

KIRTON FARM NURSERIES LTD

This Winchester based nursery, was founded in 1984 by Derek and Caroline Taylor. The nursery specialises in sustainably grown herbaceous plants and herbs and has its own micro propagation production unit.

The plants for retailer sale are all grown in biodegradable coir pots in peat free compost and sold under the Hairy Pot Plant Company trademark. They are marketed using bespoke labels in returnable wooden trays. The small micro propagation unit produces over 500,000 young plants a year for other nursery growers.



1 - Turbines



1 - View of the nursery from the turbine

This business has sustainability at the heart of everything they do, from constructing a wood store out of old pallets to sending handcrafted to recycled Christmas cards to their customers.

This business is strong on energy monitoring and reducing usage, having their own wind turbines and air source heat pumps.

However there are many other factors that also come into play when looking at sustainability. By looking across the whole business to try and minimise the impact they have on the world's resources and environment while keeping in balance the need to keep their products affordable and the business afloat. Here are a few areas where they are endeavouring to get it right and continually try to improve;

Water Use

After a major irrigation refit a water sensor was installed, so water loss can be measured and adjust the volume of water applied more accurately. Borehole water is pumped to cover a large proportion of their needs and plan to harvest more rainfall, drastically reducing dependency on the mains supply. More drainage infrastructure is being installed on site to reduce crop flooding and collect more rainfall.

Pest, disease and weed control

Weed control depends less and less each year on chemicals. The Nursery never uses herbicides directly on their crops, which are all hand weeded but they do use some to keep down the weed



seed pressure from areas immediately around the crops. They are extending use of physical weed barriers with bark, shingle and coir mulches to help minimise herbicide use on the non-crop areas.

Pest control through the summer is now largely dependant on predators either artificially introduced by Kirton or migrating in from the large volume of natural hedging planted around the site and the scattering of ponds. They still need to spot-spray areas occasionally where a pest gets established and the predators need a little help. The spray programme continues to evolve as the business changes over to more bio-pesticides and bio-fungicides as they become available.

Waste Management

The amount of type and waste produced is another business focal point. The sustainable and reusable packaging systems uses, virtually eliminate any packaging waste for our customers to dispose of. On the purchasing side they are minimising waste levels of materials and products bought onto the site through tighter planning and buying. The waste produced is either reused, recycled, composted or used as fuel. There is only a small volume going to the local incineration and power generation station with no waste knowingly going to landfill.

Energy developments on the nursery

Carbon footprint reduction is still an important part of the businesses overall sustainability effort. The initial target has always been to lower energy consumption by using new technology, closely monitoring usage, adjusting heating and lighting programmes, fitting extra insulation and improving staff awareness. This has resulted in reductions in our electricity use by over 30% and 30% in heating oil.

Solutions can be as technically diverse as fitting specialist LED lighting in the lab growth room, or installing variable speed pumps, to constructing a waste wood store from old pallets. Generating their own power has proved very beneficial after the installation of the three 11kW wind turbines above the nursery.

If the weather is kind, they can now generate more electricity than they use, which helps save on costs and provides useful income from any excess power that they export and the feed-in-tariffs paid for renewable energy generation.

Investment last winter in yet more LED lighting is expected to reduce overall consumption by at least another 15%.





1 - LED lights in the coldstore



2 - Modules in the polytunnel

Back in April, Kirton Farm Nurseries was in the news for giving away £500,000 worth of plants that were likely to perish during the lockdown.

The business handed out free flowers to households in Hampshire rather than throw away their seasonal stock.

Its 'Plants for People' scheme has seen hundreds of volunteers make surprise deliveries of potted plants to 15,000 homes with a garden. Recipients could then donate cash if they wanted to.



Erasmus Case Study – Sustainable Business

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