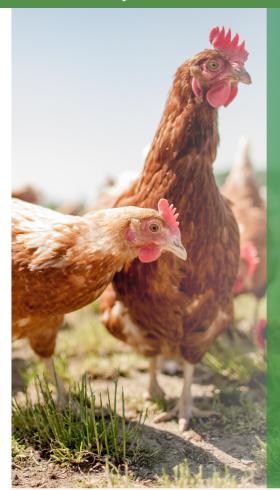


Northumberland egg producer grows family business with biosecurity-first approach

Case study: Catherine Armstrong



As the UK egg industry outlook remains positive, Catherine Armstrong is expanding her family's free-range egg business at Detchant Farm, near Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Running a 170ha farm with 32,000 laying hens and an arable enterprise, alongside her husband Neil and parents, Mrs Armstrong is rebuilding flock numbers as the egg sector rebounds.

But with avian influenza (AI) an ongoing threat, she has also been prioritising robust biosecurity measures to protect her hens, staff, and livelihood.

"At our peak, we had 56,000 free-range hens, but when egg prices collapsed in the early 2020s, we sold some sheds to help weather the storm," explains Mrs Armstrong.

Now, she plans to grow the flock back to 40,000.

"The egg side of our farm business is strong right now, I don't see any insurmountable short to medium-term problems," she says.

"But with farm subsidies dwindling, it's important to protect our poultry income stream from risks like bird flu."

The breakdown

Bolstering biosecurity

With the insurance route proving complex for AI coverage, Mrs Armstrong turned to Livetec Systems for a fresh approach.

Jack Hughes, Livetec biosecurity adviser, who knew her farm well from his days as a Lion Code assessor, recommended a biosecurity assessment.

Mrs Armstrong explains: "Our biosecurity was already strong, but this system felt more formal and comprehensive.

Jack is excellent at explaining what happens if AI strikes – you must be ready for when government officials arrive.

Catherine Armstrong, Detchant Farm

The solution

What services did Catherine use?

→ Livetec Emergency Response Plan (ERP)

→ Livetec Systems App

The assessment identified areas for biosecurity improvements, particularly in signage and physical barriers.

"We were advised to add very fine mesh onto the side fence to ensure absolutely nothing could enter our wooden Harlow house flat-deck sheds," says Mrs Armstrong.

The importance of managing visitors was also highlighted.

"No one goes near the sheds without reporting to the office first, which is a fair distance from the hens," she explains. "Only feed comes in, and eggs go out."



Emergency planning

One key outcome from Livetec's initial review was a tailored Emergency Response Plan (ERP), which outlines necessary steps to take if AI is suspected or detected on-farm.

She adds: "The Livetec team know what they're talking about – they deal with this on a daily basis – and for us, it's money well spent to gain their expertise."

The ERP is a document we could hand to the APHA officials upon arrival, it shows we've planned ahead, which keeps the process moving smoothly to avoid delays and uncertainty.

It's a hugely valuable way to stay ahead of a stressful situation.

Catherine Armstrong, Detchant Farm

Ongoing vigilance

Although recent government housing orders for poultry have been lifted, Mrs Armstrong remains mindful of ongoing Al risks.

"We're on the coast, so wild birds, particularly seagulls, are a risk we need to manage," she says.

"We must keep the ranges clean, water uncontaminated, and biosecurity tight."

To maintain high standards, she ensures staff are fully engaged.

She adds: "I'm lucky, we have one man per shed, nothing goes between the sheds, and everyone understands what's needed to protect our hens."

Looking ahead, Mrs Armstrong plans to upgrade Detchant Farm's layer housing to a steel-frame multi-tier shed, incorporating new technologies and automation.

"We're looking at AI technology and robotics as we upgrade, and will explore the digital biosecurity tools available from Livetec," she says.

For other poultry farmers, she advises: "Whether you have insurance or not, revisiting your biosecurity with fresh eyes and planning improvements is invaluable.

"Livetec offers a great support system to help shoulder the load of biosecurity."

The importance of biosecurity for all farms

The biosecurity assessment at Detchant Farm began with a thorough walk-through to review protocols. It's essential to understand why these are in place and whether they're working for that specific farm.

Biosecurity can be effective on any type of farm, but methods must be practical and manageable for each farm's needs.

Jack Hughes, Livetec's biosecurity adviser

Biggest biosecurity risks

Human complacency and unmanageable infrastructure as two of the biggest risks, says Mr Hughes.

"While most farms have protocols in place, sometimes they're bypassed due to time constraints or lack of understanding," he warns.

A single biosecurity lapse can allow disease to enter, so maintaining vigilance is key. Which is why a formal plan ensures consistency, reduces the likelihood of gaps, and clearly guides staff.

Mr Hughes stresses additional vigilance is needed in coastal areas or those near migratory bird routes: "Farms in or near these areas must continually monitor wild bird deaths and use bird deterrents to reduce risk.

"Even with these measures, it's important to evaluate whether housing free-range birds is necessary for their safety during outbreaks," he adds.

Livetec Biosecurity

Biosecurity Advisory Service

Our Biosecurity Advisory Service provides you with an on-farm visit with a biosecurity expert.

Our on-farm discovery sessions make us a supportive partner, helping you to minimise risks and imparting knowledge so that you can better protect your farm from disease incursion.





Contingency Plan

Our Contingency Plans encompass every aspect of farming businesses, risks and emergencies that could arise in the future. We help you to design strategies to manage the impact of these concerns. A comprehensive package, this helps make you compliant and insurable.



Emergency Response Plan

An Infected Premises Response plan or, as we call them, an Emergency Response Plan, significantly enhances your preparedness and is designed to cover everything that APHA and insurance brokers require if and when they visit your farm business. This plan holds all the necessary critical information, in one place, putting your mind at rest during a time of crisis.

▶ Cleansing and Disinfection Plan

Our Cleansing and Disinfection plan is designed to give you the framework for all of the measures you need to take, with clear instructions that comply with APHA requirements.





Cost of Depopulation Report

Our Cost of Depopulation calculator will help you accurately assess all catching and disposal costs related to depopulation, assisting you in gaining the correct level of insurance.

▶ National Outbreak Plan

Our National Outbreak Plan has been designed to comply with the regulations and requirements set by the UK government, providing bird owners with everything you need to know should you be impacted by a disease outbreak or fall within a restriction zone.





View Online



The Livetec Systems App

You can stay ahead of bird flu outbreaks with real-time alerts from across the UK delivered to your phone. So, if there's an outbreak near your premises you can be proactive and protect your poultry - whether the threats come from wild birds or neighbouring premises.



Learn more



Learn more

Livestock Protect Platform: Digital Biosecurity 365

Livestock Protect is Livetec's powerful, subscription-based platform built specifically for poultry producers like you. It puts control back in your hands – delivering the insights and tools needed to manage biosecurity, disease risk, and site compliance all in one place.

View Online



To find out more about how our plans can help your farming business, please visit **www.livetecsystems.co.uk/plans** or email us for more information **sales@livetecsystems.co.uk**

