

Climate change series

Focus on renewable energy

Name: **Parkers Nurseries Ltd**

Region: **North-east Essex**

Grows: **Patio & pot plants** Size: **2 hectares (under glass)**

Number of farm/office staff: **12 full-time, 6 part-time, 6 casual**



How long have you been growing patio & pot plants and why did you decide to grow them?

We've been in the business for 12 years. It fits in well with our other land-based businesses and suits our skill base. Our other businesses include a 240 ha arable operation and a garden centre.

Do you think climate change is making a difference?

Yes, we are already changing our product range to suit warmer summers and we are finding that customers are already showing an increased interest

in heat/drought tolerant plants. A core part of our business strategy and commitment to the industry is to enhance our "green" credentials and reduce our energy costs to a more sustainable level. This is why we switched our heating system over from oil to biomass (mainly chipped wood waste) in 2005.

What are the main cost implications of such a change?

Each case must be assessed on its merits – the size of your operation is definitely an issue as the large installation cost needs to be spread over a reasonable output. The relative costs of conventional fuels and the availability of grants are critical to the





investment appraisal. We were already facing the issue of boiler replacement and therefore it was timely to take advantage of this new technology. The biomass boiler has reduced our energy bill by approximately 40%. There should be further savings as we improve our understanding of the system and eradicate the teething problems. The Climate Change Levy has also been a motivating factor. Installation costs attracted 100% capital relief which was another financial consideration.

What have been your biggest challenges?

A lack of knowledge and genuine expertise in the biomass boiler industry and no UK models to follow at the time of installation. There was also a lack of constructive assistance from some of the authorities involved and a shortage of accessible grant schemes. It is a totally different heating system and therefore there has been a very steep learning curve, e.g. the management of a buffer system which is not required with conventional fuels which can be turned on

and off. There is definitely a higher labour requirement. The fuel supply is not a uniform material and therefore consistency and quality of supply is critical. Anyone considering such a change should be aware that the number of road based fuel deliveries could be higher than with conventional systems and this could off-set some of the carbon savings.

What opportunities does climate change present to you?

More time and interest in gardening and the potential for lower heating bills.

Where do you see the business going from here?

An expansion of our existing market by demonstrating a long-term commitment to our customers. The government strategy to reduce carbon emissions and a more favourable fiscal regime should reduce the number of imported plants which, in turn, should increase the market for our produce.

FARMING FUTURES

For news, events, and links to stories about how other farmers are managing climate change on their farms, please visit: www.farmingfutures.org.uk

With thanks to: ARF, BBRO, BPC, BPEX, Carbon Trust, CLA, Defra, EBLEX, Forum for the Future, HDC, HGCA, MDC, NFU, PGRO and UKCIP