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# New brand proves successful for Essex forage specialist

For a professional Essex-based business specialising in grass forage and straw baling and supply, running the right machinery is essential. **David Williams** reports.

For 25 years, Blackwater Baling Ltd has served customers including farmers and equestrian businesses. Its machinery fleet is large and comprises mainly well-known major brands but when updating its grass harvesting equipment this year, owners Gavin and Liz Strathern were tempted by the range from SIP – a relatively new entrant to the UK market. SIP has manufactured grass harvesting machinery for more than 50 years but set up its UK subsidiary less than three years ago. New Holland and Case IH main dealer Ernest Doe & Sons has depots across east and south-east England and was one of the first to take on the franchise.

## Dealer view

“We sold a previous brand successfully for many years,” explained Ernest Doe Ulting-based sales representative Derek Peck. “Like other members of the sales team, when I was told we were taking on SIP, which was relatively unknown, I was sceptical. We saw examples from the range at the company’s UK base, then visited the Slovenian factory. We were extremely impressed by the design, the care of manufacture and the finish and came back totally reassured and looking forward to the 2018 grass harvesting season, when we would be able to demonstrate the range to prospective customers. The performance will match any other premium brand, and the products incorporate exclusive design features and come with the reassurance of a unique three-year warranty. We have a huge range to offer and customers from small farms to large professional contracting businesses like Blackwater Baling have quickly accepted it. Customer feedback is extremely positive, support from SIP managing

director Martin Holden and his team is excellent, and I know sales representatives at all our depots confidently offer it to their customers - no matter how demanding the situation.”

## Hay and straw specialist

Blackwater Baling operates 12 balers including three conventional small balers, and nine New Holland large balers – one round, and the others producing 80x50cm, 120x70cm, 120x90cm and 120x130cm large square bales. These operate behind a fleet of mainly New Holland T7 tractors, plus three JCB Fastracs which are favoured for bale transport and baling further from the Purleigh, Essex base.

The contracting service cuts, prepares and bales hay, haylage and straw for customers from private horse owners to larger professional breeding and racing stables. Hay and haylage

bales are also produced on owned and rented land of which some are supplied direct to end users, mainly for equestrian use, and the rest is sold through wholesalers. Some of the grassland close to the base is also grazed during the winter by 200 cattle on a b&b arrangement.

Straw baling is offered as a contracting service although a large amount is also bought in the swath and baled behind the combine, then transported and supplied throughout the year to users including straw burning power stations.

Up to 14 machinery operators are employed during the harvesting season which starts with first-cut haylage and concludes in the autumn when the last of the straw has been baled.

Transtacker bale transporters and carting gangs are used for straw bale clearing and transport, including re-handling bales to move them from remote sites to the main yards. A core team works throughout the year loading bales using a fleet of telehandlers, and transports hay,

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The Spider 9008T 9m tedder is proving popular for its ease of set up and use. Owner Gavin Strathern says its aggressive tedding action allows it to work well in heavy swaths while also speeding up drying.





The Disc 300 front mower is pulled rather than pushed, allowing it to cope easily with uneven ground where previous mowers might have dug in. Hydraulic pressure adjustment easily achieves suitable float for any working conditions.



Design features such as colour coding left- and right-handed tines in black or red ensures correct selection and supply of replacements for reduced downtime. Pull out adjuster knobs have shaped profiles making them easier to grip when wet and slippery.



Gavin Strathern is pictured (left) with Derek Peck.

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haylage and straw bales to equestrian customers across East Anglia.

"We decided early on to specialise in baling and bale supply," explained Gavin. "By specialising we can offer the most efficient service without being distracted by other tasks. We also offer grassland fertilising and spraying as well as pasture reseeding, which complements our grass harvesting service and is for the same customers."

