



Heart of England Farms Ltd

Breeders of Quality Game Stock

Established 1983

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Dear Customers,

As we turn into 2020 another decade has passed on the calendar, Brexit is done and the shooting season has ended though it seems only to have just begun. Time goes quickly when you are enjoying yourself!

Everyone with whom I speak, large and small shoots from all parts of the country, appear to have had an excellent season with good returns even if they have got rather wet in doing so. Regular soakings on shoot days as well as on the shoot whilst feeding will have had an adverse effect on the moral of even the most enthusiastic guns and keepers. But as always, the resilience and resolve of many has led to a positive outcome in the end. Right through January many shoots have been able to achieve or even exceed their bag limit and managed to do so with scarcely a frosty morning and with no hard winter weather to sharpen the birds appetites and help bring them back to the coverts. It has always been my belief that pheasants hold well during wet times and it stands to reason that birds will stray less from their home woods during rain and the shorter days that accompany wet weather. During the last wet season of 2013 when the worst had been expected birds held well and good returns were achieved.

Here on the farm we have not escaped adverse effects of this weather this winter. We have been busy building a large extension to our hatchery. Having cleared the site in perfect conditions last August our only problem was how dry it was, bemoaning the hardness of the ground as we dug off and excavated for the new building! When the steel erectors arrived in September the heavens opened, and the site flooded. Everyone working on the building looked forward to the roof going on to dry the working area but by this time the surrounding land had reached saturation point which allowed the water to flow over the whole new site. Even with more stone ordered and drainage ditches dug the site was not stable enough to concrete the new floors until mid-December. We now thankfully have the building weather tight and are back on track with the new Petersime incubators and hatchers having been erected. This week sees the arrival of teams of electricians, plumbers and fabricators to receive and commission the new state of the art egg washing and sanitising machine, tray washer, waste remover and incinerator with a new and improved chick counting machine which is required to handle the extra capacity the project will allow. The whole hatchery project, which has been several years in planning, will not only provide us with a greater hatchery capacity but also the ability to both improve efficiency and streamline the whole hatchery cleaning and sanitation system. The addition of more new incubators and the conversion of the existing machines to CO2 control will allow us now to change to the single-stage system of egg setting with all the health benefits that this system brings to both hatch rates and quality of the resulting chicks.

We continue to over-winter all our pure bred breeding stock of pheasants and partridges and this last year keeping these large flocks in good condition in open winter pens has proved a real challenge for the teams who manage them. The partridges were penned early last autumn as they do not thrive on the ground when their feet are wet. This allowed us time to also lift the pheasants earlier than normal and as we finish catching and penning the last of them I am left to survey field pens with deep ruts flowing with water which have been left by the forklifts carrying them from the wintering fields. As with many farmers and estate managers I will be needing a good team of tractor drivers to repair the damage when it finally becomes dry enough to do so.

Despite the challenging wet conditions our stock has endured over this last winter, bird health appears good with all the flocks testing clear on routine blood testing for Mycoplasma. We have now completed their vaccination programs against all the major poultry diseases and the resulting immunity will protect the hens during the breeding season.

Our birds are produced without any shortcuts and our long-established reputation for providing a service which surpasses customers' expectations continues.

We have received many favourable reports on the progeny from our Manchurian pheasants which we imported from Macfarlanes Pheasants in America two years ago. I am told they have not only flown exceptionally well as we had hoped they would but have also held well in most cases. Their only drawback to us is their smaller size and as they do not grow as quickly as other strains, we need to keep them a week longer before the poults look their best and can be delivered to shoots. Crossing these birds with Polish hens counters this problem to a degree and these cross-bred birds are listed on the price list at a slightly reduced rate for both chicks and poults.

Last year in this newsletter I wrote of my concern for the continued requirement for additional birds needed to supply a booming shooting market. With such high confidence from shoots leading to increasing demand I questioned where all these extra birds were going to come from. Pheasants have been short for several years now, even in good production years, and with the French already limiting supplies to their own markets the situation is not improving. We have penned more laying pheasants for this season to supply our new hatchery but with the high capital cost and the time required to manage breeders correctly the extra we can create is but a drop in the ocean to the shortage I fear is now developing on prime time weeks. This supply shortage is being compounded by everyone's desire to move their orders to these prime weeks, this is not something we are able to do. One can only profitably and successfully increase egg production so much each season.

Following last years bumper global grain harvest wheat prices are lower so pheasant feed prices, I am promised, will follow suit. We are therefore holding poult prices at last years' rates and I am bearing in mind that the outlook could be radically different for next seasons prices. Possibly by then we will have all been 'Trumped' and be buying cheap American wheat in exchange for Range Rovers and prime British lamb. Maybe not!



Not so on chicks though where we seem to have omitted to increase prices as quickly as those hatcheries who rely on bought in eggs. These eggs have in recent years increased in value considerably as they have become more difficult to source leading to smaller margins and the need to increase prices. To catch up and to stay in line with other hatcheries we are therefore increasing chick prices between 2p and 4p per chick on the main weeks though we are still able to offer good discounts on both pheasant and partridge chicks during the later off peak weeks. A new price list is enclosed showing these changes.

To all our customers we thank you for your custom and continued support. Demand for shooting remains as strong as it has ever been which must bode well for the coming season. On that note I wish you all a prosperous and successful season ahead and hope that a change in the weather will soon allow us to at least get started if not 'done' as Boris might say.

Kindest Regards

Ole & Judy Gronning