Danish Farmers
ABROAD

A successful DFA study trip to the UK at the end of June 2024

On June 24, a group of farmers and consultants went to the UK to get an insight into how Brexit has affected the opportunities and perspectives for agricultural production in the country, and at the same time, once again, to get a deeper insight into how progressive farmers in the country have practiced the transition to more sustainable agriculture, among other things, via no-till cultivation and conservation agriculture. True to tradition, the trip included a one-day visit to the very versatile Groundswell festival, where there was an opportunity to see and hear about the many initiatives and opportunities that lie in the transition to a more sustainable agricultural and food production, as well as a number of visits to both agriculture, biogas plants and producers associated with the agricultural industry.

Thanks to Kirsten Risbjerg from Agrovi and Morten B. Hansen from Alltech for a well-planned and exciting program, which really gave food for thought, and blood on the tooth for the participants to get even further with the green initiatives in the field.

Minutes and impressions from the DFA/Agrovi trip to Groundswell and the United Kingdom June 2024.

Monday afternoon started with a very exciting visit to the vacuum cleaner manufacturer James Dyson. However, it was not vacuum cleaners we were presented with, but rather a 14,500 ha. large-scale high-tech agricultural company in harmony with nature. 1,600 hectares are fallow flowers and there are 400 km of hedges, 15 km of stone walls and forest on the properties. The land is cultivated using regenerative methods, including grazing with sheep and cattle. Biogas plants produce electricity and heat, where the heat is used to heat 5.7 hectares of greenhouses with unsprayed strawberries that are tended by robots. A very exciting and inspiring visit, where you sensed that the money idea behind agriculture made it possible to invest with a slightly more long-term perspective.

After a lovely stay at The Crown Hotel in Stamford, we visited Alltech at their headquarters in Stamford, where we, among other things. We got a thorough insight into the major changes that are on the way for the English farmers. A continuous winding-up of the former EU ha. Support, which is then replaced by about 100 different subsidy options tied to environmentally improving and sustainable initiatives as well as setting aside agricultural land for non-productive crops.

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Both animal production and crop production are declining in the country, and with the many schemes towards more sustainable farming practices, there is no doubt that this trend will continue, just as it seems that profitability in English agriculture will also be declining.

We also got an exciting and interesting review of Alltech's history, and not least their ability to adapt to the development in agriculture, where they are also ready to assist farmers all over the world in their efforts to get financial gain from the green transition.

Then we went on the Adapt Biogas plant, where we got a tour of a 21 MW biogas plant, which based most of the production on the deep straw bed from a fattening calf production. Here we got insight into how to use extruded straw as an essential raw material resource, but also mix it with other available waste products.

On Wednesday we left by bus from Stanstead Airport towards Groundswell. One of the highlights of this year's Groundswell was the introduction of a so-called "biodiversity net gain" service providers, and that the sale/audit of carbon credits has slowed since now, news from certification bodies and commercial buyers has been developing since last year. The biodiversity net gain is

apparently that the UK government is implementing a concept where new housing developments must compensate for the loss of biodiversity by developing the land into houses, which means that housing development companies pay farmers to compensate for this biodiversity problem.

One of this year key-note speakers was the famous John Kempf who's hosting the regenerative agriculture podcast (the worlds most listened ag podcast). So pretty huge deal. John shared experiences and ambitions learned through his 20 years working with regenerative ag farmers and practitioners which have evolved into the famous Advancing Eco Ag (AEA) consultancy firm (currently 50 employes strong in the USA I believe). Key to Johns philosophy is the strong believe that correct and balanced crop nutrition, preferable through foliar application, can make strong and stress (biotic/abiotic) tolerant plants performing to their maximum (high yield/quality). I'm following this topic with a key interest but more research trials and experiences here in Europe would be much appreciated.

Another topic which has my attention and was quite popular among the British attendees is the cropping system with permanent living mulch integration. The idea is to grow annual cash crops while keeping a permanent clover/alfalfa/legume in the bottom of the cash crop so the ultimate cover crop is already established at the time of harvest.

On the machinery side I did not notice much new. There is a good representation of notill seed drills.

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On the next day we visited David Walston which farms Thriplow Farms 20 minutes-drive south of Cambridge. David mainly grows winter wheats, barley and oats using a notill/conservation ag approach. This season David was also attacked by the new yellow-leaf disease of wheat which is not yet properly understood. Here after harvest, I can understand that his wheats still yielding ok considering the yellow-leaf disease. Another general UK farming topic which we discussed with David was how the UK government encourages “Sustainable Farm Initiave” (SFI) set aside which means David and many UK farmers are now taking 25% of arable farm land out of production in order to farm these highly subsidies initiative. They are using the setaside as a rotational break crop in their wheat rotation. Because they can put in a 12-month summer to summer legume setaside which works perfectly in a winter wheat rotation.

In the afternoon we visited Jeff Claydon farmer and owner of Claydon Machinary factory. Very interesting farmer and company. My take home message was the importance of “mole-plowing” as a tool of improved drainage on soils with very high clay content (+50%). The mole plow loosens the soil and makes a temporary tile drain channel at the depth of 50-75cm. This help close the gaps between tradition tile drains (14-20 meters apart).

On Friday before our flight back home we visited NIAB research institute in Cambridge for a general introduction and tour of the facilities.

Al in al a good tour with good networking opportunities and some fresh inspiration.

Tom Axelgaard and Frederik V. Larsen