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Riverford Farm Report

October 2025



November 2025





“Farming sustainably is at the heart of all we do, looking after our soil, wildlife, and water sources. We think that small-scale organic family farms are the most sustainable way of producing food.

Anything we can't grow or make ourselves comes from our group of organic growers and producers. Working with them over the long-term means that our food is completely traceable and we are supporting farmers like ourselves and ensuring their future.”



Live life on the veg



Andy Hayllor

Day 1 of the trip started on the site of Riverford Organic Farmers root processing facility. Riverford works with many farmers and growers in the locality to ensure a constant supply and choice of organic produce which it then distributes through a delivery box scheme to its customers. It also has a with very small amount wholesale to the business.

Andy Hayllor's farm hosts the root processing facility and he grows a range of crops for Riverford, mainly root with 150 acre of potatoes, as well as carrots, beetroot, savoy cabbage, cauliflower and other brassicas. Andy is part of the South Devon Organic Producers co-operative, a group of local farmers who supply Riverford with organic produce. His farm has a "programme" that is agreed with the company and he supplies the quantities outlined on a weekly basis. Part of the programme arrangement guarantees the company will use Andy's produce or if there is a surplus they will help find a market for it.



Andy Hayllor



Andy Hayllor

As we sheltered from the relentless heavy rain Andy filled us in on the **economics, practicalities and challenges** that they are currently facing farmers in the UK. There is a very evident “cost of Living Crisis” that is affecting consumer spending and this has resulted in a reduction in sales, thus next year they intend to produce less as there is also a price freeze on their programme with Riverford. The general feeling is according to Andy is that “the money is just not circulating!”

The **weather** has presented challenges as they farm on clay loam mainly, wet weather makes every step of the growing process more difficult. The Labour force and costs of same are increasing in the UK and so they are working on becoming more and more mechanised and keeping as much labour as possible within the family.

Sourcing seed since Brexit has become increasingly difficult as the plant breeders are mainly based in Holland. Inheritance tax implications are also having a negative effect in relation to farming in the UK at this time.

We concluded our tour with Andy with the **sorting area, storage sheds and packing facility**. They are looking forward to the arrival of an opti-grade machine to sort the veg as this will significantly reduce the manual labour time spent on this task.



Clay loam soil

Wet ground and cut hedges

Compost areas

Economics

Riverford Organic Farmers most profitable years have been since co-ownership until this year – this year has it has been worse than the slump in 2008 in terms of sales.

The original business idea had been to achieve “national dominance” by setting up a number of co-op models all over the country involving organic growers who would then work through localised distribution hubs to supply organic vegetables country wide. This ideal didn’t work as enough farmers couldn’t be found who wanted to convert to grow Organic Vegetables.

Following from this idea a **franchise model** was set up for distributors in a particular area. This model worked to an extent but more recently the Co-ownership is buying back the Franchise distribution aspect due to inconsistent service.

Riverford is known as a good and fair employer that pays and treats people well in order to increase staff retention.

Apprenticeships are offered where people can work up through the business in particular areas, as well as a lot of training on offer as part of the business model.

