



Nowness Hall Trials Day – Back with a bang!

FRAM FARMERS ENERGY STRATEGY: AN UPDATE



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## HEATING UP AS WE APPROACH SILLY SEASON

As the weather takes a turn for the better and summer nears ever closer, the Fram Farmers team has a number of industry events in the diary, including some of our own. Whilst we are preparing for a busy few months, the team continues to support members, sharing industry developments, and providing advice on navigating exceptionally volatile markets.

Some of our recent events offered an opportunity to catch up with fellow members, including the Pie and Pint event in Cheshire, and the seed focused 'Regenerative Agriculture Meeting', which took place at the Fram offices. There's more on recent past events on the news pages (4 and 5).

I'd like to extend my personal congratulations to the members of the Fram Farmers team who recently completed the Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge, raising funds for PAPYRUS charity in sweltering conditions! You can find out more on pages 4 and 5.

In late April, Fram Farmers announced some exciting news about the collaborative procurement initiative with Woldmarsh Producers and AF Group - the Agri Procurement Alliance Ltd (APA) – find out more on page 7.

We will soon be hosting the first Essex and Suffolk regional forums as part of rebuilding more direct connections between the Board and regional member needs post-Covid. We have previously hosted a Sussex forum in the autumn, and we are looking to expand on this by establishing a Cheshire forum.

On pages 12-13 you can delve into a

crops special with the Fram Farmers crops team, who provide some expert insight into the 2023/24 season, while the crop marketing team shares news of their impressive trading stats.

It wouldn't be an issue of Farmers First without a member profile or two; Fram Farmers board member, Frans de Boer, has been trialling an alternative crop on his farm in West Sussex (see page 9) and we hear from a beef farmer member in Essex who has been using our own-brand mineral buckets since their launch last spring (page 17).

The Fram team has been seeking out and capturing significant savings in all parts of the business, including our expanding online offering, which now includes our new business account with Amazon – more on page 21.

The business services team has made real headway with npower, catching up with a lot of historic electricity invoices, so hopefully members can see some progress on this. To help members understand the complex issues, we've provided a detailed breakdown on pages 12 and 13.

Unfortunately, the new Fram IT system has experienced a few bugs and initial



Andrew Knowles, Fram Farmers CEO

issues, resulting in monthly statements being presented incorrectly. We acknowledge the inconvenience and additional time this will have caused our members when reviewing their monthly statements, and we are working hard to resolve the issue. We would like to thank you for your patience and understanding on the matter.

Summer on the horizon means show season is once again upon us! We're looking forward to seeing members at the Suffolk Show at the end of May, (you may even be reading this at the Suffolk Show), as well as Groundswell and the Royal Norfolk Show at the end of June. Also coming up is the Mowness Hall Trials Day, which is set to be back to pre-Covid levels, with over 50 suppliers – you can read more about this on page 11. See you there!

### FRAMFARMERS GREAT BRITISH FARMERS CO-OPERATING

Fram Farmers, Station Road, Framlingham, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP13 9EE Tel: 01728 727700

Every precaution has been taken to ensure that the material published in Farmers First is accurate at the time of printing. For further details about anything featured in this edition please call Fram Farmers on 01728 727700, or Juliette McDaniel at Kendalls PR and Marketing on 07833 777518. If you would like to opt out of receiving Farmers First, please email mail@framfarmers.co.uk

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### FARM FINANCE WEBINAR

On the 19th April, Fram Framers hosted the 'Farm Finance Webinar' with guest speakers Kirsty Sadler, deputy head of agriculture for Lloyds Bank, Will Mitcham, partner at Wilson Wraight, and Tamer Barakat from TCM Capital.

During a time when farming continues to experience rapid evolution and volatility in terms of policy, commodity prices and input costs, as well as the financial markets adjusting to life after Brexit and Covid, the webinar came at a vital time to take stock of farm finances and planning.

Thank you to those who joined us for an informative morning, and to our speakers for covering topics on 'What makes a financially resilient farm business?', 'Making the most of R&D tax credits' and 'The bankers eye view'.

If you missed the webinar, you can view the presentation on the new members portal.



#### YORKSHIRE THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE

On Saturday 20th May, twenty-one Fram Farmers staff members took part in the Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge, a 24-mile (38.6km) round trip, with 1585m (5200ft) of ascent.

The challenge takes on the peaks of Pen-y-Ghent (694 metres), Whernside (736 metres) and Ingleborough (723 metres) in under 12 hours.

It was a fantastic day, and the team was blessed with sunny skies, even if the sweltering conditions made the ascent even more challenging.

Almost all of the team completed all three peaks, and the lead group ended the challenge in an impressive 11hrs 19mins. The experience was a great personal achievement for all, and we are extremely proud of those who took part.

So far, we have raised over £5,000 for our chosen charity, PAPYRUS, which is dedicated to the prevention of suicide and the promotion of positive mental health and emotional wellbeing in young people.

You can continue to support those who took part by donating via QR code.





### FARMERS WEEKLY WEBINAR IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AGREENA



On 16th May, in partnership with Agreena, Fram Farmers CEO Andrew Knowles, hosted a Farmers Weekly webinar – 'How to enrol in a Carbon Programme, from Data Entry to Income'.

Joining Andrew on the webinar were Agreena customers Fraser Bush, a tenant farmer on Badminton Estate in the Cotswolds, and John Miller, who farms 660 hectares of combinable crops in Newark, Nottinghamshire. UK country lead for Agreena, Thomas Gent, who has been on a regenerative farming journey for the past 15 years on his farm near Peterborough, also attended the webinar, providing an overview of Agreena's role in supporting farmers into a more regenerative future.

The webinar explored the purpose of carbon farming and how farmers can discover whether these schemes are suitable for their businesses and how to get involved.

A few years ago, a series of carbon schemes emerged, along with opportunities that were aimed towards farming businesses, as a way of rewarding and recognising the unique capabilities we have in terms of carbon sequestration.

Today, carbon farming and the landscape has developed significantly, but there are still misconceptions and confusions for farming businesses, advisors, and wider farming traders about what carbon farming schemes are, how they work, and what is required by carbon participants in this scheme.

