

Allpress Farms – Grower Profile

Background

Allpress Farms in Cambridgeshire is a multi-generational family business that was founded in 1965. Today the farm encompasses some 3,000 acres and is run by brothers Nick and Patrick Allpress, with Patrick's son Angus a recent addition to the team. The land base is partly owned, tenanted and rented and stretches across Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire.

Leeks and onions are the main crops, with the farm producing around 8,500 tonnes of leeks each year, comprising pre-pack, loose, baby and organic leeks. The farm supplies some of the UK's leading retailers.

Challenges

Growing leeks is a year-round project and according to Patrick Allpress one of the biggest challenges farmers now face is dealing with climate change and our erratic weather. The farm has experienced temperatures ranging from minus 12C to 40C in one season, along with periods of drought and heavy rain.

In addition to the family the farm employs around 90 staff, plus seasonal workers and another challenge is sourcing good quality labour to cut and process the leeks. The farm now recruits seasonal workers from across the globe as it impossible to fill the roles required locally.

Innovations

Farming practices are always evolving. Changes to regulations around the use of pesticides has seen the farm move towards the use of more plant-based crops rather than growing from seed.

Looking ahead the Allpress's are exploring ways to farm regeneratively alongside producing crops. To this end they have introduced an anaerobic digestor, which now provides energy for the farm and factory, with the digestate produced being used as a fertiliser on local farms. Where possible any new plant and machinery purchased is now carbon neutral.

The farm is part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and the Sustainable Farming Initiative. While Nick Allpress sits on the board of Fenland Soil, a not-for-profit organisation aimed at achieving climate change mitigation and biodiversity enhancement in the Fens. Very much embedded in the local community, school visits and work experience is offered to students from the vicinity.

A typical day

Patrick's typical day begins at 7am with a visit to the pack house to check on the leek processing. Later in the morning he'll spend time in the office doing paperwork and talking to his customers. He might also walk the crops and organise overseas supply – which requires planning about 12 months ahead.

The Allpress family eat leeks at least once a week and their favourite recipe is called 'Flamiche' a very simple leek pie dish from northern France, where between the pastry the filling is usually a simple mixture of chopped leeks, egg yolk, butter, cream cheese, double cream, grated nutmeg, chives and grated parmesan.