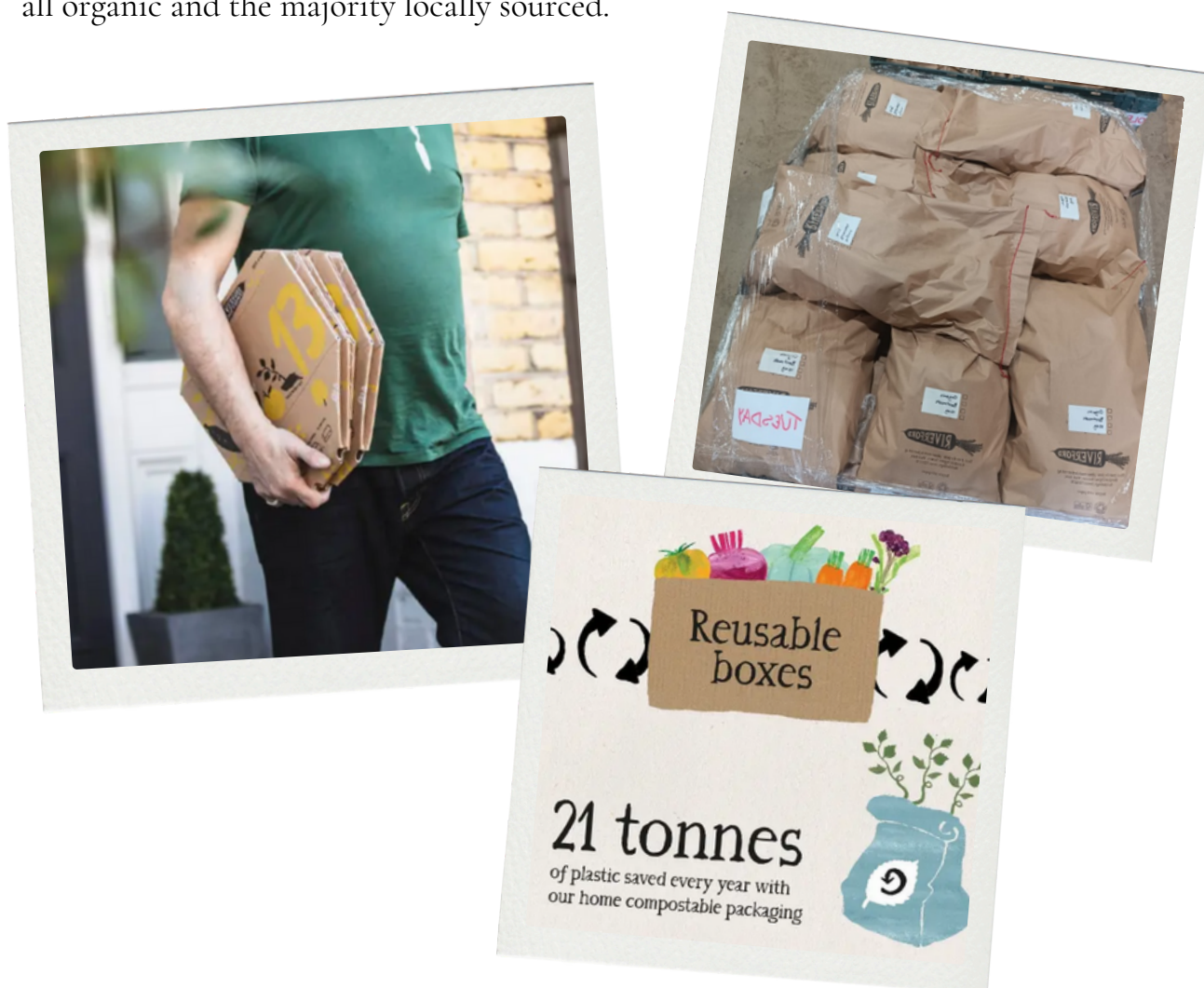


Packing Centre

Kerry gave us an excellent tour of the packing centre. It was quite an assault on the senses as the centre is comprised of many different areas all highly automated and very busy. It packs an average of 70,000 organic produce boxes a week and was able to increase this to 91,000 during busier years.

The company's ethos places a strong emphasis on zero waste. Any produce that cannot be sold is distributed to charities and co-owners. Packaging is also designed for zero waste, with high levels of reuse and recycling. Boxes and any additional materials are returned, ensuring the entire system operates with minimal environmental impact.

The centre is in operation 6 days a week rolling shifts cover from 6am to 10pm. There are a variety of boxes available ranging in size and contents, from veg, meat, and dairy, all organic and the majority locally sourced.



Packing Centre



Current sorting machine



Cold storage crates



Cold storage

Packing Centre



Packing shed



Highly automated packing shed



Final package



Out on the field (Photo
courtesy of Padraig Fahy)



Combi crop (Photo
courtesy of Padraig Fahy)

Customers

The customers can choose what they would like in their box or they can avail of a recipe box bundle. Riverford invest a lot in customer care and value the importance of customer retention which sparks initiatives like the customer re-activate campaign.

The main driving factors that bring customers to Riverford is personal health, quality fresh produce and knowing the impact of ultra processed food or “inconvenient food”. Customers are kept on board due to convenience, quality, engagement through newsletters and the ethics of the business. As it costs approximately £100 to recruit each new customer, retention is a high priority, and is carried out by a dedicated customer care team.



Lunch

Lunch was served in the on-site restaurant and consisted of delicious dishes consisting of the finest organic produce. It is great value to eat there and Guy joined some of our group over lunch.



Lunch with Guy



Kitchen & Wash House



Kitchen



Wash house



Riverford Organic Farmers Ltd fully embraced our visit, and the day was so full that there was nothing more they could share with us.



Growing Areas

The afternoon started with Ed giving us a tour of the growing areas around the restaurant and close by. He is polytunnel operations manager. As part of the environmental awareness ethos of Riverford there are constant trials being carried out in order to improve the way farming is done. At present they are trialling perennial kale as an alternative to an annual crop.

There are 1,500 acres around the area as part of Riverford Organic Farmer's. 120 Acres are used to grow vegetables at present. They work on a 5 year vegetable crop rotation with 3 of these being in fertility building through green manures, clover, grazing cattle or silage production. Agroforestry in various forms are in early trial stage as well as a trial nursery of unusual edible trees like mulberry, Rowan, Szechuan pepper, and pomegranate close to the restaurant. After visits to the brassica and leek fields we finished in the polytunnels. There are 3 acres under tunnel growing a variety of salads, cucumber and tomatoes.



