

PRESS RELEASE



Date: November 2011

Title: Energy and Food – Room for Both

The Isle of Wight is blessed with a mild climate with plenty of sunshine – ideal for growing an amazing range of crops. The Island is renowned for supporting produce as diverse as tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet corn, cauliflowers, garlic, as well as wheat, barley and other arable crops.

There is another crop which farmers are currently being encouraged to harvest – renewable energy. At any gathering of Isle of Wight farmers the conversation soon turns to this new technology and how land can be turned to helping the drive to meet the government's new targets for renewable energy. It is exciting to think that the Island's farmers are now at the forefront of this crucial change.

Many people will have seen the new “solar farms” at Blackwater and Porchfield – a common sight across Europe, but a new venture for this country. Soon to be added to these are a number of smaller photovoltaic installations on barn roofs across the Island. These simple pieces of equipment make best use of the Islands record sunshine hours to produce renewable electricity. For the field based systems sheep can still graze between the panels and wildlife thrives in quiet corners.

It does not stop there – oilseed rape with its vivid yellow flowers in April and May, widely grown on the Island is crushed to make bio-diesel – every acre providing enough fuel to take the average family diesel car 3,000 miles. Bio-mass – burnt for heat production and generating electricity – comes in many forms. On the Island wheat straw is processed for burning in domestic and commercial boilers and “elephant grass” is grown for burning to generate electricity. These are annual crops which only travel very small distances before they get converted to heat or electricity.

Woodland plays its part with the new Pan Meadows housing development and the Waitrose supermarket both being powered through woodchip. Local woodland owners are working together to build a supply chain of woodchip for these commercial and domestic users. This doesn't mean wasteful clear felling, but better use of “thinnings” from traditional woodland management. The added benefit, beyond reducing the Island's carbon foot print, is better managed woodland with enhanced biodiversity.

Will these “energy crops” take over the farm land on the Island? In my view they won't. Modern agriculture has the capacity to grow crops very efficiently and raising crops for food remains farming's priority. As a rural land agent for BCM I meet farmers every day, many of whom are clients and spend a lot of my time advising them on the best use of their land. I get the firm impression that farmland on the Isle of Wight will always be there to produce food, however it is also playing a key part in the green revolution supplying the Island with its own first generation renewable energy.

By James Attrill, Partner at BCM Rural Property Consultants

The Old Dairy | Dean Farm | Whitwell | Ventnor | Isle of Wight | PO38 2AB
t 01983 731348 | f 01983 731029
www.bcm.co.uk