

ANDREW COLCHESTER, SENTRY ASSOCIATE MEMBER

Church Farm, Thrandeston, Suffolk

Andrew Colchester told us that his family had been tenants at their farm in Thrandeston, Suffolk, just 5 miles south of Diss since 1916. The farm was taken over by Andrew and Sharon Colchester from his father in 1991, and Andrew had been working on the farm since leaving school in 1977. Andrew's grandfather, Frederick Colchester, was the original tenant followed by his son, Peter Colchester, who took over in 1957.

The farm is rented from John Cole Farms Ltd and a good relationship between landlord and tenant has developed over these many years.

Andrew and Sharon have invested a considerable amount of their own capital into improving the properties on the farm especially the lovely farmhouse which they live in.

The crops currently being grown on the farm include oilseed rape, winter wheat, winter barley and potatoes. Andrew has always been interested in maintaining an attractive environment and was a willing participant when the Entry Level Scheme was introduced in 2005.

Andrew and Sharon were introduced to Andrew Mason of Sentry by their farming neighbour, Jimmy Laurie, and they decided to join the Sentry Associate Membership Scheme in 2003; in the succeeding 12 years they have benefited from

the advice of that scheme. The encouragement by Andrew Mason to join with Sentry arose from a conversation around their kitchen table when the many financial benefits of the scheme were highlighted to them. Andrew Colchester commented that he felt protected by being involved with a larger company and the benefit of knowing that he can pick up the phone at any time and talk to people within Sentry is a comfort when he realises that the farming knowledge and experience of the wider industry is available to him.

It also means he can take advantage of the professional services of the Sentry Advisory team and this has ranged from preparing and submitting his claims for the Single Farm Payment (which is now Basic Payment Scheme), preparation of annual budgets and cash flows for good business management and support from his bank manager. There have also been applications for planning consent in connection with various projects on the farm.

The situation in 2003 was quite different when Andrew used the contract services of the neighbouring farm which was better equipped and wanted to expand its operations. However changes in farming policy of the neighbour resulted in Andrew directly contacting John Benton, who managed a considerable acreage for Sentry. This resulted in certain tasks on the farm being dealt with by Sentry, including drilling. Andrew has now been able to take back in hand many of these tasks but he still hires in specialist equipment such as potato machinery, and he has realised that there are considerable benefits in being flexible with working with other people whose machinery is available at reasonable charges, thus reducing the fixed overheads that his farm has to carry.

The Associate Membership benefits Andrew in receiving agricultural chemicals at reduced rates with regular rebates on spray purchases. The flow of technical information and reports on grain marketing are found to be useful and interesting.

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The Associate scheme has two tiers - Silver and Gold. Andrew and Sharon Colchester have a farm of under 500 acres which makes him eligible for the Silver Associate membership but they have chosen to remain a Gold member at the present time entitling them to the maximum number of 8 hours of free professional time. Their decision was based upon the new Basic Payment Scheme which carries with it a considerable number of uncertainties on its preparation and application.

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The current year is very difficult with the cost of production exceeding the market price, and all aspects of financing in the farm have to be looked at very carefully. A successful wedding venue business has been run on the farm for the last 6 years but last year considerable difficulties were raised with planning consent regarding noise pollution, so that has now ceased. Andrew is currently looking into providing courses in hedge laying this winter as he needed a vocation and has an open mind on all aspects of enhancing his income using all of the opportunities that his farm will support.



ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Associate Membership enables external clients to have access to professional services and the benefits of our national scale. There are 2 Levels of Membership:

Gold - for businesses of 500 acres and above. Membership includes 8 hours of professional advice.

Silver - for businesses below 500 acres. Membership includes 3 hours of professional advice.

Both membership levels are payable in two instalments in January and July.

HOW TO JOIN

If you would like to join the scheme or if you would like more information, please contact:-

ALEC SMITH

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