



FOCUS Devon



QUICK FACTS

Farmers	Mark & Emma Sampson Sampson Agricultural Services
Location	Loddiswell near Kingsbridge
Area Farmed	250 Acres /Contract 150
Cropping	Winter wheat, winter & spring barley, oil seed rape

Farmers Mark and Emma Sampson operate an agricultural contracting business and have noticed a dramatic drop in time and cost since changing to strip seeding.

Strip seeding transforms performance and profitability

Purchasing a Claydon Hybrid Direct Drill has enabled Mark and Emma Sampson to dramatically reduce the cost of establishing crops on their own farm in Devon and allowed them to add a much-in-demand service to their contracting business.

Establishing crops using plough-based or deep cultivation systems is unsustainable with agricultural commodity prices at current levels, says Mark Sampson, who has benefited from dramatic reductions in time and cost since changing to strip seeding on the family farm at Loddiswell near Kingsbridge two years ago.

“All farmers are looking to reduce the cost of establishing their crops, as this represents one of the few potential areas for savings,” says Mark, who farms 250 acres and operates an agricultural contracting business, Sampson Agricultural Services, with his wife Emma. “We were in exactly that position until discovering that strip seeding would provide a far more financially, agronomically and environmentally sustainable alternative on our own farm. This technology is now also enabling

contract customers to make major cost savings, which provides a big incentive for them to change the way they do things.”

The Sampson family have farmed in the area for nearly 100 years and been at Woolston Farm since Mark’s great, great grandfather bought it in 1945. Mark’s grandparents took over in 1959 and ran a very successful poultry rearing business, together with a small dairy unit. Then, his parents, John and Rosemary, took over in 1974, expanding to over 300 cows and acquiring more land. The dairy herd was sold in 1992 to concentrate on the arable and contracting operations.

Mark and Emma Sampson have run the farm and contracting business since 2007, when they added additional services and constructed extensive cold storage facilities as part of a 1200-acre potato contracting operation, but it

required a high level of capital investment, machinery and labour. In 2012, following a full reappraisal of their operations, the couple decided to get out of potatoes, slim the business down and do more of the work themselves.

Two years later, with agricultural commodity prices still at low levels, they reduced their acreage, cut borrowings and lowered fixed costs. The farmed area was cut back to 250 acres, which now comprises 100 acres of winter wheat, 70 acres of winter barley, 50 acres of oilseed rape and 20 acres of spring barley, plus an area of permanent pasture on land which is too steep for arable cropping. The couple also contract farm a further 150 acres and run their contracting business with the help of one additional member of staff.



After examining their business from a different angle, Emma and Mark Sampson took a novel approach to crop establishment, purchasing this 4m Claydon Hybrid in 2015.

FORCED TO CUT COSTS “One thing which became very clear when we really analysed our business was that we had to reduce the time and cost of establishing crops, as it was one of the biggest areas of expenditure,” Mark explains. “Using the traditional plough, power harrow and drill approach was simply taking too long and costing too much.

We knew that we had to change and that some form of direct drilling was obviously the way to go, so we looked at drills from a range of manufacturers, including Vaderstad, John Deere Moore and Aitchison. Nothing really stood out because every one of them had a drawback of some sort. They were either too heavy, too limited in the range of crops they could handle, or did not have enough clearance between the tines or discs to cope with all soils and field conditions. Being able to work in any situation, from dry light soils in the spring to wet, heavy clay after maize in the autumn is vital, which led us to the Claydon System. It was the only one that really looked right and gave me the confidence to invest.

We had heard a lot about how it could dramatically reduce the cost of establishing crops, as well as benefiting the soil, so in 2015 we had a 4m Claydon Hybrid on demonstration and used it to establish cover crops in winter barley stubbles. It did the job without

any fuss or bother, in a fraction of the time it would normally have taken and Claydon’s demonstrator was able to answer every question that I could think to ask. It was just what we had been looking for and the crop rocketed out of the ground much more quickly than expected.

It was hard to convince Emma that we should invest in a new drill, and a 7.5m Claydon Straw Harrow to carry out stubble management prior to drilling, but the Claydon System has proved itself beyond any doubt. We have never looked back. I can now drill 80 acres a day, so our own 250 acres is just three days work instead of almost three weeks when we were using a plough, power harrow and drill. We are using much less fuel and wearing metal, yet producing better results and the condition of the soil is improving.

The output of the Claydon drill means that crops are established on time, in ideal conditions and the results have been so good that we added it to our range of agricultural contracting services. Farming just eight miles from Dartmoor and 11 miles from the south coast the catchment area for contracting services is relatively limited and farmers are fairly well catered for in terms of general work, so you have to offer something different to get their attention.

When customers heard about the results we were achieving with the Claydon Hybrid they were keen to try it to save money and improve their margins. As a trial offer we charged £15 per acre for the first six months and offered to go back and re-drill if they were not happy with the results, but no-one ever took us up on that. The cost is now £20 per acre, still a bargain compared with what it would cost to establish their crops using traditional methods, as we are saving them £30 to £40 an acre.

The Claydon drill also helps to overcome a big problem on steep land where maize is grown. When the crop is harvested in the autumn, ground conditions are often not ideal and traditionally the land has been ploughed to establish a following crop of winter cereals. If the weather is wet, soil wash can be a big issue, potentially leading to heavy fines. The Claydon Hybrid will even work on compacted headlands which are typical after maize harvesting and its leading tines create ideal conditions for establishment at a time of year when drilling might otherwise be impossible. I have drilled winter wheat directly into wet maize stubble and the crop has yielded 3.5 tons per acre from land that would otherwise have had to wait until the spring before it was ploughed and drilled.

The Claydon Hybrid makes you much more thoughtful about how you farm and focus on best practice. Because you can cover so much ground, so quickly, you can stay off the land when conditions are not ideal knowing that the results will be much better if you wait. Soil structure has improved dramatically using the Claydon drill, so much so that in the winter we can drive a 4 x 4 on fields where previously we would have struggled to walk.

This year we sold our existing Vaderstad TopDown cultivator, power harrow and Triple K cultivators as they were no longer being used and the six-furrow plough that we'd held back 'just in case' has not moved in 18 months, so that will be on its way shortly. That says it all really. The challenge now is getting agronomists to recognise that farmers cannot carry on using conventional cultivation methods to establish cereals and that there is a better way."

Soil structure has improved dramatically using the Claydon drill



The Sampsons' 4m Claydon Hybrid drill is used behind a 250hp John Deere, the front tines set between 4" and 6" deep, slightly more if compacted soil needs to be loosened in fields where the drill is being used for the first time.



The Claydon Hybrid will work in any conditions, including directly into grassland, as seen here



Soils are already improving after adopting the Claydon System



The 7.5m Claydon Straw Harrow is a key part of the stubble management system on the Sampsons' own farm