

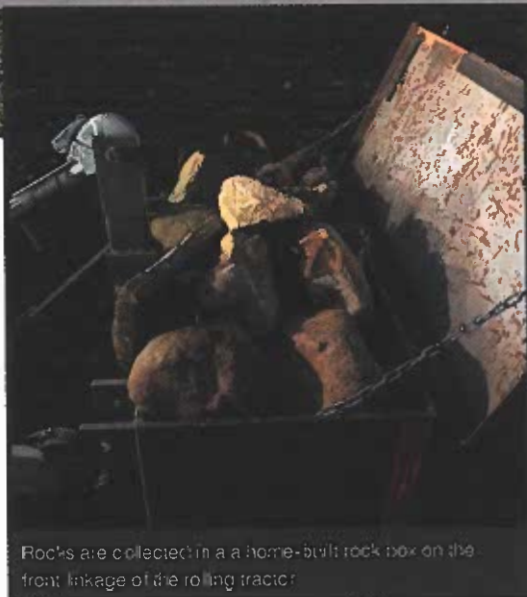
ON A ROLL - HIGH OUTPUT AND SENSIBLE SPEED

One Suffolk farming business has very specific reasons for running the wide rolls of an Opico He-Va King roller. Andy Newbold caught up with Freddie Gittus over the Easter weekend in the middle of a 160ha block of spring rolling.

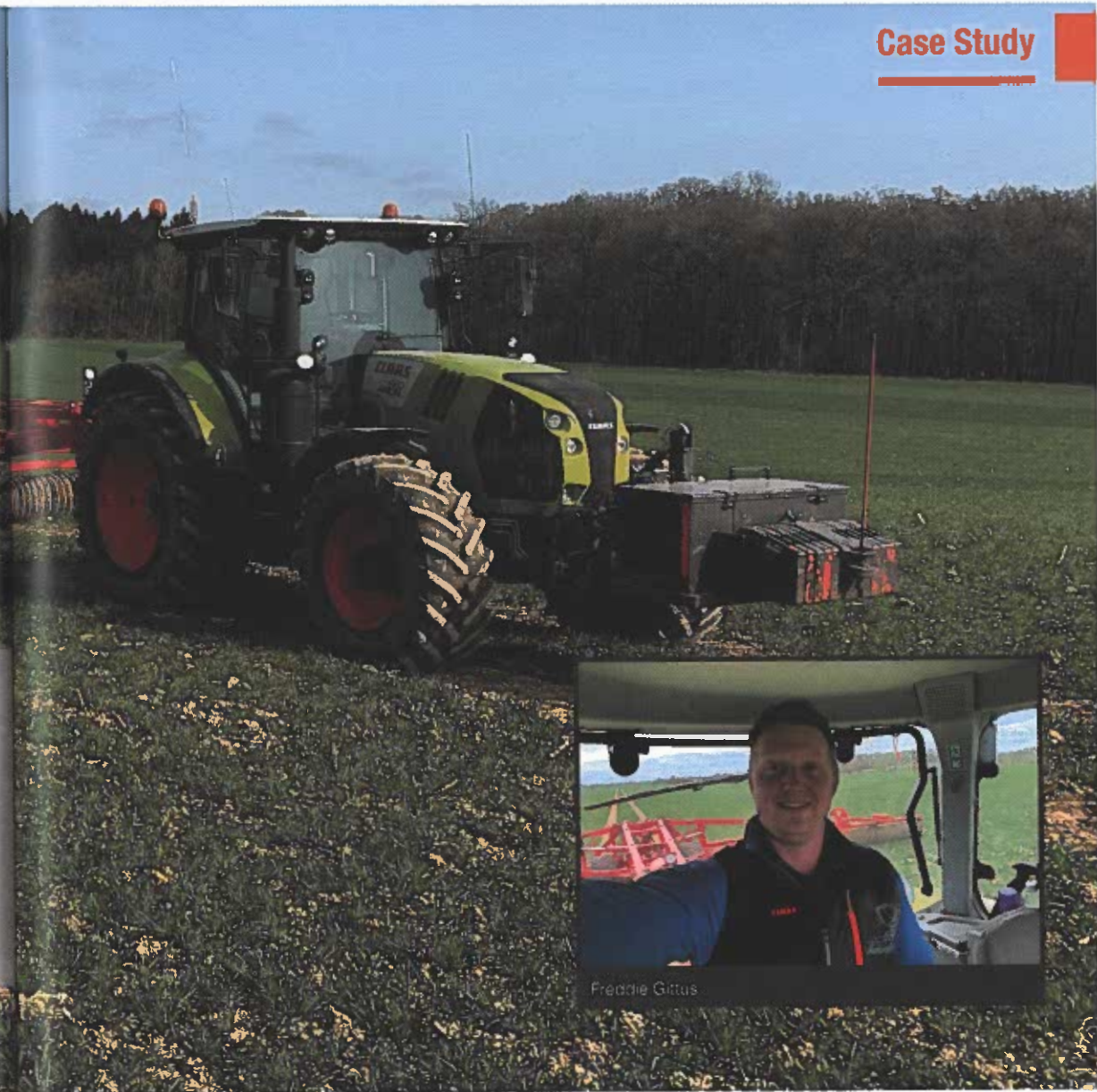
Geo. E Gittus and Sons Ltd of Risby has a lot of ground to cover with spring establishment of sugar beet and maize being a priority. The business still, however, finds time to roll a significant percentage of its winter cereals.

