



Growing success together

INNOVATION is at the heart of Claydon Drill, a family business that's grown significantly in the last 11 years to become the leading direct drilling company in northern Europe.

Key to the operation (based out amidst the fields of Wickhambrook) is Jeff Claydon, the patriarch whose ideas and ingenuity are the very basis of Claydon Drills' success.

Jeff's family has been farming in the area since the early 1900s, making him fourth generation and his two sons Spencer and Oliver the fifth generation of Claydons to be running a business from the site.

Both an engineer and a farmer, Jeff's story began with the invention of the Yield-O-Meter, followed in 2002 by his groundbreaking, patented drill – created in response to the toughening financial climate faced by farmers.

"When the millennium came wheat prices dropped to £60 per tonne," says Jeff. "This price crash meant farm incomes reduced and we then decided we had to go about the job in a different way, to plant the seeds faster at a lower cost. And that was that."

The Claydon Drill is now one of the most sustainable pieces of farm machinery for decades, costing a third of a traditional set-up of five or more machines, and taking a fifth of the time to do the work.

Instead of ploughing topsoil, the Claydon Drill draws deep lines underground for drainage, while simultaneously dropping seeds and covering the area with a layer of soil.

Not only has the invention increased yields, says Jeff, but it's better for the environment too. Less machinery means less diesel being used, and because of this relatively gentle technique, nesting birds are able to settle between rows of crop with Skylark in particular finding homes on the Claydon fields.

Structurally Claydon Drill has no

shareholders and is family-owned between Jeff, his brother Frank, wife Denise and his sons Spencer (who is director of sales and marketing) and Oliver (director of operations).

Talking about the dynamics of running a family business Oliver says: "There's a hierarchy and respect."

While Jeff adds: "We try to work together to move forward, and in a positive way. "Thankfully the boys are often coming up with such good ideas between them. They work extremely hard and are pushing in the right direction."

It's Jeff's vision that his sons will eventually succeed him in the business, and they are already making their mark

Spencer has worked closely with the team to ensure that all branding, promotion and sales of the Claydon Drill reflect the family's values – which are to only bring products to the market that are genuinely needs-based.

"We wouldn't sell anything we wouldn't use ourselves and wouldn't put the family name into something we didn't believe in," he reveals.

Talking about the company's promotion and route to market, Spencer says they make good use of trade shows and trade magazines, and focus on direct sales.

"This allows us to keep better contact with our customers and it's much more effective. Working with our customers is like being on a live feed because we are constantly listening to the market. We're lucky because it's a closed circuit for us."

Both brothers are involved in employee development and training, and were themselves encouraged to go to college and university before joining the family business.

In all, on site Claydon Drill employs 37 members of staff, from salespeople to engineers, welders and painters – the majority with agricultural backgrounds.

It's important to all three businessmen that staff have access to training. "We do all the compulsory training such as fork lift driving," says Oliver. "But we don't really push people into training. We will pay for them to do it in their own time as an incentive. I need to see a commitment from them and, as long as it's relevant from our side, we're willing to help."

Talking about the access staff have to external learning, Jeff adds: "Without training they can't do the job we need them to do."

"When we take people on they have to demonstrate they are capable of doing the jobs and we will then further develop their skills. We have welders at the moment, for example, who are going to college to enhance their skills."

Training has already paid dividends for one worker, Jamie, who went into Claydon Drill as a forklift driver and has been trained up as a paint sprayer.

Jamie took the Employee of the Year award at Christmas and, says Jeff, has come on leaps and bounds.

Staff are also encouraged by an efficiency and production-linked bonus scheme, which the Claydons have put in place to instil a sense of pride in everything each member of the team does.

Whatever they are doing, the efforts by everyone at Claydon Drill have delivered continued success. From 2009 onwards the business has grown by 100% year on year, dipping to 70% last year due in large to the weather and the financial climate.

"We've grown from doing £300,000 to £400,000 per year to just under £7million. You have got to invest so much money into staff and stock and it's very much a balancing act. We need to be doing £7m to be able to grow," says Spencer.

The onward strategy for Claydon Drill is to continue to stay close to their customers in order to develop



where needed, and to make bigger inroads into Europe.

Last year the company catered for 15% of the drills sales market in the UK, so clearly there is room for them to make a larger dent on British soils too.

Talking about the move to drive sales in Europe Jeff says: "It's a fast market over there and for us is about 10 times the size of the UK."

Being a family-run business is key, he says to the continued growth

of Claydon Drill and of its ability to make a dent in the European market.

"Larger companies will have too many arguments about trying to do things rather than actually doing them.

"As a family business we can go into a room and chat. We are quick on our feet - a multinational has to make plans for six months ahead. And although we are a big ship now we are sitting up at the helm."