

The Institution of Agricultural Engineers

Founded 1938 – Incorporated 1960

IAgrE Team Award 2019

Thatcher's Cider

The Western Branch enjoyed a visit to the cider making facilities of Thatcher's at Sandford in Somerset in the autumn of 2017. John and Martin Thatcher rely on local farmers for approximately 20,000 tonnes of apples every year, and they guarantee payment five days after delivery. A commendable commitment when considering the viciously competitive market that Thatcher's Cider markets their products through. Keeping their roots very much in the agricultural arena, John Thatcher has been involved in research to optimise the planting of trees, developing deeper roots to maximise water uptake.

Significant recent capital investments of £7 million and a further £15 million have significantly increased their bottling, canning, warehouse and distribution facilities.

These projects also included redevelopment of their pub, The Railway Inn. A further £14 million planning application will provide them with a new Cider Mill, planned for commissioning in 2019.

Applying his apple tree agronomy skills and engineering ingenuity, John Thatcher approached a local engineering company SFM Technology to design and build a bespoke harvesting unit. The tri-modular straddle harvester carefully picks the fruit and also undertakes shaping and spraying operations. The machine prevents the apples from touching the floor and is also very efficient in operation.

With an ever expanding market place, this includes Australia; Thatcher's Cider ensures that its continuing development is undertaken with environmental considerations whilst applying the most up to date engineering technology.

