

# farms

Newsletter for tenants of Cambridgeshire County Farms Estate

Please note change in  
telephone numbers

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Approved for circulation

## A royal visit

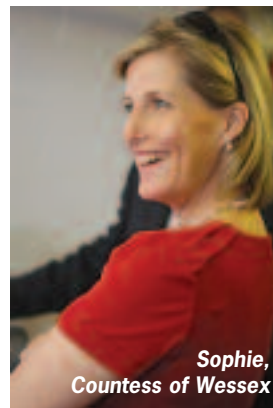
### Westmoor and Purrants Farm, Chatteris

Another first for George Munns when he welcomed the Countess of Wessex to his farm.

About 40 guests, made up of family, friends and business partners from across the Fens, turned out to greet the Countess on her arrival to Westmoor Farm. Among the dignitaries were the Mayor of Chatteris, Councillor Sue Elam, and her husband Brian; Councillor Bernard Keane, Chairman of Fenland District Council, and his wife Sylvia; and Councillor Alan Melton, Cambridgeshire County Council Cabinet member for Corporate Services, with his wife Joanna.

The Countess visited George's 150 ha holding on the 13 September 2007 primarily to see the geese and rape seed oil enterprises and also the recently constructed reservoir. She arrived by car and after introductions George explained how 'Munns Extra Virgin Cold Pressed Rapeseed Oil' is made. The visit was very relaxed helped by the Duchess' easy going approach and George's witty comments.

She was then driven to the reservoir, which George has had constructed with the help of Natural England funding and his own resources.



Sophie,  
Countess of Wessex

Dr Nigel Russell from Natural England spoke to the Countess about the role of the reservoir and how the management of the farm under Natural England's environmental stewardship schemes benefit conservation and ecology. The reservoir is for summer irrigation for root crops grown on the farm with a capacity of 17.5 million gallons and at its deepest is 9 metres. It is one of several on the Farms Estate and has been visited by a

variety of birds. In 2005 George received the RSBP's Midland Regional Lapwing award for the conservation work he has done on the farm.

The Countess was radiant in a red summer dress. Before leaving, the Countess was presented with a basket of multi-coloured roses by 10-year-old Lucy Munns. Mrs Munns, who is a qualified florist, prepared the presentation. The Countess left by helicopter after about an hour on the farm with her lady-in-waiting and private security.

A first for George and the County Farms Estate and our thanks go to him and his helpers for making the day a great success. ●

# Framework Contract

The Council, in an effort to improve efficiency and achieve better value for money, is aiming to use fewer consultants for professional work by introducing a Framework Contract. It is always going to be necessary to buy in outside advice in areas where we do not have expertise but also when the capacity to do the work does not exist.

In the last few years County Farms have not been able to retain staff and have been unsuccessful in recruiting replacements. We advertised most recently for a new Patch Officer in the summer but were unable to fill that post.

A large number of firms were invited to be included in the Framework Contract for work as diverse as rating, planning, agricultural sales and agricultural management. These were whittled down to up to four firms in each category.

When work is required, instead of sending it to lots of firms, only the four in that category are invited. In that way a more limited number of firms are involved which will, in time, lead to them gaining more experience of working with the Council.

So far the Estate has used the Framework Contract for several Opportunity to Buy valuations, the sale of a farm at Whittlesey, a barn at Landbeach and a number of farm rent reviews. ●

*If you have any questions about how the Framework works please contact John MacMillan on 01223 699092.*

## Are you Cross Compliant?

### Are you Cross Compliant or do you need advice on your record keeping?

If you do, help is at hand! The Environment Agency has arranged a series of drop in centres in Bedfordshire, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk where you can get help and advice from one of their agriculture officers.

Under Cross Compliance, they are responsible for Nitrate Vulnerable Zones Ground Water Regulations and the Sludge

Regulations. All three require comprehensive record keeping. It is essential you know what records to keep to retain your full Single Farm Payment entitlement.

A representative from the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) will also be present to help with agri-environment scheme paperwork and discuss the many options available to you.

Date	Venue	Time
8 November	Over Conference & Community Centre, Cambs	10 am – 3pm
11 December	William Burt Centre, West Winch	10 am – 3pm
24 January	Mildenhall Jubilee Hall	10 am – 3pm
21 February	Forest Centre, Marston Moretaine	10 am – 3pm

There is no need to book, just turn up at any time convenient for you. ●  
If you have any questions contact Christopher Burton (01223) 699093.

## Budgets tight for the remainder of the year

At the beginning of October maintenance budgets were almost two thirds spent. With this in mind if you have any urgent repair please do not leave them until the last minute as we may not have the funds! To notify us of any repairs please contact Sarah Matthews on 01223 699095. ●

## NVZ's proposal may hit the County Farms Estate

On 21 August DEFRA issued a consultation for proposed changes to the Nitrate Vulnerable Zones. The NVZ's currently cover most of the Estate and it is proposed that it will cover all of it. In the past NVZ Regulations affected livestock producers most and focused on manure storage and spreading. The new proposals will further tighten how manure is stored and spread.

