farm, we have 300 crossed ewes, 250 Blackface ewes, nine rams, 80 pure and crossed Limousin cows and four bulls. Keeping up to date is really important, so I’m keen to get advice on new technologies that I haven’t used before, as well as enhancing my current practices. Improving my grassland and soil management is another area I’d like to focus on as I believe they are the cornerstone to any agricultural enterprise. With Brexit around the corner, I want to ensure my sheep enterprise is strong and prepare for any scenarios that the industry may face.”



36 *Lower Odd Farm*

Malmesbury Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Roger Wilson	Wiltshire	Arable and beef

“I wanted to become a Monitor Farmer because exchanging knowledge and information between farmers is very important and we don’t do it enough.

“I’m really looking forward to getting input from other farmers, both young and old. At the end of the three years of the programme, I hope that we’ll have a better understanding of our soil’s capacity. We’re also just starting to use variable rate fertiliser, so I’d like to know whether we’ll see any benefit from it.

“Succession is also a big topic for us. I’m 58, and my son is desperate to farm here when he finishes his studies. In a way, we’re lucky because we can work together. But a small farm of this size couldn’t support both of us at the same time. I’m hoping that we can look at succession planning during the Monitor Farm programme.”



Strategic Pork Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
David Goodier	Lancashire	Arable, pigs, chicken

Listening and questioning leads to better performance

Considering himself quite an open person, David Goodier saw a unique opportunity to learn and improve his 230-sow unit through taking part in AHDB’s pilot Strategic Farm.

“If you want to be the best, you’ve got to learn from others. Being part of this project has made me question what we’re doing on our unit much more – I’m always keen to listen to advice and try and implement changes people have suggested.”

By opening up his unit to fellow producers and the allied industry, he has benefited from the pooling of ideas, with plenty of suggestions on what could be changed to help improve pig performance.

The first step was to start using an electronic recording system fully for the first time as, without accurate performance data, it’s difficult to understand or prioritise where improvements need to be made.

Lasting results

An early priority was to reduce pre-weaning mortality which, at 15 per cent, was above the industry average when the project started in June 2016. David and his stockman Wayne Connell took a number of practical steps to try and get this down to around 10 per cent so that the unit can consistently wean just over 11 good piglets per litter. They achieved this within six months and have maintained these lower mortality levels for more than a year.

AHDB helped tag four batches of pigs with ultra-high-frequency (UHF) tags so that information about the cause of death for individual piglets could be logged.

This helped them to understand the issues and make more targeted management changes. David’s vet carried out a two-day staff training course and Wayne also spent time in the farrowing house on one of JSR Farming’s breeding units.



New service pens and routine

Changes have been made to the artificial insemination (AI) service area to provide two separate AI pens to help with more accurate heat detection.

Timing of insemination is also highly important and, having mapped the timing of oestrus with the help of AHDB Knowledge Exchange Manager Angela Cliff, it was decided to serve each sow twice instead of three times and leave a longer time between each serve so that service was as close to the optimum time as possible.

The key is learning not to rush. David says: "We're now waiting until Monday afternoon to serve and it is making a difference compared to doing it in the morning as we always had before. We just needed the confidence to wait until we saw a proper heat."

Putting in the groundwork with gilts

The main focus now, in year two, is on parity structure and gilt performance to improve numbers born per litter.

Gilt nutrition is an area that's been pinpointed for review, with David's recorded data showing consistently low numbers born in the second litter.

Angela says: "We're working on adjusting gilts' diets, having had a good look at the current feed curve and gilt condition at different stages of the production cycle."

Making the most of investment

In the finisher herd, David has made major investment in a new building to help cater for increased pig numbers being produced by the breeding herd and to enable them to take pigs to higher finished weights.

Pigs are going to be individually tagged, then weighed at birth, weaning and a week before slaughter, which will provide really detailed information on how individual pigs perform in the new accommodation and help ensure the business makes the most of the investment.

David says: "I hope other producers can relate to seeing things tried out here, then maybe take them back to their own farms and try and make improvements there too."



AHDB is looking for new pork producers to become part of the Strategic Farms programme in 2018, building on the success of the pilot initiative at David Goodier's farm.

For more information, visit pork.ahdb.org.uk

43 Manor Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Bertie Newman	Dorset	Organic beef and sheep

“I join Strategic Farms as one of the younger members, hoping to increase my knowledge by learning from other experienced farmers. After college, I spent time travelling and I’m now back working alongside my dad on the organic family farm in Dorset. Manor Farm is 610ha, made up of 565ha of grasses, 49ha of white clover and ryegrass, and 5ha of peas and barley. We’ve only started to finish our own store cattle this year and currently have 100 Aberdeen Angus and 40 Hereford cattle. We also keep 1,200 ewes on-farm. Improving our grassland management is an area I’d like to focus on, as well as starting to benchmark our profitability. By making these improvements, I hope we will be able to finish the cattle in the future on a simple system using mainly grass.”



