



Heart of England Farms Ltd

Breeders of Quality Game Stock

Established 1983

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Dear Sirs/Ladies

It is that time of year again and another shooting season nears its close. How quickly the post Christmas period passes and I trust you all had enough birds to see you through the busiest and best part of the pheasant season. The weather has certainly helped shoots this season in finally turning cold. The extreme temperatures we experienced in late December/early January will have helped greatly in bringing birds back to the coverts and finally making them more dependant on introduced feed. Following such a mild and open autumn I am sure many shoots appreciated the change and hopefully you were able to take full advantage of the extra birds in the drives.

The start of the colder weather has also coincided with a reduction in the numbers of cases of the dreaded bird flu in domestic poultry. Up to Christmas reported cases had been running at a worrying level with some shoots also affected but fortunately to a lesser degree than had earlier been predicted. The census now being reported by APHA is suggesting a reduction in levels being found in wild birds which can only be positive news though the threat is ever present and numbers could easily rise again as the spring migration of wild birds resumes. We are not alone in this battle as globally many other countries are experiencing similar patterns, with France of particular concern, as the disease is back in the game producing regions in previously vaccinated ducks.

We continue to overwinter all our pure breed pheasant and partridge breeding stock, which ensures a 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 placed in their pair units last autumn and we are now well on with penning pheasants which gets them off the ground and into units where we are better able to control their condition to ensure they do not become too fat pre-lay. Whilst moving to the breeding units all our birds are fully vaccinated against Newcastle disease, TRT, IB, EDS and Mycoplasma which should also help with chick health. We hope to be finished penning all breeding stock by late February which should have a positive effect on early egg production and hatchability. 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 2026 price list is enclosed with this letter and I am pleased to inform that we have held prices, as we did last year, due to our perceived reduction in the risk from bird flu and inflationary pressures. Many input prices have gone up and few have come down but we have experienced lower costs in feeding our overwintered flocks which has proven to be a considerable saving on previous years. For those of you who, like me, feed much more wheat than we are able to grow, will have experienced this benefit on your own shoot and farms. A further positive, lower wheat and protein prices globally will ensure manufactured game feed prices will hold or even reduce slightly this coming season. Forward wheat prices are showing little change up to harvest but should be closely watched as any world events can easily swing the pendulum when the price is so unusually low.

With wheat prices so low this may be the year for some of you, who have suitable ground and the knowledge to make them work, to try some ex-lay pheasants. They can be fed on a high wheat diet, they are a fraction of the cost of poults, they do not get mauled by buzzards or hexamita and, most importantly, I need to get them moved! Consequently I can offer good deals on early June 2-3000 bird lorry loads, please enquire with any interest.

May I also ask that you take a serious look at whether you could help me in taking any later pheasant and partridge chicks. On a normal season, from mid-June onwards, chicks become more difficult to sell even though we reduce their price each week on both the chicks and the corresponding poults. The economics of game bird breeding are difficult to balance at best in the UK and it will definitely only balance if all our eggs are utilized, even if the later eggs/chicks/poults have to be sold at cost of production.

Last year, whilst we were struggling to sell the later chicks, I became aware that French lorries were still trundling into this country delivering late eggs and chicks at the same prices or more than I had home produced stock listed. I am very aware that the UK market is largely reliant on European suppliers for their early and peak week supply and the French with their more southern climate are very good at producing these. What grates with me is that if the UK egg producing game farm and hatcheries are not fully supported they will continue to retire without replacement and the whole British market will be handed to European suppliers to control. It may be prudent to recall only four years ago when those remaining UK egg producing and hatching game farms were the life blood of the whole shooting industry on the year when bird flu stopped

French imports. I am sure I speak for other UK game breeders when I say that we are unable to supply all of your peak week requirements but if you could think of us when you are ordering your later chicks and poults your trust in us would be much appreciated and you will be helping to ensure that the home produced article remains available into the future.

Strong demand for quality shooting seems to be returning, as does the confidence within the shoots from which we are already receiving enquiries for increased orders. The confidence of these shoots has been boosted as many gun teams are back to booking up for next season 26-27 as they have been leaving after shooting days this year - just how it used to be!

But where are all these extra birds going to come from? This question I first raised in this annual letter in 2019 and 2020 when a booming shooting market had yet to be so brutally smacked down by bird flu, then covid19 and then the affects of bird flu on bird supplies from France, in near consecutive years. Confidence was lost, understandably, but lost too have been some of the breeders and suppliers of game stock both home and abroad which cannot now be turned back on. The French suppliers only seem to have had eggs to spare on the very early and late weeks for the last two years and this is without any export / import restrictions which could be imposed in the future due to bird flu. Despite the above we still seemed to have seen a glut of mid-season poults in the UK which could only have been produced on spec by rearers who overestimated the market or chose to take a gamble. These soon cleared though and the season ended with just enough birds to satisfy demand.

One problem which we had to deal with last year was the number of chick orders which came in late. Many of these were from long standing chick rearing customers who had held back with their chick requirements as their poult customers were reluctant to commit. By the time they did order we were heavily sold on home produced stock and could only satisfy their requirements by purchasing eggs from abroad. Inevitably these arrived later than promised and in lesser numbers than ordered leading to considerable stress and disappointment as we were then short of requirement ourselves. Needless to say I will not be going down that path again and to counter this problem I must ask you all to look at who your late ordering culprits were and not allow them to order late again. We have kept additional breeding pheasants and partridge this year which will somewhat help the situation but the extra we are able to accommodate in new pens each year is but a drop in the ocean when the overall demand increases.



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 Rosie are your main contacts for enquiries, ordering and confirmation letters, with Nathalie managing payments. All are experienced and organised, keeping me in check as well as all of you!

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Ole Gronning