The role of Fram Farmers is to save members time and money, and also provide advice on a range of services, including capital grants. The Fram Farmers team is constantly scanning and responding to new opportunities that present themselves to our members' businesses, and a regenerative farming and carbon scheme is a good illustration of this function.

Agreena supports farmers in 16 European countries with 600,000+ hectares under management, and Fram Farmers is proud to work closely with Agreena to support our members in making positive changes to reduce carbon emissions on their farms.

If you missed the webinar, it is still available to watch on-demand. Register using the QR code here:



#### DIARY DATES:

8th June	Agrii Trials Tour at Throws Farm, Essex
13th June	Cornwall Farm Walk
13th & 14th June	Cereals Event
15th June	NextGen Summer Event at G's Fresh
21st June	Wiltshire Farm Walk
23rd June	Suffolk Wildlife Trust Midsummer Meet Up
27th June	Mowness Hall Trials Day & Fram Supplier Event
28th & 29th June	Royal Norfolk Show
28th & 29th June	Groundswell Event
4th July	South East Trials Walk, Plumpton College

### NEW JCB DEALERS FOR EASTERN REGION DCB

Following the news that Tuckwells has relinquished the JCB franchise, the Fram Farmers machinery team has followed developments closely and are pleased to inform you that G&J Peck will be covering the Suffolk area, and that Oliver Landpower will be covering the Essex area.

#### **G&J PECK**

Fram Farmers has had an excellent partnership with G&J Peck for many years, as they cover the Norfolk area for JCB and also hold the Case IH franchise in Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. Fram Farmers has direct links to both the managing director lan Loversidge and JCB product manager John Wareing. With a members' account with Pecks, Fram members can expect a discount on fast-moving parts over the counter.

Gordon Cummings, Fram Farmers machinery manager, has had many discussions with the Pecks team, and if all plans come to fruition, the new Pecks JCB branch will be in Framlingham. Already, Pecks have appointed the well-known salesman Graham Goodwin, who will not be a stranger to many Fram members.

G&J Peck will be exhibiting at the Mowness Hall Trials Day on 27th June – see page 11 for more details.

#### **OLIVER LANDPOWER**

Oliver Landpower is part of the Olivers Group, one of the UK's leading Claas and JCB dealers.

Again, well known to Gordon Cummings from his Claas days, the MD at Oliver Landpower is Charlie Glennister, and we have been told that they have secured premises to open their JCB dealership in Colchester. Fram Farmers now has a members account at Oliver Landpower.

We ask all members, especially those with JCB machines, to support these two new branches to assist the Fram Farmers machinery team in growing these partnerships.

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#### NORTH WEST PIE AND PINTS EVENT

On 28th April, over 40 north west members gathered in Cheshire for a Pie and Pints event. The evening began with a Fram Farmers update from Andrew Knowles, CEO, followed by department updates from the livestock, crops and electricity teams. The rest of the evening was spent indulging in some delicious pies and pints whilst members shared their thoughts and feedback.

#### REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE MEETING

At the end of April, Fram Farmers hosted their first seed focused 'Regenerative Agriculture Meeting', which was held in-person at the Fram Farmers office. The morning consisted of three speakers; lan Gould, director at Oakbank Game and Conservation, Natallia Gulbis technical and arable farming lead at Smart Rotations and Lee Bennett RAGT's managing director.

Starting the morning off, lan explained that reducing inputs is a strategic change, and not something that can be achieved overnight. He referred to cover crops as an investment and a tool for improvement. Natallia followed, explaining the difference between rhizobacteria and mycorrhizal fungi and their individual features and benefits to plant growth and health.

Lee finished the morning with 'The latest in BYDV breeding technology,' recapping the last 20 years - the length of time that breeders across the world have been working to get the BYDV resistant gene across to wheat varieties.

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## FRAM FARMERS FORMS ALLIANCE TO DELIVER PURCHASING EFFICIENCY



In late April, Fram Farmers announced a new collaborative procurement initiative with Woldmarsh Producers and AF Group - the Agri Procurement Alliance Ltd (APA).

This exciting new initiative aims to secure better value to the members of all three cooperative buying groups by leveraging the strength and influence of the combined 6,000 members. All three groups, each with our own unique operational methods, have a common purpose – to improve margins for members and build stronger relationships with the supply chain.

Fram Farmers has always recognised the value and benefits of cooperating, collaboratively working with other organisations that share its values, objectives and ethos. As such, Fram Farmers was a founding member of the first collaborative procurement initiative SATURN established over 30 years ago with Woldmarsh Producers.

"UK agriculture is undergoing a period of rapid evolution, adjusting to a post Brexit and Covid marketplace, transitioning from an EU to UK agricultural policy platform and responding to new opportunities and challenges from consumers, climate change and global competitors," explains Andrew Knowles. Fram Farmers chief executive.

"There also continues to be adjustments and consolidation in the agri supply chain, including manufacture and distribution. APA has been established in response to these developments in our sector and the needs of respective members of Fram Farmers, Woldmarsh Producers and AF Group."

As was the case with SATURN, APA will work exclusively with suppliers, focusing on procurement, negotiating terms availability and service, collation of market intelligence and new product innovation. In the first instance, APA will solely focus on negotiating terms for fertiliser and sharing them with the three farmer owned cooperatives.

"Cooperation between the groups provides an opportunity to make a stepchange in size, bringing the total to over 6,000 members. We are confident this will elevate discussions with suppliers to another level, bringing benefits to all," Andrew adds.

The boards of the three founders of APA - Fram Farmers, Woldmarsh and AF Group - are very clear that the individual groups have distinctive memberships which they serve and support in different ways.

"The establishment of APA will in no way dilute the independence, identity,

### **TAPA**

#### Agri Procurement Alliance

or distinct proposition of Fram Farmers. We will continue to support and serve our members in terms of understanding requirements, ordering, delivery, and providing expert independent advice."