35 Manor Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
David Barton	Gloucestershire	Arable and beef

“With over 35 years of experience, I am still always looking for new ways to improve my suckler beef production. I currently have 60 South Devon and Sussex x Saler cows and breed my own replacements. Improving the benchmarking on-farm is a large focus area, as well as learning how to get the best from grass and forage. I’m hoping that being involved in Strategic Farms will provide the opportunity to share information and engage with other farmers, as I often feel this is the best way to learn about different techniques and make improvements.”



22 Manor Farm

Newark Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
John Miller	Nottinghamshire	Arable

“I see the Monitor Farm programme as a challenge. It’s about getting like-minded farmers together, thinking of our problems and the solutions to those problems. We want to try to make ourselves more profitable and productive. Hopefully, if we work together, then we can do that.

“My personal goal is to make my farm more profitable and become a better farmer.

“I’d like to think we’ve got black-grass under control, and to a certain extent we have, but one slip-up and the black-grass is there. Because of this, we’ve moved away from all-autumn establishment to more spring establishment, trying to mix the two to help with black-grass control.

“The soil is our main asset on the farm and we need to learn how to look after it, increase the organic matter content and improve our understanding. Realistically, we shouldn’t have taken our eyes off soil health.”



4 Mill of Inverarity

Angus Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Alison, Rob, Rory and Tom Stodart	Angus	Arable, beef and sheep



“We really want to make sure we have something to pass on to our children. We love farming, it really is a way of life for us, but it needs to be a sustainable business as well. That’s a big part of the reason we wanted to be involved in the Monitor Farm project, to help us become more productive and efficient in the long term.

“We have been grazing the cattle out and about at extra cost and we want to keep them on-farm in future. However, that would mean giving over arable land to pasture and we’re not sure that’s the best idea. Do we reduce livestock or reduce cereals? It’s all up for discussion.”

“We are running a trial on undersowing spring barley with grass. The aim is to find the best variety we can put down under the barley so we can graze our breeding ewes over the winter. We have a large area of this spring crop and we want to make the field work for the rest of the year.”

The National Cut Flower Centre

PROJECT MANAGER
Lyndon Mason

LOCATION
Lincolnshire

FARM TYPE
Ornamentals

Why do we have a National Cut Flower Centre?

For a long time, the UK had a relatively low per capita consumption of cut flowers compared with other Western European countries, but between the late 1980s and early 2000s, the UK's annual imports of cut flowers rose from some £125m to around £550m. Over the same period, the value of UK-grown cut flowers remained static at around £50m per year.

This shortage of enterprise was attributed to, firstly, a lack of know-how, and secondly, a reluctance to challenge the Dutch flower export market. Therefore, the Cut Flower Centre was developed to become the primary site for cut flower research in the UK.

What does the Cut Flower Centre do?

The Cut Flower Centre (CFC) project was set up in 2007, largely with funding from AHDB Horticulture, with the immediate aim of providing information about cut flower crops and growing formats that are new to UK production, enabling UK growers to make informed choices about different marketing opportunities.

The longer-term aim is to stimulate the UK growers' interest in developing and commercialising novel cut flowers, while continuing to improve the quality of the more traditional products.

Trials include novel variety or species trials, herbicide trials, long-term Fusarium work, and potentially nutrient management research.





How does the Centre work?

The CFC is here to help the UK cut flower industry as a whole and is run “by the industry, for the industry”. Its strategic direction is driven by a management group made up of key individuals who represent the whole cross section from grower, to packer, to supermarkets.

What has the project achieved?

The Centre continues to develop its role as an information hub and cohesive voice for the UK cut flower industry, demonstrated by the popularity at the regular open days.

Over the two phases of the project so far, the CFC has hosted AHDB Horticulture-funded herbicide trials resulting in new EAMU applications, developed cultivation recommendations (planting density, continuity of cropping, whether under

tunnel or glass, etc) for 17 varieties or species, identified particular varieties that have good shelf life, determined weaknesses in varieties (such as attractiveness to pests), and established alternative growing media mixes for boxed lilies. Furthermore, a stand-alone trial investigating hydroponic production of cut flowers identified that stocks are oxygen-hungry plants.

How do growers take home the knowledge?

