

'It's important to me that all our advisors work together to understand the business.'



Farm extends to 4,000 hectares growing crops including:

- Winter wheat
- Winter oilseed rape
- Spring barley
- Winter barley
- Sugar beet
- Spring beans

Soil type:

- Heavy clay, high pH

David Knott has worked for Trumpington for over seven years and in that time has built a solid relationship with a team of five specialist advisors from Frontier Agriculture and its divisions. This team collaborates to provide the right advice for David's business across the full spectrum of crop production. Sharing expertise and information helps the Frontier team achieve their principal goal of generating sustainable success for the whole Trumpington business.



No single aspect of crop production takes priority and decisions are not made in isolation without thought of how they will affect the farm's overall financial, environmental or agronomic success.

David says, "This coordinated thinking allows my agronomist, the fertiliser department and SOYL precision to create recommendations and suggest application techniques, or specialist fertiliser requirements for the crop. What can be an issue with a business like ours is that there is sometimes friction between different (advisory) companies not allowing information to transfer between them, causing complications on the ground for us. We don't have time for that sort of friction, so working closely with Frontier and their advisors helps our business.

"In my role, I am concentrating on a number of things at the same time. I can't necessarily specialise in a particular area such as agronomy or fertiliser. I rely heavily on somebody else being extremely well informed on the latest technology, molecules and application techniques. I work with Frontier to get that sort of information to allow our business to move forward."

With overall responsibility for the management of the Trumpington Estate, David Knott needs a team around him that he can trust to deliver against his objectives.



Matt Phillips
Commercial Director,
GFP Agriculture

Nik Thompson
Regional Fertiliser
Business Manager

Nick Bullen
Regional Sales Manager

David Knott
Customer

Dominic Chatwin
Agronomist

Richard Markham
Area Manager,
SOYL Precision

The Frontier team supporting David's business.

Collaboration aids crop production

Nick Bullen, regional sales manager for Frontier has been working with David since David joined the estate. What started as a relatively narrow trading relationship has developed significantly over the years. Nick explains the approach the Frontier team takes to working with a business like David's and the benefits this 'whole picture' view of crop production delivers.



Nik, Nick and David in the yard.

"Our understanding of what David wants goes back to that very first point I met him. We sat down and had a very long conversation about his business and what his aspirations were. We've taken small steps and slowly built the relationship bit by bit. We've grown the amount of work we do with David and now we're doing some agronomy, grain, seed, fertiliser and precision advice too."

The Frontier team on this account works in harmony. "Collaboration is hugely important. We work together to understand the different aspects of David's business. The factors that affect, say, seed or fertiliser markets can have a significant impact on other business decisions for David.

"The advice I give is around the marketing of the crops and what we see happening in the world market. There is fair reliance on the Frontier grain trading team and the information they're pushing out to me, as a farm trader. I feed their global trading expertise in to David to help him make decisions.

"I also regularly speak to seed specialist, Matt Phillips from GFP Agriculture once it gets to the time for variety choice. I want David to choose the right varieties that have a reliable end market and that we are confident of buying back from him."

Expertise and efficiency

Nick says that the strength of the wider Frontier support team is another factor that has helped cement the relationship with Trumpington. "This is a big estate with multiple collection points; so understanding that and the implications of buying grain and adhering to collection dates means we don't get complications."

It is easy to see how complicated this could become if Nick could not rely on the efficiency of the transport, forwarding and administration teams at Frontier. But Nick explains that the process of trading grain, from agreeing the contract through to collection and then invoicing or payment, is very slick. "Imagine getting it wrong and trying to pick up grain from two different farms that are 10 miles apart and then finding you have got to get through the middle of Cambridge to get where you are meant to be! That could be very frustrating for the farmer awaiting his collection. I regularly speak to our transport and forwarding teams to ensure they understand what's needed. That means David and his team are not bothered by problems like this when it's time for collection."

Similarly David is kept informed about his grain at all stages, often receiving text messages detailing quality and load details within a few hours of the lorry leaving the farm.

Financial security is another benefit influencing David's decision to work with Frontier. David explains how this helps ease cash flow, "One of the things that's very important to us is the security of the businesses that we deal with. We like the fact that Frontier has a particularly strong balance sheet and is able to help us with cash flow, forward purchasing of products and delayed payments. We value that flexibility and that's why we choose to work with a company who has that ability to provide this."



Nik and Nick discuss the latest fertiliser requirements.

“Service, trust and knowing the farm are paramount.”



Matt Phillips
Commercial Director, GFP Agriculture

A joined up approach

Dominic Chatwin, agronomist explains how he supports David. “Once I’ve walked the farm every Monday, I make crop protection recommendations; they’ll also be discussed with David. The Frontier delivery service is pretty impressive. I send the recommendation to David’s office and the order is sent through to my colleagues at Sandy who organise delivery of the product.



