

# PRIME IN THE MINT



Nigel Stangroom

Norfolk farmers Stangroom Brothers Ltd believe in investing in the best tool for the job. A new trailed mint harvester has been proving its worth at Hamrow Farm where they are part of a syndicate providing mint to the Carrow factory producing Colman's mint sauce. "We have to harvest as quickly, efficiently and tenderly as we can," says Nigel Stangroom, a fourth generation director of the family farm.

## Innovation

Another new innovation arrived in April to start the new financial year with a 'bang'. This time it was office based and Di Stangroom, who ran the complex business administration single handed until five years ago, has installed KEYPrime Advanced Accounts for Angela Jarvis, part-time farm secretary for the business and an experienced software user. "I found the system in place inflexible, particularly when editing and searching for transactions, and from working in other farm offices I knew that there were better systems designed for agriculture on the market." Landmark was a familiar name to the Stangrooms as they had been keen users of its marketing software Market Controller in the early nineties when fruit was their main crop.

Much has changed in the twenty years since Landmark was first involved with software supply at the farm. The harvesting season is long, with an influx of labour for the intensive weeding and picking of fruit and herbs. Alongside the more common arable crops there are five ha of Bramley apples with 37 ha of blackcurrants destined for the Ribena bottle. The season starts with chives in March and then until October mint, parsley, oregano, tarragon and coriander follow on – the Bramleys have seasonal pickers who come year after year and who stay on the farm to assist the six full time staff. "They must like it here," comments Angela, "because the same people come back year after year which is good."



Angela has been entering all the business transactions on KEYPrime successfully with only half a day's training from Landmark about six weeks into her use of the system. "Jo Robinson came here in May which was ideal as I had found my way around and had more questions for her, it was more cost effective than at the start. I have used Farmplan, Pegasus, Sage and HNL so I know what we can get out of a system," says Angela.

It was because Angela knew what she wanted and is a competent user that Stangroom Brothers have gone straight onto the new KEYPrime Advanced from another system. "At the demonstration Angela asked about drilling down into an entry directly from the

## A CHALLENGING CLIMATE

Nigel Parsons,  
MD of Landmark

One of the benefits of providing software into our business market sector is the range and diversity of businesses that we support. Landmark is not just about providing a software package on a CD or via download, but being involved in the adoption of that product into the business and making it work to achieve the results agreed with the client - which sometimes provides a challenge!

During the past year we have utilised our property software for the management of caravan storage, investigated its use for a classic car storage business and installed accounts for a road construction company and a wine business.

Closer to our core business in the rural sector, the number of business diversifications revolving around ELS/HLS payments or organic conversions has diminished, largely due to the government policy changes. Instead we have clients investing in many forms of 'green energy' creation, which include biomass plants, hydro plants, wind turbines and the most popular of all, photovoltaic (PV) installations, all of which require some long term planning and budget calculation.

Comprehensive budgeting, integration with Excel and the ability to report over multiple years are some of the main reasons why professionals recommend our products for management purposes over other software. To try and highlight the differences to those not 'in the know' we have commissioned a comparison report between our product and Sage (P2).

All this has happened in a year of extraordinary highs and lows. Whilst we all strive to plan and forecast for our business, the harshness of last winter – especially for those in Scotland, coupled with temperatures nudging 30°C in October, alongside a 30% variation in input and output values, ensures that the skill of head scratching is still required – even with a computer to hand. There is plenty more hard thinking ahead with the re-introduction of set aside and additional crop rotation requirements in the CAP reform proposals.

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▶ bank reconciliation and this is a specific new feature in KEYPrime," says Jo Robinson, a Landmark Sales and Training Consultant. "It made sense to go straight there."

## Time Saving

As with any new piece of machinery refinements are necessary in the field to fine-tune each machine to its required performance and both the mint picker and KEYPrime are in their first year of use. Angela is looking forward to presenting the Stangrooms with some new customised reports from KEYPrime once enough data has been entered. In the meantime she is enjoying the flexibility of her new accounts program: "I like the 'Items' section in which I can relate different prices to products or customers, and the product 'Quantity' button which I use to change quickly from kilos to tonnes and as a time-saver I think that copying a previous invoice is excellent."



Mint harvester supplied by Nicholson Machinery - Norfolk

# THE BIG 6

Recent requests on our support lines included the following. Check these features against your own accounting software and if you find it lacking or want to discuss their use in KEY Accounts give us a call.

**1. Can I Email an invoice directly upon creation?**

Yes, simply select 'save & email' upon completion of the invoice as a one stage process and at the same time choose to print a copy for your records if required.

**2. If I need to send confidential/important reports i.e. neither for amending nor in Excel, can I do this?**

Yes, with the report showing on the screen select the export option and the default setting will be to save as a pdf file which you can then email.

**3. How can I email quickly one, or a range, of my suppliers/customers in KEY Accounts without having to copy their email address into my email?**

Set up the main contact email in your supplier or customer ledger, highlight the account from the list and use the 'email' button to mail directly.

**4. Can I see the running balance of my banking as I enter cheque receipts as I do on the bank paying-in slip?**

The running payslip total (PST) is shown at the foot of the screen when entering receipts.

**5. Can regular payments be set to process automatically?**

Recurring transactions can be processed automatically e.g. Council Tax, N.I. for specific time periods using the STO button in data entry.

**6. After year end will I be able to access bank and VAT information or should I print it out to be safe?**

NO, spare the trees. KEY Accounts allows retrospective reporting so that even in to the next year you can still report between two historic dates.

## Does the old adage

**"In this world, you get what you pay for" still hold true?**



vs



**Q. Why buy a new car for 20K when I can buy a cheaper brand for £8000?**

A. If the cheaper car will do all that you ask of it in comfort, then fine – but if you are commuting 100 miles per day and want a car to last for 10 years then the more expensive option is probably right.