The work has been widely publicised via a broad range of outlets, including the CFC website (www.thecutflowercentre.co.uk), various publications (such as factsheets and articles in the AHDB Grower), TV and radio programmes, as well as the ever-popular annual Open Day in early August each year, where growers can view the trials and ask questions of the contractor Lyndon Mason, and the project management group.

14 Northfields Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Guy Prudom	North Yorkshire	Arable and beef

“I’m a beef and arable farmer from North Yorkshire, working alongside my parents and one part-time member of staff. By joining Strategic Farms, I’m looking to increase my knowledge of herd genetics and feed management. Making improvements to my grassland management will help me to increase return per hectare and, with infrastructure nearly in place to allow for rotational grazing, I’m hoping to learn how to maximise my grass utilisation to get the most from my system.”



21 Park Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Tony Seals	Derbyshire	Arable and beef

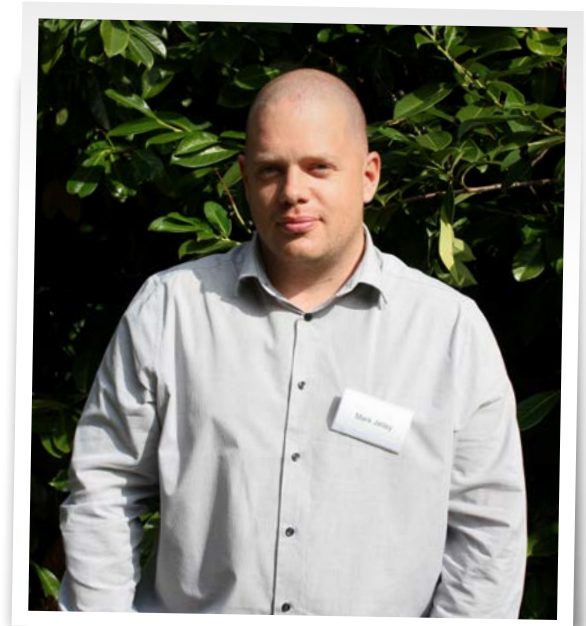
“Alongside my father and brother, I manage a 135ha mixed farm in Derbyshire. We currently have native and continental cattle on-farm and I want to be able to improve my profit margins on finishing bulls through beef feed efficiency. I’d also like to look at how we can reduce the mortality rate among the cattle. AHDB will be able to give me fresh insights and I always feel it is important to have an understanding of new techniques so that I can apply them to improve the overall farm business.”

28 Perkins Lodge

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Mark Jelley	Northamptonshire	Arable and beef

“I’ve been managing my family’s beef enterprise since returning home from Harper Adams in 2002. My family moved to the farm, based in Long Buckby, Northamptonshire, in 1920 and run a herd of 95 Hereford x Friesian cows, finishing all of the calves on the farm. Following an outbreak of TB in 2017, suckler cow numbers have fallen by 20 per cent. We are now looking to rebuild numbers and taking this opportunity to start breeding our own replacements. The 200ha farm is currently part of AHDB Beef & Lamb’s ‘Connected Farm’ trial and, as a Strategic Farm, we’re hoping to be able to drive the experience gained from the project forward and discuss and share results with other producers.”



44 Rawston Farm

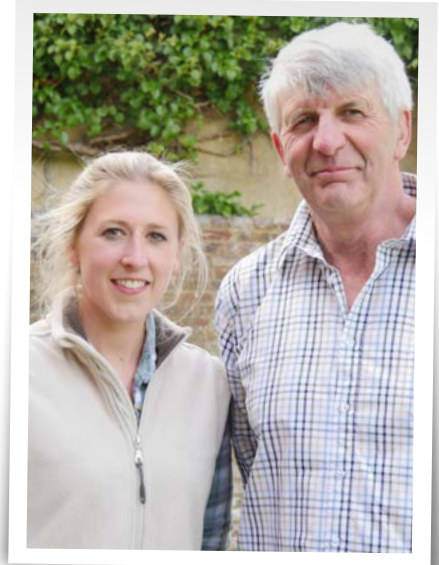
Blandford Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
James and Georgie Cossins	Dorset	Arable, dairy and beef

“By the end of the Monitor Farm programme, we’d like to have a better understanding of our cost of production, the profitability of the various enterprises, and perhaps get an idea of the direction of travel.

“Our biggest challenges are low commodity prices for what we produce. We’re trying to produce crops as profitably as we can, but does that mean throwing everything at them to get high yields or throwing slightly less at them, to go for slightly lower yields?”

