Agreena farmer story

Gentle Farming

With Thomas Gent

Gentle Farming is a family-run 4th generation farming business dedicated to implementing regenerative agriculture practices since 2008. Based in Cambridgeshire in the UK, we currently farm 800 hectares focusing on large scale arable crop production.

Farm facts

Name: Thomas Gent

Location: Cambridgeshire, UK

Farm Name: Gentle Farming

Farm Team: Thomas Gent, 4th gen, Edward Gent, 3rd gen & Tony Gent, 2nd gen

Farm size: 800 hectares

Website: gentle-farming.co.uk

Enterprises: Arable, Poultry, Machinery Development and Start Up Innovation (inc Robotics, Insect Farming and much more)

Current Cropping: Winter Feed Wheat, Spring Milling Wheat, Spring Beans, Winter Rapeseed, Triticale for AD, Grass, Herbal Leys.

Current Regenerative Practices: No Till, Cover Cropping, Livestock Integration, Companion Cropping, Organic Manure application, Reduced Fertiliser Input, No Insecticides and Diverse crop rotation.

Soil Type: Clay Silt

Soil Organic Matter: 6%-10%

Biodiversity: N/A

Water Quality: N/A

The transition to regenerative agriculture

In 2008, amidst poor farm economics and ageing machinery, we faced a choice: invest heavily in new equipment and hope for better economic conditions, or explore a no-till farming method my grandfather had observed in Argentina. We chose the latter. Despite initial challenges due to lack of experience and information, we saw immediate cost benefits in the first year. Our commitment to soil health and continuous refinement of techniques have led to increasingly positive outcomes each year.

Why regenerative farming is here to stay

I believe that regenerative farming and a focus on soil health are key to the future of sustainable food production. At Gentle Farming, we've seen the resilience, efficiency, and environmental benefits of these practices, and we'll never return to an intensive, plough-based farming. Instead, we're continuing to innovate and adopt new practices that prioritise soil health.

Over the past 17 years, we've been refining and improving our techniques. It simply wouldn't make sense to revert to old methods, especially since we're seeing that our approach is more profitable in the long run. During extreme weather events, which I believe will only become more frequent, our farm has been more resilient than our neighbors, and we haven't faced the same severe consequences. While there's always room for improvement, I'm confident that we're on the right path.

Economic & business impact

The most significant change on our farm since transitioning to regenerative practices has been economic. Our costs have decreased substantially, leading to greater long-term profitability. The largest savings have come from machinery; we simply need less. Compared to our previous system, we have managed to remove 3 large tractors on the farm. Given the high cost of tractors and their maintenance, this has significantly impacted our bottom line, enabling investment in other areas of the business. While yields initially declined around 20%, they have stabilised back to the previous average but of course with much less cost. Additionally, we have been able to access new funding sources, both government and private, to support our ongoing development of regenerative practices. Having access to financial support—such as government funding or private investments like Agreena's programme—is crucial to enable farmers to get through the transition phase to support ongoing development of regenerative practices.

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The role of companies in supporting farmers

When we transitioned, there was little information available. We mostly learnt through trial and error, which was, of course, costly. Today there are much more opportunities for farmers to learn from one another and from experts. The reality is that farmers are often facing low margins and complex business models, farming is also a long-term game that is dramatically affected by weather conditions. Even making a simple change to a farming system they have used for decades is difficult—both financially and emotionally. It is important people understand the complexity and risk a farmer takes on when they transition; it should never be taken lightly. Drainage has been the most important factor on our farm for a smooth transition. However, this can be a very costly upfront investment.

Why Agreena

I chose to work with Agreena on my farm for two main reasons. Firstly, I needed something simple enough to understand and use. Secondly, I wanted to measure and control the climate impact on my farm so I could make informed management decisions. I am intrigued by future technology that could make reporting and paperwork much simpler!

Looking ahead

In simple terms, innovation is the most important thing on my farm. There are so many new ideas and concepts I would love to trial and test. My big focus at the moment is establishing consistent ground cover with clover to reduce my fertiliser input. Regenerative farming isn't just good for the environment - it's a huge opportunity for farmers. By leading the way and showcasing sustainable practices, we can connect with a new generation of consumers who truly care about where their food comes from. It's an exciting time to be a farmer, and those who embrace this shift will help shape the future of agriculture. I truly believe that this is the most exciting time ever to be a farmer!