

Farming Insights Supper – Great food & inspiring conversations



On Wednesday 12th November, Newton LDP hosted our Farming Insights Supper at The Red Barn in Spratton. The event brought together over 30 guests and speakers, creating a vibrant forum for younger farmers and rural professionals to share experiences, explore success factors, and discuss the challenges shaping modern agriculture.

The evening's purpose was clear: to foster positive conversation and collaboration among the next generation of farming businesses and professionals. We wanted to understand what makes a rural business thrive and how individuals have overcome obstacles to achieve success.

Highlights from Our Speakers

Our speakers provided a wealth of insight and inspiration:

- **Guy Holt**, runs The Red Barn with his wife Lily, shared their journey from traditional farming to creating a farm shop and restaurant. Guy explained how converting a farm building into a farm shop and cafe not only diversified income but also strengthened the wider farm business, demonstrating the power of thinking creatively about existing assets.
- **Charlotte Gore** from Newton LDP outlined the common factors seen in successful businesses. These include adaptability, a detailed knowledge of the business' costs of production, strong financial planning, understanding optimal scale of a business and a willingness to embrace change.
- **James Horn**, a first-generation sheep farmer, gave an inspiring account of building an enterprise of over 900 ewes without a farming background. His story highlighted the importance of determination, hard work and a focus on performance and margin to overcome barriers to entry.
- **Emily Mee** described her family's diverse business model, which includes arable cropping, storage, and a substantial blueberry enterprise supplying fresh fruit directly to supermarkets. Emily also shared how they are developing products to add value to fruit, illustrating how innovation and market awareness can create new revenue streams and reduce wastage in supply chains.
- **Tristan Ashby** provided insight into his family's large-scale arable operations in the UK and Romania. Tristan explained how a desire to achieve scale in the UK and abroad, a focus on performance of key enterprises and the adaptability required to farm outside the UK has created a business which is thriving in challenging circumstances.

Key Conclusions

Conversations revealed several recurring themes and practical lessons:

1. **Focus on key enterprises encourages excellent performance** – Businesses which focus on key enterprises drive exceptional performance. Diversification spreads risk and supports the key enterprise but it mustn't distract management from main profit generators.
2. **Adaptability and resilience are critical** – The ability to pivot in response to changing conditions, from changes in commodity prices and the availability of subsidies, together with a clear business plan is a defining trait of successful enterprises.
3. **Collaboration and knowledge-sharing accelerate growth** – Networking with peers and professionals provides fresh perspectives, sparks innovation, enables businesses to benchmark performance accurately and opens doors to new opportunities.
4. **Strategic decisions should be driven by sustainable profit, not tax** - Too often, farm businesses invest in wasting assets to save tax and then reduce cash availability for future productive investments.
5. **Passion and persistence drive success** – Every speaker's story underscored the importance of commitment and creativity. Whether entering farming from scratch or scaling a family business, determination remains the cornerstone of achievement.
6. **Understanding your market matters** – From farming livestock and crops for commodity markets, direct-to-supermarket supply chains to value-added products like drinks and direct sales through a farm shop or cafe, businesses that anticipate consumer trends and adapt accordingly gain a competitive edge.
7. **Long-term planning underpins stability** – Financial foresight, succession planning, and strategic investment are essential for building businesses that endure across generations.
8. **Business managers should identify their strengths and weaknesses** - Some people work well with direct customers, others are more suited to practical production. Managers should focus on enterprises which are suited to their strengths.
9. **Create a strong team and delegate effectively** - Most businesses will want to expand to the point where they require additional team members. These may be family members or external. It is essential that the team is motivated, have clear objectives and can implement the business plan.

Looking Ahead

We are proud to have facilitated such an inspiring exchange of ideas and look forward to continuing the conversation. At Newton LDP, we are committed to helping farmers and landowners unlock opportunities, navigate challenges, and achieve sustainable growth.

If you'd like to explore how we can support your business, please get in touch.

