

RADICAL COMMUNITY PROJECT AIMS TO KEEP DEVELOPERS AT BAY

Family beefs up farm fight with £1m appeal

No bull - Genus is charging ahead

A SPECIALIST breeding company expects its prize bulls to lead the charge to success.

Genus, which employs 60 staff at its Stapeley bovine genetics facility, is expected to announce that the six months to October have been in line with expectations.

The company pointed to encouraging results from leading bulls in its Genus stud as a future money-spinner when the next batch of proof results are officially announced in November.

It said in a statement: "We have created a technique to improve dramatically sperm membrane quality.

"This is significant as it makes delicate sperm from animals with low fertility capable of producing more active sperm, and should reduce post-thaw damage in species where semen is currently difficult to freeze."

The company announced in May that after-tax profits had risen to £6.4 million.

Ham Baker lands deals

ENGINEERING and valve-making company Ham Baker has landed two major deals.

The Potteries firm, which employs 55 people in Garner Street, will supply specialist piping and accessories to Thames Water for two years and Anglian Water for three.

"We've shown through the fulfilment of contracts with Thames and Anglian that our logistics business is professional and efficient," said spokesman Mark Beesley.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Brother and sister team Charlotte and Ben Hollins with some of their produce, and inset, with some of their cattle

Picture: Steve Bould

By Christina Savvas
Business Reporter

A FARMING family is hoping that a new campaign will save its bacon and keep it in business.

Brother and sister team Charlotte and Ben Hollins have been inundated with offers of help since they launched a project to save their family farm from being lost to development.

Charlotte, aged 23, and Ben, aged 21, took over Fordhall Farm, near Market Drayton, following the death of their father in January.

They have set up a land initiative to save the farm, which is one of the first in the UK to practice organic farming and yoghurt making.

Now, like much of the English countryside, the farm is under threat from developers. The family are tenants on the land and have until 2006 to buy it and

prevent it from being sold off for development. Community spirit and generosity from volunteers, local businesses and wildlife lovers has given them hope in the fight to raise £1 million by next summer.

Ben manages the beef cattle, sheep, pigs and chickens, with all produce sold through the farm's organic shop, and Charlotte is helping to organise a trust to buy the land and run it for community benefit with emphasis on education and encouraging people to visit the farm.

Charlotte said: "This is not just about saving a farm that has been chemical free for over 60 years. It is about involving people, educating and promoting sustainable farming techniques — that is why people are buying shares in the initiative."

More than £5,000 has been raised for the scheme in the last couple of weeks.

The trust board aims to raise money through charitable grants and the remainder by selling not-for-profit

shares at £50 each. Charlotte said: "We have had a fantastic response. We have received emails from across the world, even as far away as South Africa and Australia. People want organic farming to live on. People are buying into everything that Fordhall represents. It's not just about saving a family farm, but about sustainability, local food, wildlife, bio-diversity and heritage."

The initiative originated from the ideals of Arthur Hollins, who took over after the Second World War, aged 14.

His father left the 150-acre farm with huge debts and failing crops but Arthur turned the farm's fortunes around, making it one of Britain's first yoghurt makers.

Charlotte added: "Our father believed in nature and working alongside the natural cycles which had withstood the earth for trillions of years."

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important supplier of glass bottles to the U.S. soft drink business has experienced severe financial difficulties.

Volume growth seems to be continuing in line with the guidance given at the time of the half-year figures, but the continuing programme of improvement in margins is unlikely to meet management's targets. The effect of the oil price seems somewhat surprising, given that management last updated analysts at the end of July.

Transportation costs have certainly been a problem, as the U.S. administration has been commandeering commercial vehicles, especially in the southern states. Some analysts are concerned that management seems to have been taken by surprise in the

last nine or ten weeks by a change in the profitability of the business and analysts are uncertain as to whether this is the whole story. The company is holding a two-day seminar for analysts in Dallas next Monday and Tuesday, and more information should be forthcoming as the news is disseminated.

Whatever the outcome, it is clear that profits will be impacted this year and, probably next. The overall story seems to be intact, as there does not appear to be any evidence of a breakdown in management control.

Northern Foods' half-year trading update was less than illuminating, giving little information about current trading.

Underlying sales rose by 3.4 per cent, which is within the 3-4 per cent range targeted by management. Disappointingly, operating margins will only be "broadly maintained," as the trading environment remains challenging. Despite gains from the Group's procurement and efficiency problems, there has been significant inflation on the cost side of the equation. In addition, management highlights the need to recover further input cost inflation in the second half of the year, referring specifically to utilities costs.

These views are the author's own and you should bear in mind that no investment is suitable for all circumstances. It is important to seek expert advice if in any doubt.

An Evening focussing on Design, Skills and Technology
Interviews with leading innovators such as
Richard Reed of Innocent Drinks
Exciting and Innovative local companies IPH and Touchline-Pro
with their Design Consultants
Join us on the night to be inspired, ask questions and network
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To book your free place ring 0845 8458020

Date: 18 October 2005

Time: 6 - 8.30pm

Venue: Sutherland Institute
Longton, Stoke on Trent