However, there is a proposal which will require

arable farmers to establish cover crops before spring sown crops if the previous crop is harvested before the 1 September. This will impact most farmers on the Estate. ●

Full details are available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/naturalenvironment.htm>

The National Farmers Union are gathering responses from interested farmers if you feel strongly about the proposals.

## Brian (Mick) Day

**Mick was a former tenant at Bexwell Farm, Shepreth. Both Mick and his son, Stephen, were well known to many tenants particularly in the south of the County.**

We employed them as contractors on the Farms Estate where they would consider tasks such as pruning/trimming trees, planting and general environmental works. They always did a first class job.

Mick was seriously injured after getting trapped under a trailer at Bexwell Farm. He died at Addenbrooke's Hospital on the 4 August 2007. A celebration of his life was held at Cambridge City Crematorium on the 16 August. Mick was held in very high esteem which was evident by his many friends who attended the Crematorium. He will be greatly missed. ●

# Organic farming: a labour of love



Organic vegetable grower, Simon Steel, has been a tenant since 1990 and farms 26 acres with his wife, Michelle. Their business is known as Mayfield Organics and grows a wide range of vegetables such as onions, cabbages, kale, calabrese and leeks as well as salad crops and some herbs.

It isn't an easy life but, hail, rain or shine, Simon is outdoors up to 16 hours each day, and because he grows organically his crops get more hands-on care than they would if he were able to kill off weeds and pests with chemicals. No heated greenhouses for the Steels', just a number of polytunnels and a lot of rich Fen soil. Simon's leeks, for example, are hand planted, hand weeded and eventually pulled, cut and trimmed by hand. Because the plants, when young, would be easily swamped by robust weed growth, the weeding is a regular event.

Simon says: "In sandy soil you probably get one swathe of weeds in spring and very few more and they're fairly easy to remove, but the soil here is so fertile that they just keep coming – its great for crops, terrible for weeds!"

Simon has been a farmer all his working life managing businesses for other people. He said: "We had always liked East Anglia so when we spotted this it seemed ideal. Initially we farmed conventionally but converted to organic methods about 8 years ago. It seemed the right thing to do from all points of view, commercially and environmentally. I was almost farming organically anyway because I didn't like using sprays and it was the only way I could see the

business surviving because the returns on conventional crops were so poor". At one time, as well as farm work, Simon had to take a job working the night shift in a local factory to make ends meet. This involved 30 hour days twice a week which lasted for eight months.

He knows that going organic was the right decision with more people questioning how food is produced and the increase in Farmers' Markets allowing small producers like Simon to meet customers face to face. Without Farmers' Markets many small growers wouldn't be able to survive. Simon is aiming to price his vegetables competitively so they are no more expensive than the conventionally grown equivalent would be in a supermarket which means that in effect people are getting the organic benefit for free. Half of his crops are sold through Farmers' Markets in Ely, St. Ives and Wisbech and Cambridge market on Sundays and the remainder goes to Eostre Organics, a co-operative which sells through box schemes, small shops and London markets. Most of Simon's customers are regulars who like to know where their food is coming from and that it is so fresh.

Wildlife on the farm also appreciates the organic lifestyle. Ponds have been dug to encourage frogs and toads who would eat the slugs and that has brought more insects and a much wider range of birds which eat the insects.

This October Simon's holding is doubling in size, taking on two more fields which were farmed by Barry Howard who retires this autumn. ●

If you would like more information on Simon's organic enterprise please contact him on (01353) 862251 or (07747) 697645 or by email at [simonorganic@aol.com](mailto:simonorganic@aol.com)

## competitions

### Muckspreaders' Cup 2007: A Southern Hemisphere Battle

The annual cricket match between the County Council Staff and the County Farms' Tenants – 8 June 2007

The morning of the 8th started in traditional English summer style of thick fog following on from a previous day of heavy rain. Luckily the weather was with us and we had a fine evening of sport. This annual fixture is played for the prestigious Muckspreaders Cup which has been won for the last 2 years by the Tenants' team and so it was well overdue for the cup to be returned to Shire Hall.

The Council batted first and Chris Badger showed some resilience by getting 13 before being caught. It was downhill after that. Ben Sawyer bowled for 4, Bill Blackaby out for a duck, Nick Sweeney bowled for 1, Adrian Dobbyne bowled for 2, Matt Mallory run out for 0, to name but a few. In the end it gave a fairly defensible score of 84 off 20 overs for the County Council.

