

## Cope Seeds & Grains – Leading agricultural seed & grain specialists

As part of our SOPA Member Spotlight series, here we interview Gemma Clarke of Cope Seeds and Grain.

COPE Seeds is a family business set up by my father in 2003. I joined in 2008 working from home and bought him out of the business in 2020. The business is now run from its offices in Lincolnshire and is a team of 11 people, focusing on organic seed and grain trading.

Where we are different is our involvement in genetics, bringing EU cereal and pulse varieties to trial in the UK. We are always looking for varieties which offer agronomic and end user benefits to organic growers and producers.

We now offer nutrition which is a new part of the business which includes organically registered products like the organic soil improver, Leodita. Leodita is high in humic and fulvic acid which helps balance soil pH whilst improving the absorption and transport of nutrients for plants.



# Q&A

## 1. What inspires you to do what you do?

I get the most pride when I bring a seed variety from trials to market and farmers call in after growing it to say the variety was excellent and they want to use it again. There's nothing better than that feeling.

## 2. What are the company's key strengths would you say?

We have a great team with a mixed skillset, all of whom are hugely empathetic to growers especially in terms of government policy and support. I have a committed team that want the best for farmers.

We really understand the supply chain and are strong in all areas across that supply chain including genetics, seed, nutrition and grain which allows us to offer expert advice to growers which we hope helps improve their businesses.

Another strength of our company is our strong relationships with our end users and we are not afraid of bringing them together with farmers. Processors like to meet the farmers and farmers like to know where their goods are going to, so we often organise mill visits, farm visits and trips to Europe.



### 3. Why is organics important to the company?

I want to leave a positive legacy behind, our days here are numbered and I don't want to leave the planet knowing I've done harm to it. I want to be a small part in leaving the planet in a better state to the next generation. Therefore it is so important that what COPE do as a business is in line with our ethos of leaving a positive impact.

I'm passionate about organic and I'm horrified at how much chemical we put on our fields and how so much of that is on what we eat. I want myself and my family to have the option of eating healthy food, which has full traceability, whilst supporting the environment and soil health in doing so.



### 4. How can COPE Seeds help SOPA members?

We have exciting new varieties in our pipeline that are suitable for Scottish farmers. An example of how we have done this already would be Merlin Spring oat which we brought over from Europe. This variety is now the number 1 spring oat variety in Scotland.

We also offer organic buy back contracts, which gives commitment to your members, allowing them to have guaranteed and secure markets for their harvested grain.

## 5. Where do you see the future for organic seed production?

The future is strong for organics, there's growing interest from the younger generation who are more health conscious.

We need a reset to be able to bring new varieties in from Europe. The costs are so high because of Brexit and therefore to make this affordable, we have to bring in varieties that are suitable for both organic and conventional growing but we know there are varieties out there that suit purely organic much better. Thank fully this is due to be reviewed in the near future and we hope that governments can work through this quickly.

## 6. Where do you conduct your trials, are any done in Scotland?

We run some of our own trials across a network of organic farmers as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> party trials contractors. We are actually looking at starting some trials in Scotland this year and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with your members.

## 7. What is there most demand for?

Definitely organic oats, there's a growing demand for this in both England and Scotland.



### 8. And finally Gemma where in the EU do you look for varieties?

We look in France, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic and Poland mainly. Organics is much stronger on the continent with around 30% organic market share in Austria; there's time and money spent on organic plant breeding over there which is just not the case over here.

If you are interested in buying seed from or doing trials in Scotland with Cope seeds do get in touch with them.

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