

Doug Pickup's Sentry Career History

My career with Sentry or Sentry Farming Ltd as it was called then started on 17 August 1987.

Sentry had been asked to enter into a contract farming agreement at Potterells Farm in Hertfordshire and required a manager at quite short notice.

I was in a position where I could leave the job I was in which was funnily enough working for a farm manager by the name of David Stacey. Hertfordshire was my home so I could live at home and commute to Potterells every day.

So here my career in management started. I was given the existing machinery on the farm and was left to get on with it as they say. I spent four years at Potterells on my own with student help at harvest time.

In 1991 I was offered the position to manage 1500 acres in North Norfolk which included Summerfield Farm for Robert Roy Farms as it was then.

This was a complete change for me as it introduced me to malting barley and sugar beet which were crops I had had very little experience with.

Over the next three years we entered into contract farming agreements with Cley Hall Farms and Ringfield Farm. These farms brought with them livestock and potatoes.

Between 1999 and 2006 two more farms have come on stream, Grange Farm in 1999 and Congham Farms in 2006; these totalled 1400 acres and further increased our area of potatoes and sugar beet.

The latest block of land was acquired in 2012 and made a nice change as it joined our boundary on the farm at Syderstone which we use as a base.

We were successful in an FBT tender for Barmer Hall Farm which consists of 900 acres of mainly light sandy soils.

This farm brought changes to our farming practices in that we ventured into maize and rye as energy crops along with parsnips and outdoor pigs. We also increased our potato acreage but with no irrigation. The remaining area is cropped with wheat, OSR and occasionally sugar beet.

Sentry North Norfolk has grown from one farm of 500 acres in 1991 to seven farms in 2015 with a total area of 5000 acres. The farms are located across a 30 mile wide stretch of North Norfolk. We have cropping rotations which include: potatoes, sugar beet, wheat, barley, OSR, maize, beans and linseed.

We have contracts for approximately 18,000 tonnes of sugar beet and produce about 9,000 tonnes of potatoes for the processing markets.

I have seen the business grow and evolve over the 24 years I have lived in Norfolk; some things have not changed, we are still heavily committed to sugar beet and malting barley. Potatoes have become a very important crop to us and have grown in area during the years from 65 acres to now over 400 acres.



Having now been with Sentry for nearly thirty years my career has also been allowed to develop through training and continual professional development. The company has enabled me to gain BASIS and FACTS qualifications including an advanced BASIS sugar beet course in 2014.

I have been fortunate enough to join a number of study tours overseas through various competitions. Every year Sentry hold a net crop margin competition which I have been fortunate enough to win twice in the last five years, resulting in visits to both Italy and Germany.

In 2011 myself and three local sugar beet growers entered the British Sugar "Beet the Best" competition. We must have impressed the judges suitably as we came away as the winners and joined a study trip to Spain where we visited beet factories and growers achieving very high yields.

So what's for the future? The opportunity to bring others on a similar career path to myself and further development of the North Norfolk business continually adjusting to the challenges ahead.