



Heart of England Farms Ltd

Breeders of Quality Game Stock

Established 1983

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Dear Sirs/Ladies

As another season draws to a close, I am sure you are all relieved to reach the end without the experience of any major curtailments of programs or cancelled days despite the threat having often never been too far away. I have not dared to write this line until the last week in January as any disruption to shooting this season would have been disastrous for the whole industry. The loss of confidence that such a closure would have caused would be far reaching.

What every shoot needed this season to help in balancing the books and restore order following the trauma of last years' cancelled January was exactly what has been delivered. A good long and open season with little adverse weather curtailing days and birds which seemed to stay at home and exactly in the drives where they were needed. I am informed that returns have therefore been exceptional on both pheasants and partridges and many shoots have added extra days to their programs to harvest this unexpected bonus.

The exception has been those unfortunate shoots in Northumberland and north Yorkshire who were hit by Novembers' devastating storms. I understand the damage to property and forestry to be beyond comprehension. It is hard for us to imagine how shoots in the worst affected areas have been able to finish their season when woods and birds have been simply blown away. Those affected have my full commiseration as they will have a lot of extra work to do to be back on track for the coming season.

We enjoyed a successful rearing season last year helped by the opening of our new hatchery which gave us greater capacity and many new machines to streamline our hatchery process. The new hatchery was an extension to our existing facility which had been due to open in 2020 but then proved surplus to requirements when the country was forced into Covid lock down. The investment though proved much needed and appreciated last year when we were able to fill all our hatching capacity. The new single stage setting, improved tray washing and auto chick counting systems all complimented and enhanced our existing facility and there was a distinct improvement in hatch day efficiency and chick quality.

More recently our seasonal turkey business enjoyed a successful year but once again by the skin of our teeth as areas of the country succumbed to Covid. Social gatherings and Christmas festivities were constrained or cancelled in the lead up to the big day. We were more relieved than ever though to reach the end of 'turkey time' this year, as the constant and very real threat of bird flu appeared greater than ever, with sporadic cases being reported daily throughout the country from November onwards. The ministry vets again reacted quickly and decisively in controlling the spread once it was in the UK by introducing a housing order for all domestic poultry to help control the spread. As our turkey sheds were being emptied, they were quickly refilled with our breeding pheasants and consequently our efficient bird-catching teams become even more efficient and well-practised in their job! The housing order seems to have been effective in that new cases have slowed in the last few weeks, but the threat is ever present and likely to rise again as the spring migration of wild birds resumes. The ministry advice to poultry units to increase biosecurity is sensible and laudable but not always so easy to comply with for the game industry. Our captive and released birds are kept in close proximity to the very wild birds which we are told to encourage on our farms and estates. At the time of release the classification of a game bird moves from domestic poultry to a wild bird but we all know how released birds prefer the best of both worlds and will move back to a pen to visit any captive cousins at every opportunity. What is most worrying is the high level of avian influenza being detected on routine testing of all truly wild birds around the world and so the disease is likely to be with us in a greater or lesser degree for years to come. I see this as the next big threat to game shooting, a concern I voiced many years ago in this very letter. Covid proved me totally incorrect but then, no one saw that one coming!

Despite the challenges and threats our breeding flocks look well, bird health is good and all our birds continue to test clear on routine blood testing for Mycoplasma. As we finish moving the pheasants to their laying pens we will complete the rigorous vaccination program we have adopted for Newcastle Disease, TRT, IB, EDS and Mycoplasma. The protection of our breeding stock involves nearly as many injections as the NHS vaccine rollout program. Let us hope they both remain equally effective!

In my 2020 newsletter I wrote of my concern for the continued requirement for additional birds which were needed to supply a booming shooting market. With shoots being highly confident with their demand from guns seeking shooting, this in turn leads to an increased demand for stock, I therefore return to my question 'where are all these extra birds going to come from?' As I wrote this question in 2020 pheasants had been short for several years, even during the good production years, and with the French limiting supplies to their own markets the situation was not likely to improve. However, I was wrong again! Six weeks later lockdown occurred and the market was awash with cancelled birds! The effects of Covid continued to distort the market throughout 2020 and early 2021 but then the real situation returned last August. Insufficient birds had been placed to supply the spike in demand for later poults and many shoots were unable to secure their full requirement. The same demand occurred in both France and Spain where there is now no availability of birds for their late release programs.

Every shoot with whom I have spoken mentions the increased confidence displayed recently by guns and agents looking to buy January shooting and the insatiable demand for all size days for next season. Conversely, I know of no breeders both here or overseas who have increased their breeding stock numbers and this is the first year when we ourselves have chosen not to overwinter additional hens. I fear the shortages experienced last August may occur earlier this season and this is probably not the year for your orders to wait. You could just be too late! Or, could I be wrong again?

2022 Prices

Even those of you who may have been living 'off-grid' or in the most extreme and remote areas of the country will be aware of how every day prices have risen continually over the last year and so I will save you the monotony of reading a list of each one. Though government still try to delude us with figures suggesting inflation is running at 6-7% this figure is blown apart for us when feed and energy companies are quoting inflation of at least double this. To try and reach a real figure of just how our production costs will have increased from last year I have compiled a list of all the commodities which we use and then put each one into a basket as a percentage of their use in the production of your birds. I have then taken the percentage use of each commodity and multiplied that by its anticipated inflationary increase.

For example: rearing feed last year @ £425/t. Requirement per 1000 birds = 1.25t = £531 per 1000/birds.

Therefore feed was 13.27% of the cost of rearing a £4 poult last year.

Add the forecast increase in feed for this year @ 13.5%

Each commodity is then taken in turn chicks, gas, labour, timber etc, applied with the same formula and placed them in the basket. The figure at the end was a shocking 12.5% which I regret to inform is an unavoidable increase. The new season price list is enclosed and shows this averaged increase from last years' prices. I thank you for your understanding.

Last year we moved away from the postal system for order confirmation to an e-mail system with the facility for the signatory to sign on-line. This proved successful saving much time for everyone but also the added advantage if required of us being able to send to additional recipients keeping both the office and keeper up to date with order dates and delivery information. We will of course need the contact details of all in the loop.

Judy and Nathalia remain your main office contacts and I look forward to speaking with you soonest.

Yours sincerely



Ole and Judy Gronning