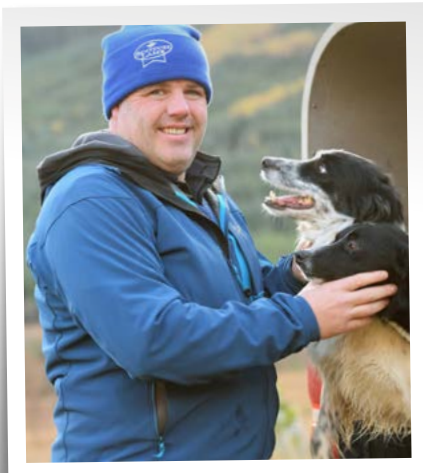
“We’ve also got environmental considerations here in Dorset – we have potential issues with the River Stour and the River Frome, and the Poole Harbour catchment area. We’d like to think that, as a Monitor Farm, we could work with Bournemouth and Wessex Water on various projects.”



6 Strone Farm

Lochaber Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Chris Cameron	Lochaber	Beef and sheep



“We are far from perfect and we know that there is plenty of scope to make improvements to our business through being part of the Monitor Farm project. We’re also really looking forward to sharing the benefits of having a Monitor Farm in Lochaber with other farmers in the area.

“We have already successfully introduced some changes in response to some of the main challenges the farm faces – including an annual rainfall of 120in and a major fox problem at lambing time.

“However, we are open to fresh ideas to improve the efficiency of the business, which runs 550 North Country Cheviot ewes and 40 pure Limousin cows.”

46 Tregairewoon Farm

Truro Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Howard Emmett	Cornwall	Arable

“I wanted to become a Monitor Farm host to make it easier for farmers in Cornwall to share information, and to help us all to improve our farming. There are a lot of fields around here that aren’t meeting the yields they could do, and this is something that I’d like to look at over the three years of the programme.

“I’ve been here all my life and our biggest challenge is to make a profit. I want to find a rotation for Tregairewoon that will give us that profit. Like many other farmers, I’m looking for an alternative break crop to oilseed rape, which we dropped from the rotation in 2015 because of profitability issues.”



25 Stoughton Estate (Farmcare)

Leicester Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Jack Smith	Leicestershire	Arable

“There are so many people in this area who have similar challenges to ours, for example black-grass and a reduction in soil organic matter levels. I’m hoping that if we can share all those things together, somewhere there’ll be some solutions.

Our fields are very small, ex-grassland with lots of headlands. I’d like to improve our field structure and performance so that one day we’re in the top 10 per cent of arable farms in the country. At the moment, we wouldn’t be and I want to try and find out why.

Jack Smith Farm Manager,
Stoughton Estate

”

Jack Smith, Farm Manager at Stoughton Estate, on the outskirts of Leicester, plans the meeting topics with a steering group of other farmers and agronomists, and AHDB Knowledge Exchange Manager Harry Henderson.

An important subject for the group is to identify the good traits of farm businesses, regardless of size.

It is a topic that has come up because the Monitor Farm group includes a wide variety of farm sizes, all from the local area. Jack manages 1,650ha for Farmcare and is at the larger end of the spectrum.

Jack says: “I’m striving to have a better-performing business. People often think that bigger is better but that’s not always true. You can get a lot of diseconomies of scale and end up taking your eye off the ball because you’re trying to look at too many things.

“I’d like us to look at the secrets behind successful businesses. What can the big farms learn from the small ones, and vice versa?”

“Our Monitor Farm benchmarking group works really well. There are 10 core farmers and although we’re not all of a comparative size, there is always something you can learn.

“We’re not just farming, we’re running a business. That means we’re always trying to improve our performance. If we find a successful business that’s half our size, we want to know what they are doing to make it work.”

The group has been benchmarking using AHDB’s CropBench+ programme and this year will use the new Farmbench system, which allows farmers to enter multiple enterprises into the same programme.



30 Swanton Morley Farms

Dereham Monitor Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Simon Brock	Norfolk	Arable and beef

Simon Brock, who farms at Swanton Morley, near Dereham, entered the national Yield Enhancement Network (YEN) competition, where farmers across the UK try to achieve both the highest yield and the highest percentage of their potential yield.

Simon says: "I'm taking part because I want to see how far we can push yields, as they're the key to profit. Yield affects our cost of production per tonne the most."

