

CASE STUDY

Tom halves operational time with Multicut 460

Maintaining upwards of 1,000 hectares whilst rearing over 2,700 dairy cattle across three farms, Tom has a huge amount of pasture to manage. Choosing the right tools for the job has transformed his business in many ways.

A third-generation South African farmer, Tom has been running the family business with his father for three years. Established by his grandfather, the focus of Mearns Farming is dairy and seasonal calving across three sites. The business is currently growing to a total of 3,000 cattle.

A tough climate demands strong tools

Typical of South Africa, rough and uneven ground is a constant challenge for Tom. And the harsh climate can be very dry and arid during the summer, followed by very low temperatures across the winter. Robust machinery that stands up to the job is essential.

“Prior to purchasing the Spearhead Multicut 460 about 18 months ago, we were using a couple of three-metre mowers. This was taking quite a bit of time. Having stronger summer grasses to manage in South Africa, it’s important to mow down to where you want it to be for quality grazing. It was clear that to get the job done more quickly, we needed something bigger.

The Multicut 460 is the right size for us in terms of power as we use it with a particular tractor. Importantly, it’s a much hardier machine than our three-metre mowers. Given such uneven ground, the sheer bolts on earlier machines could snap quite often. Not so with the 460. It has proper dishes underneath to help with levelling. So, if there’s an issue with the ground depth, or an area of bumps, it stays in perfect control. You won’t have that flat mower problem of digging into the ground. Having wings is also a huge benefit for uneven ground as it floats in this situation.

Altering the cutting height is very easy – you just change the shaft and put it in another hole. We only mow when we need to now. The 460 is so easy to hook up, go to the land, mow what you need and bring it back again.

Our farms use GPS and a lot of technology for driving our tractors. The 460 works perfectly with this, letting the tractor guide it along. Having this bigger machine is saving us a great deal of time.”

Same work from less machinery

Tom’s biggest benefit from running the Multicut 460 is the time and labour saved on pasture mowing. It’s literally reduced by 50%, which, on such a massive undertaking, is significant.

“Instead of having two three-metre machines and two tractors cutting, we now have one 460 mower and one tractor doing the same work. So, we’ve halved our labour costs in this area of the business. We’ve also freed up a tractor and labourer to be productive elsewhere on the farm. That makes a huge difference to us.”

Better cutting improves milk quality

Aside from the performance of the Multicut 460 and the operational costs it's reducing for Tom, there's one more very important benefit he highlighted. The quality of the pasture has improved dramatically.

Unwelcome, aggressive grasses such as Kikuyu are commonplace in South Africa. They're very invasive and detrimental to both the quality of pastureland and the quality of the milk. Not an ideal situation for a large-scale dairy operation.

"Many summer grasses in South Africa are stronger and less palatable; not ideal for milk production. We can get quite a bit of dry, hot weather around February and invasive summer grasses, such as Kikuyu, love these conditions.

We've had a big problem with Kikuyu, which we've been working on for a few years. If you don't keep on top of the situation, Kikuyu will quickly get away from you and grow tall. This restricts the population and growth of better-quality rye grasses, reducing the productivity of your pasture.

Our dairy consultant always tells us if you're going to control the spread of unwelcome grasses, you need the right tools for the job. The Spearhead Multicut 460 is without doubt, one of those tools."

18 months on from his purchase, Tom couldn't be happier with his Spearhead Multicut 460. He also credits his local distributor for their relentless support.

"We're really happy with Spearhead, and our local distributor, Mooi-Mec. They're bringing a lot of high-quality farming equipment over from the UK and have some great contacts to support large-scale South African farmers like us. We'll always consider machinery that can demonstrate the potential for huge operational improvements and cost savings."