



AUTOMATIC BATCH DRYER IMPRESSES ON EAST LOTHIAN FARM

Replacing their two existing continuous flow and batch dryers with an automatic batch dryer in time for the last year's harvest delivered a number of key benefits for Hamilton Farmers (East Lothian), Phantassie Farm, East Linton, East Lothian.

The capital cost of replacement was one. "I priced a static drying system and it was considerably more cost effective to buy the OPICO 600QF," said William Hamilton. "In fact, I could have bought five OPICO's for the price of a fixed installation scheme. I felt the money was better spent having plenty of floor area to tip the grain on and, if necessary, catch up with the drying later."

The fact that the dryer is automatic is another big advantage, says Mr Hamilton. Situated in an open fronted lean-to shed next to the farm's new grain store, the dryer has a holding capacity of 12 tons and a maximum throughput of 150 tons per 24 hours.

"I have a 25 ton bin which holds two batches. I only need to fill it up four times a day - the rest of the time the system looks after itself. We just check the moisture from time to time, but the machine is accurate and we've not had any problems."

Last harvest, the dryer coped easily with 450 acres of cereals from the 600-acre Phantassie Farm and a further 250 acres from the Hamilton family partnership's second farm a short distance away.

Starting with oil seed rape at the end of July, the dryer was then used for Winter wheat, autumn barley and finally for oats in October.

Over this eight-week period, the machine dried some 2,500 tons. "We were regularly doing 100 tons in eight batches a day," said Mr Hamilton, adding that the polishing effect of continuous recirculation was especially noticeable with the barley. "It greatly improved the barley sample," he said.

A fixed cost contract for gas at 19.9p per litre meant that to reduce the moisture content of the grain from 17.5% to 14% cost about £2 per ton. "Obviously with increased fuel prices it is likely to be a good bit dearer this year," he added.

Reliability is an important factor. Electric drive is a great advantage, he says, and doesn't tie up a tractor to power the dryer.

"I have been very pleasantly surprised at how low the maintenance is on it. Also, it is quite user friendly. The computer works pretty well and its easy to set up.

"Another advantage is that being a portable dryer, it has a trade in value so if we want to upgrade it we can do so at minimal cost because it's easy to move."