For Fram Farmers members, the establishment of APA means very little will change on a day-to-day basis, with no impact on the staff and teams within Fram Farmers, who will continue to share technical advice and market intelligence with members through the usual methods, as well as that made available as a result of APA.

Members of the three groups behind APA will all have access to the same products, prices and terms where the groups collaborate, but Fram Farmers will also utilise their national and local market knowledge to deliver member benefits, as they always have done, where appropriate.

Each of the groups, as shareholders, will hold an equal proportion of the equity of APA, with two directors representing each of the shareholders on the board of the new alliance:

- David Horton Fawkes AF Group Ltd CEO
- Iain Gardner AF Group Ltd chairman
- Heather Claridge Woldmarsh Producers Ltd CEO
- Andrew Price Woldmarsh Producers Ltd chairman
- Andrew Knowles Fram Farmers Ltd CEO
- David Sheppard Fram Farmers Ltd board member

"In short, APA is about collaboration to deliver even better value to Fram Farmers members through a more structured, efficient, and focused procurement approach with specific fertiliser supply partners," Andrew concludes.



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### ALTERNATIVE ENERGY CROP TRIALLED BY FRAM FARMERS MEMBER

Fram Farmers board member Frans de Boer has been trialling an alternative crop – Silphium Perfoliatum - on his farm in West Sussex.



Here, we share some information about this high yielding crop and Frans tells us how the trial is going.

Silphium Perfoliatum, otherwise known as the 'Cup Plant' is a low-input, high-output perennial crop. Known for its high-quality and excellent yield, which is approximately 15 tonnes of dry matter/ha from the second year of cultivation, it has been said to offer a 'versatile, eco-friendly and profitable' replacement for maize, both as a ruminant feed and as an energy crop for AD plants.

"As a perennial, it has a 10 to 15 year life span and, once established, it is largely resilient, reliable, and unaffected by major pests or diseases," says Emma Green at Newtone Agriscapes, the UK distributor for the crop.

The plant is expected to have anything from 3 (in the first year) to 20 stems per sqm from one plant by year fifteen. It favours wet but well-drained soil, and has a complex root structure, which acts as a carbon sink, while improving soil health. In addition, the soil is covered and protected all year round, providing an ideal habitat for insects and birds.

On paper, it promises to deliver a number of benefits, something which board member Frans de Boer, who has been a Fram Farmers member since the Lewes Farmers merger in 2005, decided to test out

Frans farms around 800 acres, of which 500 acres is down to energy crops to feed the on-site 500kw AD plant. The remaining land is down to cereals, which is managed by his son Archie, while Frans runs the AD plant with one other employee.

Frans heard about Silphium Perfoliatum from an agricultural consultant who was aware of its popularity overseas, but was unsure if it was suitable to be grown in the

UK. This led him to Newtone Agriscapes, who advised him that it could act as a suitable replacement for maize and could solve many of the issues of cropping rotation, while offering environmental and financial benefits.

The dry matter yield of Silphium Perfoliatum is similar to a good crop of maize silage, with an energy value of around 80% of that of maize, making it an attractive proposition for AD energy production, which fits suitably within Frans' business model.

"It seemed a risk due to the high cost of the seed," explains Frans.

"But I decided it was worth a punt, and I have applied for R&D tax relief. I drilled it in the spring with a maize drill. It's not an easy seed to handle, as it's flat and oval like a sunflower seed."

To ensure successful growth and establishment, Newtone Agriscapes recommended sowing Silphium seeds with maize for the first year, which is what Frans did. This helps to provide a companion crop for the silphium and provide the necessary support for its initial growth, plus the bonus of getting a maize crop in the first year.

Frans initially planned to trial 6ha, but dropped this down to 2ha, due to very dry spring drilling conditions. The 2ha drilled resulted in a patchy crop, which Frans puts down to a difficult establishment period, which is key for this perennial. Slug damage was also evident, as well as weed competition.

"I can see the attraction of Silphium Perfoliatum. People are less keen to grow maize now because of stewardship options, and the difficulties of establishing it, as well as the input costs," says Frans.

"While the establishment difficulties are the same for this crop, once it is established, the upkeep is minimal, especially in the spring, and the inputs required are far less."

Once established, Silphium is a hardy plant that requires minimal maintenance, which should outcompete most weeds. Its deep root system can also help improve



soil health and prevent erosion, making it a great addition to any sustainable farming system.

"When it comes to growing crops for AD plants, I don't believe in using a lot of carbon to 'save carbon', and the environmental benefits of this are impressive," he adds.

According to Emma, it can take up between 5-8 tonnes of  $CO_2$  (eq)/ha/ year below ground, with the level of  $CO_2$  sequestered depending on crop yield.

For Frans, there are additional benefits; in France, it is not attractive to wild boar, and with issues with deer in West Sussex, Frans is hoping the crop will be deer-proof too.

Now in its second year, Frans has applied 30m³ of digestate, providing around 75-80kg of nitrogen, 40kg of phosphate and 50kg of potash. It is early days as yet, but he is committed to the 2ha trial and believes the crop has potential, despite picking "the worst year to try it" in 2022. He is paying close attention to its growth over the next few months, and looking forward to harvesting it for the first time later this year to see if it is viable.



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### MOWNESS HALL TRIALS DAY – BACK WITH A BANG!

Fram Farmers is delighted to inform members of the return of the Mowness Hall Trials Day and Suppliers Event, taking place on Tuesday 27th June 2023.

With a slightly smaller event taking place last year, this is the first time the event will return to its larger format, a scale last seen pre-Covid.

Organised in association with BASF and Walnes Seeds, the event will take place at Mowness Hall, Stonham Aspal, Suffolk, and is kindly hosted by Fram Farmers member James Forrest.

With 20 varieties of wheat on show, including LG's newest group 4 soft wheat LG Redwald, the event will provide the opportunity for members to compare varieties with BASF's Real Results trials.

With the potential for a big year on disease, the untreated plots are a chance for the varieties to really show how their agronomics and disease ratings fair against Septoria and both Yellow and Brown Rust. As well as untreated trials, BASF will be running their treatment trials.

