

MIKE PURNELL, WEST GRINSTEAD ESTATE

Sentry Farm Manager

Mike Purnell joined Sentry in January 2016 to manage the farming business in Sussex, including the West Grinstead Estate. The land is weald clay with impeded drainage and short work windows resulting in high grass weed pressure. Sentry have invested in a Sumo DTS drill and we have sold all the old cultivators. Mike will 'strip till' with the DTS for 3-4 years before changing to an ultra-low disturbance disc drill. He uses controlled traffic principles and RTK to ensure as little of the field is driven on eliminating the need for cultivations to remove compaction, allowing nature to structure the soil how it wants, which is invariably better than we can do it.



Traditional farming tends to see the soil as a medium in which the crops stand and we feed them as required. Mike however sees the soil as the living heartbeat of the farm that will feed the crop what it needs if the soil conditions are correct. His focus is on feeding the soil and building soil fauna from the fungi and bacteria through to earthworms. Weed burden will be dealt with by 2 consecutive spring crops with preceding cover crops. Three winter crops complete the rotation.

Mike's short term aims are to reduce the seed bank, increase the work window and water infiltration, and increase organic matter and soil bio diversity. In the longer term this will reduce his reliance on artificial ag-chem inputs. His long term targets are to cut fungicide usage by a third and fertiliser usage by a quarter, whilst all the while raising yield and increasing profit.

Won't work on my land..... only if that is your mind-set!!!

WHY SHOULD A LAND OWNER SELECT SENTRY TO FARM THEIR LAND?

Adrian Weller on behalf of the West Grinstead Estate Consortium

Sentry has farmed the West Grinstead Estate for the past 20 years. In September the estate was purchased by a consortium of 5 local parties having been on the market officially and unofficially for the previous 10 years. This had created uncertainty for Sentry as well as the landowner who was not prepared to invest in land or buildings that were going to be sold.

It was the decision of the consortium to remain with Sentry as we liked their approach to getting the farm back into shape.

It was suggested that we should try the regenerative agriculture route. Within weeks the new Sumo drill had arrived. Mike Purnell, the farm manager explained how it worked and I admit I was not convinced that it could

be so accurate until you see this autumn's drilled wheat smack in the middle of the rows of last year's oat stubble rows.

One thing I have learnt is that the key to the success of direct drilling is soil condition. We are on heavy clay and there is a commitment and passion from both the landowners and Sentry to invest in improving the soil condition. We have incorporated mushroom compost, all the straw was chopped, and we have a ditching and drainage restoration project in progress. It is a back to nature way to increase the best soil quality indicator, the humble earthworm. They don't like lots of tillage and thrive with more micro-organisms and bacteria. Our goal!

Globalisation appears to be the latest political buzz word. To compete in this market we now have to be more competitive than ever before and the West Grinstead consortium understands that Sentry with their knowledge, support and infrastructure can offer a most cost effective solution to achieve the best possible yields.