

**‘On a diversified farm, we can’t be specialists in every enterprise so we need expert advice to help us grow high quality crops.’**



Father and daughter James and Georgie Cossins of Rawston Farm say that with a wide-ranging business incorporating arable, livestock and a number of diversification projects, it's impossible for any one person to be expert in everything. Linking with the latest thinking and technology is a vital part of the Cossins family's strategy. That's where the support of the Frontier team comes in, in the form of agronomist Russell Dean, farm trader Rachel Panting and precision advisor Richard Hales.

James, a fifth generation arable farmer, and his wife Barbara began to diversify during the 1990s. First buying a local pub, followed by setting up a butchery and opening a farm shop. James explains the complexity this brings to farm management, "With a dairy herd, a beef herd, various diversification and all the combinable crops we grow it's very difficult for Georgie and I to be a specialist in absolutely everything. That's where we call in Frontier and they are a great support to us. We don't employ managers or people to look at the different aspects of business. Georgie and I tend to run the farm together, while Barbara focuses on the pub and shop, so we need the expert advice from Russell, Rachel and Richard.

"Every day on this farm is different. You start off with the best plan in the world and occasionally it doesn't quite go to plan. At busy calving times we are flat out and meanwhile in the background of course crops are growing and we need someone to monitor them and check for disease and weeds. Russell will walk the crops and we will discuss what treatments are needed. He provides a great back-up because I just don't physically have the time to go around every field.

"I keep an eye on the market trends but Rachel will say 'look, there is an opportunity here for selling', which I hadn't appreciated. She will keep me up-to-date with what's going on and then we make a decision on when we are going to sell and how we sell. We grow quite a lot of malting barley and the marketing for that is key. It is important we market that right and Rachel is a great support to us."





## The Frontier team supporting David's business.

The Cossins have dealt with Frontier for a number of years. Russell, Rachel and Richard have become an integral part of the day to day arable business. James says, "You build up a trusting relationship and they are good to work with. I always feel they are looking after you, looking after your business and trying to do the best for you. They understand our objectives and what we are trying to achieve. I feel they are working for us, in our interest and it's great to have a good working relationship."

### Finding the right markets

Rachel and James speak regularly, up to several times a week at peak periods such as harvest. Rachel sees her role as one of a markets advisor. She says, "I give James information about what the markets require from him. I liaise with Russell to help me decide on what varieties James should be growing and whether they are going to suit the market place that we have available. That's my main role."

"It's just as important to be telling someone what they perhaps shouldn't do as well as what they should be doing and by doing that you give a balanced view. Obviously then the trust is built because they feel that your view is balanced rather than just pushing them down one route."

One of the main markets Rachel has linked James with is barley used by Molson Coors for brewing. Rachel says James is especially good at this for a number of reasons, "This particular area is very good for growing malting barley. Then there is the expertise that we get from Russell, who I work very closely with to get the right variety, the right inputs and so on. James also has good attention to detail and storage. Everything works smoothly together to produce what Molson Coors want at the end of the day."



James and Rachel in one of the grain stores.



The view across the farm to the west.



“It’s really important that we understand our cost of production.”



**Russell Dean**  
Agronomist

## A joined up approach



*Russell discusses inputs with Georgie.*

### Benchmarking cost of production

As the farm’s agronomist, Russell says he has three clearly defined roles, “I walk the crops, I advise on what crop protection to apply and I’m also responsible for getting it ordered and here on time. My second role is crop nutrition; I advise on what fertiliser to apply. I’m also responsible for ordering the fertiliser and trying to get the right price. My third role is that I’m responsible for all of the cereal seed and the rapeseed seed that comes onto the farm. I work with James on what he wants to grow, and then I order the seed and make sure we’ve got it here when he needs it.

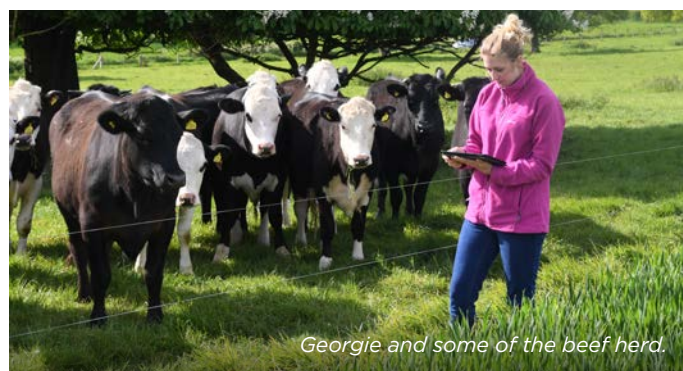


*Russell and James on one of their regular field walks.*

“James and I have worked together for 15 years and we keep in regular contact. We often like to chat in the evenings when he updates me on what he’s been doing on the farm. During harvest he’ll often text me to say how a field has yielded which is really interesting because obviously I’ve been part of helping to grow the crop. To hear how it’s coming off at harvest time is quite exciting!”