"Picking a variety with good disease ratings should always be high on the priority list," says Rachel Cooper, Fram Farmers seed product manager.

"For those members who are moving towards more regenerative farming it should be even more important. Breeders are trying to improve their disease and agronomic packages whilst keeping that all important yield. We have seen varieties that haven't quite managed that, and they haven't stuck around on the RL for long."

The Fram Farmers team has been monitoring the trial site alongside BASF agronomy manager Matthew Keane, since September when it was drilled, to see how each variety compares at different stages.

"Varieties like LG Redwald, which suit the later drilling spot, and typically do better



on heavier land, were away quickly and tillered exceptionally well. This is continuing to look especially good, and we're excited for members to take a look," says Rachel.

The use of a drone to view the plots from a bird's eye view has been useful for the team to monitor differentiations in colour between variety, as well as areas with frost damage and establishing disease. The layout this year differs slightly from previous years; plots will be laid in recommended list groups to make them easier to follow. As the trial plots near ear emergence, the event at the end of June provides a well-timed opportunity for growers to compare notes, and discuss varieties with fellow members and the Fram team.

In addition to the trials plot tours, over fifty key Fram Farmers suppliers will be exhibiting at the event. From farm machinery and plant hire, to seed and ag chem, suppliers will be on-hand to discuss a huge cross section of developments across the agricultural industry and showcase the services and products available to Fram Farmers members.

The event is open from 9am – 5pm, and lunch will be provided. BASIS and NRoSO points will also be available, and the event is open to everyone, not only Fram Farmers members. For this reason, booking for trials tours is essential - please check your inbox or visit the members' portal to book your space, and keep an eye on the Fram Farmers social media channels for previews and updates.

### CONFIRMED LIST OF SUPPLIERS IN ATTENDANCE:

- Comm-Tech Voice & Data Ltd
- Everflow Water
- Styne Solar
- Unium Bioscience
- PlantWorks (Smart Rotations)
- Drone Ag (Skippy Scout)
- Yara
- Payne Crop Nutrition
- Thomas Bell & Sons Ltd (SJS)
- Origin
- Ernest Doe Power
- Thurlow Nunn Standen
- MDT Ltd
- Spaldings Ltd
- K & M Tyres Limited
- Mervyn Lambert Plant Ltd
- Suffolk Agri Centre/AMAZONE
- Toyota Material Handling Ltd
- Witham Oil & Paint (Soham) Ltd
- Sunbelt Rentals LtdArdent Hire Solutions
- G & J Peck Ltd (JCB)
- Enterprise Flex E Rent
- Hytek (GB) Ltd
- Richard Western Limited
- UK Fuels Ltd/Radius Payment Solutions
- Multicell International Limited
- Certas Energy
- Portable Space
- RTFKnet
- Scrutton Bland
- Premier Seeds
- Oria Agriculture
- Ashbrook Ltd
- Fieldview Trailers Ltd
- Bush Tyres
- Linde MH UK Ltd
- Agricast
- Tyson Cooper
- Tanks UK
- Grimme (UK) Limited
- Wilson Wraight
- RAM Mount Ltd
- Tricel Environmental UK
- Treadfirst Tyre & Exhaust Ltd
- Rock Chemicals Ltd
- MKM Agriculture Ltd
- East Anglian Bearing Services Ltd
- County Battery Services Ltd
- Strimech Engineering
- Votex Hereford Ltd
- Opico/Farmdroid

#### AN UPDATE FROM THE CROPS TEAM

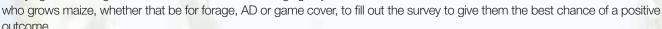
The crops team at Fram Farmers has seen a changing landscape over the past year where arable inputs are concerned. Here, they provide us with an update across the board, as well as insight into the 2023/24 season.

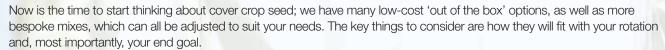
#### SEED

#### **Rachel Cooper, Seed Product Manager**

Commodity prices have dropped back, and it is likely that we will see seed prices for wheat and barley drop back around £50/t - £100/t under last year's prices. Bear in mind seed contracts with growers will all have been agreed at much higher prices, so this will have some effect going forward.

The maize seed dressings outcome is still undecided for the 2024 season. The MGA and NIAB have created a survey to aid the lobbying of MPs to get a solution, and we are encouraging anyone





In terms of varieties to look out for:

- Barley LG Caravelle a new two row feed added to the RL for this autumn highest yielding variety, rivalling hybrids. Fram has an exclusive block booking which is available to members on a first-come-first-served basis.
- Wheat RGT Grouse a new BYDV resistant variety from RAGT, which will be looking for full approval to the RL for the 24/25 season. There is a very limited volume of seed available for this season, and it carries a SFI insecticide free wheat payment of £45/ha.



#### **FERTILISER**

#### India Gibbons, Fertiliser Specialist

The Fertiliser industry has seen a rapid turnaround since last year, when prices were rocketing due to the conflicts in Ukraine affecting gas price. Now a year later, we are seeing prices of ammonium nitrate (AN) almost halving in price.

Without a crystal ball, it's difficult to predict what the year might hold for the fertiliser industry. Suppliers are suggesting markets will quieten down, but we won't see prices as low as they were pre-war in Ukraine.



With the success of last year's fertiliser requirement forms, these were sent out again for the 2023/24 season, to allow us to secure blocks of product to maintain supply in a volatile market. Since the form was issued last year, CF have closed their factory at Ince; putting tighter restrictions on supply as they can only produce Nitram from their remaining plant at Billingham.

Following on from conversations with the manufacturers, we sent our form out earlier this year. This was on the expectation that the new season would start earlier. However, due to the continued wet weather, the spring top up market is later. This has, in effect, pushed back new season to early June. Despite this, we are in a great position, because we have our member's requirements in front of us ready to go. With the help of the fertiliser requirement forms, we were able to service 50% more of our members on day 1 of new season Nitram last year.

