

Taylor Organic Farms



Nick Taylor with an early crop of pre-pack carrots ready for the supermarkets



Our machines work on over 2,000 acres of farmland

Taylor Organic Farms is currently the biggest producer of organic carrots and potatoes in the UK. It is the only commercial grower of organic parsnips and it supplies in bulk to all of the major multiples.

FACTS ABOUT TAYLOR ORGANIC FARMS

- » Organic farm business based in North Shropshire
- » 9 Full time members of staff, led by Nick Taylor and farm manager James Britton
- » 25% expansion in potato and carrot business in last 3 years
- » Produce over 8,000 tonnes of organic packed carrots and organic potatoes per annum
- » A potato store was built this year allowing us to offer year round supply of organic potatoes
- » New cold store to be completed in June 2018

Production of root crops has increased by an average 10% annually over the past decade. The secret to this growth and the success of the business is down to the acute attention to detail by Managing Director, Nick Taylor, supported by the rest of the highly-skilled and specialist team. The business is consistently awarded the accolade of Grower of the Year by RBO, the organic arm of Produce World, and in 2010 Nick won the Progressive Farmer of the Year Award at the Farm Business, Food and Farming Awards in Westminster.

The Taylor family has been farming in North Shropshire for five generations. In the 1990s, the farm was a conventional mixed business producing pigs, potatoes, milk and combinable crops. Nick and his father set up a new business away from the existing family set-up, following organic principles in the production of pigs and a mix of arable and vegetable crops.

The pig herd was highly successful for a number of years but, in 2008 (post credit crunch), following a steep fall in organic pork prices alongside the rising cost in animal feed, it was decided to finish the herd and concentrate on the production of high-quality root vegetables, namely carrots, parsnips and potatoes, which is food everybody could afford.

Today we are farming a total of just over 800 ha (2,000 acres) of land made up of a mix of owned and rented farms. Within this, for the 2017/18 season is 120 ha of potatoes (just over a third of which are salad potatoes), 133 ha of carrots

and 12 of parsnips. Additionally, the farm is producing about 300 ha of combinable crops.

So how has this been achieved? Quite simply through management and investment. The management of land, with nearly 75% being rented in, has had a key impact. By working alongside landlords and using their knowledge of their land and historical cropping, it has been possible to plan a long-term rotation. The Farm Business Tenancies (FBTs) are generally on five-year rolling contracts, and these relationships are protected through investment, to mitigate damage normally associated with root vegetable cropping, mainly in tracked machines, thereby causing less damage to soil structure and avoiding compaction during winter and allowing early spring harvesting and cultivation.

Being part of the Environmental Stewardship schemes has supported the direction of our business in terms of traditional practices. The protected hedgerows and in field trees, alongside the drilling of wildflower strips and use of overwintered green manures has set the basis for implementation of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) scheme in the fight against pests and diseases. Last year when introducing

ladybirds to a carrot field, it was clear to the naked eye that they were moving across a field and tackling carrot willow aphid.

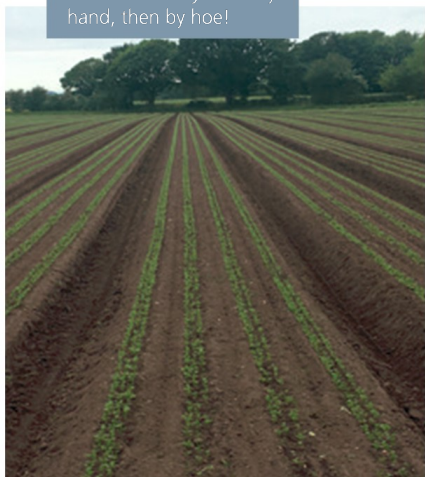
Other effective methods have been to create a stale seedbed in advance of the target crop being drilled. We do this by allowing weeds to germinate first and then flame weed them prior to drilling, allowing the target crop an advantage to establish. Large-scale use of vision guided weeding machinery running in parallel with Real Time Kinetic (RTK) Global Positioning Systems (GPS) has delivered unrivalled accuracy and ability to operate before crops are even visible. Lastly, drone technology has been employed for 2017 for crop surveillance. This allows high-definition pictures to be studied and a database to be built up for the future.

Working in partnership with the pack-houses, there is constant trialling of new varieties, finding out which will work best in our soils and with our methods, optimising the Shropshire sands on which we are mainly based.

Success has allowed for constant investment in machinery, training, and also in research. There has been a shift to tracked machinery and we operate RTK GPS in all tractors.

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Carrots following two lots of weeding – first by hand, then by hoe!



Investment in the new ASA-self-propelled carrot harvester, designed and developed by ASA-lift and Nick Taylor





As the crop nears harvest, remaining weeds are pulled the old fashioned way!



Early morning harvest

“Our stated objective has long been the aim of making organic produce more accessible to more people over a longer period of time throughout the year, by bringing down the costs of production and extending the seasons”

In 2015 Nick worked with the Danish company Asa-Lift to create a self-propelled, tracked carrot harvester with many innovations to make it suitable for organic production and this put us firmly ahead of our competitors in our ability to harvest quality crops, whatever the weather.

The future of the business is clearly to keep on growing our market. Our stated objective has long been the aim of making organic produce more accessible to more people over a longer period of time throughout the year, by bringing down the costs of production and extending the seasons.

Organic growing presents a myriad of problems on a commercial scale, the key ones being the need to control weeds and diseases without resorting to chemical methods. This is where a lot of management and time has to be dedicated. Over the years, through using best practice and traditional rotational methods, the sustained health of the land being farmed has become the cornerstone of what we do. Once pesticides and herbicides were removed from our arsenal, the health of the soil and environment is the best tool we have for successful growing.

Our planning revolves around the key elements:

- » Timely cultivation – working soils when at their optimum.
- » Precision machinery – minimising disease through managing canopy cover (green foliage) and ‘clean’ harvesting so as to reduce wastage.
- » Availability of water so that crop stress is kept to a minimum, working with the Environment Agency to plan boreholes and irrigation without disturbing the environmental balance.
- » Analysis of nutrition, knowing our soils so as to optimise their capacity. Using green manures and a rotational system where farm animals, usually sheep, graze the ground during breaks from cropping.
- » Having the best team – through training and development, our team is exploiting innovations in machinery. Recently we have taken on an agronomist to help us put more time into analysis of our crops and where we can improve.