Report

## DFA and Agrovis Groundswell tour 26 to 28 June 2023

A group of 25 farmers and agronomists from Denmark and abroad had an adventurous and learning-full trip to UK to look at Regenerative and Conservation Agriculture in both praxis and theory.


Frederik was one of the participants, and below you will get his detailed report of the tour.

**By Frederik Vilhelm Larsen, agronomist at Agrovi.**

In collaboration, Agrovi, DFA and FRDK arranged the 2023 tour to Groundswell Agriculture Show. We started the tour on Monday the 26th of June by leaving Stanstead airport together destined for the farm of George Sly which farms on the flat clay soils of “the fens” which is a reclaimed clay outwash slightly north of Peterborough. George is an agricultural engineer renowned for having developed and founded the Horizon no - till seed drill factory which is currently his main occupation while farming part time.

George is not only a farmer, but has also big plans of expanding his manufacturing of the Horizon no-till drill machine.

The farm is a family farm with an emphasis on winter wheat, and corn and winter triticale for biogas. The flexible approach to cropping allows George to sell biogas crops in order to fight the heavy black grass infestation while getting the opportunity to return the fiber fraction back from the biogas digester. This is an important approach to George's farming systems because it provides a good P and K source while also returning a large quantity of carbon back into the soil in order to build soil fertility. Another small development on George's farm was the recently planted Hazel and Walnut agroforestry system incorporating 2000 hazel trees. The goal for George was the added benefit of habitat and crop environment modification while allowing for a future farm diversification strategy to allow possible income from selling harvested food products from the nuts and provide future agrotourism options.

Diner was on a local pup on our way back to Stansted for the hotel and social get together in the hotel lobby.

Tuesday morning, we set out to visit the farm of Toby Simpson. Toby is a young farmer in his 30'ties having recently mowed back to the 650-ha family farm after a military officer carrier in royal guard in London city. Toby farms together with his farther and wife on variable soil types south of Peterborough.

Toby is a 2022 Nuffield Farming scholar which has provided him the opportunity to travel the world visiting farmers and investigating the successful implementation of cover cropping into arable crop rotations for the UK. Drilling is done by a Sly boss drill as well as a modified Horsch tine drill with low-disturbance narrow

aftermarket tines. The farm is arable farming with an emphasis on winter wheat and are currently reintroducing winter oilseed rape after having stopped growing it due to resistant cabbage stem flea beetle. Key goals of the future development of the farm business are a vigorous approach resilience and risk management in a high variable and more drought prone climate while weaning the farm of the reliance of government cash support schemes. This is done by investigating the possibilities of early spring grazing by sheep on the winter wheat and how this interacts with crop growth regulator spraying. Also reduced nitrogen fertilizer rates and foliar nitrogen applications was currently trialed at the farm. It was clearly demonstrated to the group that spring grazing of winter wheat has the opportunity to make the winter wheat shorter. Whether this will reduce yield is difficult to say. Also there seemed to be a strong negative effect of both grazing and spraying PGRs on the same plot of wheat. Another important learning for the group was that black grass seemed to grow more vigorous in the growth regulated winter wheat compared to the more tall and non-regulated winter wheat. This clearly demonstrates the importance of creating a tall dense crop for the competition against tough to control grass weeds.

Toby is a very innovative and passionate CA farmer, and not afraid of also showing his mistakes

Toby was also trialing interrow-hoeing to fight his resistant black grass and cut back on the reliance on herbicides. It was interesting to learn that it was possible to run a advanced high-end hoe even though that the crop establishment was no till with plenty of retained chopped straw and the leftovers from the previous cover crop.

Next and final stop on our Tuesday farm visit tour was to the Lear family at Creslow Manor Farm. Steve Lear being the youngest generation to join the family operation showed us around the arable and livestock farm. Creslow Manor farms 1500 ha of arable and forage grass land while running a 400-cow limousine pedigree breeding herd with full finished of all offspring (that is roughly 1200 head of cattle on the farm). As a neet side business in order to diversify the farm income (risk management) the Creslow Manor runs a wedding event venue in beautiful facilities in the Manor Park. Drilling was by a 5-meter Cross Slot no till drill. Which has recently been supplemented by a 3-meter Simtech direct seeding tine drill in order to drill faba beans deeper into the ground (aiming at 12cm).

Danish Farmers
ABROAD

The 7 years of no tilling and a strategic decision not to spray insecticides in any crops has recently allowed the Lears to reintroduce winter OSR into the crop rotation with high expectations for the upcoming harvest. Previously it has not been possible due to very high insect predation by cabbage stem beetles and stem weevils. Steve Lear assigns the new possibility to reintroduce OSR to the fact that high numbers of beneficial insects are now present throughout the farm from the non-insecticide strategy.

Steve clearly lives and breathes for his and his family's farm and business, where the high value breeding herd is a big part, and a tasty part.

The group of farmers on tour was blown back by the kind hospitality of the Lear family especially the delicious serving of pulled beef burgers back in the event tent on the park.

The day finished at the hotel in Luton with a much-deserved beer at a local pub.

Finally, Wednesday had arrived and the group travelled through small country lanes in a large bus (we got a large damage to the bus by passing a lorry load of stones on our way) to the Groundswell show grounds at the Weston Park Farm just north of Stevenage not far from Luton Airport. Groundswell was exciting and full of smiling farmers as well as regenerative agriculture industry representatives.

There was a large representation of new companies within the business of certification of ecosystem services (carbon credits but also biodiversity gains). Also, a wide array of companies providing bio stimulants for enhanced fertility management and crop growth improvement was present. It is easy to get the feeling that many of these new companies are rushing to get a quick piece of the pie yet not really putting much emphasis on durable product development and testing prior to market launch.

The was a large array of speakers and many sessions to attend. I managed to attend two very interesting sessions. One was farmer experiences on the planting and design of arable agroforestry systems. New to me was the realization that tree rows in the arable field and the corresponding root pruning can be an effective way to increase drainage but also effectively reduce the evapotranspiration of water from the crop canopy (by planting tree rows the cash crop will suffer less from drought). Another session which I attended was on by Frederic Thomas on future farming systems. His key take-home was the absolute necessity of sustainable intensification of our cropping systems by harvesting as much sunlight as possible. This is especially enhanced by the introduction of legume living mulches in arable crop rotations but also the possibilities of

second cash crop harvest by dual cropping and/or relay-planting (seasonal water availability are main limitations).

Happy, tired, inspired and full of thought the group set out to the final drive for the Stansted airport where the tour had begun.