Elsewhere, granular urea sales have increased by 80%, as it remains a better price for the value pence per kilo of N. Defra finally released an update that, from the 31st March 2024, farmers wanting to use any urea based product on their land after this date, will have to be using inhibited urea.

#### **AG CHEM**

#### **Matthew Cobbald, Crop Protection Product Manager**

All eyes have been on crop protection products, with a significant rise in prices. The Fram Farmers product pricing sheet, with offers from five or more suppliers has been overhauled to incorporate an inflation tracker by product line, which has helped communicate value options to members who wish to discuss chemical values and movement with the team.

In addition, there is now the calculation incorporated for a cost per hectare, as well as value per unit. This upshift in the price sheet

capabilities is market leading and represents a significant opportunity to upskill the team's communication to members.

The market options and median pricing offered from the sheet is now also accessible to the independent agronomists we work closely with, helping the right product offer to be ordered at the point of recommendation. In the future, we hope this level of information will help with season planning of products, as well as forecasting the right offers that fit both technically and commercially on-farm.

Through the Fram Farmers technical briefings, we continue to offer online forums to share the latest information and updates from our key manufacturers. This year marked the first occasion where a separate biologicals/adjuvants/generic products meeting took place.

The removal of parallel product recognition in the UK is significant – reports from the NFU indicate that the removal of parallel products (lookalikes of main branded materials often purchased from other EU countries) has not been recognised by Government as significant enough to save. This stance puts the UK chemical industry with only one main market competitor to novel chemistry, which is the generic product offers. With increasing levels of biological based resistances to 'older' chemistry, it is noticeable that the generic offers are not always possible to use with full confidence of performance. It is in this place that the removal of parallels will be felt the most.

Fram Farmers has tried to help the NFU with information and feedback on the market to see if further leverage can be created on behalf of our members. Parallel offers will be removed as of June 2023 with all parallel product needing to be used by June 2024.

The team has been made aware of several supply chain challenges in the sector including pendimethalin last autumn. It is with pride that we can say that through Fram there has always been an offer available this season for the actives that members require. By purchasing from the whole marketplace and with good forecasting, the Fram team continues to deliver for members.



Jono Woollatt, Farm Trader

Since last October's extension of the Black Sea's Grain Corridor Agreement, we have seen markets slump into a downward trend that is proving difficult to push out of.

Alongside this, we have seen a shift in the selling patterns of members over the past five years, from roughly 60% in favour of pools marketing, to 70% in favour of free market trading (spot and forward selling). Recognising this, we have become more

competitive on the spot market and through forward selling on the free market. With more time and resource, the ability to grow and improve has enabled us to find new opportunities to offer more competitive prices on the day.

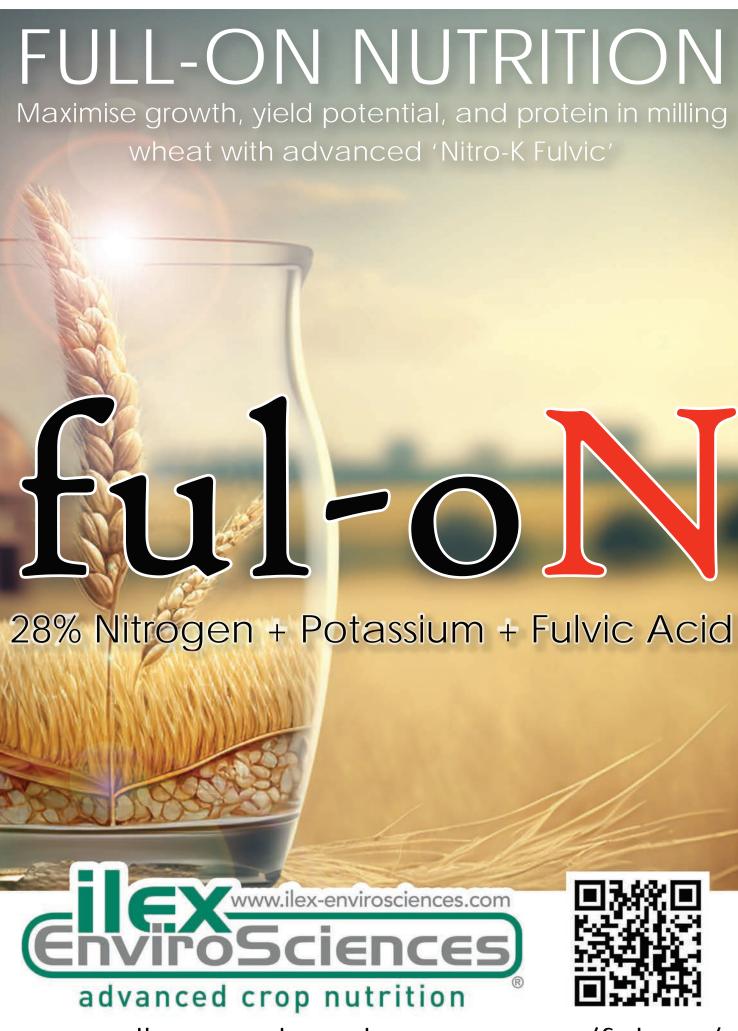
Whilst growing our free market book, we have recently paid out our Jan-Mar pool with a feed wheat base price £3/tonne higher than ADM and £19/tonne higher than Frontier for the same period. Our pool committee of farmer members, directors, and external traders have performed well over the past few seasons.

An increase of 15% of farmer members marketing grain through the group over the past 12 months is proof of this. The WhatsApp group is flourishing, with over 350 members now in the group, benefitting from regular, timely advice and insight direct from the Fram Farmers trading team.

We are pleased to report record crop trade purchases of approaching 130,000 tonnes, beating our previous figure of 110,729. Pool levels have been sustained given the bigger crop, with 69,830 tonnes in the 2022/23 pool and 79,113 tonnes in the 2023/24 pool. With a few weeks to go, we're striving for a 200,000 tonne year for the first time since 2015/16!

Our relationship with customers in the trade is improving also, in support of our drive for competitiveness. Milling and soft wheats, and malting barley are areas in which we have improved options in the last year, so please give us a try if you haven't already.





