

THE

# FRUIT

SEPTEMBER 2022

GROWER

- 
- A group of people, including men and women of various ages, are walking through an orchard. They are dressed in casual summer attire like polo shirts, t-shirts, and shorts. Some are wearing hats and sunglasses. The orchard has rows of trees with green leaves and some fruit visible. The ground is covered in grass and straw.
- **Weald NFU Orchard Competition**
  - **Prognosfruit 2022**
  - **WET Centre update**
  - **Cider orchard walk**



# Weald Group NFU Fruit Spraying and Orchard Management Competition 2022

***The warm summer evening of 3 August was the perfect time for a walk around the picturesque orchards at Hadlow Place Farm, this year's winner of the Weald Group NFU Fruit Spraying and Orchard Management Competition. Rachel Anderson reports.***

**D**ozens of people from the UK's top-fruit industry gathered at Hadlow Place Farm in Tonbridge on the pleasant evening of 3 August to catch up with their colleagues, celebrate the region's best top-fruit growers, and enjoy a brief walk around the winning Hadlow Place Farm.



**Dozens of people from the UK's top-fruit industry gathered at Hadlow Place Farm on the pleasant evening of 3 August to catch up with their colleagues, celebrate the region's best top-fruit growers, and enjoy a brief walk around the winning farm.**

Owned by the Teacher family, Hadlow Place Farms' orchards are run by farm manager Nigel Gibb. He noted that the farm has 600ha of arable land, including winter and spring wheat, barley, rapeseed, peas, oats, and linseed. He added, "There are a further 80ha of top-fruit, including 10.6ha of Conference pears, aged between five and 35 years old, with Comice pollinators. We have 27.5ha of Bramley and Golden Delicious with Russet pollinators, aged between five and 38 years old." He added that most of the farm's top-fruit is Gala apples, including Mondial, Galaxy, Royal Beaut, and Jugala, with Malus pollinators.

Helping Nigel to run the farm are an assistant manager, two full-time arable workers, and three full-time fruit workers. In addition, there are 20 people pruning, 20 people thinning, and around 70 pickers for harvest. The fruit is stored at Hadlow Place Farm and packed locally by Adrian Scripps Ltd for Tesco.

The evening began when Nigel kindly took the visitors around

some of the farm's orchards. Then he revealed some of the management practices that he and his team use at Hadlow Place Farm that have earned the business so many coveted prizes this year. As well as being awarded the BASF Championship Trophy for being the overall winner, Hadlow Place Farms won four other trophies in this year's competition, including:

- the BASF Trophy, for the greatest increase in marks from previous year
- the NP Seymour Trophy, for highest marks in Class II
- the Norman Collett Trophy Class II, for highest marks, pests and diseases section, and
- the Group Secretary Award - highest marks for management.

During the tour's first stop, the group was shown an orchard of six-year-old Galaxy Gala trees. "We pick everything from the

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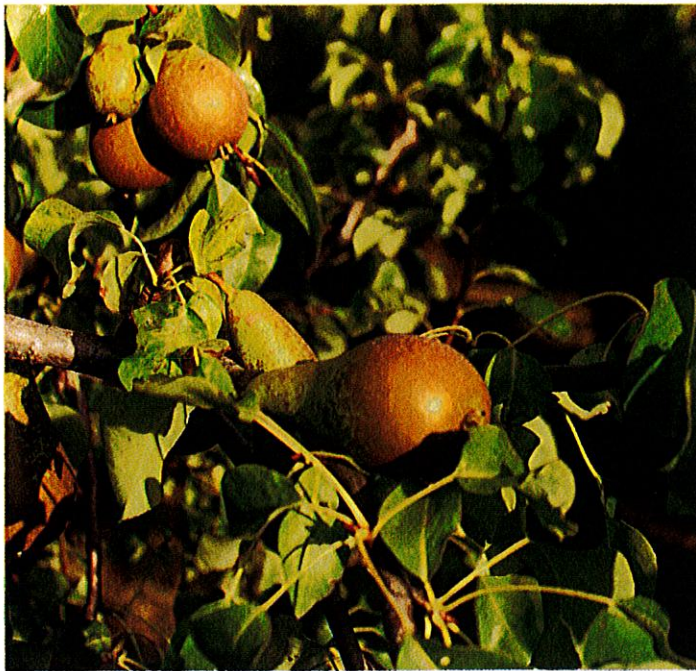
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ground - no ladders, so we try and keep them as low as possible," said Nigel. He noted that most of the farm's Gala orchards are irrigated, except for two orchards whose "soils are that good that we've never had a problem."

He told the visitors that, due to the drought, the apples are



"We've got 27ha of Bramleys, and most of it is pretty much the same as this, size wise," said Nigel.

"running a bit behind at the moment" but "they're still sizing up." Similarly, on the tour's second stop, Nigel revealed that some of the farm's Conference pears were also "a bit lighter" than they have been these past couple of years, although there will still be a decent crop. Nigel said: "We've been out here with a bowser trying to get some water onto them and see if we can make some difference. But some of the pear trees are getting a bit touchy now and I think they are going to drop some [fruit] before long if we don't get some rain."

During the third stop of the walk, the group was shown some more Gala - Mondial and Royal Beaut. Nigel revealed that the business has purposely invested in several Gala varieties to help extend the season. Furthermore, a new planting of Jugala has seen the farm switch from its traditional double-row orchard system to single rows. When asked why he switched to single rows, Nigel joked: "Because I didn't want to grow double-row anymore!" But, in all seriousness, he explained that it has been tricky to manage the area underneath the double rows. He also admitted that, with the future in mind, it will be tricky to mechanically farm double rows.

