

Top cheesemaker chooses CLAAS combination

With its working width of 10.3m, a CLAAS front and rear mower combination is increasing efficiency for one of the largest and oldest farmhouse cheese makers in the world.

For the past 180 years the Barber family has been farming in Ditcheat, Somerset, where it combines traditional, age-old practices with the latest technology to produce award-winning Cheddar cheese.

Barber's is one of the world's oldest producers of Cheddar cheese, which it makes using the only remaining traditional cheese starter cultures. It is also one of a few dairies with Protected Designation of Origin accreditation for 'West Country Farmhouse Cheddar'.

Milk quality is paramount to great cheese. So, to secure not only the quality but also supplies, the Barbers also maintain nearly 1,500ha in Ditcheat and milk about 3,500 cows, which are split into small herds across the farm.

As one of the world's largest Cheddar producers, Barber's also requires huge quantities of milk – up to 0.5 million litres/day. This is drawn from 150 dairy farms, in a 30 mile radius, all of which comply with its own in-house assurance scheme.

Barber's cheese is exported all over the world and to maintain the high quality required for export markets the herds are fed solely a grass diet.

Without forage maize, it puts a big priority on making high quality grass silage and, to secure that supply and quality, the farm runs its own in-house harvesting operation. Based around a CLAAS JAGUAR 950 forage harvester, this also includes a LINER 3600 rake and a recently purchased DISCO 1100 C Business rear- and a pre-series front-mounted DISCO MOVE 3200 mower combination.

"The previous mower was up for replacement and we chose the CLAAS set up to increase efficiency, because at nearly 11m, it is the widest in the market. We also know we can rely on good service and back-up from CLAAS WESTERN in Frome," says Alfie Barber a seventh generation member of the family.

To spread the workload of its annual 2,800ha grass harvest the farm sows early, mid-term and late leys. This entire area is all cut by a single tractor and the CLAAS mower set-up.

"I usually start mowing at nine in the morning and finish at nine at night, aiming to cover about 80ha/day, to keep ahead of the forager," says its operator, Steve Fry. "Fortunately most the land is local – in a block in and around Ditcheat. So, basically we start at one end and work across the farm. But I've also noticed I do get more output from the new set-up compared with the previous mowers."

This, he adds, is not just from the relatively minor amount of additional width. "I can now drive consistently faster. Previously, on undulating ground in some fields, I had to slow down because the previous mowers didn't follow the ground so well and didn't react to the changes quickly enough. The CLAAS combination is also noticeably smoother to use, particularly the front mower. I used to be able to be able to 'feel' it working, now I don't even know it's there.

"The suspension system works really well and helps the mowers follow the ground contours much better than before. I now drive faster and leave a much more even stubble without ever snagging the ground," he explains.

Steve operates the mowers through the tractor's ISOBUS terminal and assigns the lifting and lowering functions to its joystick. He says while he could program it into the headland management system, he finds it easier to control manually.

"I have noticed that the CLAAS mowers react quickly to the controls. Now I know when I press the button they will move, the previous mowers used to 'hang' for a split second and I had to anticipate that short delay in response. And that was really annoying," he comments.

As well as a happy operator the owners are also pleased with the purchase: "We bought the combination based on the performance and its contour following ability," says Alfie Barber, "plus CLAAS WESTERN offered us a great deal and provide us with excellent service."



Steve Fry | Barber's | Ditcheat, Somerset

“The new mower combination has increased output because I can drive faster, thanks to their ability to closely follow ground contours.”

Steve Fry



Barber's still uses traditional cheesemaking processes, such as 'Cheddaring' which involves cutting up and stacking the curds by hand.

Barber's combines traditional cheesemaking techniques with the latest, state of the art processing technology to make its award-winning cheese.

Operator Steve Fry starts mowing about 9am and by 9pm he can knock down about 80ha of grass, which means he can keep ahead of the forager. Steve Fry says the front-mounted DISCO MOVE 3200 works smoothly, reacts quickly to controls and its high lift provides plenty of clearance above the swathes.

This CLAAS combination mows 2,800ha of grass each season, helping to secure the silage harvest for Barber's in Somerset, one of the oldest and largest makers of West Country Farmhouse Cheddar cheese.