

Update

September 2014 – Issue 3

Beacon Commodities



At Beacon Commodities (BCL) we are excited to share with you a trial project we have been nursing over the last 6 months and hope it will be the start of something far more significant. In the last few weeks, we have successfully completed the harvest of an area of English coriander, close to our offices in Sussex.

The reasons for the project:

Over the past two years, the weather and price fluctuations in Eastern Europe, India and Morocco have resulted in difficulties with the supply and demand of coriander seed worldwide. This has led to unprecedented price increases of well over 100% in certain regions. This desperate situation has been exacerbated in recent months with the situation between Russia and the Ukraine.

This year, we are experiencing one of the most difficult times for sourcing coriander, with issues of quality and sensible prices. At BCL, we have been let down on over 10 loads, a total of 200 tonnes. These difficulties have led BCL to plan for the future and explore the possibility of growing English coriander, to protect and control both the supply and quality. It will also provide distillers with an alternative origin, an origin that is much closer to home!



Inspecting the crop

Distilling trade:

Our main market is the distilling trade and our agricultural background at BCL has enabled us to form a close relationship with a local farm and select a suitable trial site with a gentle south facing slope to ensure maximum exposure to the sun with further help from a qualified agronomist. We planted a variety of coriander already favoured by major distillers which is usually grown in Eastern Europe.



Coriander leaf



Coriander seeds one month before harvest



Inspecting the crop prior to harvest



Harvesting the 'top lot'

Drilling and harvesting the crop:

The selected trial site, which measures 2.60 acres, was first sprayed to eradicate any weeds and then ploughed to a width of 24 meters (three widths of a combine header). The area was fertilised and the seed was broadcast behind a power harrow on 17th April 2014. Coriander, as a crop, is hard wearing and even though it was inspected at regular intervals, no further field operations were required until the harvest. The crop was harvested on 18th September 2014 by a New Holland Combine with a header specifically set up for the coriander seed. The field was split into two lots, 'Top' and 'Bottom' and the seed from each lot was transferred direct into separate waiting trailers and then into half tonne bags.



Unloading the 'top lot' from the combine



Tommy was NOT allowed to drive

24th April
Field after drilling

1



27th May
Coriander leaf

2



24th June
Growth in line with maize
crop on the right

3



3rd July
Small white flowers start to appear

4



3rd July
The flowers attracted
numerous honey bees

5



11th July
A white blanket of flowers

6



29th July
Seeds start to appear

7



6th August
Average seed heads of 10-12 seeds

8



19th August
Seeds start to dry and change colour

9



9th September
Seeds almost ready for harvesting

10





Harvesting next to the mature maize crop

Cleaning:

No matter where in the world coriander is grown, it needs to be cleaned as this removes dust, foreign seeds, stalks, and other impurities. This reduces the yield by approximately 30%. For this job BCL have enlisted the specialist skills of a seed cleaning plant in Suffolk, W A Church (Bures) Ltd. W.A Church handles high value seed and has a full range of equipment for every cleaning eventuality. Churches are a family owned company established in 1902, and BCL are delighted to work with such a long established and experienced family run company.



Checking the sample before unloading into trailer

Drying:

Coriander needs to be dried to a maximum moisture content of 12% and with some heavy rain in the weeks leading up to harvest the coriander seed was dried before being sent to a specialist cleaning plant.



Harvesting the 'bottom lot'

Lessons learned:

Following this success, BCL are keen to increase the cropped area for next year but we have learnt some valuable lessons for future crops. The planting of this year's crop on 17th April was a little late in the season and therefore an earlier planting will bring an earlier harvest with better weather (but not guaranteed).

The two/three weeks of showers prior to harvest had turned the seed a slightly darker brown and although this is of little relevance to distillers, it can affect buyers in the food trade where an alternative market exists. Next year we will also look to plant coriander after a maize crop, as maize completely wipes out all ground weed giving the coriander an excellent start with no competition and the potential for no foreign matter in the final product.

The success of the crop has encouraged us to vastly increase the growing area next year and with full agreement from our farmers, we hope it is something distillers will support. We would be delighted to send out free samples to interested parties and would welcome thoughts on quality and whether this is a product you would look to use in the future.