Production & Packing



On the way for packing



Different sized boxes



Dairy included



Various packaging forms

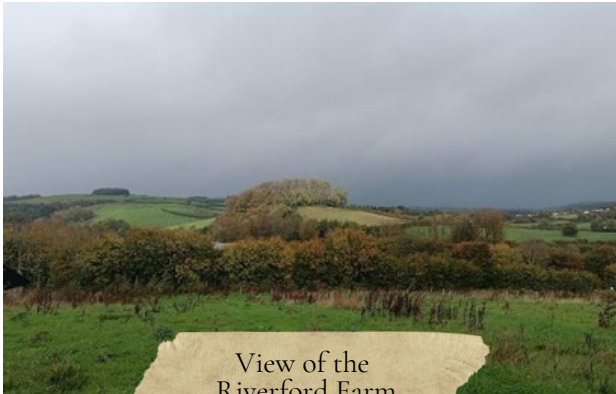


Recycling department



Recipe boxes

The Farm



View of the
Riverford Farm



Ed gives the lowdown



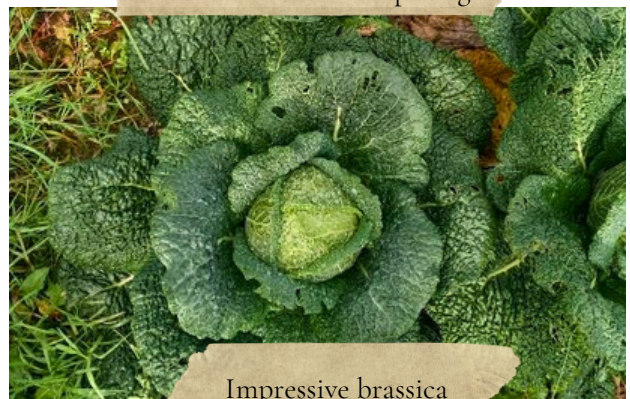
Listening intently



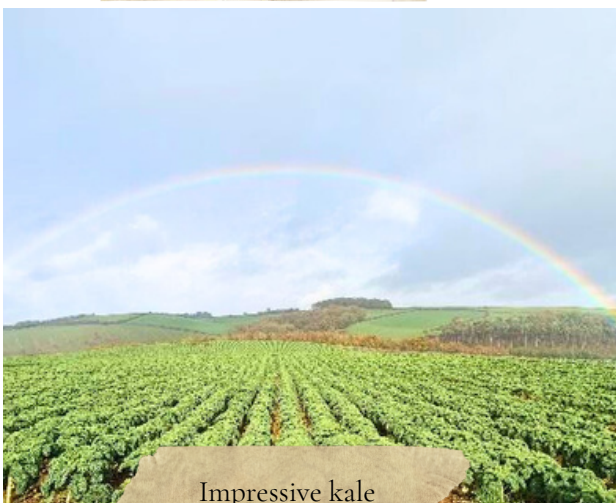
Harriet is passionate
about the perennial kale
trial at different spacing



Harvesting
platform



Impressive brassica



Impressive kale



Need for shelter

Shed & Polytunnels



The babies who will help graze the Brassicas in the future



And finally to the tunnels



Sand on the carpet of seed



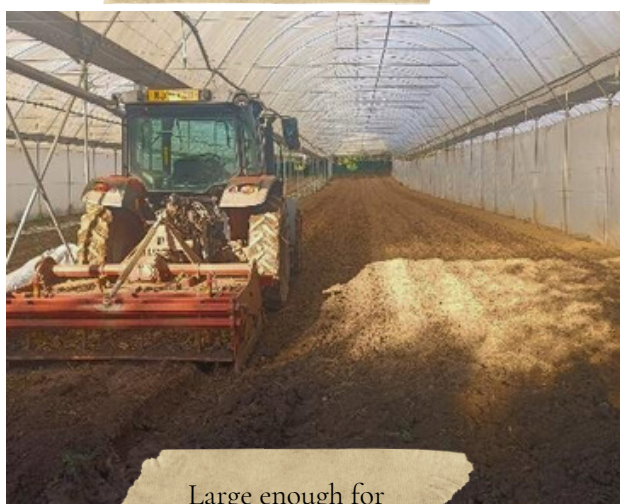
Seed stiched fleece



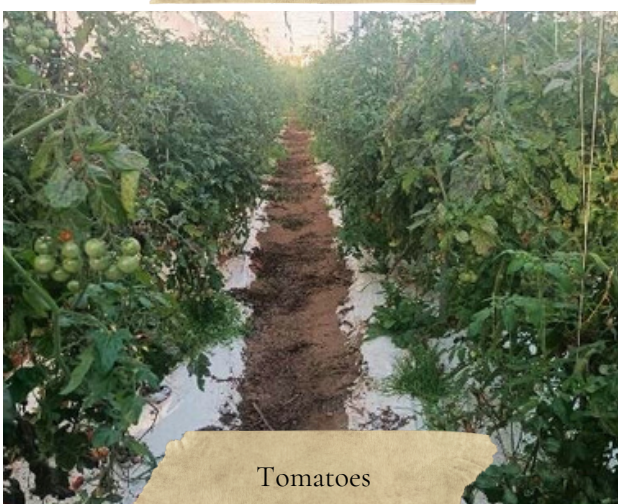
3 acres under tunnels



Plastic for weed protection



Large enough for tractor cultivation



Tomatoes

Shed & Polytunnels



Other salad tunnels



Group photo courtesy of
Úna Ní Bhroin