

# FRUIT PRODUCTION AT NICHOLASTON FARM

**CALU**  
**DEMO FARM**  
**FACTSHEET**  
March 2009



## INTRODUCTION

On 26<sup>th</sup> March 2009 Nicholaston farm, near Swansea hosted a CALU workshop focusing on fruit production. This factsheet provides a review of that workshop. The farm is an established pick your own business and a popular caravan site. Nicholaston is situated on a gently sloping meadow facing southwards and overlooking Tor Bay.



## BACKGROUND

Nicholaston farm has been in the Beynon family for five generations. The site was previously a mixed farm with beef and dairy cattle, sheep and potatoes. The 44.5ha farm includes 10ha of fruit and vegetable production area. The rest of the land is used for sheep grazing, the camping and caravan park and to grow a small amount of cereals.

The site is approximately 75m above sea level and has an average rainfall of 1500mm a year. The soil is mostly light sandy loam.

## CROPS

For the pick your own crops the farm grows strawberries, redcurrants, raspberries and gooseberries. The farm also grows rhubarb, asparagus, potatoes and beans that are not included in the pick your own. The most recent crop to be planted on the site was a hectare of strawberries. This is part of an ongoing planting rotation to ensure high yields and healthy plants at the site.

## STRAWBERRIES

There are four strawberry varieties grow on site: Christine, Eros, Symphony and Judy Bell. Christine will be ready for picking in late May early June, while Eros a second early will ripen in early July. Strawberries are planted on a bed system, this means two rows of plug plant strawberries are planted approximately one meter apart before being allowed to mat together to form a bed. This system has been developed at the site because the more conventional raised bed single row system was not working.

The strawberry beds are only cropped for three years before being removed and a new site established. To keep the rotation going new beds are planted every year. The strawberry plots are walked in March to check for any pest and disease problems. When conducting the crop walk the back of strawberry (and other crops) leaves are checked for hidden pest and diseases.

## REDCURRANTS

There are two varieties grown on site Jonkheer Van Tets and Rovada. Jonkheer Van Tets is ready for picking in July, while Rovada will ripen in later July to August. The fields are sloping and open to winds and so a wind break of an old redcurrant variety which has been left to grow is used to shelter the compact redcurrant buses.

## RASPBERRIES

Raspberry canes are grown in the Scottish lacing system. This involves tying each productive raspberry cane to wire along the row. Each cane needs to be around 10cm apart and held with twine. Twine is the most suitable material because it is easy to remove the following year when the process will be repeated. The tops of each cane are then trimmed to head height to allow for easy picking and reduce wind damage to the plant and crop as shown in Figure 1.



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu  
Gwledig: Ewrop yn Buddsoddi  
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig  
The European Agricultural Fund for  
Rural Development: Europe Investing in  
Rural Areas



Centre for Alternative Land Use  
Canolfan Ddefnydd Tir Amgen



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



Figure 1: Scottish lacing system

Raspberry canes can also be grown on a double wire system; this is where the fruiting canes are grown between two rows of wires. The two row system was trialled at the Nicholaston site. However it was unsuitable for the site due to the strong winds blowing from the sea.

### ASPARAGUS

The variety grown at Nicholaston is Gijnlim. It is an early season, high yielding male variety of asparagus which produces medium thick, mid-green spears with closed purple tips.

The asparagus crop is very popular with customers at the farm shop. Salt (NaCl) is added to the crop at the rate of one tonne per hectare every year. Asparagus has been shown to respond to an application of salt; however it is not absolutely

necessary. The crop grown at Nicholaston has shown signs of improvement after application.

### RHUBARB

Within the asparagus patch there is a row of rhubarb. This high value crop grows very well on the site. The variety grown is Victoria, it has a broad stalk with a heavy leaf; this can suffer from wind damage. Rhubarb suffers from very few pest and disease problems. It is relatively easy to harvest.

### GOOSEBERRIES

Gooseberries are a popular crop at Nicholaston. The main variety grown is Invicta. It produces large berries with a good flavour. Gooseberries are most commonly grown on a leg. At Nicholaston the bushes have been kept lower to the ground as bushes rather than the raised on a leg.

As part of the spray program for the site Roundup (active ingredient glyphosate) is applied in August or September to keep the area around the base of the plants weed free.

The gooseberries are fertilised in March with 16:8:24 NPK (or similar) feed at the rate of 350kg / ha.

### PROBLEMS

Although the land at Nicholaston is very productive, problems like verticillium wilt could still have a detrimental affect on strawberry plants. Therefore a good rotation system for the strawberry crops is essential. A lot of careful forward planning and good record keeping about previous crops will ensure the site does not run out of productive land.

Birds can be a problem on site, however growing any outdoor fruit crops will sustain some losses through pest damage, at Nicholaston amount of losses is minimal.

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Trevor, Lynwen and Tom Beynon are keen to develop the business. They would like to make more value added products, for example frozen fruits, smoothies and juice. Producing value added products will also use up surplus fruit that could otherwise go to waste.