



SHROPSHIRE AND SEA BUCKTHORN



Seth Pascoe had never heard of Seaberries (the fruit of the Sea Buckthorn) until he went trekking with a friend in the Himalayas.

Having reached the Everest base camp, some 5,300m above sea level, Seth and his pal started to suffer from altitude sickness. Their Sherpa gave them each a glassful of a hot, bright orange liquid - delicious to taste and, it turned out, with many beneficial properties. The altitude sickness soon cleared up. And from that moment on, Seth was keen to learn more about the nutritional properties of the Nepali "super fruit".

Back in his home county of Cornwall, it seemed like fate when he discovered native Sea Buckthorn bushes bearing their golden berries, whilst walking his dog along a cliff path.

One thing led to another, and Seth decided to try out Sea Buckthorn in the UK, planting 100 trees in a Cornish orchard. They grew well, which was very encouraging. Seth wanted to develop a really commercial enterprise and, with the help of a Nuffield Scholarship, he was able to visit growers across Europe, China and the Indian Himalayas to further his knowledge.

Full of enthusiasm, he returned home and established a farm tenancy on land owned by the Duchy of Cornwall. Here he planted a larger orchard of over 2,000 Sea Buckthorn trees. This has now expanded to around 3,000 trees. He grows named/bred varieties, not the wild cultivar. His orchards are based mainly on German varieties with a few Latvian varieties mixed in too. Seth is also an agronomist and continues to advise arable growers alongside his Cornish Seaberry Company business.

Briefly describe your holding:

We rent around five acres of orchards in mid-Cornwall plus an acre of wildflower meadow and a further acre of grass. I also have another acre of grass-keep locally. The land has heavier soils than are ideal, but that was the only land available at the time.

Were you the first in the UK to look at Sea Buckthorn as a commercial proposition?

There are a handful of other growers and a

few foragers who harvest the wild crop. We all keep in touch and cooperate where possible. I wasn't the first to establish a commercial orchard, but I may be the second!

What are your main markets?

We sell berries or juice to third parties - distilleries, breweries, chocolatiers, chefs, ice-cream makers, jam makers, cosmetic companies etc. We are developing our own native juice, which we are hoping to launch later this year. We are also looking into selling powdered Sea Buckthorn, which is great for sprinkling onto porridge, smoothies, yogurts etc.

When did you start using Shropshires?

I attended an Innovative Farmers Field Lab specifically looking at Shropshires in orchards. I met breeder Liz Bowles at that event and

I later bought some in-lamb ewes from her Hayne Oak flock. I've just completed my 4th lambing.

How do you manage the Shropshires in your Sea Buckthorn orchards?

I use electric fences and give them a number of alleyways at a time to "mob graze". How many alleys and how long they stay there depends on grass growth. During July and August I try to avoid having them in the orchard in case they develop a taste for the berries. I use alternative grazing for them at this time.

I lamb the ewes indoors in February. My fields sit quite wet in winter so the sheep are outdoors for as long as they aren't making a mess. February gets the lambing over before the agronomy season gets stupidly busy.

They do nibble on the trees and if I replant a young tree in an existing row of older trees the young tree tends to get picked on and really defoliated. Once trees get bigger, I take the view that they should

Seth, pictured with his partner Laura and daughter Emily.



be able to handle some nibbling of leaves. Ideally I would cull the culprits, but it doesn't really work with such a small flock. The bushes are very thorny so I'm surprised they do eat them. The other issue I have is that the sheep sometimes get foot problems from standing on prunings.

Are Shropshires cost effective and are you pleased with them?

The Sea Buckthorn trees fix nitrogen so I get a lot of grass growth at times. The Shropshires convert this grass to meat - and it means I don't have to use diesel mowing grass all the time. They have really helped to improve the soil quality by recycling nutrients and feeding soil biology - the "golden hoof"!

The sheep don't make me a fortune by any means, but as part of my overall orchard management strategy and business they have an important role and are also part of the marketing story too.

Future plans?

Our Two Trees flock (AGW) currently numbers 5 or 6 ewes. I would like to increase flock size, but haven't got enough land at present. My daughter Emily is three and already really enjoys helping with "sheepy jobs". I'd love to start showing our sheep and so I want to learn more about that. I'd like to learn how to shear as well. Flystrike is always a concern in a sheltered orchard. As a small flock we are never high up the pecking order for shearers. So if I could shear them myself it would overcome this issue.



For more information about
The Cornish Seaberry Company, see
the website:
www.cornishseaberry.co.uk