ROLLING WINTER CROPS TO ENCOURAGE TILLERING

The business aims to roll winter crops in the autumn, however this has not been possible for the last two seasons, hence rolling winter cereals in the spring, to improve tillering and prevent stone damage to the combine.



Rocks are collected in a home-built rock box on the front linkage of the rolling tractor.



Freddie Gittus

In a preceding wet autumn, the tine drill can pull out a lot of stones. The larger ones will be manually picked and carried away on the tractor front box, whilst smaller ones are rolled in.

Usually operators will pick up anything sizeable, which may damage the rolls or the combine, otherwise they are just rolled in.

TIMING IS ALL

Timing is crucial. If the soil is too wet and more harm than good is done by compaction. The top has to 'haze off' before attempting to roll. However, the soil needs some 'spring' to

reconsolidate any roots after the rolls and soft enough for stones to be pushed in.

The business looks to roll around 500ha over 10-12 days in late March to early April. Winter crops are usually at similar growth stages by this point, so timing is vital to ensure that the soil is not too wet and prone to damage.

Most barley will have been rolled after autumn drilling, so winter wheat is the spring priority.

Following the drill in the autumn, rolls are usually running at about 7kph. "If the rollers are bouncing, you are going too fast," Freddie comments.



FAST OUTPUT

In spring, typical working speed increases to 8-9kph depending on conditions. With 18m working width, the unit covers a sensible area with spot rates averaging 16ha/hour. At the headland turns, with lots of weight out wide, slowing to 5kph is vital.

In one day of nine fields with 19 fold and unfolds, the total area covered was 120ha.

Using autosteer and GPS of the Claas autopilot system the aim is to take alternate runs with shallow turns, missing every other pass which gets picked up on the next return. This avoids scrubbing headland soils and overly stressing the rolls.

The rolls do need some power up front and are usually pulled by the 8t 180hp Claas Arion 660 C Matic or a Fendt 724.

Freddie says: "The biggest plus is the output. However, the downside is that they are not the quickest to fold as there is a lot of weight. Slow folding is essential to avoid damage.

"Once you get into work, any extra time taken to unfold or fold between fields is soon gobbled up. In the autumn, the rollers keep up with the drill very nicely. With narrower rolls forward speed would have to increase significantly to match output."

OPERATOR EXPERIENCE IS ESSENTIAL

The unit must be folded on level ground. There is a danger in the final fold that, due to gravity,

oil will flow to the higher side (on a slope or unlevel, soft ground) and the higher side has a tendency to fold more quickly than the lower one. Operators have to be alert to ensure that the unit stays level.

FITTING IN WITH SPRING NUTRITION AND SPRAY PROGRAMME

The business ensures that crops are rolled and have some recovery time before spring spraying begins. In a dry autumn the rolls will be used after drilling to conserve moisture.

WINTER OILSEED RAPE

No rape was planted last autumn due to wet conditions, this avoided the risk of getting hammered by cabbage stem flea beetle (CSFB). However, it may return as a break in the longer rotation to help manage black-grass. Dick Neale from Hutchinsons looked at the soils before harvest last year, dug some holes and confirmed that soil health was good.

In the previous rotation it is likely that the rape was sown more frequently than every four years which allowed CSFB to remain active in crop residues. The farms manager Stephen Brummitt says; "OSR may not return to the rotation."

SUMMARY

A very specific set of reasons justifies rolling in spring, which together with a large operating width ensures swiftly covering the ground and allowing the crops time to recover before spring nutrition application.

