

Update

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Beacon Commodities



We are excited to share with you our second UK based project. Once again, we are tackling the 'indifferent' UK weather and attempting to grow a key gin botanical in the UK. We have planted a trial site of angelica in the heart of the Fens near Huntingdon. Countryside that is well known for producing excellent agricultural crops.



The field prior to planting with ridges formed



The dark peaty Fen-land soil



A case of third time lucky

The reasons for the project

We have received countless calls for UK grown botanicals and although many are sourced/foraged from these isles there is an extreme shortage of the core botanicals. With the success of our UK coriander grown in Sussex we have noticed an appetite for farmers to diversify into new niche crops – angelica certainly falls into this bracket!

Why the Fens?

An area rich with agricultural history with it's well known 'jet black' soil and famous for growing sugar beet and potatoes, the Fens were always going to be an ideal location with similar terrain to Belgium and farmers with agricultural machinery already suited to the growing of angelica. Tommy and Michael have been involved in farming for many years and therefore knew a contact who was willing to work with us on this exciting venture.



A lovely warm place to be when there is a bitter north east wind outside



The plugs ready to be planted

Nursery plugs

Many hours have been spent researching this project including trips to Belgium to try and learn as much information as possible. What we found was a seed that did not 'play by the rules'. A seed that did its best not to germinate. With this in mind we decided to give our crop a healthy head start and send our seed off to a nursery to grow into plugs so by the time they were being planted we were 6-7 weeks ahead of the game.

The nursery had two attempts trying to grow 20,000 plugs from some of Beacon Commodities' seed. One batch was destroyed by the 'beast from the east' and the second was true to form and did not germinate. A case of third time lucky and an investment with a specialised seed merchant produced 20,000 healthy looking plugs.



Plugs being individually fed into the planter

We spent a wonderful morning looking around the nursery which was established in 1979. Their greenhouses are heated by a woodchip boiler and the 240 cell plastic trays filled with soil. From here a Flier automatic seeder system which used a vacuum selector drum added 3 or 4 seeds to each cell with vermiculite added on top to aid water retention. After 10-12 days the first shoots began to appear with our trays being kept indoors for nearly 7 weeks.





Michael is wasted in the office

Field operations

In the autumn of 2017, the field was deep cultivated in two different directions down to a depth of 16 inches. The bed former was then sent through to build up the ridges. The delays associated with the failed plugs actually worked in our favour as the 'beast from the east' and miserable March and April delayed the planting not only of our angelica but also potatoes across the Fens.

When the weather finally warmed up a de-stoner was run through the ridges to break up clods of soil (there are no stones in the Fens) and remove those that did not break down. The farm then tilled the beds and rolled them down. The farm then managed to borrow a 'vintage' cabbage planter which planted the plugs on Thursday 31st May.



Now – the waiting game

Unfortunately we will now have to play the waiting game as the angelica will take 18 months before harvesting (hopefully) in October 2019.

The angelica will then need to be processed after harvest. As with many botanicals, a key component of quality is the quality of processing. Having this under our control will allow us to prepare a quality specific to the gin trade. The roots will need to be cleaned, dried and then cut and sieved before use.

We are excited about the potential for this project and extremely grateful to De Ramsey Estate Farms for supporting us. We hope it will be a crop that will become a common sight in the Fens and once again promote British botanicals and British farming.

We would welcome your support and any advice or feedback you would be willing to offer for this project so please do not hesitate to contact Tommy or Michael.



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