

Guy Dutton
Balcombe

ARION 650/430

Tackling more tasks in-house

Running an economically-sustainable dairy unit today means calculating which operations should be contracted out and which are best done more cost-effectively through machinery investment.



Since Guy Dutton completed his agriculture studies and returned to his parents' dairy farm at Balcombe, the family has reinforced its commitment to dairying with some significant investments.

Two herds of 160 and 200 cows on separate sites have become one unit of 360, new buildings have been constructed to accommodate the additional animals, and a new 20/40 swingover parlour has been installed.

The upgrades have helped create an uplift in average yield from the Holstein/Jersey crosses, rising 2,000 litres to 8,500 litres, while at the same time increasing butterfat and protein. In addition to a contract with Arla/Tesco, the family supplies a small amount of milk to Balcombe Dairy, a small cheesemaker based at its second farm, which is now also home to youngstock and a livery yard.

"There have been a few changes here in recent years, and there's one last major project we'd still like to do, covering our remaining open yards to minimise dirty water accumulation, but otherwise I think we're now set for the next ten years," says Guy, the third generation of the family to milk at Woodward's Farm, where the first herd established totalled 15 head.

While it relies on contractors for labour- and machinery-intensive activities such as silage-making, the family has also made careful investments in equipment to ensure it can manage day-to-day field activities in-house at low cost.

CLAAS FOR 15 YEARS

"My father bought our first CLAAS tractor, a loader-equipped ARION 610C, in 2009 from Southern Harvesters at Petworth when I was still studying," says Guy.



"It was a brilliant machine, and I loved it – in all its time with us it never put a foot wrong. For day-to-day yard tasks and occasional fieldwork it performed really well.

"At that time we used contractors not just for silage-making, but for many other field tasks across our two units. When I came home from university, we then decided to examine how we were doing things and make some changes to become more efficient. Along with revamping the dairy infrastructure, we moved to sand cubicle bedding from straw, and decided to take on more of the fieldwork we could easily do across our grassland and maize ground."

The Duttons wanted to take back field tasks previously contracted out, including ploughing and power harrowing for grassland reseeds and ahead of the 64ha (160ac) of maize the family grows.

"One of the qualities that first attracted the family to CLAAS tractors, says Guy, was the ride comfort they offer."

"We were looking for more power to cover ground more quickly, especially on slow tasks like power harrowing, and priced up different options, but I really liked the design of an AXION 660 we had on demo, and the way it drove. In 2018 we purchased an ARION 650, a choice based partly on that demo and on previous CLAAS tractor experiences and the back-up from OLIVERS.



“As a multi-job tractor, it’s great for lighter field tasks like rolling and harrowing, and works really well with a loader – its low profile is just right for the lower buildings.”

With 185hp maximum output, we can comfortably operate a three-leg subsoiler, 5m Maschio power harrow and KRM Bredal trailed fertiliser spreader.”

One of the qualities that first attracted the family to CLAAS tractors, says Guy, was the ride comfort they offer.

“Before our first CLAAS, our previous tractor was really not comfortable at all, especially in the field. As I took on more of the fieldwork when I came home, having something nicer to drive was a key criteria. CLAAS tractors are renowned for comfort, and none of ours have disappointed, added to which the build quality is very good, and everything is easy to get at maintenance-wise.

“Once you’ve found a tractor make you like, you tend to stick with it. The same is true of a dealership. We’ve always had good support and service from OLIVERS and Gavin Elliott, our sales manager. The back-up is as good as it’s always been from the people at Petworth, with everyone always helpful whether on the phone or in the workshop.”

AXION LEADS TO ARION PURCHASE

Good experiences with both the ARION 650 and OLIVERS Petworth convinced Guy that, when the farm’s loader tractor of a different make recently came due for replacement, a CLAAS was again the way to go.

“We decided on an ARION 430 with FL loader, and haven’t been disappointed,” says Guy.

“As a multi-job tractor, it’s great for lighter field tasks like rolling and harrowing, and works really well with a loader – its low-profile is just right for the lower buildings we have, and the panoramic roof is brilliant for stacking at height.

“Alternatives we considered just didn’t have the right design combination to be big enough for fieldwork and small enough for building access. I also love the design and feel of the controls, especially the joystick.”

It’s not just CLAAS equipment for which the Duttons are OLIVERS customers. In addition to a Richard Western SF14 trailer for shifting solid manure, having moved from straw to sand cubicle bedding there are higher demands on the farm’s slurry system, and these are now met by the business’s second Abbey slurry tanker supplied by the Petworth branch, a 2500R Premium Plus with 7.7m dribble bar.

“We can’t control the milk price but we can control our costs where possible, and moving to our first dribble bar has made nutrient application from slurry much more accurate, helping keep down fertiliser costs and allowing us to reduce the use of our GPS- and section control-equipped KRM spreader, another OLIVERS purchase, to only where bagged fertiliser is really needed.”