

DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FRUIT GROWER

Phil Acock of third-generation, family-run business Fourayes, the UK's number one grower and processor of English Bramley apples. Pictures by: Manu Palomeque

Name: Philip Acock
Job title: Managing Director
Where: Fourayes, Bicknor, near Sittingbourne

TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOU

I was born in 1963 in the flint farmhouse that came with the land when my grandfather bought it in 1951. I grew up on the farm and worked there every school holiday; by the age of 15 I'd carried out every job available – more than once.

There was no pressure from my parents to enter the business and I went away to train as a Production Engineer, but after all those school holidays it seemed perfectly natural for me to join the operation.

To test my abilities I ran a public cold store, a micro-enterprise that allowed me to face all the challenges that are scaled up in a larger organisation. I then took on the role of Production Manager at Fourayes and in 1997 I became Managing Director.

I'm the longest-serving board member of the body that represents our industry – English Apples & Pears Ltd – and a member of the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers.

I don't consider myself to be a farmer. I'm a businessman and one who believes he can never learn enough; so I also belong to a CEO group that meets once a month to discuss issues and challenges and listen to some of the best business speakers around.

I have three wonderful children, Olivia, 18, Isaac, 16 and Ethan, 14; home is 200 yards away from the house where I was born. That's a lot of travelling in 53 years!

SO WHAT IS FOURAYES?

For many years we called ourselves a 'grower and processor of fruit,' but more recently we've started to call ourselves 'fruiticians' because we're passionate about doing beautiful things with fruit.

We take fresh fruit and create a wide range of products that include fruit fillings, processed English Bramley apple, apple purée, jams, preserves and confectioneries and mincemeat. Our main product range uses the English Bramley apple – the most fantastic apple for cooking and one that we grow ourselves as well as buying from across Kent and the south east.

Our own crop of around 1300 tonnes a year from 85 acres is grown specifically for long-term storage; something that we've won numerous awards for. We also work with a wide variety of other fruits, around 5,000 tonnes per year in total. One of our most successful products is our Kentish strawberry jam, using Class 2 strawberries (and raspberries and other soft fruits) from across Kent, which we purée aseptically within 24 hours of being picked.



WHAT EQUIPMENT DO YOU USE?

We use state-of-art processing and production equipment such as our Atlas peeling machines, which not only peel and core more than 100 apples a minute (we have six of them) but also have a special device for removing septum. If you were to put all the Bramley apples we process in a year side by side, the line would stretch all the way from our door to the Ivory Coast!

WHAT ABOUT TRAINING?

We have a successful apprenticeship programme and are launching a new training programme based on the Fruiticians concept; this will be accredited. We employ 78 full-time staff, although the workforce increases significantly in the harvest season. The eight main departments are: product development, production, technical, engineering, sales, planning, transport and logistics, stores, finance and admin.

YOUR TYPICAL WORKING DAY?

There's no such thing for me. I may need to catch up with the farm manager and I'll consult with my departmental managers. Then there are the factory tours; I like to know what's going on. I'll need to make numerous tactical and strategic decisions and, of course, visit our customers and attend industry meetings. I tend to be one of the last to leave at night, not just because I'm busy but because I love what I do.

HAVE YOU WON MANY AWARDS?

Our most recent awards include the Kent Excellence in Business Land Based Business of the Year award, re:refresh Processor of the Year and winner of the Made in the South East Food and Drink Award. We have also been voted runner-up in the Mega-Growth 50 award and in the recent Brammy Awards our products were among the winners in every major category.

FOURAYES IN FIVE YEARS?

Fourayes 2020 Vision is a clearly mapped strategy to deliver continued growth and exceed our customers' expectations. Its cornerstones include growth and innovation strategies, and there is a huge focus on corporate social responsibility.

This includes major initiatives in trying to achieve even greater production efficiencies, reducing our carbon footprint, improved utilisation and higher yields.

We already use energy-efficient lighting in the factory and offices and even have our very own water borehole that feeds the production area.

YOUR FAVOURITE FRUIT?

The English Bramley apple of course: in a deep-filled pie with a jug of hot custard.

MARKS OUT OF 10?

I'd say 11 out of 10 for work satisfaction – I guess it's a good job that I'm the managing director and not the finance director! ♦

Get in touch

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