

## Q & A WITH ARABLE AGRONOMIST LOUISE PENN AROUND SUCCESSION ON HER FAMILY FARM

### **Please introduce yourselves, yourself**

I'm Louise Penn, Arable Agronomist for Hutchinsons in Northamptonshire. I have been brought up on a traditional livestock and arable farm of 650 acres. We rent an additional 1000 acres where we run nearly 3000 sheep, as well as 100 cattle. I have been involved in the family farm across all enterprises from an early age with my two younger brothers. Whilst I enjoy the practical side of farming, I have always been interested in the technical reasons behind the decisions made on the farm- particularly around crops. This led me to study agriculture at Newcastle University and then to my career now as an Arable Agronomist.



**Louise Penn**

### **Please tell us a bit about your family farm and the dynamic of it?**

We are very much the definition of a family farm. My parents and brothers work full time on the farm and we only hire additional labour during lambing time. Dad runs the farm but we are all involved when it comes to management decisions and my brothers are slowly taking on more responsibilities. I think the best part of our family dynamic is the conversations we have. We are constantly learning from each other as well as challenging each other's ideas, pushing us all outside our comfort zone. Considering we all live and work together; I think we get on really well. However, there can be disagreements especially during busy, stressful periods of the farming calendar. This has been made even harder over the last year, as we haven't been able to get off the farm and take a break.

### **What does the term 'succession planning' mean to you?**

Succession planning to me means openly communicating as a family to create plans for the future. Which should enable someone to be able to take over the business, allowing it to continue to the next generation. We are second generation tenants on the farm and unfortunately previous succession planning within my family did result in a lot of disagreements, as it often does in farming. So, my main priority is to avoid that from happening again-which is why I think it is so important to have these open conversations and normalise succession planning.

### **Thinking about now, how are you approaching succession planning?**

When approaching succession planning, we are making sure to be open and honest when discussing our individual aspirations. I think this is important to do early on, in order to manage expectations. We also discuss the future of the farm and everyone is involved in any major decision making. However, long term planning is very difficult with so much change and uncertainty in farming.

**What would a good outcome look like for you?**

The best outcome for me would be for the family farm to continue to grow and to also maintain the amazing relationship we have as a family. My brothers have always wanted to take on the farm, whereas I have always been more interested in my studies and building my own career as an Agronomist. Hopefully, the farm will continue to prosper and opportunities will come our way to enable us to do that.

**What would be your tips to someone growing up with siblings on a family farm and discussing the prospect of succession?**

Communication would be my main advice. Talk to your siblings about your aspirations and plans for the future and support each other. Make both short and long-term plans for the farm and ensure everyone is on board. It is also important to manage your expectations, because when it comes to a farming business fair is not necessarily equal if the farm is to remain viable and prosper. Don't feel pressured to take on the family farm if it's not what you want to do. Farming is a lifestyle more than it is a job. Be sure to get away from the farm, perhaps to university, or go travelling and consider other options. Perhaps a diversification alongside the farm that would future proof the business. Lastly, embrace change -there are so many exciting things going on in the agricultural industry, so take advantage of this.