**“SIP must have confidence in its range and build quality.”**

The new SIP machinery includes two Spider 9008T 9m tedders and a set of 9m triple mowers including a Disc 300 front mower and a pair of Disc 900C rear mowers. "Although we considered other brands when updating this time, we knew what we wanted and liked the solution offered by Ernest Doe and SIP," explained Gavin. "We didn't have a demonstration but saw machines at the dealer and although the brand is relatively new, the three-year warranty persuaded us to invest. SIP must have confidence in its range and build quality to offer that, and I just can't see any other brand matching it. We know Ernest Doe will back it up well too."

#### Disc 900 mowers

The single front mower attaches by a front linkage-mounted A-frame. Ground pressure adjusts hydraulically, and the S-Flow headstock extends over the top of the mower so it is lifted and pulled rather than pushed. "We immediately saw the difference in ground contour following," explained mower operator Dave Potts who has been mowing at Blackwater Baling Ltd for over 10 years. "Our previous mowers had spring adjustment which was less convenient, and on uneven ground they lacked the range of movement needed. We even had them dig in occasionally, but this wouldn't be an issue with SIP's design."

The rear bat-wing mowers are easy to set up and use and perform well. Double-acting rams ensure both units lift and lower as a pair during folding and unfolding, even on cross-slopes.

Gavin said that although the overall design and build quality of the mowers impressed, it was smaller details which highlighted the thought that had gone into the products. Examples include spare blade boxes on each mower unit, supplied full from the factory. Blade changing is quick and easy using a special tool supplied attached to each mower, and blade rotors are driven by brass shear pins which snap if solid obstructions are encountered, saving the drivetrain. Marker lights are standard too, increasing transport safety.

#### Spider 9008T tedders

The tedders perform exceptionally well and also have features which appeal to the users. These include efficient ground contour following, through a flexible main chassis with separate wheels carrying each rotor. Two large flotation tyres carry most of the weight in the field and perform well on the road, but Gavin also pointed out the two centre rotor wheels are slightly larger than the outer four on each side, compensating for



the additional weight carried. Standard equipment includes two complete spare rotor wheels mounted to the frame.

Drive between each hinged section is by a simple meshing pin connector rather than universal joints, which Gavin says is simpler and requires less maintenance. Separate rams are used to lift the tedder during headland turns, and for lifting and folding for transport.

"This allows the rotors to lift higher to clear large swaths, reducing contamination and avoiding crop damage," explained team manager Phil Belham.

Because most of the grass is for hay and haylage mower-conditioners aren't used, but Gavin said the tedder's aggressive action ensures effective movement of heavy crops and also speeds up drying. The rotor design also achieves full movement across the working width, unlike previous tedders. "We used tedders with angled tines in the past which performed well, although in heavier swaths the crop could become trapped which caused problems. Then we moved to a brand with straight tines which seemed fine, but then in some crops it became obvious that a narrow strip was missed between each rotor. The SIP tines give us what we need - they are straight and cope in heavy crops, but cover the full working width," said Gavin. "This is very important to us as we supply some of the top equestrian businesses in the UK and produce hay to their precise specifications. Achieving this requires precise and even crop preparation and handling."



Gavin says that whereas his previous tedders missed narrow strips between each rotor, the SIP version effectively covers the full 9m working width.

### Verdict

So far, investment in the SIP mower and tedders is proving successful and Gavin says it is likely that when his four rakes are next updated they will also be replaced by models from SIP. "From their ease of setting up to the results achieved, they are very good and although they come with additional features over and above other brands the price is competitive. Even since we saw the first examples almost three years ago, there have been updates and improvements and with back up from Ernest Doe and SIP UK, plus the reassurance of a three-year warranty, the brand makes sense." **FG**

*Foreman and SIP user Dave Potts says he is very impressed with the brand, and especially features such as supplying spare wheels on the tedders, boxes of spare blades supplied full from the factory and fool-proof hydraulic hose connectors.*



Members of the Blackwater Baling Ltd team with the new SIP mower and one of the tedders. (l-r) Gavin Strathern, Phil Belham, John Baker and Dave Potts with Ernest Doe representative Derek Peck.









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