

SIOFOK, HUNGARY

New drier beats snow

Simon Redfearn manages 3200ha (8000 acres) of arable land and an 800-cow dairy unit, at Siofok, on the shores of Lake Balaton, 120km south-west of Budapest in Hungary. Cropping comprises 50% grain/forage maize, 25% winter wheat and 25% sunflowers

* Snow has arrived early this year, hampering our efforts to finish the maize harvest, although our two-year-old daughter thinks it's wonderful. We've harvested and dried over 11,000t so far, with about 3500t to go. Gas prices have mercifully not moved much, unlike the diesel price, and the new drier, an Alvan Blanch, seems to be twice as efficient as the 25-year-old Hungarian tower drier it replaced.

As always, grain storage is a problem. Although we had contracted early in the year to sell 10,000t evenly through October, November and December, so far only 4000t has been moved. The builders had not even moved out when we started filling the new 3500t grain store, which is now full, along with the older stores. Unless some grain moves very soon, more harvesting is unlikely in the short term.

It is little comfort to us that the whole of Hungary is suffering similar problems. Very little of the 4m tonnes of grain put into intervention last year has moved and transport is in very short supply.

At least there is plenty of muck to spread to keep the tractor drivers busy. The dairy youngstock, which have been sadly neglected since early summer, are finally being cleaned out and the muck is being spread on the maize stubbles.

So it looks like I'll be spending more time in the office over the next few days/weeks, looking for all the millions my budget tells me we should have made this year.

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at least be able to grow profitably for a couple more years. That would give us time to review the future of the crop on our farm.

The outgoers or "restructuring scheme" at £50/t looks attractive, but our land is very suitable for beet, which fits our rotation well, so it will probably not be an option for us. But I have not ruled it out yet.

An average-yielding potato harvest finished on 14 Nov. The last crop, Nadine, lifted straight into boxes for packing, producing our biggest crop, while Maris Piper for processing was disappointing, yielding a good 7t/ha less than normal because of delayed planting in wet soils and poor early season growing conditions.
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