



# Heart of England Farms Ltd

## Breeders of Quality Game Stock

Established 1983

Henley Road, Claverdon, Warwickshire, CV35 8PS. Tel: (01926) 843460 Fax: (01926) 843281

email: [info@heartofenglandfarms.com](mailto:info@heartofenglandfarms.com) Web: [www.heartofenglandfarms.com](http://www.heartofenglandfarms.com)

Dear Sirs/Ladies,

January 2016

It is that time of year again and I am just wondering 'What do I put in this letter that has not already been said or done numerous times in the last thirty plus years?' Even the weather, that good old British conversation maker is not helping me much this time! The weather is extreme yes, but only in its mediocrity and its abject refusal to go seasonally cold. Hopefully by my making this statement in mid January, it should ensure you are now reading this in extreme cold at the end of the season with the birds drawing back to the coverts and making for some good final beaters days.

My contacts assure me that shoots in general have experienced another good season though the milder weather conditions do seem to have favoured the bird holding ability of some shoots to the detriment of others. Whether this is solely the result of weather conditions and temperatures on the shoot or due more to the birds level of dependence on additional regular feeding, you would be better able to answer than me.

What has benefited all our budgets this year has been the dramatic fall in feed prices. City money now seems to be back into equities and other fixed income securities and the over-supplied grain and soya market is back in the hands of those who use or feed it rather than speculate with it.

As a result of this stability and some other reduced costs we are again able to hold our chick and poult prices which are largely unchanged for the third consecutive year.

In the United Kingdom we appear to be coming out of recession quite nicely, the city of London is booming again and making huge profits and yet interest rates for now remain at historic lows. This feel good factor is very apparent in the shooting world and a recent Guns on Pegs survey has shown that a massive 38% of respondents intend to spend more on shooting for this coming year than they did last season.

Where are all these extra birds to support this booming shooting market going to come from? When one considers that pheasants have been in short supply over the last two years in what has proved to be good production years weather wise, and that the French are presently short of birds for their own markets, it is difficult for me to see how any further supplies can be found.

Last season supplies of eggs to the UK were restricted when orders from America were prevented leaving the country and impounded. The Avian influenza outbreak took a dramatic hold in the Western States with catastrophic results. AI is still endemic in many countries with recent outbreaks reported in France where many eggs for the UK market are produced and even a low pathogenic case in chickens reported very recently in Scotland. Let us hope there are no restrictions this year!

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. The partridges were all in their pair units last November which allowed us to start penning pheasants in early January. We hope to have 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 we are better able to control their condition to ensure they do not become too fat pre-laying, and I look forward to seeing all the mud in the winter pens ploughed in shortly.

We have again increased breeding pheasant numbers in anticipation of eggs being in short supply this season but what we are able to produce is but a drop in the ocean should imports be disrupted in any way. Last year pheasant and partridge egg production was slow to start meaning we were playing catch-up from the outset with no buffer stock to help carry us through the main weeks.

Customer demand however was very strong with the main hatch weeks of 20-24 being sold out by mid February. This left us with no alternative but to decline later enquiries for chicks from these weeks as we simply had no more eggs from which to hatch them. Strong demand continued until the end of the season and it soon became apparent that game farmers both in the UK and in France were only producing numbers in-line with what they knew they had orders for with fewer birds being produced on spec to be later dumped on an open market. Many shoots who ordered late last year were forced to make do with later season birds as these were all that was available when demand outstripped supply.

Our Polish pheasant continues to be our most popular breed choice with the original birds having come to the UK through France many years ago. We have kept this stock over-wintered now for many seasons. Recently, having tried to introduce some new blood, I have found the strain available in France to be a poor substitute for what it once was and indeed quite different compared to the strain already available here. Last year, using the services of a long term Polish employee as our interpreter, we started a search throughout Poland looking for stock of the original strain of 'bazanty' type pheasant which we could use to improve our existing stock.

Our search in Poland proved to be a real eye opener revealing an uncoordinated system of small farms with very different types and quality of stock being kept. The one thing which all the farms had in common was their universally held belief that they each had the best stock, from the original source which laid the most eggs and flew the highest and the fastest. They also all claimed a full vaccination programme, full egg production records, unlimited availability of stock and they all wanted my money! This initially sounded too good to be true but started to go wrong with the first consignment of laying hens when I asked to see a copy of the vaccination programme from the farms vet. We quickly learnt that what is said in Poland before a deal is done rarely materialised later and many disappointments followed.

However we persevered and having abandoned importing the laying hens which had no vaccination certificates we were partially successful in bringing in eggs from three different farms. Chicks from two of these were rejected on hatch day when several different coloured chicks hatched from the same pure bred eggs and some other eggs barely hatching at all. The third batch was standard, hatched well and reared uniformly. They have also excelled on shoot days where they were released as poults and have been closely monitored over the winter.

We also retained and over-wintered 2500 cocks and hens from this consignment which have restored some faith in Polish integrity and I look forward to evaluating them later this year. They are slightly smaller than my existing Polish strain and I plan to use the cocks with some of my hens as well as keeping the strain pure.

All breeding birds have been vaccinated against Newcastle disease, TRT, IB, EDS and Mycoplasma and the resulting immunity will protect the hens and give some protection to the chicks. All birds are produced without any shortcuts and our long established reputation for providing a service which surpasses our customer's expectations continues. Priority is always given to regular orders and I will therefore be contacting all existing customers in the next few weeks. Please give some thought to your likely requirements for this season which can then be pencilled in the book and confirmed in writing at a later date.

Our geographical position in the centre of the country ensures we are well placed for nationwide delivery of both chicks and poults. On hatch day we run many temperature controlled vans rather than multi drop lorries. This ensures the chicks arrive at their destination early in the day and within hours of leaving the hatchers. We have invested in several new Petersime hatchers and these are due to be installed next week. We find that these machines, being wholly computer controlled, give a more uniform hatch rate week on week with a marked improvement in chick quality over some older machines which have now been removed.

This year we have taken a stand at the British Shooting Show at Stoneleigh in mid February where we will be exhibiting the range of pheasant breeds that we produce. Please call in to see us.

2015 what a year that was!

When I wrote my last letter in January 2015 I commented on the glorious summer we had enjoyed in 2014 with record high temperatures and what a boon it had been for poult rearing. Never did I expect an even better summer and autumn last year when the temperature stayed steady and moderate with barely an extreme temperature day. Poults reared exceptionally well on the field in these cool and dry conditions without a single case of Hexamita. From my own experience we caught and loaded huge quantities of pheasant and partridge poults and can only recall one catching time when we were actually rained off! Indeed poults delivered through the season to some parts of the country never experienced any rain for weeks or even months after release. Can we have another season like this please?

Nathalia and Judy remain your main office contacts and staff in all other departments remain unchanged. With such a stable and experienced team we all look forward to fulfilling your orders.

Kindest Regards



Ole Gronning