The tenants' innings was very similar to the Council's with a big score from Quentin who got an unbeaten 35 and extras appearing on 16. However, the rest achieved low scores, collectively achieving just enough to reach a winning score of 87 within the allotted overs. The early victims were P Robinson being bowled for 3 and James Neal bowled for 0. Chris Badger took the wicket of George Munns for 3. Young Ben Sawyer caught and bowled Dale Ablitt for 7. David Wheatley and C Robinson both went for 5 bowled and caught respectively, Scott Jackson put up some resistance to get 8, James Stevenson and Matt Elliott went for 1 each both being caught and Jon Megginson was bowled for 3.

At the end of the day it was a battle of two ringers, the Aussie v the South African. The South African won! The tenants' team retain the trophy for another year in what was an enjoyable spectacle.

Afterwards the teams and supporters enjoyed an excellent barbecue finishing with the presentation by David Nuttycombe, Head of Strategy & Estates, of the Muckspreaders cup to the victorious captain. ●



# New tenants to the Estate 2007

**We are pleased to welcome three new tenants to the Estate...**

**SUE TRACEY** is the new tenant of New Farm, Earith, a 27 ha grassland holding previously occupied by the late John Eddy, who was a County Councillor and a former Chairman of the Council. Sue and her partner, Richard Hill, come from Kelvedon Hatch in Essex. She is an equine lecturer and Richard is a self-employed agricultural contractor and also part-time agricultural and animal care lecturer, both at Writtle College.

At Whitehall Farm, Farcet, **STEPHEN BRIGGS** will farm 103 ha formerly farmed by John Amps who retired this October. Stephen comes from South Luffenham in Rutland and is a self-employed organic consultant and farmer.

**MARK SWALES** is taking on the tenancy of 114 ha at Wood Mills Farm, Parson Drove and Tholomas Drove Farm, Wisbech St. Mary. James Randle (deceased) was the previous tenant of this farm. Mark is a self-employed agricultural contractor. His grandfather was a tenant at Ramsey. ●



## environment

### Environmental Compliance Workshop

The Environment Agency has finally agreed to host another Workshop. It will be held in February 2008 at a Cambridge venue and will take the form of the one held earlier this year on relevant topics on

agricultural waste and the regulations. Presentations by the Environment Agency staff will then be followed by a question and answer session. The Workshop will conclude with a light buffet lunch and it will be FREE.

If you are interested in attending please contact

Christine Larham on (01223) 699046 or by email at [Christine.Larham@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:Christine.Larham@cambridgeshire.gov.uk). Further details will then be sent to you nearer the time. If you have any general questions please ring Christopher Burton on (01223) 699093 or by email at: [Christopher.Burton@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:Christopher.Burton@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

## Cashflow problems?



In recent years cashflow problems have caused difficulties for some tenants. Some have not been able to pay their rent on time. A clear approach is important so that Landlord and Tenant know where they stand. The following points clarify the Council's approach, which we believe is firm but fair.

### Agricultural Holding Act Tenancies:

- Tenants with Agricultural Holding Act Agreements will receive a Notice to Pay shortly after the rent is due giving them 2 months for payment.
- If the rent is not received within 2 months of receiving the Notice to Pay the Tenant will be in a Notice to Quit position.

### Farm Business Tenancies:

- Tenants with Farm Business Tenancies are required to pay their rent by the date shown on the invoice sent.
- If the rent is not paid when it is due the tenant will be in a Notice to Quit position. The 2 month Notice to Pay procedure is not an option with Farm Business Tenancies.
- Interest will be charged on rent arrears at 9% over Bank of England's base rate as stated in the Farm Business Tenancy Agreement. ●

*If you have any difficulty in paying your rent on time please contact John MacMillan on (01223) 699092 as soon as possible. Do not leave this until the last minute.*

## Natural England – Future of Farming Award



Two of our tenants, David Wheatley, from Wisbech St. Mary and George Munns from Chatteris were shortlisted for the regional finals of the Natural England Future of Farming Award. The

Award, though, was won by a Suffolk farmer.

The Award Scheme was launched at the Royal Show this year. To celebrate "Environmental Excellence and Innovation in Farming and recognised farmers who had made the greatest contribution to both conserving England's special wildlife and landscapes and to help people to have access to our natural environment."

Our congratulations go both to David and George for making the shortlist. Natural England intend to run the Award Scheme next year and introducing more categories to recognise other areas of environmental excellence. ●

*If you wish to apply next year or suggest a possible candidate, you should contact Andrew Smith at [Andrew.r.smith@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Andrew.r.smith@naturalengland.org.uk)*

**Pounds to stay but acres to go!**

*Units of measurements such as pounds and ounces, pints, and feet and inches are to remain in use within the EU after research showed that a move to ban the terms would meet general hostility among the public! However, the EC will not recognise the word "acre". ●*

*Source –  
Smith Gore Landscape*



**What did the farmer say to the Duchess?**

*Answer in next edition.*