When asked if he and the fruit team had chemically thinned the Gala this year, Nigel revealed that only an area of Galaxy had been thinned in this way. However, the hand-thinning team had to return to this orchard to manually remove some clumps. "If we hadn't gone back in there and done some hand work, you know, the crop wouldn't be what it is now. We still had to take quite a bit off."

From the newest to the oldest orchards, visitors were lastly shown an established 2ha Bramley orchard. "We've got 27ha of Bramleys, and most of it is pretty much the same as this,



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Following the walk, the group enjoyed a drink before the prize-giving.

size wise,” said Nigel.

Following the walk, the group members enjoyed a drink before the prize-giving. Commencing the proceedings, NFU South East regional director William White noted that, despite the top-fruit industry’s many challenges, “there is still a future for the UK’s top-fruit growing and we are seeing it tonight.”

He added: “This competition, in my book, is about teamwork, it’s about excellence, it’s about resilience, profitability, and sustainability, and we are about to see all the prizes awarded for all of this good work.”

William also thanked his colleagues at the NFU – group secretaries Martin Webber, Patrick Bowring, and Shaun Joubert – for organising the competition and doing “a great job every year.” William also thanked this year’s sponsors, which were Avalon Fresh, BASF, and Warners Solicitors.

Gail Hall, from sponsor Warners Solicitors (part of the NFU panel), noted that, in an ever-changing world, “things are very, very uncertain. But what is great to know is that the NFU is still here. It’s an enormous challenge to be a top-fruit farmer at the moment, and it probably will continue to be, but I will always stand up and wave the flag for you.”

Nigel Jenner, representing the main

sponsor Avalon Fresh, said: “It’s a huge privilege to sponsor this competition. It’s always really well contested. Lots of farms have done this for many years and the quality is always very good.” Nigel also made the point that the NFU’s orchard competition is unique because it’s a ‘whole farm’ rather than a ‘single orchard’ competition. Nigel continued: “And it’s actually really difficult to win it because everything has to



Gail Hall, from sponsor Warners Solicitors.

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## Trophy winners

**BASF Championship Trophy:** Overall Winner – Hadlow Place Farms (Hadlow Place Farm)

**EO Moss Trophy:** Runners-up in the entire competition – Ian Overy Farms (Mascalls Court Farm, Burrs Hill Farm, and Crouches Farm)

**Bayer UK Trophy:** Third in entire competition – Kent House Nursery (Park Farm)

**Agrii Trophy:** Most Meritorious Entry – GH Chambers (Northiam Farm)

**Mike Freed Trophy:** Highest marks in competition over five years – JL Baxter & Son (Westerhill Farm)

**BASF Trophy:** Greatest increase in marks from previous year – Hadlow Place Farms (Hadlow Place Farm)

## Class I winners

**Dow AgroSciences Trophy:** Highest marks Class I – Ian Overy Farms (Mascalls Court Farm, Burrs Hill Farm and Crouches Farm)

**Norman Collett Trophy Class I:** Highest marks, pests and diseases section – Kent House Nursery (Park Farm)

**FAST Trophy – Class I:** Highest marks, management – Ian Overy Farms (Mascalls Court Farm, Burrs Hill Farm and Crouches Farm)

**Willis Corroon South, Class I:** Second highest mark, Class I – Kent House Nursery (Park Farm)

## Class II winners

**NP Seymour Trophy:** Highest marks, Class II – Hadlow Place Farms (Hadlow Place Farm)

**Norman Collett Trophy Class II:** Highest marks, pests and diseases section – Hadlow Place Farms, Hadlow Place Farm

**Group Secretary Award:** Highest marks, management – Hadlow Place Farms (Hadlow Place Farm)

**Willis Corroon South Ltd, Class II:** Second-highest mark, Class II – Adrian Scripps (Moat Farm)

## Young Orchards

**ADAS Trophy:** Highest average marks, young orchards – Adrian Scripps Ltd (Moat Farm)

**JA Prall Trophy:** Highest marks, single young orchard. Great Cheveney Farm (Great Cheveney Farm)

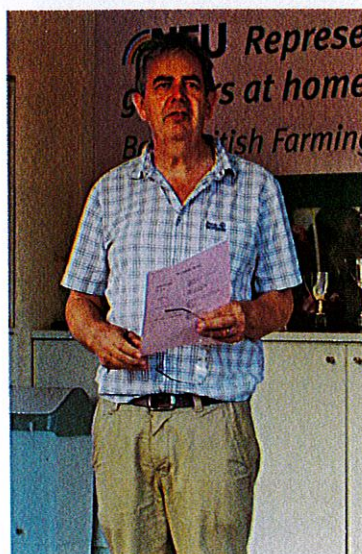
**Lambert & Foster Trophy:** Foreman/employee in charge of young orchard on winning farm in average young orchards section – Mihai Stanca, Adrian Scripps Ltd

**Origins Trophy, Joint Winners:** Highest marks, management, single young orchards – Adrian Scripps (Moat Farm), Ian Overy Farms (Burrs Hill Farm), JL Baxter & Son (Westerhill Farm)

be up to scratch. And I think Nigel has done a fantastic job this year. He's a very worthy winner."

The NFU's Martin Webber emphasised that the judging was very close this year, with just half a point between the three top entries. He said: "Congratulations to everybody who entered and thank you very much for entering. It's good to keep the competition going."

Nigel Gibb told *The Fruit Grower* that he and the Hadlow Place Farms team are elated.



The NFU's Martin Webber emphasised that the judging was very close this year,

"We've never had so many trophies." He put the farm's success down to its strong team, which is "very important for the timeliness of the crops." ◆



Nigel Gibb (left) receives the BASF Trophy from Martin Webber of the NFU.