

# Putting seedbed quality first



A change of disc-based cultivator has paid dividends at Welbeck Estates



With a broad range of soil types and a fairly diverse rotation, Welbeck Estates, which straddles the borders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, needs a comprehensive line-up of tillage tools to ensure it can get crops established in all conditions.

Prior to this, Welbeck had run another disc-press combination but after only five seasons' work it was beginning to show its age, with regular bearing failures. In addition, it struggled with soil flow in damp conditions, often clogging up to the point where the job had to be abandoned until things dried up.

"The slightest hint of moisture meant we'd have to make a compromise in seedbed quality if we wanted to get crops in the ground," explains farm manager Ray Beck.

"Our old machine simply wasn't versatile enough and it was starting to cost us serious money in repairs. We had to look seriously at changing it."

Conscious they needed to do their research properly,

Mr Beck and tractor driver Mark Newton set out to find an appropriate replacement, organising demonstrations of similar machines from most of the major manufacturers.

"We tried a number of different disc-based cultivators of all different colours and some just weren't suitable for what we do while others had eye-watering price tags.

"In the end we settled on the HE-VA Disc Roller because it offered the best value for money and was really well built. We had previously run 12m HE-VA rollers and swapped them for a 15.3m set when we moved to 30m tramlines, so we knew the kit was built

to last. We couldn't afford to have another machine that would only do five years' work."

Arriving on farm in spring 2017, the 6.5m Disc Roller Contour was put to work in less than ideal conditions. It added a new dimension to the business' cultivation strategy, providing the opportunity for a number of high-speed passes over stubbles to generate a weed seed chit as well as being put to work to produce seedbeds ahead of the drill.

"I've been places with the HE-VA that you wouldn't believe. With our old machine it would just have bugged up solid but because there's good

clearance all the way through the disc roller, the soil and trash flows freely through and you don't get anything sticking, even in the wet," says Mr Newton.

"It's all down to the spacing between the paddles, the two rows of discs and the press. Because of the clearance between the interlocking rings, they're self-cleaning and never bung up."

The disc roller certainly gets a varied workload. It's regularly used to rip up grass leys for the farm's dairy herd and followers but is equally at home being employed as a high-speed stubble cultivator to generate a weed flush after the combine.

Its core role is in seedbed preparation, either following Welbeck's pan-busting tine cultivator or being employed on the estate's shallow soils where there's a risk of hitting the underlying limestone.

The ability to work uniformly is aided by the disc roller's 'Contour' system. Each wing section can be run in float allowing it to hug undulations as it travels across the field.



Ray Beck, right, and tractor driver Mark Newton

**“ Being able to tweak the working depth without compromising the quality of the job is brilliant ”**

pressurised to maintain an even downforce across its working width. It's this contour-following capability that enables the machine to consistently produce a uniform surface finish.

"Working at an even depth is obviously important when working down ground ahead of the drill but it's really critical when I'm flying over stubbles at 2-3cm deep to produce a stale seedbed. If the discs are skipping over the top then there's no point in doing the job," says Mr Newton.

"Being able to tweak the working depth without compromising the quality of the job is brilliant. If I'm running up a tramline, for example, and I can see I'm not quite catching everything in

the wheelings, I can just lower the frame in a bit. Then I just hit the memory switch and it returns itself to its original position, eliminating any guesswork."

As for output, when the disc roller is put to work chitting stubbles at 2-5cm, it will generally run at 12-18kph, resulting in workrates of 14-15ha/hour.

In contrast, as a seedbed preparation tool running at 10-15cm its 400hp tug generally settles back to a more steady 10kph, getting over the ground at 4-5ha/hour. Although it really only needs 240hp up front, it is the farm's big Massey that is responsible for most cultivation duties.

As regards maintenance and reliability, the disc roller has certainly lived up to expectations. Sealed bearings for every disc mean there's very little greasing to do and in two full seasons' work not one has failed to date.

"The HE-VA build quality has played out into reliability as we'd hoped which gives us faith in the machine," says Mr Beck. "We had one very small hydraulic issue which fell just outside of the warranty period but it wasn't an issue.

"Importer Opico stood by it and made sure it was sorted quickly and at no cost to us. With our King Rollers and Air 8 seeders we've never had an issue they haven't been able to sort rapidly. They always go out of their way to help, making sure we have minimal downtime."

It's that combination of dependability and machine versatility that made the Disc Roller Contour the machine of choice at Welbeck.

"We couldn't be happier with the HE-VA. At the time it was the best value for money by far and it's so much more versatile than our old disc cultivator," concludes Mr Beck.

"We can switch from working at 2cm at 18kph to 20cm at 6kph simply by making adjustments from the cab. Despite having several other options, it now is our go-to machine - it'll do any job we throw at it." 