

# publisher's perspective

A look back on 20 years of CPM



## Two decades of transformation

**I was almost three stone lighter with a lot more hair when *CPM* was launched in Feb 1999 — it now seems amazing that was just two decades ago.**

At the time, IPU was still an option for controlling blackgrass, Baytan (tridimenol+ fuberidazole) was the number one cereal seed treatment and Temik (aldicarb) was still approved for controlling potato cyst nematodes. My goodness — how things have changed!

As an ex-agronomist, it's been fascinating to witness the launch of so many amazing new crop protection products since *CPM* came into existence — ground-breaking strobilurin fungicides such as Landmark (kresoxim-methyl+ epoxiconazole) and wonder herbicides like Atlantis (mesosulfuron+ iodosulfuron) — as well as a procession of world-beating wheats. Remember Robigus, Riband and Einstein?

Back in 1999, the arable farming sector was relatively unfettered by some of the legislation which exists today. Set aside may have been a frustration for those who wanted to crop all their land to optimise returns, but IACS payments provided some compensation for not being able to do so.

Now, we have the Clear Air Strategy, the Sustainable Use Directive and Soil Management Plans, with an ongoing trend in Government policy towards farmers being paid for delivering 'environmental goods', rather than producing food.

During *CPM's* relatively short lifetime, feed wheat prices bottomed out in Sept 2004 at around £62/t and peaked at £231/t in Nov 2012 following the wet harvest that year. The theme of many of the features we've published during the past two decades has therefore been to reduce the unit cost of production in order to optimise returns — and many of *CPM's* original readers will've heeded that advice. We hope our editorial content has helped guide you in making some key decisions.

Back in Feb 1999, *CPM* was mailed to a database of 23,000+ arable farmers, covering around 90% of the UK's cropped hectareage. Today, we still reach that same approximate area of land, but it's farmed by a smaller number of growers — less than 9,000 today.

The route to survival for many has been to acquire more land and to intensify. Bigger machines have enabled ever-more hectares to be covered per day, and many smaller units have been gobbled up by their larger, more progressive neighbours. Yields have gradually increased and margins have in many cases been sustained through these economies of scale.

So what about the next 20 years? The unprecedented amounts of data being generated and shared on-farm nowadays could be the route to future agronomic success. There was much talk at the Oxford Farming Conference

last month about the 'Fourth Agricultural Revolution' — a transformation which will unquestionably be driven by data.

Arguably, those most likely to succeed over the next two decades will be the ones most willing to interpret and use this data to apply their crop inputs with ever-greater precision. Agronomy has also changed beyond all recognition since my days in the field. Technologies such as Hutchinson's Omnia and John Deere's StarFire are making digitally-driven crop husbandry a present-day reality — and transforming the agronomist's role as a result.

For me, there have been many outstanding moments during the past 20 years (and way too many to provide an exhaustive list here). Numerous awards won by *CPM* writers; overseas trips to see exciting new products, machines and technologies; and the opportunity to meet some truly inspirational characters — Huw Phillips; Doug Stevens; Jim Orson; Vic Jordan; Mike May; Profs Brian Chambers and Michael Murphy; John Bailey; Steve Smith; and of course Dr Stephen Moss to name but a few.

And there are challenges ahead for the UK's favourite arable journal. Unquestionably, *CPM's* principle goal is to strive to maintain high editorial standards whilst embracing the digital era. Many technical publications in other industries are now 100% digital. Could this be the future direction for *CPM*?

In many ways, this will be driven by the roll out of high-speed broadband in rural areas under the Government's Universal Service Obligation, and whether that leads to UK-wide coverage within the

next five years is anyone's guess. But much also depends on how you, the reader, want to receive trusted information to help your arable business progress.

For now, we'll continue to print *CPM* on a monthly basis and enjoy bringing you updates on a wide range of technical topics — from sprays to sprayers, nutrient management to new wheat varieties and the very latest innovations from the brightest minds.

All our content is also available through the *CPM* website, with additional, web-exclusive news stories — free and open access with no paywall nor login restriction. And despite this move to digital, in 2018 we published more print pages than we ever have before — more than 1000 in one year — so many thanks to the amazing *CPM* team for the hard work and unstinting efforts.

And of course, many thanks to you, the dedicated *CPM* reader.

### Win some whisky!

Angus McKirdy is *CPM's* publisher and founded the magazine 20 years ago. He's interested to know what *CPM* readers feel the future holds, and is offering a chance to win one of six bottles of quality malt whisky for those willing to take part in a short online survey on print vs digital. Visit the News section on [www.cpm-magazine.co.uk](http://www.cpm-magazine.co.uk) for full details.