

# Always one step ahead

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George Crane, Norfolk. August 2020, LEXION 6800 TT with CONVIO FLEX header.

With a diverse range of crops all going for seed production, the Crane family need a combine that's capable of handling everything that's thrown at it.

## FARM FACTS

**FARM** Hugh Crane Ltd, near Norwich, Norfolk

**FARMED AREA** 810ha (2,000 acres)

**CROP** Winter wheat 210ha (520 acres), potatoes 162ha (400 acres), sugar beet 120ha (300 acres), peas 81ha (200 acres), winter barley 120ha (300 acres), spring barley 40ha (100 acres), linseed 32ha (80 acres), grass 40ha (100 acres)

**SOIL TYPE** Predominantly sandy loams

**STAFF** George and Nicholas Crane plus another 6 full-timers and up to 12 casuals for potato harvest



## Phenomenal output

This year has seen a significant shift for the Norfolk business Hugh Crane Ltd., moving from a Hybrid LEXION 750 with 9m VARIO cutterbar to a brand-spanking new straw-walker 6800 TT equipped with a belt-fed CONVIO FLEX header.

### WHY A STRAW WALKER COMBINE?

“We’ve always had to balance the need for output with having a combine that’s capable of dealing with our wide range of seed crops.

“Until now there hasn’t been a straw walker machine that could match our requirements in terms of workload.

“The 750 was great for capacity, but we were cautious of potential issues with damper-than-ideal grass and linseed wrapping around rotors. So when CLAAS started talking about a walker combine that could match and potentially exceed the output of a Hybrid we were very interested.

“In the past we’ve run straw walker combines so know their strengths. We took the view that if CLAAS was prepared to put its name to a

machine capable of matching a Hybrid, we had the faith that it would do the job.”

### HOW HAS IT PERFORMED?

“In terms of output the 6800 is quite phenomenal. It regularly exceeds the daily throughputs of the 750 and it does so comfortably.

“It’s rare I’ll see engine loading getting anywhere close to 90% even when we’re unloading on the move and we’re chopping the straw with a blunt set of blades.

“I’m convinced this is down to the changes made at the front end of the machine. That extra separator and concave plus the bigger diameter main drum means the crop flow is so much smoother and much more of the threshing is done up front.

“With previous straw walker machines we’d always be driving to walker losses, this was our limiting factor, but that’s rarely the case now. We just leave it up to the CEMOS auto settings system to determine what’s best to get the best end result.”

### HOW HAVE YOU GOT ON WITH CEMOS?

“Initially I experimented a lot with trying to beat the computer and for a short while I might be able to get a bit more output or reduce losses. But that was only temporary. I quickly learned that I couldn’t maintain the level of performance that CEMOS can, constantly tweaking settings as crop conditions alter.

“What’s interesting is that it’ll tend to run with the concaves wider and the drum running faster than I would, but it doesn’t seem to lose any more or smash the straw, despite some of the really dry conditions we’ve had this harvest.

“What I’ve learnt is how critical the grain quality camera is to all of this – I have the system set to minimise returns, but even so the sample is super clean.

“Normally everything we cut goes through our seed cleaning plant, this year certain crops like the oats have gone straight from the combine into a bin and are going straight out for seed. We never imagined we’d have a combine capable of doing that.”

### WHY A CONVIO FLEX HEADER?

“In the past we’ve used a stripper header to harvest our grass seed but we had to creep along to avoid overloading the returns. When it came to changing the combine this time we knew we wanted to switch to a Draper-type belt-fed header, but we were wary of going to a third-party make.

“We liked the idea of sticking with a CLAAS header on a CLAAS combine because everything is made to fit and is properly integrated. A good example is the header speed-matching – as you push the stick forward the CONVIO automatically picks up the pace according to forward speed. That sort of thing makes all the difference – machine talking to machine seamlessly.

“With the CONVIO we’ve found that the crop flow is so much better – when the grass gets damp and chewy the belts keep feeding it in and there is none of that nasty “whooping” as lumps enter the drum.

“With lots of secondary regrowth and laid patches in this year’s grass it’s proved ideal. Usually it’d be pretty stop-start going backwards and forwards. Having the ability to pause the belts to feather any lumps makes a huge difference and the overload clutch in the knife-drive means it doesn’t get damaged.

“The other massive benefit is that we haven’t had to fit lifters for any crop other than the peas, which are generally flat to the floor. We carry the header much higher than before but pitch it right forward to scoop up laid patches. That way there are no stones coming in which is a huge cost saving – the damage to concaves, etc... can be a big expense to put right.

“But even in standing cereal crops we’re seeing big advantages with the CONVIO. Because everything is fed head-first into the combine, it’s always presented to the drum as it should be. That makes for better threshing, fewer losses, reduced engine loading and a cleaner sample.”

### FIELD SCANNER STEERING

“The new steering system is a big step forward from the old LASER PILOT – there’s no need to constantly stop, calibrate and clean, it just keeps working.

“I use it in tandem with GPS, setting out a straight first run with satellite steering and then letting Field Scanner take over for the rest of the field.

“It’s fantastic for keeping on track and because it takes account of crops leaning over into the previous bout you don’t suffer losses on the end of the header as you would with GPS running straight up and down with a full header every time.”

### WHY CLAAS?

“As a family we’ve run CLAAS combines for the last 60 years – my grandfather was one of the first people in the area with an original SF.

“And, although we’ve remained loyal to the brand, we’re always keen to see what other manufacturers are doing. When it comes to innovation, CLAAS always seems to be one step ahead of the competition and the 6800 is no exception – it’s got some really clever technology on board.

“As seed producers we’re frequently changing varieties and every change requires a full clean down. CLAAS combines are well designed in this respect, crop doesn’t seem to hang up in the guts of the machine and everything is easy to get to to clean down.”

“From a financial viewpoint, CLAAS combines always seem to hold their value well, so that when it comes to changing the depreciation isn’t crippling. When you start to look into it they’re actually very competitively priced combines – comparing spec-for-spec with the competition they’re pretty good value.”

“But it ultimately comes down to back-up. We all have breakdowns but we know the service we get from MANNIS is always absolutely superb.”

