



DEMONSTRATION FARM

## Silton Manor Farm

**Farmer: Keith Harris**

**Address:** Manor Farm, Silton, Gillingham, Dorset, SP8 5PR

A 690 acre, family owned farm combining a mainly arable business with cattle and sheep. I am the fourth generation and my wife and I have three sons and a daughter. Harvest and much of the cultivation are done by the family with contractors helping outside school holidays. We are trying to achieve a balance between Dorset's beautiful varied county of rolling hills and famous vales, a profitable farm, a varied environment where wildlife is encouraged, the needs of our family and providing a farm where others can work and play. Time will tell whether we have achieved this.



### The Farm

Manor Farm is a lowland, mainly arable business with sheep. Our soils vary from predominately stone brash to medium clays.

### Crops for food

Wheat is the main crop and sold to local merchants. Varieties are selected to suit the soil type which varies across the farm. Wheat grown is mainly for livestock feed, whilst some milling wheats are grown for biscuit-making and bread.

We have a varied crop rotation which is fundamental to soil health and discourages the build-up of pests and diseases so break crops are very important - winter oilseed rape and arable silage are typical break crops. We often grow flower crops including borage, Echium and Corn Cromwell. As well as incorporating the straw from the break crops we are now incorporating wheat straw to raise the soil organic matter content. All crops are established using minimal tillage wherever possible.



## Community

We do as much as we can to support the local community and be good neighbours. We have built a 4.9mW solar PV installation in the middle of the farm, predominantly on an old landfill site, which provides valuable energy for the local community.

## Conservation

We are lucky in the landscape we have inherited. I see it as part of my job to look after that environment and, where possible, improve it. In the adoption of Integrated Farm Management (IFM) at Silton Manor Farm, efficiency is the key goal. Farming in an integrated way helps us do this. We have a mixture of margins, from one to six metres wide, areas of rough grass in wet, tricky corners or carefully placed around the farm for maximum benefit. These act as buffers between hedgerows/ditches and the crop and provide valuable habitats for birds, small mammals and insects. Beetle Banks divide the larger fields to provide wildlife havens and even harbour beneficial insects which help to control insect pests in the crop. We often see skylarks, brown hares and snipe on the farm.

We try to manage all the farm's resources – soil, water, energy, machinery, wildlife corridors in an integrated way. The farms' water comes from on-farm springs which also feed the lakes and wetlands. Burning chipped wood from the farm provides heat and hot water for the farm house, office and my parents' house with the benefit of the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI).

## Visits

Come and visit Silton Manor Farm and see for yourself how we are striking a balance between managing the farm to maximise profit whilst enhancing the environment and providing a good place to live and work for family, staff and wildlife.



## About LEAF Demonstration Farms

LEAF Demonstration Farms are commercial farms, which show the beneficial practices of Integrated Farm Management (IFM) to a broad range of audiences, through organised visits. They communicate an understanding of IFM in order to encourage uptake by farmers, support from the industry and political awareness of sustainable food and farming. For more information, visit [www.leafuk.org](http://www.leafuk.org).

