

Profiting from Reducing Tillage and Lowering Emissions

Case Study 2

John McClusky—Lea Farm



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John grows 450 acres of winter sown crops on his medium-to-heavy loam soils outside of Roslin and has instigated a minimum tillage approach to establishing some of his crops. The farm lies in a high rainfall area at an altitude of between 500-650ft and consequently John aims to get all sown up by the end of September before the autumn window reduces considerably.

Many of the fields have been re-instated following open cast coal mining and John has been working on improving the soils over the last 20 years. At one time the farm carried a dairy and grew whole-crop forages to feed the cattle and had plenty of manures to return to the soil. Digestate is now applied ahead of the rape in the rotation, which includes winter and spring barley and winter wheat and oats.

Five years ago, John reviewed his machinery investment policy and took the decision to partner with a contractor to carry out the work with him. Teaming up in this way with a like-minded partner, who was also actively engaged in the principles of minimum tillage, has proved a win-win for John.

Today the contractor does the bulk of this work for John using a Sumo Trio and Uni-press to set the ground up for drilling. Both he and John share the ploughing which is typically targeted at ground destined for winter barley and winter oats. With the minimum tillage approach however for wheat and rape, John can prepare a good area of 'weather resilient' seedbeds ahead of the 6 metre Vaaderstad drill, which on a good day can cover 80-100 acres. Reducing ploughing where possible also helps the soils to re-structure, retains more soil carbon and reduces fuel use and in so doing lowers overall farm CO² emissions.

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