

Contractor 2009 Report

For those of you that missed Contractor 2009 on 10th December at Stoneleigh, we are delighted to report that it was a resounding success and all the feedback (so far) has been in praise of the event. Many thanks to New Holland, Farmers Weekly, the RASE and bpi for their support.



With the theme 'Making sense of the future', the event opened with NFU president Peter Kendall giving his views on the challenges ahead. With food demand predicted to rise by 50% in the next 20 years and a proposed requirement to cut agricultural carbon emissions by 11% in the next five, he believes that British farmers are in a good position.

"With the use of smarter agriculture we could meet these targets fairly easily", he said.

"Livestock farmers have the greatest potential for improved efficiency and it'll be contractors who are key in making this happen with clever technology and skilled staff."

Three-legged hybrid

John Thorley, director of the Pastoral Alliance (NSA), put forward an interesting proposal to see livestock re-integrated back into the rotation of many arable farms.

"If we're going to see such huge rises in population growth and food demand we're going to need to get all areas back into production, including the hills and uplands," he said.

"The only way to do this in an environmentally sustainable way is to restock the hills and get animals back into the cropping regime. Many arable farmers don't have the stockmanship skills and just aren't interested which provides a great opportunity for contractors."

As part of a 'three-legged' arrangement, his proposals would see contractors acting as the 'middle-man' between upland livestock producers and lowland arable growers. By offering a full stock care service, they could generate new business which would include fencing, forage crop establishment and animal transport services as well as day-to-day husbandry (contract shepherding).

Key advantage to the arable producer would be an improvement in soil fertility brought about by the extra organic matter from dung. As well as the extra nutrients, earthworm activity would help to improve soil aeration, drainage and moisture retention while the forage crop itself would provide a 'true' pest and disease break.

Upland stock farmers would benefit by being able to increase stock numbers and finish more animals on these new lowland units.

By providing the stockmanship skills, machinery and precision technology, as well as the link between these otherwise disparate producers, contractors could stand to grow their businesses significantly, believes Mr Thorley.

Hydrogen power to make farms 'energy-independent'?

New Holland's Christophe Lemaitre jetted in especially from Italy to talk about the company's 'Energy Independent Farm' concept.

Based around the firm's prototype NH2 hydrogen-powered tractor, it encompasses a range of renewable technologies – wind, solar and biogas – to generate electricity and hydrogen to power the farm's milking parlour, machinery and New Holland tractors.

Although the principle has proven itself feasible in field tests, it is not yet economically viable. By 2011 New Holland plans to have pilot farms set up in France, Italy, Germany and possibly the UK to test the concept and its financial viability. With rising oil prices, it is expected that it will become commercial reality by 2018.

New Holland has announced that it will have a working prototype of the NH2 tractor on display at the LAMMA show.



Are you legal on the road?

NAAC Transport Consultant, Mike Braithwaite, gave a useful reminder of where we stand with the law, going through a series of questions frequently asked by contractors and farmers alike.

Q. What is the maximum legal road speed for a tractor?

A. 20mph. However vehicles such as the Mercedes Unimog, JCB Fastrac, Trantor and On-Top tractor with full all-round suspension (?and ABS?) may travel at up to 40mph.

Q. What about trailers?

A. Any trailer (over 3.5t) that will be travelling in excess of 20mph and built after May 2002 must have ABS.

Q. What is the maximum legal weight for a trailer?

A. Up to 18.29t. However, if over 1t, it must be plated and the Maximum Gross Train Weight must not exceed 24.39t.

Q. Where must side-lights and tail-lamps be positioned?

A. No more than 400mm from the outside edge of the vehicle (including tyres).

Q. How big can trailers be?

A. Max width = 2.55m. Max body length (not including drawbar) = 7m if less than 4 wheels; 12m if 4 wheels or more; 14.4m if composite trailer i.e. ex-lorry body with dolly.

Q. Can I tow two trailers?

A. Yes, so long as they are both unladen and the whole vehicle train does not exceed 25.9m. With permission from the local chief constable this can be extended to 27.3m.

Q. What are the requirements for trailer brakes?

A. Anything between 750kg – 3500kg must have an over-run braking system. Above this, power-braking must be fitted.

Q. What about converting ex-lorry artic trailers?

A. It's fine to convert from air-brakes to hydraulic actuators but remember that if the dolly can be separated and is over 750kg it too must have working brakes. If it is permanently attached to the trailer then that is not necessary. Just remove the latch handle and any existing brake components.

Q. Do mobile-phones have to be hands-free?

A. Yes – as do CB radios.

Q. What are the rules about wide implements?

A. Any projections that protrude more than 305mm from the edge of the vehicle must be indicated with marker-boards or tape. Implements over 2m in length must have marker boards along the sides. Anything over ??m wide requires police notification.

Q. What about bale-spikes, buck-rakes and muck-grabs?

A. These must be marked and effectively covered or removed.

Q. What are the rules regarding 16-year-old drivers?

A. They can't drive anything more than 2.45m wide or on tracks and any trailer must be close-coupled.

Q. What does 'close-coupled' mean?

A. Tandem axle trailers where the distance between the axles is no more than 840mm apart are classified as close-coupled.

Q. At what point do I need an O-licence?

A. Operators' licences are required when non-agricultural haulage work over 3.5t is being done for hire or reward. This is not the case when the contractor is involved in the spreading, drilling, harvest, etc... of the product being moved. An O-licence is necessary when the contractor is solely undertaking the haulage operation.