For this year's competition, a group of local farmers through the Monitor Farm group chose a 27ha field of Evolution winter wheat. Together with the Monitor Farm group, Simon changed some of his usual farming practices on this field to help increase his chances of a good yield. These included:

- More in-field measurements, including recording key dates of growth stages and photos for visual assessments
- Regular tissue tests to check for mineral deficiencies
- Splitting N applied into four applications
- Higher rates of potash and magnesium, due to inherent low levels of soil Mg
- Protectant fungicide use, particularly to make sure that no septoria is established

Judging

The overall yield was judged by taking the crop to a nearby weighbridge and the results showed that the 3ha YEN entry yielded 12.17t/ha. This was compared to an average yield of 10.7t/ha across the rest of the 26.6ha field.

Simon says: "We are very pleased with the YEN results as they are above the farm average of 9 or 10t/ha for this field.

"We tried a number of inputs including four splits of nitrogen rather than our usual three, a very robust five-spray fungicide programme, Korn Kali to address low magnesium and potassium as well as biostimulant applications.

"We've also recently installed weigh cells to our grain trailers. Hopefully this will allow us to do more individual tramline trails so we can see which inputs are adding most to the result."



“ I wanted to become a Monitor Farmer because I've got to the stage in farming where I think I need to be challenged more. I also think that more heads are better than one, so it will benefit us all to gather farmers from a similar area, see what we're doing and hopefully improve our businesses, together. ”

Simon Brock

Teresa Meadows, AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds Knowledge Exchange Manager for East Anglia, says:

"In the context of the Monitor Farm network, there has been a valuable benefit to entering the ADAS-led YEN challenge via the discussions through the season. In the group setting, we can analyse the performance of the crop and also talk about the production cost implications of the innovations needed to boost yields.

"Simon's YEN entry has shown that it is possible to push on-farm yields. It is the learning which comes from this innovation and taking best practice forward that will benefit the local farmers and industry."

41 West Sherford Farm

Beef & Lamb Strategic Farm

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
John Haines	South Devon	Beef

“I currently manage a holding of 230ha in South Devon, which focuses on suckler beef production. On-farm, there are currently 100 cross-bred cows, shared between three Blonde D’Aquitaine bulls. I also sell some weaned calves but mostly store cattle at around 18 months old. I currently don’t have a nutrition plan, so by participating in Strategic Farms, I’m hoping I can get advice on grassland management and how to use concentrates more efficiently. There are also more technical ways of choosing breeding stock that I’d like to learn from others, as well as finding options for overwintering dry cows.”



10 Whitriggs Farm

Borders Monitor Farm Joint project between AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds and Quality Meat Scotland

FARMER NAME	LOCATION	FARM TYPE
Robert, Lesley and Stuart Mitchell	Scottish Borders	Arable, beef and sheep

“We have a spring-calving herd and are keen to tighten up our calving period if we can. We think there is a potential benefit in synchronising our cows, especially our heifers, to ensure that they get into calf quickly and are looking forward to hearing what other local farmers think.

“Another key aim at Whitriggs is for our lambs to finish quickly off grass, at minimal cost. We believe that giving lambs a bolus boosts their growth rates and helps them reach their finished weight more quickly. However, we are now doing a trial to allow us to properly assess the extent of any boost in financial returns as a result of using the boluses.”



Unearth your strengths

Farmbench is an AHDB business tool to help you manage risk, resilience and volatility. It can help you better understand and compare your full cost of production across beef, sheep, potato, arable and dairy enterprises.



“*Farmbench is a way of inputting figures so you can compare your performance with neighbouring, local or national farmers and focus on the areas of your business that need attention.*”

Mark Wood Arable and Beef Farmer, Hereford

“*Every single cost that we have has to be put somewhere. So whether it be beef, cereals, potatoes or other, ie contracting or renewables, you can see exactly where the money is going. The more years you do it, the more accurate you get at it.*”

John Weir Arable and Potatoes, Fife



Benchmarking can play a key role in helping you identify the strengths and weaknesses of your business.

Register your interest at farmbench.ahdb.org.uk and start benchmarking now.

AHDB coming to a farm near you...



Following the launch of the 13 Strategic Beef & Lamb farms, plans are being finalised to host a series of events on each farm which will focus on the individuals' key improvement areas.



Following the launch of the first arable Strategic Farm plans are under way to recruit two further Strategic Farms, while we look to bring on board new Monitor Farms.



We will have new Strategic Dairy Farms to complement the work on optimal dairy systems with farmers operating either a tight block (autumn or spring) or all-year-round calving system, follow us online for further information.



We have a packed calendar of events with technical workshops, open days and study tours to facilitate grower learning and development, visit the horticulture website for more information



We are looking for new pork producers to become a Strategic Farm in 2018, building on the success of the pilot initiative, contact us for more details.



A new AHDB Strategic Potato Farm will be set-up in northern England to complement the current network of farms and will be open to all innovative growers in the region.

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