



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 I cannot help thinking just how uneventful and even at times, routine this season has proved to be. Usually at this time I can prattle on about adverse weather last autumn making the birds stray or preventing them from flying properly etc etc but really this last shooting season there has been no excuses for weather induced problems other than the usual odd days of high wind, no wind, fog or bright sunshine which are sent to try you each and every season. Most shoots have also managed to avoid the dreaded bird flu probably to a greater degree than would have been expected only a year ago though I understand pheasants have been hit quite hard on a few local shoots here in the Midlands. Though none of these affected shoots were customers of mine, one does become rather nervous when the outbreaks are so close that farm staff are telling me that they have seen dead and dying pheasants on the roads as they drive past these shoots on their way in to work. All's well that ends well and fortunately for now, the outbreaks on both shoots and in domestic poultry seem to have abated since Christmas though the threat is ever present and could easily rise again as the spring migration of wild birds resumes.

No customers that I have spoken to recently seem to have any complaints on bird returns but my guess is that returns may not appear quite so good when the final figures are shortly calculated. We are all aware that to achieve good returns for the season, numbers must be harvested in the first half of the season as big bags are more easily achieved when the days are longer and both game and game cover is plentiful. Though I am sure most of you had enough birds to get you through January it is not always so easy to show sufficient birds to make your bags on those later days. For many and various reasons I understand that some guns were hesitant in booking all their shoot days from the beginning of the season and many early days therefore had to carry forward. If you were in the fortunate position to be able to slot in extra days later when the market improved then you will have been able to catch this up, albeit into a more condensed season. Not every shoot though will have been able to accommodate this later demand and I fear more birds may have been left on the ground and therefore not included in the total return figures. Only you will know how you fared with this and I hope I have over-estimated the problem.

Our 2025 price list is enclosed with this letter and you will be pleased to see we have held all our livestock prices as 2024 rates due to our perceived reduction in risk to bird flu and inflationary pressures. Many input prices have gone up and few have come down but we hope by freezing prices we will help you to steady price increases on your shoot and hopefully keep you competitive in selling your days.

A further positive is wheat prices which throughout 2024 have been much more favourable for those of us who feed more than we grow and this will help in holding if not slightly reducing manufactured laying and rearing feed prices for the coming season. Forward wheat prices are showing little change to harvest but should be closely watched as any world events can easily swing the pendulum when the price is unusually low. 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 can offer very good deals on 3000 bird lorry loads. Please enquire. On some later weeks pheasant and partridge chicks have actually reduced in price from week No 24 where last year sales became sticky in the later part of the season. I ask you all to seriously look at whether you can help with taking some of these later chicks as their continuing sale is fundamental to the continuation of the game breeding industry in the UK. There is now only a handful of game farms in the UK who produce their own eggs from over wintered stock on any scale, and one of these has just sold up and retired. Younger people are coming into the industry as game rearers which is positive and I sell many day old chicks to these new start ups but when I ask them what prevents them setting up their own laying flocks the answer is always the same. Their customers only want poult for the peak weeks in the middle of the season and what therefore, would they do with all the early and late birds that their own breeders would potentially produce. I have spent forty years pondering this problem and have created a large pool of customers who will take birds from the first April chick to the last October poult though it is never easy business and needs constant attention. Though we keep very large flocks of both breeding pheasants and partridges I do not believe that I could sell anymore late progeny if I was to keep many more hens which is unfortunate as we can never supply the whole insatiable demand for birds on the peak weeks. The economics of game bird breeding in Britain are difficult to balance at best but it definitely only balances if all the eggs are utilised even if the later eggs/chicks/poults are sold at cost of production.

Whilst we were struggling to sell the later chicks last year I was aware that French lorries were still trundling into this country delivering late eggs and chicks at the same or more cost than I had mine listed. I am very aware that the UK market is largely

reliant on the French 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 supported they will continue to retire without replacement and the whole British market will be handed to the French to control. It may be prudent to recall only three 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 all 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 the home produced article remains available into the future.

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 breeding birds in their winter pens to ensure our 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.

Following last autumn's advertising campaign for a new Farm Manager to look after our 'Woodland Farm' poult rearing site we have appointed Will Holmes who has already made a good start in getting Woodlands ready for the new season. Will was not new to us as he worked here many years ago having prior to this been in the Army. He returns with many new skills to work with his wife Calli who he met initially in our hatchery over a tray of eggs!



Eldest son Charlie is back in April from New Zealand where he has spent our winter/their summer driving monster farm machines. He says he would rather drive long distance delivering chicks and poults on British motorways and so maybe you will be seeing him soon as our permanent drivers here will not be standing in his way!

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 Nathalia 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! Rosie Tidball has joined us in the office working alongside Judy and brings considerable shoot and game farming experience to the ladies area and conversations!

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Ole Gronning