

Life outside

All,

another month has flown past, it now feels as if I have been doing this for ages. I am even occasionally mistaken for someone who knows what they are talking about, although there is usually someone around with considerably more knowledge to keep my feet on the ground!

My first advert was run in Vineyard magazine last month and has already led to 7 expressions of interest. They also wrote a piece on what I am up to - see Vineyard p13. The plan is to do a longer interview when I have something to photograph.



I have now taken over Unit B, Highland Court Farm and all the furniture, from its former life as a distribution centre, has been cleared out. I am in the process of finalising my plans for the space and obtaining quotes for various work - the most important of which will be drains (as a huge volume of water is involved when making wine, mainly in keeping everything crystal clean).

After much tooting and froing, I have also decided to keep part of the mezzanine floor, which will give me a significant amount of extra space.





I have still to hear whether I will get EU funding (which will still be available whatever happens after 29th March!). I am going before the panel next Thursday to explain how I will help generate jobs in the rural economy, so am expecting a cross between Dragon's Den and CountryFile. After that, I can order my tanks and presses, plus bottling, riddling and disgorging lines and all the other paraphernalia I will need to be up and running by harvest.



Another shed - former cold stores

In the meantime, the joint venture with my neighbouring farmer to store wine for 'on-lees ageing' in their old cold stores is progressing - we can potentially store up to 1.4 million bottles. We have had a number of enquiries, driven by the size of last year's harvest, a staggering **15.6 million bottles**, a significant increase from the previous maximum of 6.3 million. More significantly for me, **a recent survey** has found that 41% of growers in the South East are planning to plant more grapes, so demand for the services I am offering is highly likely to increase.

I am very glad of the qualification I got from the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants as my resettlement from the Army, as I have spent lots of time over the past month refining my business plan financial projections

and working out my pricing. Otherwise, I am loving the variety. I am getting involved in the Kent festival of English wine (to be held in Canterbury over 22/23 June for those who are interested), have been back to Plumpton College for a one day skills course on 'clarification and fining' and am now off to network at a pruning competition, after which I need to find out what has happened to my trade effluent application....

**Regards,
Henry Sugden**

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