



AUTOMATIC BATCH GRAIN DRYING FAVOURED FOR QUALITY SEED BARLEY IN KINCARDINESHIRE

Automatic, labour saving operation plus easy cleaning, reliability, and improved grain bushel weight are just four of the many benefits that a Kincardineshire cereal grower has achieved from automatic batch grain drying.

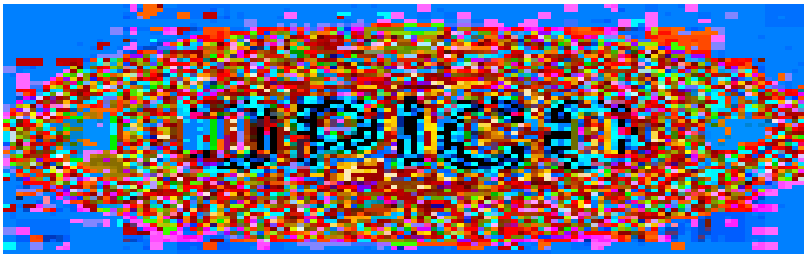
"Even if I was offered a state of the art, continuous flow dryer set-up I wouldn't have one," says James Jacobsen. "We grow barley for seed and I probably clean my grain dryer twenty-five times in a season - from wheat to barley, then changing from different barleys.

"For ease of cleaning, you can't beat a batch grain dryer and I certainly don't want to be climbing around the inside of a continuous flow dryer with lots of conveyors."

James speaks from experience. He has been using OPICO batch grain dryers for 21 years and firmly believes that the technique produces a top quality product at a reasonable price.

AM & AJ Jacobsen -the family farming enterprise of Angus Jacobsen and two sons, James and Symon - grow some 800 acres of combinable crops on Grade 3 and 4 land at Grange of Kinneff, Inverbervie, Montrose, and six miles away at Kair Farms, Fordoun, Lawrencekirk.





Cropping consists of 150 acres of winter barley, 110 acres of winter rape, 240 acres of winter wheat and 300 acres of spring barley. There are also potato and turnip enterprises.

Grain drying is shared between two OPICO batch dryers: a seven-year-old 795QF electric model, sited at Fourdon, and a fully automatic 600QF. James estimates that grain from 300 acres goes through the 600 dryer, while the 795 handles the crop from 500 acres.

They have had the OPICO fully automatic 600QF since August 2001.

"We were going for a manual model but because there wasn't one in stock, we paid the extra £1000 for the automatic model," James explained. "It was the best £1000 we have ever spent because it gave us the facility of going to fully automatic batch drying."

Manual batch drying means you have to be in attendance says James. A fully automatic system, on the other hand, can be set up to dry continuously, with the added benefits of the cleaning system and the batch drying facility.

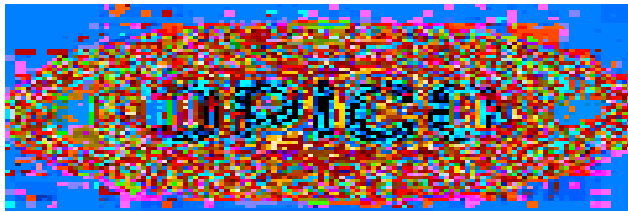
"Batch dryers dry more evenly and more accurately," says James.

"Being fully automatic, it doesn't matter if you are bringing grain in at different moistures, the dryer always sorts itself out. It doesn't try to spit the grain out too soon when it's not ready."

Combining starts about August 5 with winter barley and finishes with wheat about September 15. During this period of 4-6 weeks, the dryer at Grange Farm will run between 600 and 850 hours, working 22 hours out of the 24, with the remaining two hours being taken up by unloading and filling up.

"We can hold 25 tons in the hopper above the intake", explains James.

"We put one batch in the grain drier in the morning and put two batches above it. Once the first batch is dried, the dryer empties the grain into a corner of a shed then takes in the next 12 tons. When the grain dryer is full it switches the loading auger off, stops taking any more grain in, and starts the drying cycle.



"It means I can be away for up to twelve hours in a day. If anything does go wrong the dryer shuts down – it's quite safe."

The dryer is moved out of the shed a month before harvest and, once its job is done, it is washed, put away and serviced ready for the following season.

Having completed five seasons, the dryer has proved extremely reliable.

"Only two bottom bearings have failed plus a bearing in an electric motor, but this has to be considered against the intensive work load placed upon the machine," says James.

"With most breakdowns you're down for three hours at most. Our local dealer has sorted it out very quickly and the back up is tremendous.

"It's particularly economical on belts," he adds. "It's had just one set of drive belts in five years."

The cost of drying he describes as "realistic and economical".

Other advantages include the control box – "very user friendly" – and quiet fan operation. "You have to be within 50 yards of the 600QF grain dryer to hear it working. You can't hear it from the house" says James.

A further benefit is that the dryers have a good re-sale value. James explained: "After nineteen years use, we still managed to get £2,500 for our old grain drier as a write off. They fall in price to an amount and then stay there.

"We will keep the dryers for a minimum of ten years."

But the biggest bonus is the improvement to the grain bushel weight brought about by the polishing effect of continuous recirculation - a critical point when selling good quality grain.

"It is second to none," says James. "You hold 12 tons of grain in the batch drier and it circulates six times per hour. When I'm drying the seed barley, most of my batches are in for between four and six hours because I'm drying very slowly. So that grain's circulated 24 times.

"You can put grain in at 62kg/hectolitre off the combine and when it comes out of the grain drier four hours later you can increase it 4/5kg/hectolitre in weight because of the polishing effect. All the awns are knocked off, all the chaff is taken out – its just fantastic.

"I would say that this is probably their strongest selling point."