Cotswold Seeds Ltd
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Julian Gold Announced as the Winner of the 2019 Soil Farmer of the Year

Congratulations to Julian Gold, who has won the award for Soil Farmer of the Year, organised by the Farm Carbon Cutting Toolkit (FCCT) and Innovation for Agriculture (IfA) and sponsored by Cotswold Seeds and Lush.

Julian features as one of our new First Hand Case Studies in this year's catalogue. Watch the video here:

Cover Crops with Julian Gold

Below, is the press release from the Farm Carbon Cutting Toolkit.

The competition aims to find farmers and growers who are engaged with, and passionate about managing their soils in a way which supports productive agriculture, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and builds soil health, organic matter and carbon.

Julian farms 751 hectares of medium soils and grows a variety of crops. Focussing on carbon management, Julian has been using a range of techniques including controlled traffic farming and minimising tillage to achieve his goals and prioritise soil health.

Julian has been chosen as the winner this year due to the enthusiasm and passion for which he manages his soil, as well as his desire to spread the message and share information. He focusses on developing a simple system which delivers in terms of improved soil health, maintains production and develops resilience.

Julian comments, "*I am very happy to have won this award. I hope that it will help inspire other farmers that soil health improvements are possible on larger scale arable units without grass breaks and access to external organic matter sources and that a systematic, multi-pronged approach can deliver a real win/win of profitable farming and environmental repair, as well as bringing much interest and satisfaction back into the job!*"

Second place for this year's competition has been awarded to William Blackburn, who farms 470 acres in Cheshire. Running a dairy farm with 300 cows on light sandy soils, Will has moved over to direct drilling with an overarching focus on developing soil structure and building humus. Will is starting to see his soils respond to his change in management and is building resilience within his system.

The judges recognised Will's dedication to his soil management and the steps that he had taken to change his system. Walking round the fields it was evident to see the health of the soil.

Will comments "*It's fantastic to have been recognised in SFOTY, it is exciting for us with livestock in a no till system seeing the potential when we add precision to the manure management*."

The accolade of third prize was taken by Paul Davey from Lincolnshire. Paul farms 1100 acres in Lincolnshire and manages a range of arable crops and a sheep flock. Pioneering new approaches and experimenting has led to a focus on soil management and the ability to include livestock and grassland within the rotation.

Paul explains *“I’m delighted to have been placed third in this year’s Soil Farmer of the Year competition. It is extremely rewarding to receive recognition for the mixed farming methods implemented over our widely differing soil types, from marine clay to chalky wold soils. Farming is endlessly fascinating and the on-farm changes implemented in the pursuit of improving soils whilst reducing weed, pest and disease burdens has been challenging but also rewarding as noticeable improvements become apparent*.”

Jonathan Smith, FCCT Director said *"The importance of building soil organic matter in farm soils has never been more important. In order to move towards more sustainable and resilient farming systems, it's imperative farmers and growers concentrate heavily on improving their soil health, fertility, water holding capacity and carbon sequestration. This can all be achieved through a focus on building organic matter. It's a win-win approach!*

Furthermore it is quite clear that policy direction in the UK is heading towards farmers being paid for 'public goods'. Central to this is the role of healthy soils, and their societal importance in being a vast carbon sink to help us all in reducing our carbon emissions rapidly. All our Soil Farmers are great ambassadors and practitioners of improving farm soils. They should be a great source of inspiration and information to other farmers."

The top three famers will all receive prizes of fertility building or green manure seed from one of the generous sponsors of the competition, Cotswold Seeds. Cover Crops with Julian Gold

Deborah Crossan Soil and Water manager with IfA “ each year we meet passionate and dedicated farmers making changes which invigorate their soil health and inform and inspire our industry “

Peter van Vliet has been awarded highly commended this year due to the fantastic work that he is doing restoring the soils of his market garden in Sheffield. Producing an impressive yield of produce whilst at the same time operating as a care farm, and running an innovative composting systems were all recognised as attributes by the judges.

As an exciting extra this year, all of the finalists will have their awards presented to them at Groundswell, taking place on the 26th and 27th June. There will be a discussion with last year’s winner Simon Cowell in the conference barn in the afternoon of Thursday 27th after which this years prizes will be awarded. This will be a fantastic opportunity to meet all of the finalists and see them rewarded for their dedicated management and find out more about the farm walks.

The top three farmers will also all be hosting farm walks who are open to anyone who is interested, where there will be a chance to see, understand and dig a bit deeper into what they are doing. Julian will be hosting his walk on Thursday 11th July, Will Blackburn on the 9th July and Paul Davey on 2nd July. Further details on these walks are available on the FCCT website.

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