

Otter Farm - Climate Change Farm



Photos: Olive trees at Otter Farm (courtesy of Otter Farm)

Overview

Otter Farm is a small farm in Devon, where positive steps have been taken to grasp the opportunities that climate change presents. This has become a unique selling point for the farm, which is now being marketed as Britain's only 'climate change farm'.

Mark Diacono, owner and manager of Otter Farm, has recognised that, regardless of what we do to cut carbon emissions, some climate change is inevitable as a result of our historic actions. He is responding to this positively by taking advantage of the effects of climate change - by growing many foods that would otherwise be 'foreign' to the UK, Otter Farm can expand its product market. This sustainable exploitation of a changing climate also helps to mitigate against climate change by making otherwise overseas produce available locally with low food-miles.

Climate Change Adaptation measures

- Appreciative of the likely increased unpredictability of weather systems, Otter farm is taking out a little 'edible insurance' – planting many more medium sized crops rather than going for a few larger harvests. This will mean that whatever the year's weather, the majority of crops will do well.
- Aiming for new 'climate change harvests' - the only English orchards of almonds, pecans, persimmons, pineapple guava, peaches, grinding pepper sharon fruit and apricots...and the olive grove.
- There is also a vineyard split between varieties that are already reasonably reliable in England, and more well known varieties (e.g. Sauvignon blanc, Gerwurtztraminer) that aren't currently grown elsewhere in the country but that are likely to escalate in productivity in years to come with the changes in climate.

Benefits of adapting

- A more robust business model
- An increase in biodiversity
- Cornered a niche market
- Interest guaranteed due to originality of idea/produce
- Sense of action rather than paralysis in face of climate change
- Creation of a beautiful and productive place

Challenges

- Establishment costs
- Length of time to harvest (and therefore return) for many crops
- Doubt about timing – have I done it too early?

Recommendations

- Look at the sustainable opportunities rather than just the limitations and restrictions implied by climate change, and see whether there is a niche to develop using the businesses current skills and resources to build on
- Think and act sustainably – consumers will increasingly demand it – and publicise
- Don't be afraid to tell current and potential customers what you are doing and why
- A good source of information is the South West Climate Change Impacts Partnership website as a starting place: www.oursouthwest.com/climate

Contact:

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Relevant links:

www.otterfarm.co.uk

View SWCCIP's short video about Otter Farm on YouTube:

http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=lhZISsj_ge4