

A frontline tractor



Having a frontline tractor that will comfortably do everything that is asked of it has been key in helping one Pembrokeshire dairy farm develop its business.

Based right on the west coast of Wales, the Williams family's Morfa Milk enterprise has rapidly gained a big following with locals and holiday-makers alike who queue up to buy milk and milkshakes from the farm's cliff-top vending machine. As anyone who's been involved in diversification projects knows, setting up such enterprises is very time-consuming.

"As a family we're not afraid of doing things a little bit differently and have gone down various different diversification routes," explains Randal Williams.

"But sideline projects take up a lot of time and mean you have to streamline your core farming activities, whether it's reducing your time in tractor seat by running more powerful machines or changing your parlour."

Six years ago a bold decision was taken to invest in a 36-point rotary milking parlour to cut milking times in half, freeing up time for other projects. In a similar vein, two seasons ago the family opted to upgrade from their 130hp front-line tractor to a 175hp CLAAS ARION 650.

"We realised a long time ago that just producing commodity milk isn't sustainable for a small-scale family farm like ours so a few years ago we started looking at ways of adding value.



"We could see an increased interest in people wanting to buy locally-produced food and decided we needed to capitalize on that so we set-up our own Morfa Milk brand, selling via a vending machine positioned on the side of the main coast road. It has gone way better than we expected and this year we've extended our reach further, selling through local shops."

Although the self-service set-up has proved to be a huge success, it isn't without its demands. Alongside bottling the milk going out to retail outlets, the vending machine needs to be kept topped up.

“Having a 36-point rotary parlour might seem like an extravagance for a 220-cow herd but it means milking now only takes an hour and a half, freeing up my time to get on with pasteurising, bottling and delivering milk.”

That same principle applies to the family’s machinery fleet.

“Time is the one thing we can’t get any more of and so we need to make sure we have the kit to make the most of every hour we’ve got.

“Last year we decided that we needed a more powerful tractor to speed up our heavier machinery workload. We do a fair bit of tankering, silage-carting and mowing and our existing 130hp tractors were struggling to get it done.

“We looked around at the different options and decided to switch away from what we’d had before and go for a 175hp CLAAS ARION 650.”

WHY CLAAS?

“We tried the tractor on demo and really liked it but the truth of it is that it all came down to the dealer. We’ve had a long relationship with RIVERLEA and have had plenty of kit from them over the years but never a tractor. However we know the back-up is far and beyond the best in the area.

“Their fitters all know their job really well and the stores are always really well stocked so you’re rarely waiting on anything. They’ve got a long history of serving the farmers in this corner of Wales and I’m pretty convinced they’ll be here for many years to come.”

WHY AN ARION 650?

“To get jobs done more quickly we needed to take a significant step up in the horsepower stakes – I wanted something over 170hp.

“What I particularly liked about the ARION 650 is that it’s rated to produce a maximum of 185hp and it’ll do that all day long. There’s no messing about with boost that’s only available for transport or pto work – you get full power all the time.

“For power-hungry jobs like tankering and silage-carting in our hilly landscape the engine seems to hang on in there much better than anything else we’ve tried.”



“The ARION has made us much more efficient in everything we do.”

Randal Williams

GEARBOX AND SUSPENSION

“We really like the six-speed HEXASHIFT powershift. With no big lever to yank about everything’s effortless – you come off the ARION after a long day not feeling like you’ve been arm-wrestling for the last 12 hours.

“That’s helped by the suspension. It’s the first tractor we’ve had with proper cab damping and that makes a huge difference. Comfort-wise it is absolutely brilliant – you can go as fast as you like without bouncing around, hitting your head.

“More importantly, because of its weight distribution, it’s a much more planted machine which, in combination with the suspension, makes it a much more stable platform on our steep ground for things like the fertiliser spreader.

“On our other tractors we could only put two bags on the hopper. The ARION will comfortably handle four. Critically our staff feel more safe and confident in it.”

EFFICIENCY

“Being able to carry double the amount of fertiliser and travel at a decent pace means we can now use our spreader to its full capacity. But that’s just one part of the picture – the ARION has made us much more efficient in everything we do.

“One simple example is hauling in woodchip for bedding. Previously it was a two and half hour round trip, the 650 has knocked that back to an hour and a half. That’s purely down to its power and gearbox – it just doesn’t die back when it hits a hill. An hour saved with each trip is an hour freed up to do something else.”

RELIABLE?

“It’s two years since the ARION arrived and in that time we haven’t had a single issue that’s stopped us. Like any modern machine it’s got complex electronics on board which have their niggles but any problems have been swiftly sorted by the RIVERLEA team.

“As a family we like to keep our tractors a good while – up to 20 years – and we’ve got confidence that the 650 should do that. It seems like a well-engineered, well put together machine.”

FINANCE

“When it came to pricing the machine up, spec-for-spec the ARION was by far the best value for money.

“What made it even more attractive was the bespoke finance CLAAS offered to suit the number of hours covered each year.

“We opted for a four-year package alongside a four year warranty – that way we know exactly what it’s going to cost to run.”

THINKING AHEAD

When it came to getting the specification right, Randal was keen to ensure the farm invested wisely in a machine that would be relatively future-proof.

“I like to think ahead to the future to ensure we don’t have to change tractors just because the technology has moved on. So having a front-linkage and pto means that we can upgrade to a front and rear mower when the time comes. Likewise it’s ISOBUS and auto-steer-ready so when we decide to take the next step up in precision farming kit we can just plug in the gear and go. Ultimately though the ARION isn’t an over-complicated machine to use. Anyone can just jump on it, turn the key and go.

“Critically we know it’s a reliable machine that is more than capable of doing any of the jobs we throw at it. We might be over the top on horsepower but it means we can get the jobs done without struggling. That’s meant there’s been time for us to get on and develop the other parts of the business – it’s been central to that.”



Carwyn Evans, RIVERLEA Field Sales Manager, Philip and Randal Williams

“As a family we like to keep our tractors a good while – up to 20 years – and we’ve got confidence that the 650 should do that. It seems like a well-engineered, well put together machine.”

Randal Williams

Farm Facts

- FARM** Parc-Y-Morfa Farms, Fishguard, Pembrokeshire
- FARMED AREA** 166ha (410 acres) with youngstock reared off farm
- LIVESTOCK** 210-220 cows in milk (spring and autumn block calving) plus another 350-head of followers and beef cattle
- STAFF** Philip, Randal and Rhys Williams plus Barrie Thomas full-time and one other part-time