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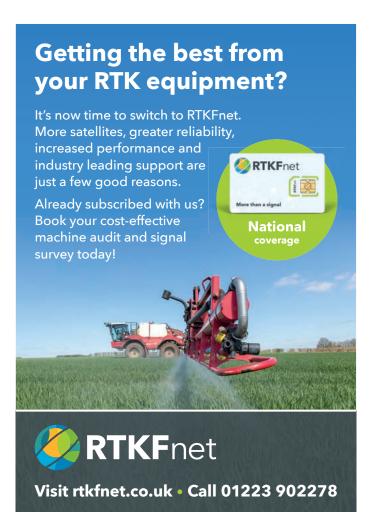


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#### FRAM FARMERS BRANDED MINERAL **BUCKETS PROVIDE VALUE AND** PERFORMANCE FOR MEMBERS

The own-brand mineral buckets were launched in Spring 2022, and have been popular with Fram Farmers members looking for a cost-effective or bespoke feeding solution.

Working with a reputable company which specialises in manufacturing quality mineral buckets and feed supplements, the range was launched in March 2022 and has sold 55.5 tonnes of the buckets to date since the launch, including numerous repeat orders.

"Grass staggers, which is deficiency of available dietary magnesium, is a very real threat for suckler and dairy cows at turnout and other key times in the year when grass supply and quality is seasonal," explains Jessica Frost, Fram Farmers animal health buyer and livestock supervisor.

"Rapidly growing spring grass typically has a low magnesium content, which plays a key role in cattle diets and is essential for bone growth and maintenance, nervous system function and also as an aid to fibre digestion in the rumen."

"Therefore, daily access to a palatable magnesium supplement is essential to help alleviate the risk of grass staggers," she adds.

Fram Farmers member Jim Pearce has been purchasing the High Mag Cattle Mineral Tubs (80kg) to supplement his predominantly grazed mixed-breed beef

Jim, alongside wife Heather and sons Harry and Rob, farms in Rivenhall, Essex over two sites. His son Rob takes care of the Suffolk-cross-mule ewes and has a small Simmental herd of his own, and on the arable side, they grow 150ha of continuous milling wheats.

He has been a Fram Farmers member since 2008, joining the cooperative to streamline his invoicing and purchasing, and to reduce spend on farm inputs. Alongside vehicles, machinery, utilities and crop inputs, most livestock-related items are purchased through the group, such as wormers and fly-control products, and



general livestock husbandry items.

Ex-dairy farmer Jim turned to Fram Farmers to supply a magnesium supplement soon after the Fram Farmers branded mineral buckets were launched. He is acutely aware of the magnesium deficiencies in early and late grass, and was looking for a product that looked after his herd and provided value for money.

The eighty-head spring-calving herd is grazed outside for as long as mother nature allows, and once brought inside, is fed clamped grass silage. Cattle are usually sold at Ashford market at twelve months old.

"I order a tonne of the buckets at a time, and litter them across the farm," Jim explains.

"I like the cattle to have easy access to them, so I put them in every field and every gateway as soon as they're turned out. That way, they cannot avoid passing them, and there's a better chance that they're getting enough magnesium."

"I've been using the tubs for over a year now, and have never had a problem – the cattle like them, the herd is healthy, and the Fram Farmers tubs are the best value I can find."

The Fram Farmers range of mineral

buckets consists of five core products:

- Pre-Calver a high specification mineral lick for dairy and suckler cows during the dry period
- Cattle Optimiser designed to supplement dairy and beef cattle throughout the year
- High Mag Cattle a high specification mineral lick for dairy or beef cattle at risk of grass staggers
- High Energy Sheep for ewes, lambs and rams, providing essential nutrients throughout the full grazing season
- Special Sheep (Ewe & Lamb) with elevated levels of vitamins, minerals and trace elements to support flock performance all year round

The range can also offer bespoke formulations for cattle or sheep; Fram Farmers works with members to create customised formulations suited to individual feeding systems and complement forage available.

Being available directly from Fram Farmers means the lead time between ordering and delivery is only 7 days, compared to the lengthier lead time of some other brands, effectively enabling Fram Farmers to provide a more streamlined service. The range is available alongside the usual brands, which are still available through Fram Farmers' trusted suppliers.

The Fram Farmers range of Feed and Mineral Buckets for dairy, beef cattle, and sheep are available now. Please contact Jessica Frost and Bex White in the Livestock Team: 01728 727 716 | jessica.frost@framfarmers.co.uk or bex.white@framfarmers.co.uk

### FRAM FARMERS ENERGY STRATEGY: AN UPDATE

Energy bills have been the topic of conversation across the country for over a year, with the rise in prices causing a number of issues to both consumers and energy companies. Here, we provide a detailed insight into the complexities, and introduce the team at Fram managing the challenges on your behalf.

The Fram Farmers utilities team supplies over 4,000 farm sites with electricity, using the combined purchasing power to secure competitive rates. The team purchases energy on the open market, bringing huge savings to members.

In 2019, Fram Farmers purchased wholesale electricity at around £43/MWh, which, including the non-commodity costs added by Government and energy companies such as green tax etc., resulted in a unit rate of between 9p and 14p for most members. So for three years, members had got used to paying this unit price, billed monthly.

This contract was due to end in October 2022, but with the wholesale price sitting at £250/MWh in April, the Fram Farmers team decided to wait until September, expecting the wholesale price to drop soon. However, during summer 2022, the prices continued to climb, peaking at nearly £800/MWh in August 2022.

"At this stage, members were asking the team why we weren't purchasing electricity and why we weren't able to tell members what their costs would be," explains Dan.

"But, at sky-high wholesale prices, we were avoiding locking members into long-term contracts."

In September, with the contract nearing its end, the utilities team negotiated a multiflex contract with npower, which allowed them to purchase energy in short term



layers over the winter period to try to 'ride' the high winter rates.

This strategy enabled Fram Farmers to have greater control over the volatile market, enabling them to make assessments on a monthly basis until the spring.

