

Vertical strip seeder helps heavy soil establishment

- Twin-tine system benefits fen farm
- Reduced compaction and damage
- A more sustainable farming system

A vertical strip seeding system developed by Claydon Drills is proving to be a good crop establishment option on heavy clay soil in Lincolnshire.

Using Claydon's twin-tine set-up for vertical rather than horizontal strip seeding has delivered numerous advantages for Mick Stanley, of M&G Farms at Helpringham, near Sleaford. The benefits were all too apparent during the challenging 2019/20 season, he says.

"The traditional way to farm on the Lincolnshire Fens was with crawler tractors, subsoilers, ploughs and combination drills. That was how things were done here for many years, but it was time consuming, labour intensive, frustratingly slow, hard work and expensive."

Instead, Mr Stanley uses a Claydon Opti-Till strip seeding system, based around a 4m Hybrid drill fitted with a twin-tine kit to vertically strip seed in lines rather than bands. It is the best way to establish 282ha of combinable crops on the farm and for neighbours, he says.

Mr Stanley's first experience of the Claydon system came in au-

tumn 2006 when he asked neighbouring farmer Tom Ireland to drill some oilseed rape with one of the company's original V-Drills, so named because its tines were in a V formation.

Benefits

"When Tom came here with the V-Drill I could see that it was much faster and more efficient than the conventional approach we had been using, but the traditional farmer in me kept looking for potential pitfalls."

Initially, Mr Stanley says he was concerned that the V-Drill might encourage flooding of seeded areas, poor rooting and slugs on the farm's water-retaining heavy clay soils. But exactly the opposite prove to be the case.

"Drainage and rooting were significantly improved because the soil structure, health and worm populations were so much better, but it was not an overnight process. The benefits continue to compound even years later."

In 2010, Mr Stanley purchased his own 4m Claydon Hybrid drill. Mechanically, he says, the Hybrid drill is bulletproof and does a wonderful job. But the twin-tine

set-up is the better, more versatile option on fen soils with a high clay content.

The twin-tine set-up was fitted to cope with wet weather in 2012. "Initially I used the standard one-piece leading tine and 7-inch-wide A-Shares but found that they could bring up slivers of wet clay in exceptionally wet conditions."

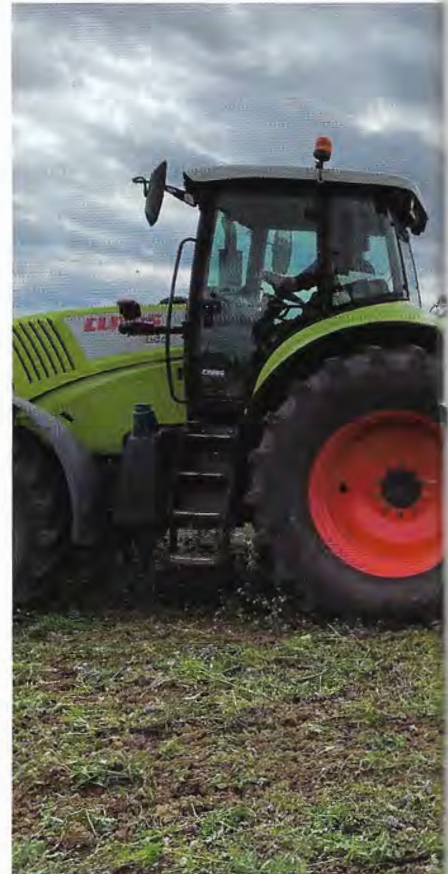
The intention was to return to the standard set-up when the land dried out. But the twin-tine system was so effective and versatile that it has been used continuously ever since. Evidence of that is that a new set of A-shares purchased six years ago remains unused.

"The land here is extremely difficult to farm well and even now I am still learning because every season is different. The 2019/20 season is a case in point, the first that I can remember when no winter wheat could be grown anywhere on Helpringham Fen."

Soil health

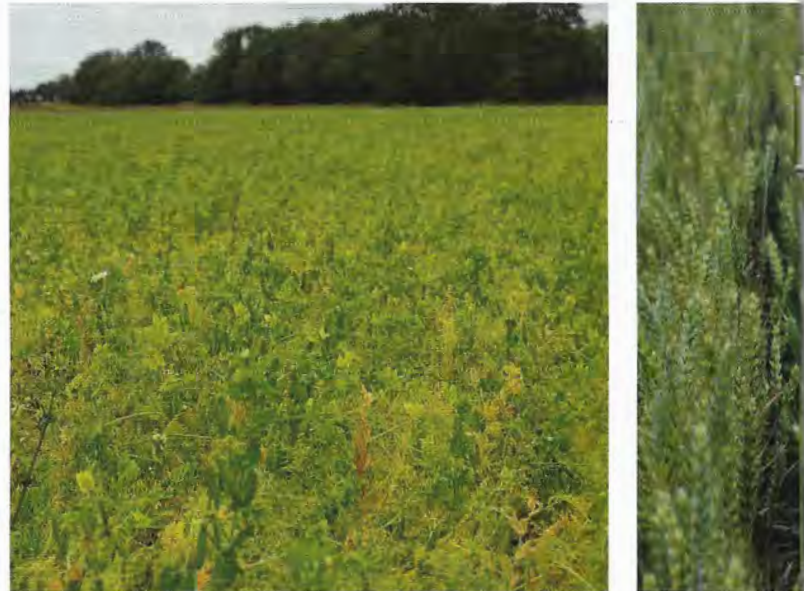
The Claydon system has also increased Mr Stanley's awareness of soil health. Over the years, the structure of the farm's heavy clay land has improved significantly, he says, helped by use of bio-solids and the huge increase in worm activity.

"It now drains much more



quickly after heavy rain, the surface remains level and is much more supportive, so even running machinery on the land after heavy rain has little impact. The System has transformed the way I farm, and average yields have definitely increased."

Most winter milling wheat now averages over 9.9t/ha, with some varieties yielding up to 12.6t/ha, adds Mr Stanley. "It has also helped to ensure the financial sustainability of the operation for my son Ben," he says.





Above: Drilling a trial crop of spring oats directly into a cover crop

Right: The twin-tine kit has major benefits, says Mick Stanley



Left to right:

Mick and Ben assess prospects for a spring bean crop in early July 2020.

Peas drilled for a neighbouring farmer pictured in early July 2020.

The twin-tine set-up produces uniform crops, including this spring wheat

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