



## FOCUS DORSET



### QUICK FACTS

|             |                                |
|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Farmer      | Julian Lownds<br>Farnham Farm  |
| Location    | Dorset                         |
| Area Farmed | 300 acres                      |
| Cropping    | Oilseed rape,<br>barley, wheat |

*Left: Julian Lownds, contractor and farmer at Farnham Farm, has improved his economic stability using the Claydon Strip Seeding System.*

## Claydon strip seeding system offers much more than big cost savings

**The economic pressures of farming in an environment of low agricultural commodity prices were the driving force behind Dorset farmer and contractor Julian Lownds' decision to change from min-till methods of crop establishment to strip tillage. But, two years down the line he is finding that the new technique offers much more than just big cost savings.**

"The challenging combination of falling grain prices and potential increases in rent meant that to keep farming we had to do things differently. Establishing crops using the Claydon Strip Seeding System has substantially improved the economic sustainability of our business, as well as providing other benefits in terms of improved timeliness, soil structure and yields," says Julian, who farms 300 arable acres at Farnham Farm, Farnham near Blandford.

A tenant of the Rushmore Estate, working land which his family have farmed for more than 100 years, Julian currently grows equal areas of hybrid oilseed rape (DK Exalte), winter feed wheat (LG Revelation) and spring malting barley (KWS Irina) on soils which range from heavy clay to chalk. Surrounded by large estates, which make it difficult to take on additional land, he is also involved in agricultural contracting,

providing a range of services for other farms within a 20-mile radius to bring in additional income and add variety to the working week

### Taking the plunge

Having first looked at the Claydon System in 2012, as a possible alternative to the ploughing and min-till techniques which he was using at the time, Julian kept it in the back of his mind but initially did not pursue it further. It was not until two years later, after agricultural commodity prices dipped yet again, that he decided to visit the system's designer, Jeff Claydon, on his arable farm in Suffolk during spring 2015 to find out more about the practical benefits. "I left there thinking 'I like this system' and could clearly see the benefits. My initial thought was to order a 4m Claydon Hybrid, but I got cold feet at the last moment because it was

a new concept in North Dorset and no-one else was using it, so I played safe and went for the 3m version," Julian explains. "Because it was late in the season I only drilled 13 acres of spring barley for a neighbouring farmer, but the crop produced one of the best yields that he had ever had, so I knew that the Claydon System had significant potential in this area."

That autumn Julian drilled all his own arable crops, which went on to produce yields of 9.0t/ha for winter wheat, 8t/ha for spring barley and 3.75t/ha for oilseed rape. He also drilled another 600 acres of oilseed rape for other farmers who were keen to assess the potential of the Claydon System for themselves. "When drilling oilseed rape, the key is to bale the straw from the preceding crop immediately after the combine and get it off the field to minimise slug populations," Julian explains. "Because we are



Julian Lownds' 3m Claydon Hybrid drill has significantly improved the economics of producing crops on his Dorset farm. Covering up to 25ha per day, it is fast, efficient and far more economical than other methods of establishment.



The Claydon Straw Harrow is used immediately after harvest, at an angle of up to 45° to the combine's travel, to create a shallow tilth which provides ideal conditions that encourage volunteers to germinate, as well as killing slugs. This autumn, wheat was established following two passes with the Claydon Straw harrow and one pass with the TerraStar where required, before drilling with the Claydon Hybrid.



Julian Lownds had a pre-production 6m TerraStar light cultivator for evaluation in 2015 and bought one as soon as it went into production in 2016. He has fitted it with a broadcast seeding unit which allows grass, cover crops and stubble turnips to be established very effectively in one pass, a service he now offers to other farmers and which is proving popular.



drilling on wide 600mm row spacing the seed rate is reduced to 30 seeds per square metre so that every plant has the best possible chance of surviving. The results speak for themselves."

Having experienced the benefits of the Claydon Hybrid drill, which reduced the cost of establishing crops to less than half even that of using min-till establishment, Julian subsequently purchased a 7.5m Claydon Straw Harrow, which has proved to be an invaluable tool for stubble management.

"The Straw Harrow is simple and effective in controlling volunteers and slugs, as well as being very fast and cheap to use, so it makes sense to use it as many times as time and conditions allow. When it comes to controlling volunteer cereals, weeds and slugs the Straw harrow is my first choice, because as farmers we all should be very careful not to over-use products such as glyphosate, which are too valuable for our industry to lose.

"After harvest I carry out two passes using the Straw Harrow, with the tines set to the maximum angle so that their action is as aggressive as possible and the tractor's hydraulics adjusted so that the whole weight of the implement rests on the tines. That creates about 25mm of tilth, which is normally ideal to encourage weed seeds and volunteers to chit."

The final element in the Claydon System was the purchase of a 6m Claydon TerraStar light cultivator.

"When I first used the Claydon Hybrid drill on some heavier soils it seemed that there might be a benefit in achieving slightly more tilth to increase the seed to soil contact than was possible using just the Straw Harrow. The TerraStar is the ideal tool for the job, because it produces a little more tilth but not an excessive amount as you would get with a normal cultivator. The TerraStar also thoroughly mulches and incorporates any stubble and chopped straw, leaving a clean surface, says Julian, who has modified his TerraStar to incorporate an air-seeder unit. This combination provides a fast, effective one-pass establishment method for crops such as grass, stubble turnips, cover crops and game crops.

"The most difficult aspect of the Claydon System to grasp for anyone who has been used to ploughing or deep min-till cultivating prior to drilling is the idea of seeing stubble after the next crop is in the ground, rather than a clean, brown seedbed," Julian notes. "It can look a little untidy over winter, but the reality is that the Claydon-drilled crop will actually have been established with much better timeliness and into ideal soil conditions. The stubble between the rows also benefits wildlife by providing food and shelter over the winter. Although a Claydon-drilled crop might take slightly longer to establish than one which is established conventionally, when it does the germination is much faster and more even.

"Earlier this year I visited a farm in Hampshire with similar soils to our own and where the

Claydon System has been used for five years - the crops looked fantastic. They were using the front tines slightly deeper than I had done in my first year and since then I have operated the leading tines on the Claydon Hybrid at about 6" for oilseed rape and 5" for wheat, with a noticeable improvement in germination."

Julian Lownds offers his customers the whole Claydon System, and because it substantially reduces the costs of establishing crops it is proving increasingly popular. The biggest issue, it seems, is persuading customers that any trial of the new system should be judged over at least a two-year period for all the benefits in terms of soil structure, worm populations and improved soil structure to begin to show through.

"I think that it will take three or four years to get the most from the Claydon System and it is still a learning curve, but I have been very pleased with this year's crop and am looking forward to using it again in the spring," Julian states. "It takes a while to adjust to doing anything differently and to get the best from it, but the Claydon System has already made a significant difference on our own farm, both in economic terms and the way in which we establish crops."

**To find out more, contact CLAYDON on +44 (0)1440 820 327 or [info@claydondrill.com](mailto:info@claydondrill.com) [www.claydondrill.com](http://www.claydondrill.com)**