



# 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)

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Dear Customers,

Another shooting season over and one where few records appear to have been broken as far as returns are concerned. Up and down the country, large and small shoots have all reported the same shortage of pheasants in their drives since December. I am sure many of you will be relieved to have got to February and not to have the daily worry of 'can we get enough birds over the guns to make the bag today?' It is my belief that these birds were lost at the end of last summer and into the early autumn. Following one of the hottest, and definitely the driest summers on record, both natural cover and cultivated cropping were severely retarded allowing birds to roam freely and easily. The long hot summer continued into a glorious and extended autumn which gave the birds long bright days and little reason to return to the woods each night. This I believe became a habit with the birds, and even now they are still spread far from their release sites having had no hard weather to force them back to the feed rides.

Maybe some winter weather in February will bring them home even though it will of course be to no avail. Partridges seem to have both held and survived well with good returns recorded, which was probably to be expected as the Redleg bird always performs when it has dry feet.

Demand for quality shooting remains high, as does confidence within the shoots from which we are already receiving enquiries for increased orders. But where are all these extra birds to support this booming market going to come from? When one considers that pheasants have been in short supply over the last few years in what has proven 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 further supplies can be found. We have again increased breeding pheasant numbers in anticipation of eggs being in short supply but what extra we may produce is but a drop in the ocean should imports be disrupted in any way. Last season our pheasant egg production was slow to start having been hampered by the cold late spring. We were playing catch up from the outset with no buffer stock to help carry us through the main setting weeks. Customer demand however was very strong with all the main weeks booked up in February. This left us with no alternative but to decline later enquiries for both pheasant chicks and poults as we simply did not have the eggs from which to hatch them.

Our Polish pheasants continue to be our most popular breed choice with the original birds having come to the UK through France many years ago when they were known as 'Bazanty'. We have kept this stock overwintered here now for many years and regularly introduce some new blood into them by purchasing eggs from the best strains available in Poland. Last year, using the services of our long-term Polish employee as an interpreter, we secured eggs from a small farm where I think the stock is as close to that original strain as I have seen in many years. We are just moving them now to the laying pens and I note they are slightly smaller than the main flock here so we will pen the cocks from this new strain with our original hens.

Also new for this year are a replacement flock of Manchurian pheasants which we imported last year as chicks from Macfarlanes Pheasants in America. Our old strain of Manchurian had become too diluted and I wanted to introduce something that would strengthen and improve our Kansas Cross. Having been informed by customers of issues post-delivery of general morbidity in both chicks and poults from our pure Kansas birds we took the decision last year to discontinue this line as a pure-bred bird. Though our Kansas stock was good and very true to breed type, as a breed they were considerably smaller than other types and chicks hatched from these small parents were much more difficult to start, lacked vigour and needed more time on the rearing field to make good poults. We have however kept back some Kansas cocks and these we will cross with our new strain Manchurian hens which will produce a larger and stronger bird which will fly as well as the pure Kansas. These birds will be 'wilder' as the Manchurian is only a few generations removed from the truly wild Manchurian eggs found in China and exported by Macfarlane and as such, I am confident they will make a better all-round sporting bird. They are also cheaper to buy as being a cross breed they are listed on our price list at a lower price, though availability is limited to just 16000 per week on a first come, first served basis.

We routinely blood tested for Mycoplasma throughout last autumn on both the new and old flocks and with all results having come back negative our stock was vaccinated before being moved to their winter pens. The second round of vaccination is now taking place as we move to the laying pens against Newcastle disease, TRT, IB, EDS and Mycoplasma and the resulting immunity will protect the hens and give some protection to the chicks. All our birds are produced without any shortcuts and our long-established reputation for providing a service which surpasses our customers' expectations continues.



You will be aware that feed prices have increased over the last year along with most other inputs. When feed prices rise, we have to increase bird prices but have limited these increases to 2p on chicks and 5p on poults. A new price list is enclosed showing these changes.

To all our customers we thank you for your custom and continued support. Demand for shooting remains as strong as ever and this must bode well for the coming season. On that note I wish you all a prosperous and successful year and let us hope an end to all things 'Brexit' ahead.

Kindest Regards

Ole & Judy Gronning