



Heart of England Farms Ltd

Breeders of Quality Game Stock

Established 1983

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Dear Sirs/Ladies

Another shooting season draws to its close and maybe to some of you one that is best forgotten. For such a wet autumn and winter to then culminate in a total wash-out of the Christmas and New year dates could not have been on any shoot managers radar when plans were being made last year. January's crisp and colder weather has been much more conducive to better flying birds leading to bigger bags shot but then, there are only so many days available in January in which to catch up. My understanding is that pheasants have held reasonably in the wet conditions though maybe not flown and presented themselves as well as usual, leading to less birds overall being shot earlier in the season. Late demand for January shooting has to some extent saved the day but to little benefit if you were unable to accommodate this later demand into your shooting programs.

Partridges did not withstand the incessant wet days as well as the pheasants, in some parts of the country I hear that even the early released and therefore the older poults struggled to maintain their strength and vigour with daily soakings throughout last autumn. Later hatched and released birds were seriously challenged and those on heavy ground or released on areas with little cover and/or predation pressure succumbed to the increased challenges and faded out leading to lower numbers over the guns.

The lack-lust demand for shooting experienced by many shoots last year and the reasons for it have been much debated. My view is it was caused by a combination of the ending of pent-up demand following covid in season 2021, poult shortages in 2022, and then the fear of bird flu restrictions being implemented in 2023. This opinion is strengthened by the fact that recently later season shooting has been taken up by guns who must have been waiting to see how the situation developed before committing to buying all their shoot days. The big positive going forward must now be the more optimistic outlook for bird-flu in the UK with reduced infection leading to many less cases on both shoots and commercial poultry units this season. The disease and its inherent risks have certainly not gone away in this country though and there are still cases being reported in France, even in the birds which have previously been vaccinated.

A further positive for this year is we have been able to significantly reduce our gamebird prices as a consequence of the reduced risk to our business from bird flu and the more controlled inflationary pressures we are now seeing on our costs of production. Reductions on the year of 45p on pheasant chicks and 65p on partridge chicks for prime-time birds are substantial and when carried onto the less expensive later season chicks makes these look very good value. Your new season price list is enclosed for your perusal.

Wheat prices are also back from their high of a year ago which has helped us all with feeding wintering pheasants but is only a minor factor in the price of manufactured game feed. I have lost count of the times I have heard it said that poults will be much cheaper in 2024 because cheaper wheat will lead to cheaper feed to rear them. Rearing feed will be less by £40-£50 tonne but my calculations make this quite minor as 1000 pheasants reared to 7wks require 1.25 tonne of feed which equates to a saving of only 5-6p per poult. I can think of a multitude of other costs whose increases will easily negate any saving on feed. Pheasant and partridge poults will be less expensive to buy this season but the main driver for this is the lower chick cost from which to start. If only we were able to rear these cheaper chicks on home grown wheat this year!

Ex-lay birds can be fed on a high wheat diet and these birds are priced very favourably against poult prices this year. If you have suitable ground and the knowledge to make them work on your shoot we offer very good deals on 3000 bird lorry loads. Please enquire.

We continue to over-winter all our pure breed pheasant and partridge breeding stock, which ensures the supply of home-produced birds for our chick and poult customers whatever financial, logistical or disease problems may occur elsewhere in the world. Our partridges were all in their pair units last November which has allowed us to start penning pheasants in early January. We hope to be finished penning all breeding stock by late February which should have a positive effect on early egg production and hatchability. The hens certainly look more content in their new pens where they are off the ground and we are better able to control their condition to ensure they do not become too fat pre-lay.

For many years now our 'belt and braces' approach to mycoplasma control has involved routinely blood testing all our breeding birds in their winter pens to ensure all flocks return negative results before moving them to their laying pens. Once there they will be fully vaccinated against Newcastle disease, TRT, IB, EDS and Mycoplasma which should also help with chick health.

All our birds are produced without any shortcuts and our long-established reputation for providing a service which surpasses our customers' expectations will continue.



Our system of ordering remains the same but just to recap:

Please telephone or e-mail your requirements with numbers, type or breed and date required.

We then compile a confirmation letter which is e-mailed to you via the 'DocuSign' system which gives the facility for you to check the details before confirming the order with an on-line signature.

Enclosed with this e-mailed letter of confirmation will be an invoice for the standard deposit amount of 25% of order value.

Please ensure that this payment is completed within the time requested on the letter or please notify us if an extension of time to pay is required. In past years we have spent too much admin time chasing these deposit payments and respectfully ask you to note that the order is not confirmed if the deposit payment has not been made by the due date.

For this system to work smoothly it is important that we have the email address of the signatory and therefore the person responsible for paying the account. A copy of the letter can also be sent out by email to other recipients keeping your office and shoot managers informed on numbers and delivery dates. We will of course need the contact details of all in the loop.

The old postal system is available for those who do not use email if required.

Judy and Natalia remain your main contacts and with both having been central to the office for many years they look forward to receiving your orders and a good chat!

We look forward to hearing from you.

Ole and Judy Gronning