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Case IH Quadtracs help Danish company to revolutionise farming in Slovakia

Host farm is a case study in farming revolution/ Quadtracs chosen in evaluation/ Two machines conduct nearly all cultivation on 9,300ha

Agricultural journalists from around the world attended the annual Case IH media event, which this year was held in Slovakia on an estate operated by FirstFarms A/S.

Case IH is helping to change the face of agriculture in Eastern Europe, which in recent years has seen massive increases in efficiency and productivity on the best-managed farms. Much of these improvements have been due to advances in the quality, power and efficiency of machinery used, which has helped to transform the timeliness of field operations, provide optimum growing conditions for crops and reduce production costs.

FirstFarms A/S is a company which is at the forefront of this 'new-look' agriculture. Headquartered in Billund, Denmark, it invests in, operates and develops agriculture in Eastern Europe, where it farms 16,400 ha and employs 250 staff. In 2016, FirstFarms' turnover was DKK 130.3 million and it has ambitious plans to become one of Europe's largest farm management businesses.

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY

The concept for FirstFarms started in 2005, when eight investors joined forces to acquire agricultural company Agra M. in Slovakia, then in July 2006 they purchased another Slovakian agricultural company, Mast Stupava. In December that year, FirstFarms A/S listed on the NASDAQ OMX stock exchange in Copenhagen, attracting over 2600 shareholders, and in 2007 it expanded in Slovakia through the purchase of Mlyn Zahorie A/S.

FirstFarms currently operates in Slovakia, Romania and Hungary, where favorable cost, production and sales conditions provide the foundation for continued high operating earnings. In addition to a



PRESS RELEASE

return on invested shareholders' capital, FirstFarms expects, over time, to realise significant capital gains for its shareholders in the form of increases in the value of land and tangible assets.

The company's investment in Slovakia is one of the largest-ever by a Danish agricultural business in Eastern Europe. In Slovakia, the three farming operations are located 20-30km north of the capital, Bratislava, where the company operates approximately 9300ha, consisting primarily of leasehold fertile farmland. Some of the land is owned by FirstFarms, around 600 ha, and the rest is leased.

It has also built up a herd of 2500 dairy cattle plus young stock, all the milk produced at FirstFarms is being sold to European dairies. FirstFarms' ability to provide large, consistent quantities of a uniformly high-quality product is attractive to international dairy companies, putting it in a good position when negotiating contracts.

Cropping includes 1948ha of winter wheat, 1465ha of maize, 1278ha of oilseed rape, 874ha of rye, 505ha of sugar beet and 220ha of pumpkins. The business also produces a range of fodder crops, including 936ha of maize, 400ha of lucerne and 274ha of sorghum, together with 875ha of grass and 392ha of fallow.

Through focused production investments and successfully implementing Danish-style agricultural management techniques the three companies achieve significant economies of scale, greater efficiency and increased production.

Crop yields and quality have been significantly improved, partly by the company's considerable investments in advanced agricultural equipment and machinery. Old, worn-out infrastructure and farming equipment has been disposed of and investment has continuously been made in new machinery, including two Case IH Quadtrac tractors which have helped to revolutionise field operations.

A NEW APPROACH

Soren Nielsen, who joined FirstFarms 11 years ago and is now its Chief Operating Officer, Field Operations, states:

“On our farms in Slovakia we currently operate two Quadtrac 620 tractors, which replaced the two Quadtrac 600s which we operated previously. They were purchased through AgriCS, our Case IH dealer in the Czech Republic, with whom we have a good working relationship.

“The Quadtrac’s four-track design offers significant benefits over a twin-track system, and we evaluated both before deciding which to buy. The Quadtrac is very efficient at transferring power to the ground and the fact that it is under 3m wide is a significant advantage because it means that we do not need to provide an escort when travelling on the road.

“The Quadtracs 620s have greatly reduced the time and cost of establishing crops. They enable us to do almost all the heavy cultivations and soil preparation work on our 9,300ha with just two tractors. Each Quadtrac has two drivers, who operate in 12-hour shifts to keep them running 24/7 at peak times. We use a range of subsoiling and cultivation equipment from 6m to 12m wide, at speeds from 5-15 km/h, covering 5 – 10 hectares per hour, depending on the task and size of field.

“We have used AFS AccuGuide since purchasing our second Quadtrac in 2012. It operates to an accuracy of 10cm and is used for all cultivation operations, on all fields, ensuring that the tractors operate at 99% efficiency instead of around 80%. The AFS AccuGuide system is much easier than the guidance system we used previously, the operators find it easy to use and it greatly reduces driver fatigue.

“This has enabled us to significantly improve the productivity and profitability of our farming operations in Slovakia. Today, we operate 9,300 hectares with the same number of employees that we had in 2006 on 3,800ha, which is a massive improvement. By farming more efficiently, we have been able to significantly reduce our cost of production and improved yields, which are now 10% to 40% higher than before. The average yields, on good soil, are 3.4t/ha for winter oilseed rape, 7t/ha for winter wheat and 65t/ha for sugar beet, with 25 t/ha of maize and 4.5t/ha of hay produced on the lighter soils.

“Each Quadtrac will complete 2,000 hours in its first year and 1,500 hours in subsequent years.”

Press releases and photos: <http://mediacentre.caseiheurope.com>

Case IH is the professionals' choice, drawing on 175 years of heritage and experience in the agricultural industry. A powerful range of tractors, combines and balers is supported by a global network of highly professional dealers dedicated to providing our customers with the superior support and performance solutions required to be productive and effective in the 21st century. More information on Case IH products and services can be found online at www.caseih.com.

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