

BELGIUM – GLYPHOSATE POTATO/ GOFFINET

Contact details

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Pictures + quote

"A clean plot, that's what you need. And there's nothing better than grassland to keep the land clean."

Description of the farm and the farmer

- Size: 130 ha, of which
 - 11 ha of potato cultivation
 - 35 ha of grain cultivation
 - 84 ha of grassland
- Production: Organic livestock farming of 250 Limousin cattle for meat production. Quentin Goffinet's farm is 99% self-sufficient for its feed. Feed production (grain and legumes) requires 15 ha. Apart from this, 11 ha is dedicated to growing seed potatoes (5 different varieties), produced under contract with the seed distributor. Potatoes unsuitable for reproduction are sold for retail consumption at the farm.
- Date of establishment: The Goffinets' farm has been in the family for generations. Quentin started out in 2004, taking 60 Limousin cows (non-organic) from his father, then added 24 organic Limousin cows from a neighbour 5 years later. He immediately converted to organic farming, for which the breed and the region are very suitable. He wanted to be independent as far as feed is concerned, in particular to avoid the significant costs of organic-certified feed. Starting with only 40 ha (8 of which were intended for grain), he subsequently acquired new land from nearby, increasing his livestock farming and his overall production.
- Number of associates and workers: Quentin works alone and gets occasional help from his family.

Description of agro-ecological practices

To avoid using pesticides on his grain and potato crops, Quentin does the following: Bel

- He prepares the soil and weeds mechanically
- He rotates crops
- He uses Bordeaux mixture as a preventative measure (and in emergency) on the potato crops

Technical information concerning agro-ecological practices

Preparing the land

It's essential to avoid weeds appearing at all if possible. Starting after the harvest, Quentin follows the technique of **stubble ploughing** and the **stale seedbed technique**. Initially, he ploughs over with a disc harrow to cut down the residue of the harvest and any weeds. Then, he ploughs over with the tooth harrow (using crow's feet), which will

- on the one hand, destroy any weeds that have rooted after the first ploughing
- on the other hand, loosen the soil and make any remaining weed seeds germinate

This process is repeated 2 to 3 times per year, and enables Quentin to eradicate weeds (the quantity of new growth decreases each time).

Mechanical weeding

Using the **chain harrow** to get rid of weeds: this takes up the roots of weeds, which dry out in the sun. In plots with potato plants, Quentin then goes over them with the **potato hiller** to replace the earth in mounds (and avoid the potatoes becoming exposed).

Rotating crops

For potatoes, Quentin conducts a **7-year rotation**, applying the following model:

- 1st year: potato plants
- 2nd & 3rd years: grain to be harvested (spelt / triticale), possibly with intercropping
- 4th year: grasses and protein crops intended for silage (for livestock); for this, he uses a relatively complex and resistant mixture
- 5th (start of July), 6th and 7th years: grasslands (grass)

For grain crops, Quentin uses a **5-year rotation**:

- 2 years of grain
- 3 years of grassland (grass)

Treating diseases

The only treatments Quentin applies are preventative, against mildew and aphids on potato plants. For mildew, he uses **Bordeaux mixture** (copper and algae, +/- 5kg/ha) to which he will add **rape oil** if there is a risk of aphids (only once every 7 years in rotation except in emergency). If there is an outbreak alert, he'll apply this treatment twice a week.

Financial information

From a financial point of view, these agro-ecological practices cost Quentin the following:

Bordeaux mixture: €160/ha – Rape oil: €150/ha

Crop equipment:

- Potato hiller: €300 (bought second-hand)

- Chain harrow: shared with a neighbouring farmer (€15,000 new)
- Stubble plough: €12,000 at the time (€18,000 today)
- Sprayer

Certain tools are shared with a neighbouring colleague.

Through investing in these chemical-free techniques, farmers are able to stay secure financially, saving a significant amount on chemical treatments and investing instead in long-term methods (eg. rotations) to keep the soil healthy and minimise weeds.