

HIGHLIGHT OF THE YEAR ON THE FARMING CALLE

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Farmers turn over land to alternative uses

TRADITIONAL farming methods were on show alongside the latest

alternative conservation uses at this year's East Kent Ploughing Match.

The venue at Gosmere Farm, Lees Court Estate, Sheldwich, provided visitors with not just a reminder of centuries-old techniques, but also a look behind the scenes of one of the most forward-thinking farms. Landowner Countess Sondes said she was thrilled to host the event, which is in its 58th year.

"I couldn't be more delighted because it really is the farming and social event of the year in east Kent," she said.

"I am also pleased so many people have taken the opportunity to tour our farm and see our approach, which is holistic and conservation minded."

Conservation experts were invited to the show to offer farmers advice on diversification and alternative use of non-food crops.

More than 4,000 people are thought to have visited the event, which is the highlight of the year in the farming calendar, showcasing life in the countryside.

In particular, the horse drawn ploughs were as popular as ever, but the sheep dog trials had to be cancelled because of quarantine restrictions.

Ploughing Match Association chairman David Solley was delighted with the turnout and said it reflected a much more positive mood in the farming industry than had been evident in recent years.

He added: "Not being able to hold the sheep dog trials was obviously disappointing because they are very popular."

"The reason involved the movement

and quarantine of sheep after the event but we are getting to grips with the new regulations and will be prepared next year.

"Farming is changing and more are prepared to diversify to make a living. The mood is quite upbeat but the big question is always what is sustainable.

"Farmers are also sharing equipment to help keep their overheads down." David Hirst, of land surveyors and valuers Angela Hirst, said diversification of land and farm building use was a new growth industry.

He explained: "While good quality arable land is still in demand for farming, we have seen a change to much more amenity based uses, like equestrian."

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PULLING TOGETHER: Vintage tractors in action at the East Kent Ploughing Match at Lees Court Estate. *Ref: 01486846*