

Drill system is game on for establishing crops on shooting estate

Establishing game cover crops using the latest strip seeding technology has brought numerous benefits to a large Bedfordshire estate.



The latest development in drilling technology for farm crops has significantly improved the quality of game cover crops at Turvey Farms Ltd, a privately owned 800ha (2000-acre) estate in Bedfordshire which hosts 10 days of private and syndicated pheasant shooting each season. The Claydon System also saves considerable time, cost and stress establishing game cover, while leaving the soil in much better condition and benefiting the population of English partridge because stubbles remain largely intact, providing dry ground, food and shelter.

JP Agri's 3m Claydon SR drill establishing cover crops at Turvey Farms.

That's the opinion of Jamie Osborne, gamekeeper on the arable estate, who identified the potential of this new technology, and says the results have attracted widespread interest.

Costly business

"Growing game cover can be a costly exercise for any shoot," Jamie states. "When I started here in 2006 the 10ha (25 acres) of game cover were established using a full cultivation system. This included ploughing, two passes with a power harrow and then drilling, followed by rolling, with all the work being done by contractors. With small patches of game cover spread over the estate it was a huge, time-consuming and expensive operation," he explains.

"To make matters more challenging, the estate is in Higher Level Stewardship (HLS), which means that we used many different seeds and mixes. The results were variable, two of the main problems being the weed burden and because covers are drilled in May and June, so if we caught a dry spell the heavy Bedfordshire clay soil soon dried out."

The year after Jamie joined Turvey Farms the contractor, LE Barnes & Sons Ltd, purchased its first Claydon drill, a 4.8m V-Drill and which was subsequently extended to 6m. Initially used to drill the farm's oilseed rape crop, in the first year it also drilled 10ha (25 acres) of wheat direct into stubble as part of a trial to compare it with conventional establishment. The results were so good that they led Jamie to consider whether it could also be used to direct drill the game covers.

"At the time diesel costs were soaring and ploughing game covers was fast becoming a very expensive operation," Jamie says. "In 2009 our contractor changed the Claydon

V-drill for one of the new 6m Claydon Hybrid drills which had just been launched and by now the whole farm had moved away from the min-till method which had been used previously, so all the wheat, rape, beans and linseed was Claydon drilled.

"A major benefit of that to me as the gamekeeper was that the soil was not inverted and much of the stubble remained, which encouraged wild broods of pheasants. Another big advantage was that the ground remained dry, as well as being smooth and much more supportive, so heavy traffic did not leave any impression, which made getting around the shoot much easier.

"In 2010 I took the plunge and decided to Claydon drill all of the game covers, which are supplied by Oakbank, HLS compatible and have been vital to increasing the numbers of English partridge. As some of the strips were only 3m wide I had to bring in another contractor, Jason Parish from JP Agri, with a previous-generation 3m Claydon SR drill, which uses the same twin-tine technology as the current Claydon Hybrid range. Having seen first-hand how the farm had benefited from using the Claydon drill I set about a similar theme. The covers were topped off in April and

then sprayed off using the small buggy sprayer in early May. At the end of May we started drilling straight into the covers and followed that with the rolls. We have been using the Claydon System ever since and noticed a number of significant benefits.

"Firstly, the cost saving is amazing. Whereas the cultivation-based establishment was previously costing us around £94/acre, it is now just £30/acre to establish game cover using the Claydon system, including rolling. That represents an overall saving of £1,600 per year, with much better results.

"Secondly, the whole operation is stress free, because we don't need several passes with different implements and I don't have to show several different people where the game covers are.

Cleaner crops

"Perhaps the biggest benefit is that the game covers are so much cleaner. Because we are not disturbing the soil, we don't have a mass of different weeds coming through, which would be a challenge to control. Another advantage is that if we have a long dry spell during June and July, as was the case in 2015, the covers don't dry out because the soil has not been disturbed and so the moisture is

retained.

"The other thing I have noticed across the whole farm is that because stubble remains on the surface after Claydon drilling there has been a huge increase in English partridge numbers and the system has been massively beneficial to all wildlife.

"Many keeping friends have commented on the quality of the covers and, come drilling time, I get numerous phone calls asking how the Claydon system works. All of the arable crops at Turvey Farms are drilled by LE Barnes & Sons' with its new Claydon T6 Hybrid, which is a good recommendation for how well it performs on that side, and I can certainly recommend the Claydon



Contractor Jason Parish with the 3m Claydon SR drill which has transformed the establishment of game covers.

system for game covers. I know that people who use it will be very surprised at the financial savings and other benefits which it brings." ■



Gamekeeper Jamie Osborne in one of the many strips of game cover on the Bedfordshire farm which were established using the Claydon system.