

The best deal on offer

With a mix of owned, rented and contract farmed ground, the team at Wilbraham Farms need to know they've got a harvester that's capable of comfortably clearing their 810ha of combinable crops when they're at their best.

FARM FACTS

FARM	Wilbraham Farms, near Cambridge
FARMED AREA	810ha (2,400 acres)
CROP	Winter wheat (350 acres), winter barley (350 acres), spring barley (350 acres), peas (350 acres), sugar beet (350 acres)
SOIL TYPE	Predominantly sandy loams over chalk
STAFF	Chris Ascroft and Phil Baynes plus two others at harvest

“This latest generation of LEXION are different beasts altogether. It's a combination of all sorts of things from simple bits like the header pitch function to the really clever CEMOS automatic setting system.”

Chris Ascroft, Cambridgeshire, August 2020, LEXION 6900 TT.

Things have moved on

For the last six seasons Wilbraham Farms have run a LEXION 670 with 9.3m VARIO cutterbar but this year that's been replaced by a brand new 6900, again with a 9.3m VARIO.

WHY CHANGE?

"We generally look at replacing the combine every five to seven years," explains farm manager Chris Ascroft.

"That way I think we find the right balance between depreciation, residual value and reliability – if we went any longer than that we'd be exposing ourselves to a much greater risk of breakdowns and we'd see the second-hand value of the machine drop significantly, making the cost to change even greater.

"Although we have no fixed replacement policy, we're in a cycle that sees our main prime movers swapped out at somewhere between five and seven seasons, spreading our capital expenditure accordingly.

"The other factor I'm very aware of is the need to keep up with technology and to go any longer than that would mean we were seriously lagging behind."

"When it came to making the decision about which machine was right for the job, several different colours were trialled last season but nothing quite measured up to CLAAS' straw walker LEXION.

"Having a number of machines on demo last harvest really opened our eyes up to how things have moved on. Six years ago the 670 was the height of technological sophistication – now it's been blown out of the water.

"This latest generation of LEXION are different beasts altogether. It's a combination of all sorts of things from simple bits like the header pitch function to the really clever CEMOS automatic setting system."

HOW HAS THE 6900 PERFORMED?

"The appetite of the new combine is seriously impressive. In typical 9t/ha crops of wheat where the 670 was doing 35-45 tonnes an hour, the 6900 will comfortably romp on at 50-60 tonnes and spot rates regularly exceed 75 tonnes.

"Getting 33% more throughput you might expect fuel usage to have crept up too but the reverse is true. The old machine would get through an average of 16-litres/ha across all our cropping whereas the new one sits closer to 12-litres/ha.

"Again that's got to be down to a combination of factors but the single most noticeable difference is the smoother flow of crop through the machine – I'm convinced that makes it a good deal more efficient."

But it's not all about output. For the team at Wilbraham the quality of what drops out of the spout is a big factor too.

"One of our contract farming customers said the sample was the best he'd ever seen come direct off a combine, which speaks volumes for itself," says Mr Ascroft.

"Every improvement on the machine is having an impact – the extra drum up front, the tm sieves, JET STREAM cleaning and the grain quality camera. It all adds up to doing a really impressive job."



“And it’s not just the sample that’s clean. The combine itself is a much cleaner beast too – there are so many fewer places for dust and chaff to hang up.”

“Previously we would blow off the 670 every day with a road compressor, now it just needs a quick whip round with the on-board air line.”

QUANTIMETER

“The accuracy of the new Quantimeter is significantly improved. As an example, on one day it recorded that we had cut 508 tonnes of barley. When we checked it, it amounted to 502 tonnes. I’d say an accuracy level of 1% is pretty good.”

“In fact, we now have so much faith in it that we’ve stopped using our trailer weighers. That saves us a good two to three minutes per load – the man on the grain cart just comes in, tips and goes again. It’s a good job given the output of the 6900 – any longer and we’d be struggling to keep up!”

CEMOS

“I was initially dubious about the CEMOS auto settings system, but the guy that drives the combine had driven other LEXION with it previously and had absolute confidence in it.”

“It’s proved to be fantastic and we especially like how easy it is to customize the preferences. Given we’re well over capacity we tend to set it to minimise losses and have the cleanest sample possible – even so, it just eats up the acres at an eye-watering rate.”

“The other benefit is the reduction in fatigue, knowing the system is constantly tweaking things to get the best out of the threshing gear. That works in tandem with the CLAAS S10 steering system which has integrated faultlessly with our RTK Farming Dual Sim correction signal.”

HEADER PITCH CONTROL

“Being able to alter the angle of the cutterbar is fantastic for getting in underneath laid crops like peas, without the need for lifters.”

TERRA TRAC

“The 6900 is the fourth combine we’ve had on tracks. I’m very compaction conscious and when we initially demo-ed a tracked machine, I measured the difference between it and a wheeled combine with a penetrometer, which made the decision easy.”

“With our trailers running on flotation rubber it was nearly always the combine doing the damage, so we decided to take the leap and go down the TERRA TRAC route. The initial outlay was significant but with every change of machine we’ve seen that premium realised in the second-hand value.”

WHY CLAAS?

“We’ve stuck with CLAAS because we’ve always been so well looked after by our dealer MANNNS. Their main depot is very close by, but more important than that, they’re so much better staffed with more knowledgeable people than other dealers.”

“When it came to changing last season we did look at other brands but they couldn’t offer the back-up and, when you looked at the deal, there wasn’t a lot in it. In fact, when you took into account all the extras on the LEXION like header pitch control, CEMOS and tracks it was the best deal on offer.”