Under this contract, the first purchase was for October at £297.93/MWh, the second purchase was for November at £504.88/MWh, and December at £473/MWh. The fourth winter purchase was at £381.97/MWh, which was fixed for January, February and March. This resulted in an average unit price of 38p per unit for members over the winter.

In February, as prices began to drop, the team purchased at £143/MWh for the period of April 2023 to October 2023, resulting in an average unit price of 28p per unit for members during the summer.

#### **BILLING ISSUES**

"The consequence of this purchasing

strategy was that it contributed to npower's billing issues," says Dan.

With the introduction of the Government's Energy Bill Relief Scheme (EBRS), came complications; the Scheme was announced in October, and commenced in November. Unfortunately, the Government didn't liaise with energy companies over how this would work administratively, and so Fram Farmers was hearing nothing back from npower to pass on to members.

By December, this meant Fram Farmers members hadn't received bills for October, November or December.

"We were unable to tell members the rates they would be paying, or provide any billing paperwork. We were receiving upwards of 250 messages per day from members, who, understandably, wanted to know what was going on, and our levels of customer service were slipping, with only two people in the team at the time," adds Dan.



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"This is why we started issuing the Friday night energy update, in the hope that, with more transparency and information, including additional support schemes, members were not left in the dark."

"This did help put members at ease, and progress was being made, but it was slow. At first, we had hoped we would be able to bill members in January, then February, but it was pushed back multiple times," he explains.

As it turns out, npower's automated billing system wasn't able to cope with the different rates at which Fram Farmers had purchased electricity. npower was aware of the issue, but could do nothing about it.

"Thank you for trusting us. As a team, we are sorry for the problems and inconveniences it caused. We understand your frustrations, and felt them ourselves," says Dan.

"We only hope that, with this more thorough explanation, you consider it a trade-off worth making. We strongly believe that our approach and strategy was the right thing to do for our members, despite it causing issues with the billing."

Alternatively, if locked into a longer-term contract, members would have been paying 85p/KWh (51.5p/KWh with the Energy Bill Relief Scheme discount) between Oct 2022 – April 2022, rising back to 85p/KWh when the EBRS discount ceased in April 2023.

#### **NEW SYSTEM**

Now, with the launch of the new IT system at Fram Farmers, the process has been streamlined, making it clearer for both the utilities team and members.

As of a few weeks ago, members are now able to view their bills and statements in the online portal as soon as they are sent to Fram Farmers directly from npower. These bills will then be shown on members' statements the following month.

#### **MEET THE TEAM**

#### DAN COX - BUSINESS SERVICES, MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING MANAGER

Dan Cox joined Fram Farmers in June 2020 and heads up the business services, membership development and marketing and communications teams.

Dan has extensive experience supporting agriculture, having previously worked for another large agricultural cooperative for 6 years, where he also headed up utilities and telecoms product areas.

Dan also has a background in marketing and business development, with a degree in marketing, and a post-graduate diploma in local and regional economic development. With over fifteen years' experience working in global commercial organisations, Dan also brings a high level of professionalism and commercial acumen to the cooperative.

#### **RYAN WADEY, UTILITIES SPECIALIST**

Ryan joined Fram Farmers at the beginning of October 2021 after 4 years working at Haven Power (rebranded to Drax Energy in September 2021). Ryan entered the energy industry as a customer service advisor, working on multisite accounts. Tasks involved general invoice enquiries, investigating meter and supply faults, and raising jobs to fix them, all to Ofgem regulations and GDPR compliant.



Since joining Fram Farmers, Ryan has helped to stabilise the portfolio during the most volatile period ever seen in the industry. Ryan has very much been in the firing line as a result of npower's billing issues, HMRCs implementation of their premise ruling, VAT for domestic meters and the record-breaking high wholesale market prices.

#### LEA-MARIE BROOKS, UTILITIES ADMINISTRATOR

Lea joined Fram Farmers in April 2022, so members will have spoken to Lea about both electricity and telecoms at some point. Lea was new to the utilities industry when she joined, but has been a fantastic addition to the team, supporting Ryan extremely well during this time. Lea's background is in hospitality but she enjoys problem solving and customer service.



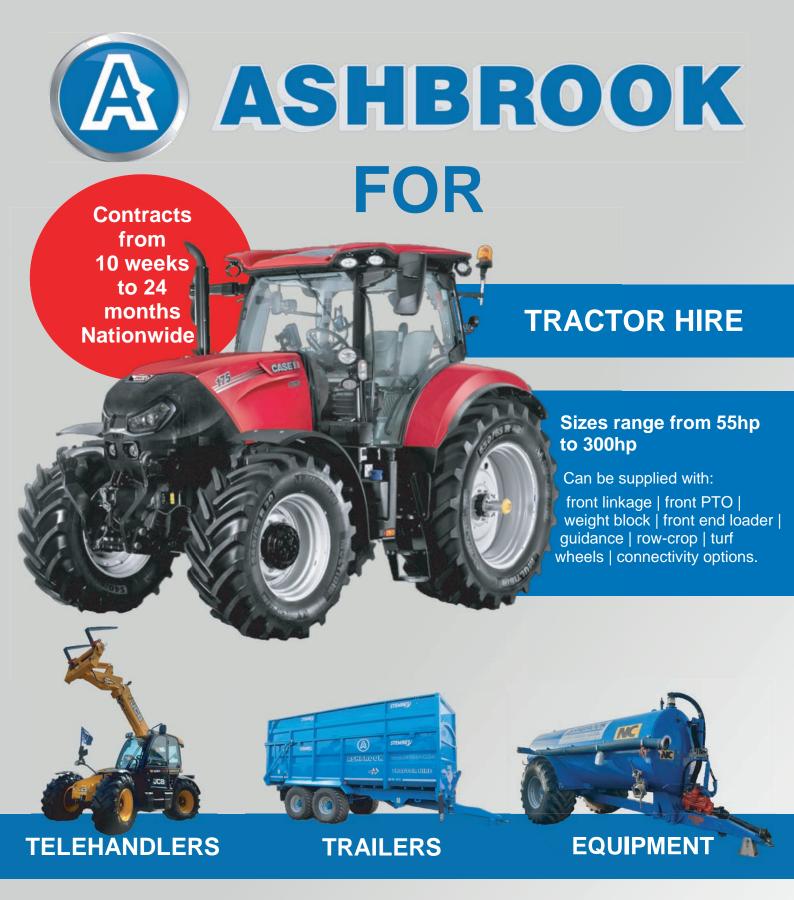
#### TAMARA GAUTHIER, UTILITIES ADMINISTRATOR

Tamara has been working tirelessly on members' electricity queries since August 2021. She will sadly be leaving the business at the end of May, but we wish Tam all the very best in her new role. Jenny Cole starts with the business in early June, and we will introduce her in due course.