Russell explains that Georgie’s addition to the farm has brought an added dimension, “Georgie’s interest on the farm is to make sure the business is fit for the future. Georgie is driving that forward.”

One aspect that Russell and Georgie have been taking a closer look at is benchmarking performance using Frontier’s online portal, MyFarm. Russell says “It’s really important that we understand our cost of production, especially as we live in a volatile time and as we move towards Brexit. By using MyFarm and recording what we’ve applied to each field we’ll be able to monitor the cost of production and then understand which crops to grow in the future. We have been questioning whether to continue to grow winter barley because we’ve found out by benchmarking that actually the economics of winter barley may not be as good as, say, spring barley or a second wheat on this farm.”



*Georgie and some of the beef herd.*

Georgie adds, “It’s so important to us just to have that professional relationship with someone who’s up to speed with all the new products coming out and regulations. Russell’s keeping an eye on what’s going on in our fields. He’s totally on board with the ethos of our mixed farming principles; it’s absolutely key to what we do. We are not an intensive arable farm, nor are we extensive. We just want to produce top quality at a reasonable profit margin and he gets that.”

### Demonstrating to the local market

The Cossin’s farm is also home to one of Frontier’s 3DThinking demonstration sites, used as a venue to showcase new varieties. The crops that are in the demonstration plots are used by Russell, James and local growers to help inform decisions. Russell says, “James takes a keen interest in the demonstration site. For example, a couple of years ago, James introduced Siskin because he liked the look of it in the demonstration site.”

The demonstration site is also the focal point for Frontier’s 3DThinking summer open day, bringing together the local farming community to view the varieties and enjoy the more social aspects of the day.

**As Georgie concludes, “The best thing about working with Frontier is that despite them being a huge firm, they are actually focussed on us as a local business and they are really involved in the local community – which is something that’s very important to us as a business. As well as that, they are strong enough to hold their own within the competitive marketplace and hold some good customers.”**

## Technology, precision and efficiency

**Rawston Farm is embracing technology, especially in the arena of precision farming. Georgie has taken the lead in the business's precision journey, guided by SOYL area manager, Richard Hales.**

Georgie explains, "Over the years we have been investing in precision farming technology and it's definitely something we see being a big part of the future. I think it helps in maximising our efficiency and hopefully will help improve our productivity as well."

"On part of the farm which is just arable, where we don't put any livestock or manure, we felt there was a lot of variability within the fields. The mapping survey confirmed that and using technology we now have variable rate P&K. Having done that for four years, the crops are becoming more even. We don't want to over or under apply inputs to crops; we can now put on what the crops need which I am sure is the way forward."



*Georgie using the Frontier MyFarm portal.*

### Precision data in one place with MySOYL

MySOYL is a web-based precision data management tool which is used to store the farm's precision farming data. Using the tool Georgie, Richard and Russell can view, analyse and add data on nutrient maps, soil types, land features and yield.

SOYL samples and maps the farm's soils every four years, using the data to create requirements and build variable rate application maps. These are stored in MySOYL and loaded onto the iSOYL iPad app, which then connects simply with the controller on the farm's tractor.

Georgie says, "The nice thing about MySOYL is it's very easy to use; it's very user friendly. We use our iPad in the tractor cab to communicate with our equipment for variable rate application maps. That makes it so much easier; we don't have to have loads of different wires, loads of different technologies and lots of different bits of kit communicating to one another. It's just one iPad and that communicates with the kit on the back of the tractor."



*iSOYL being used to download application maps..*

### iSOYLscout - logging features in the field

A recent addition to SOYL's tool library is iSOYLscout which Georgie, James and Russell have loaded to their iPhones. Using this they can log features and problems on the farm while they are out in the field. These are then loaded to their MySOYL account when their phone next has a signal, be that GPS or wifi, so everything is connected.

Richard Hales explains, "Whenever they are out and about on farm they can scout data that's going to be relevant for future decisions. For example, it could be that they are out scouting a black-grass area on their phone with iSOYLscout. They can bring that data into MySOYL and create a plan, whether it's for herbicide application or perhaps variable seed rate drilling."

### Benchmarking

Georgie adds that the digital journey continues, with benchmarking using Frontier's MyFarm platform next on the horizon, "Digital records definitely help reduce the amount of paperwork in the office. We would like to look at how MyFarm can contribute to our benchmarking - that for me is really critical at the moment, just looking at where our costs are. I think MyFarm will definitely help in aiding that."

**MyFarm** is Frontier's online portal enabling farmers to log on and manage all aspects of their business.

**MySOYL** is a web-based precision management tool used to store, view and analyse farm data (which sits within the MyFarm portal).

**iSOYL** is an app for iPad enabling the transfer and execution of variable rate application maps between MySOYL and the tractor cab.

**iSOYLscout** is a field-scouting app for iPhones and iPads used to log features and problems whilst out in the field.