

AROUND SCOTLAND

with
Karen Elwis



Oil in a Day's Work at Ferneyfold

In spring 2008, Summer Harvest Oil was launched by Perthshire farmer David Cameron and his son-in-law Mark Bush, a fine food aficionado and former IT consultant. Karen Elwis visits Ferneyfold to find out the history behind their successful diversification project.

For over fifty years, the Cameron family has been farming at Ferneyfold, near Madderty in Perthshire. Their 160 ha mixed farm, mainly medium loam, produces winter and spring barley, winter wheat, potatoes and – for the past 25 years – oilseed rape. The latter yields particularly well at Ferneyfold, enjoying the wet conditions early in the season and the long hours of daylight in June, which coincide perfectly with the crop's maturing stage.

Previously, all the rapeseed harvested at Ferneyfold was sold to merchants for the production of cooking oil and margarine, so it was crushed at a high temperature to maximise the oil yield. All that was to change, however, after an agronomist at a Cereals Roadshow attended by David and Mark last January mentioned the production of cold-pressed rapeseed oil.

Mark's ears pricked up immediately. After several years working in the IT division of a London bank, he had taken the decision to change careers, so he and wife Maggie (David's daughter) had moved up to Scotland. Having always been passionate about food, and especially healthy food, Mark completed a hospitality course then set about finding a way of combining his previous business experience with his new profession. That chance remark at the Dalgety agronomy meeting was thus a defining moment for him. As he explains: "I'd often

wondered about the possibility of producing cold-pressed rapeseed oil, and here was an expert saying it could be done. Our experience of selling potatoes at local farmers markets had already shown us that consumers appreciate a quality product, and they want it even more if it's local. It was this that encouraged us to push on with the oil project."

In March 2008, a specialist contractor was commissioned to crush the remainder of the 2007 rapeseed harvest. The gleaming, golden oil from Ferneyfold was filtered, bottled and labelled, and the Perthshire Chamber of Commerce Spring Fair in May 2008 saw the launch of Summer Harvest extra virgin cold pressed rapeseed oil.

To Mark and David's delight, the first batch of Summer Harvest bottles disappeared off their stall like greased lightning. Even better, it wasn't long before restaurants, farm shops and delicatessens throughout Scotland were queuing up to stock and use their oil, making the decision to enter full-time production an easy one for both business partners.

"We've had immense support locally," says David. "For example, Gloagburn Farm Shop and Brig Farm have hosted tasting sessions for us which have been very successful. He continues: "What people particularly like about our oil is that they know where the crop has been grown. The public seem to respond to that."

Marks adds: "They also love the fact that Summer Harvest oil is 100% natural, has only 6% saturated fats, a high omega 3 content, naturally occurring vitamin E and no trans fats. It's beautifully fresh and light, with a distinctive "green" flavour which is the result of our careful choice of oilseed rape variety." [A trade secret, no doubt! – Ed.]

A recent highlight for the young company was when Mark secured a stand at the popular BBC Good Food Show in Glasgow, where Summer Harvest oil enjoyed very positive press coverage because of its health advantages, versatility and environmental friendliness. Mark explains: "Like olive oil, our oil is ideal for salad dressings, pestos and salsas – plus, due to its high flashpoint or burn point, rapeseed oil can be used for stir-frying, roasting and baking. Unlike olive oil, however, Summer Harvest is local to Scotland, with no air miles involved in transporting it from Italy!"

Already favoured by Crieff Hydro, Yann's Rooms and Kitchen in Crieff and Cargills Restaurant in Blairgowrie, rapeseed oil from Ferneyfold is rapidly earning the approval of the catering community in Scotland and beyond. Moreover, Demijohn Ltd in Edinburgh and Glasgow, renowned for being supremely discerning in their choice of suppliers, conducted a tasting session and chose to

stock Summer Harvest oil based purely on taste.

Back in the office, Mark's IT expertise has come in rather handy designing the Summer Harvest website (www.summerharvestoils.co.uk) which he hopes will receive online orders once he's sourced a suitable postal packaging solution.

The website design mirrors the simple, yet stunning, black and golden livery of the Summer Harvest bottles, which are extremely eye-catching. Meanwhile, the striking colour of the oil inside almost defies description. Mark sums it up most eloquently, saying: "When the sun is low in the sky at the end of the Farmers' Market and you see a Summer Harvest bottle caught in its rays, the oil gleams like gold and it looks simply amazing." The future of Summer Harvest would appear to look golden too.