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#### FRAM ONLINE



With the growth of the 'digital age', Fram Farmers is continuing to move with the times, exploring opportunities for members to benefit from the convenience of online purchasing.

With the cooperative's existing online accounts with Kramp/MDT, making thousands of items available to members 24/7, there are already easy ways for Fram Farmers members to purchase farm inputs at the click of a button. Recently, we have added Arco, which supplies a wide range of PPE to members.

Purchases from both of these outlets go straight onto members' Fram Farmers monthly accounts, streamlining the billing process and removing the need for additional paperwork.

Now, Fram Farmers is pleased to announce a business account with Amazon, the largest, most used shopping website in the world, with an increasing number of agricultural and business items for sale. This arrangement enables members to order and receive goods from Amazon and have them invoiced through their monthly Fram Farmers account.

Members can sign into this account via an individual account login, order what they are after (Amazon supplied products only), and it will be delivered to their address



of choice. The invoices are then sent to Fram Farmers with a member code for easy processing in the Fram Farmers office. Members' orders will appear on the monthly Fram Farmers statement to be paid in the usual way.

This service is available now. If you are interested in gaining access to the Fram Farmers Amazon business account, please contact the Fram Farmers office to find out more; 01728 727700.

#### **PLEASE NOTE:**

Fram Farmers cannot engage in delivery disputes, or put invoices into dispute. The member is responsible for doing this themselves directly with Amazon, via the webshop. Delivery is not by Amazon Prime, so expect slightly longer delivery times. Fram Farmers is able to sign up as a group for Amazon Prime but must have a minimum of 100 members joined. Once we hit this number we will advise. Fram Farmers has found that prices are not the same on the business account as the general public site. Most are less, but a few are more.

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### Helping navigate the future for your business



At Wilson Wraight we work hard to help our clients with the challenges facing them. Two big topics now are the end of the Basic Payment Scheme and diversification.

DEFRA has created the Future Farming Resilience Fund to help farmers and land managers understand the impact of the loss of BPS. This is the second phase of FFRF with an overall budget of £32 million being delivered by a range of specialists, including Wilson Wraight.

With an increasingly complex agricultural backdrop, the need for businesses to review their performance and consider future strategy has never been more vital. Rachel Brooks, consultant at Wilson Wraight, noted "it can be difficult for business owners to step back from the day-to-day pressures to properly consider the impact of recent changes on short- and medium-term prospects. The FFRF provides an excellent opportunity to do this, supported by experienced

consultants with a broad breadth of knowledge on all aspects of running a rural-based business".

This leads neatly onto diversification projects as many farmers are considering developing their business after the loss of BPS. Wilson Wraight is well placed to assess the financial and practical impact of such enterprises and also the planning requirements, which often can be one of the key challenges.

The planning consultancy services are built on in-depth understanding of the wider development process, enabling Wilson Wraight to provide timely, professional and cost-effective advice.

Head of Planning, Dan Hewett, comments that "our service is tailored to unlocking opportunities through the planning system and our experience enables us to cover a wide range of projects from the strategic promotion of sites through to the project management of development and diversification schemes via planning applications or appeals."

Contact us at Wilson Wraight for more information.
For FFRF enquires contact advice@wilsonwraight.co.uk
and for Planning contact Dan Hewett dhewett@wilsonwraight.co.uk





## FRAM FARMERS AGREES A MAJOR INDEPENDENT SUPPLIER FOR TANK MONITORING TELEMETRY



With fuel supply chains continuing to be challenging and precarious, Fram Farmers is pleased to inform members of a new partnership with Kingspan, worldwide manufacturers of the Watchman Radar, a remote tank monitoring system.

The Fram Farmers fuel team advises members to keep a close eye on their stocks to avoid running out, the simplest method of doing so by using technology to monitor fuel levels in your tanks.

"For a few years, remote monitoring of fuel tank contents has been available," explains Gordon Cummings, Fram Farmers general farm inputs manager. "Normally this is provided free of charge by fuel distributors, however this has meant the customer is tied to that specific supplier. We believe that it is in our members' best interests to be independent, and always get the best price on fuel, so we have partnered with Kingspan to help Fram Farmers members maintain their independence while also having control over their fuel levels."

The Watchman Radar monitors how much oil is left in your oil tank, setting off an alert in the event of a sudden drop in oil levels. Not only does this reduce the likelihood of your oil running out, therefore avoiding emergency fuel delivery fees, it also

increases the security of tanks, particularly those in remote yards.

With higher accuracy and cloud-based technology, the Watchman Radar works alongside the easy-to-use Watchman Toolbox app, which can be accessed via any PC, tablet or smart phone. Closer management and awareness of fuel levels will enable members to be more flexible when purchasing fuel. With some fuel suppliers charging for fuel returned to depot, understanding tank capacity will also avoid unwanted charges.



Fram Farmers has negotiated a special 'first adopter deal' for the first 100 units ordered by members. Under this deal the unit is available for the one-off cost of £30\*, plus £36 per year, per unit, for the cloud access and app subscription, under a 3-year contract. The units can be fitted by yourself (a fairly simple process), or by the manufacturer for a fee of £65 +VAT.

For more information, or to order your Watchman unit, please contact the Fram Farmers fuel team on 01728 727714, or email fuel@framfarmers.co.uk.

\*This offer is restricted to the first 100 members to sign up. After this, the individual units will cost £120.

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