

# A 'QUICK' GUIDE TO SPARSHOLT FARM

The farm and college has been in existence since 1913, growing to its current size of 143ha in 1935.

The soils vary across the farm, with the hilltop soils being generally red/orange clays that are slightly acidic (low ph) and are poorly drained. The soils on the flatter land at the bottom of the hill tend to be better drained, brown loam soil. Loam soils are a mixture of sands, silts and some clay and are considered to be good soils for most crops. The ph is slightly alkaline.

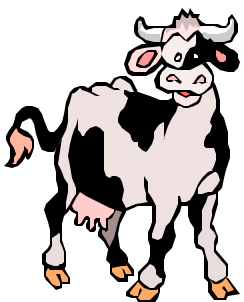


The soils are prepared for crops in early spring by adding animal manure and slurry as fertilizer then ploughing, before drilling the seeds. Further animal waste can be added during the year. All the seeds are treated with a fungicide to stop them rotting but few other chemicals are used unless the weeds pose a threat to animal health. Everything added to the fields is done according to the farms policy which aims to produce maximum soil fertility and prevent pollution.

Crops are grown at Sparsholt mainly to provide food for the livestock. Maize (sweet corn) is planted in April and harvested in September to feed to the cattle as silage. At the moment Sparsholt is operating a land swap with the neighbouring farm who is growing our maize and Sparsholt is growing their peas and wheat.



Grass is an important crop at Sparsholt. Some fields are permanent grass, used for grazing animals especially those close to the dairy. These are a mix of grasses and clover that ensures a steady growth during the season. The short term grass fields are usually rotated with a crop every 3 years. The grass type here is ryegrass which is able to produce 12.5 tonnes of dry grass per ha per year. It is cut 3 times a year and used to make silage for winter cattle feed or quality hay for the horses and deer.



The livestock on the farm between march 2003-2004 consisted of 160 dairy cows, 35 beef cattle, 1000 pigs, 320 breeding sheep producing lambs and 44 Sika deer.

In the dairy herd of 160 Holstein cows, 130 are currently being milked twice daily at 4.00am and 1.45pm. The remaining 30 are awaiting the birth of their calves. After a cow has had a calf, she will produce milk for approx. 10 months. The cows are fed cow cake in the milking parlour to help keep up their milk production. The target milk production per year for each cow is 8,000 litres, with cows who have recently given birth.

capable of producing 40 litres each per day. The parlour is a triangular shape which can accommodate 15 cows at a time and uses automatic clusters, feeding and milk recording. The milk is cooled then stored in a bulk tank holding 7,200 litres, at approx 4°C. The milk is sold to and collected by United Dairies in a tanker every other day. Currently the farm receives 18p per litre for its milk. The cows are housed in open barns with straw bedding or mattresses. They are fed silage mixed with rape seed meal, soya and wheat with added concentrates that is delivered using a feed wagon. The costs for feed brought in (i.e. not produced on the farm) averaged £124 per tonne last year, with each cow using approx 3 tonnes. Other machinery used include a front loader and a tractor mounted scraper.



The 35 beef animals are sold at Frome market (auction) when they reach 18 months old. The expected price would be between £300-£400 per animal.

The new pig unit was completed in May 2004 at a cost of £600,000. The unit houses 120 sows, 4 boars and the 1,800 piglets born each year. Purpose built facilities provide accommodation for sows in social groups, individual farrowing pens (for birth and young piglets), weaner pens (for litters of piglets between 3-12 weeks old) and finishing pens. Pigs are fed a dried food (pellets) containing grains, fish oils, milk, vitamins and minerals. Feed costs are £113 per tonne with adult animals eating 3 kg per day. The pigs are Large Whites purpose bred to produce traditional Wiltshire cured bacon. Most sows are made pregnant via artificial insemination to maintain the genetic health of the herd. The average number of piglets born per litter after a 115 day pregnancy is 10, although litters can be much larger. The pigs that are not selected to join the breeding stock are sold to market at 6 months old weighing approx 95kg. The current price is around £1.00 per kg (Spring 2005).



The sheep unit consists of 320 ewes, mostly Suffolk and Scotch half breeds. In the last year 396 lambs were sold at the average price of £45 per lamb. The unit is centred around the sheep barn where the lambs are born in February. Apart from this they spend the year outdoors grazing grass.

There are 4 full time farm staff including the farm manager, head of dairy unit, a stockman and the head of pig unit. There is also extra help from students studying agriculture. Farmers pay is considered low but is above the minimum wage. However they do have to put in very long hours.

The farm also has other sources of income unusual to most farms as it has a Fish hatchery breeding Salmon and Brown Trout, an equestrian centre with indoor and outdoor arenas, as well as other college facilities. Please see the full Farm and Estate Guide on the website for details.