Dominic with David during one of his weekly field walks.

“The direct ordering system we use will tell our office team exactly where to deliver and the timescale I would like product delivered within. Nine times out of ten, product is there the day after ordering or even sometimes on the same day!



Richard Markham, Matt Phillips, Nik Thompson, Nick Bullen and Dominic Chatwin.

“Matt Phillips and the advice he gives is crucial on this farm too. He’s our seed specialist and Nick and I work with him to ensure that David’s choosing and growing the best varieties for his land and for the end markets available.” Dominic Chatwin

Choosing the best margin opportunities

Matt explains his approach to seed advice on the farm, “My role here is not about selling the latest species or variety. It’s about advising on the best gross margin opportunities for David. So we are trying to give an all round independent view and helping with advice and ideas. For example, that may mean choosing an older variety that happens to agronomically suit the farm with an end market that carries a premium.

“Service, trust and knowing the farm are paramount. Service is something that our business relationship has been built on. So for instance, David rang recently for a mobile seed dressing service and no dressers were available. To keep him going with seed we sent a bulk lorry down here; we picked up his seed, took it to our plant in Lincolnshire and he had the seed dressed and back the next morning by 11am!”



Matt Phillips checks the OSR with David.

Fertiliser is another area where David relies on teamwork to make the most profitable decisions. Nick, Dominic and Nik Thompson work together with David to agree the requirements for the season, set pricing, delivery times and, of course, product choice. The aim is to provide David with the market and agronomic information he needs to choose the right fertiliser products, at the right price and delivered when they are needed. Trumpington has made a move to use liquid fertiliser for some of its nutrition requirements. This offers the benefit of more accurate application and, with Frontier’s support, David now has on farm liquid fertiliser storage tanks to make the process of delivery and application straightforward. Nik Thompson says, “We have a great working relationship at Trumpington. We understand the needs of the farm, particularly that they are running fertiliser at 40 metre widths. We ensure David gets the right products to meet those needs.”

Precision decisions

David uses a range of precision techniques to manage the farm and these tools impact across the whole of the farming business – not just nitrogen applications and maps. He says, “We work closely with Richard who coordinates our soil sampling. We have nutritional and soil structure sampling to enable us to create maps and carry out variable rate seed and nitrogen applications. We work with Richard and Dominic to produce the maps, so that we get the right information going to our sprayer operator for accurate application of products. We are looking at which parts of the crop are more productive than others and why. We want to farm those bits that are productive and maybe put the other areas into wildlife schemes.”

Richard Markham says, “We create all of David’s plans and maps, which are delivered to his iPad and that works really well. This precision approach to inputs is also being extended into variable rate agronomy.” “I work with Dominic and we discuss the season and nitrogen and seed plans together. We are proposing to apply growth regulators variably too in the future and that’s an idea that’s been well received by David.”

David has full access to the MySOYL online platform and this enables him to view all of his precision data and transfer his maps onto his own equipment.



The collaborative approach to providing crop production advice is one that clearly works well for David, as he concludes, “The best thing about working with Frontier is the people, the financial security, the level of information that they provide for our business, the personal interaction, the attention to detail and little things like correct invoicing, prompt load collections, polite drivers and clean lorries. It’s the whole package...”

Black-grass - an integrated approach

As with many farm businesses, black-grass is a significant concern at Trumpington. Clay soils and challenging field drainage compound the black-grass threat to a profitable rotation.

David explains, “We take advice from Frontier on different ways in which we can control black-grass. That advice is proving very influential to the way we manage the weed. The introduction of techniques such as increased water rates and the stacking of chemistry have all played a very important part in enabling us to keep a lid on the ‘black-grass box.’”

David’s agronomist, Dominic Chatwin draws on data from Frontier’s technical team and the company’s 3DThinking trials. This expertise helps Dominic to select different cultural controls and alternative regimes to strategically manage this difficult grass weed.

“It’s extremely important for us as farmers that those trials go ahead to enable us to tackle the problems like black-grass,” says David.

Delayed drilling is one of the methods of control now in place across much of the estate, creating a stale seedbed. “Over the years we have mixed black-grass seeds through the profile. So a lot of our cultivations are close to the surface now to avoid mixing soil through the profile. In this way black-grass weeds are more easily sprayed off with the chemistry we have available.”

With Dominic’s help and support on variety choice from the seed team, the estate has also introduced more diverse cropping. Hybrid winter barley, spring barley and an increased area of sugar beet are all contributing to efforts to break the cycle of black-grass.

“Hybrid barley has been one of the game changers for us. Its competitive nature was such that it has suppressed the worst of the black-grass down to a level that has become manageable in the rotation,” adds David.