**Q. When I can buy an instant accounts package for around £200, why should I spend over £1000 for an alternative?**

A. Apply the same principle. Do you want something to add up the figures or a tool to use those figures to provide you with management information?

And that is where the Landmark KEY brand comes in. Each year we replace about 30 client systems where the customer is not using the right tool for the job. And how did that happen? It is often because of a lack of proper research at the outset, for example a

potential customer may ask around and say to his accountant, "what accounts software should I use?" to which the answer comes, "well, we use Sage." So the client replies, "so we'd better use the same?" "Yes," replies the accountant. However, the accountant may not have any idea of the management information requirement of the customer and thinks naturally of his end of the business which is accounts preparation. In which case, "yes" seems to be the right answer.

In order to help with the decision process we have commissioned a KEY Accounts and Sage comparison report, which has been independently prepared using input from accountants, consultants and Landmark staff. It is designed to show the pros and cons objectively of the two software systems. For a copy, either in paper or PDF format, please call or email. There is also a shorter précis of the main differences between KEY Accounts and Sage Line 50 on [www.landmarksystems.co.uk](http://www.landmarksystems.co.uk).

# EXPLORING THE DIVERSE USE OF KEY

## - FROM COWS AND ARABLE TO CRUSHING COMPUTER CHIPS...



Haresfield Farms

Madeline Osborne is someone who likes things 'spot on' when it comes to accounts. At Haresfield Farms, in Gloucestershire, she is running two sets of accounts on KEY Advanced for the family partnership headed up by Mark Heywood. Closer to home Madeline has put her husband's business Pilamec, which processes silicon and other metals for the international metal, chemical and ceramic sector, onto KEY Accounts. She explains here why she is happy to be a reference site for Landmark software and how KEY is used for these diverse businesses.

**Q. Tell me about the farms – when did you first use KEY Advanced at Haresfield?**

A. In 1998 there were two large dairy herds and an arable enterprise on the 1,000 acres at Haresfield Farms. Mark's accountants, Woodward Hale, of Cirencester suggested that we look at KEY when our DOS based system ceased to be supported. We didn't need to look outside the accountant's recommendation.

**Q. How has the farming structure changed in the years since?**

A. Haresfield sold out of dairying in 2009. The timing was triggered by going free from TB for just long enough. But there were other issues, principally the price of milk which hadn't, and still hasn't, moved to a realistic level. Two weeks before the dispersal sale our milk buyer Dairy Farmers of Britain called in the liquidators. When KEY first came on the scene there were eight full-time and a couple of part-time employees, 500 head of dairy cows and followers plus the arable land.

We had a dairy program, a different accounts program and we used Sage to run the payroll. Now the farm is all arable you would expect accounts management to be simpler. There may be fewer invoice entries but the structure has actually become more complex with a residential development scheme now attached to the business.

**Q. How did you find KEY Advanced at the outset and does it still perform to your needs?**

A. I found the management reporting in KEY different – and I took some time to get used to it - but over the years the software has progressed and so have I! Now I know the software I can normally get around a problem and allocating stocks has become simplified as the business has changed to contracted arable farming. Roger Winter helps out as part of the Landmark Year End service at both businesses, and as I do like the Profit and Loss to agree to the last penny it serves as a double check for me, and I am sure it saves expensive accountant's time.

**Q. Have you used an 'off the shelf' accounts package?**

A. Yes, we inherited an old accounts program with Pilamec and I could neither input enough detail nor get out what I wanted in management information. I set up and re-grouped the nominals for Pilamec on KEY, based on my knowledge of it from Haresfield. Now, I am able to give Mark and my husband the sort of performance information which is required in today's very tight economic climate – I feel on top of the figures and can highlight a problem to management as it arises. I think that the flexibility and friendly, forgiving format of KEY makes it stand out from a standard retail package.



**Q. How did you get involved in such a specialised business as Pilamec?**

A. My husband was in the agricultural sector, he ran a plant that manufactured granulated lime, but this involved being away for periods of time, so when he had the chance nearly four years ago, to buy Pilamec, and to work for himself he took it.

**Q. What exactly does Pilamec do?**

A. Pilamec is a company which deals in specialised metals; part of the business is to crush slag to reclaim precious metals for customers. The other part of the company is to process metals such as silicon to a very high specification. We can take products from 100 mm down to 2 micron for specialised markets. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the business and the very fine dust we are unable to keep the computer or KEY Accounts anywhere near the industrial unit.



Unprocessed Silicon

Another relevant service we offer is useful as a security measure in the destruction of data discs and computer chips. We mill the items to a fine powder and then return the powder to the customer, or we can dispose of the waste. Data destruction is guaranteed.

**Q. Any software has its faults and KEY is no exception if you had a magic wand what would you change?**

A. My sticking point is normally 'stocks', which I admit I push to the limits, although simplifying the farm structure and knowing the program has reduced the need for too much support. I would love KEY to be able to copy the purchase invoice record over to the stock transaction, so that you did not have to re-type in the description, you would only need to change the quantity. KEY does it at the moment when you copy a purchase invoice to do a journal accrual etc.

I do attend the Landmark winter training workshops because client feedback does get included in upgrades and the group format of going through new features works for me. I find there simply isn't time in the office to keep up to date with the new updates and shortcuts.

All in all I love KEY and I wouldn't change it my motto is: "if I haven't got a problem I don't change it!"

# IF YOU'VE GOT PROPERTY BUILD ON KEY



## Hinxhill Estate is a family run business and is based on the outskirts of Ashford Kent.

The family installed KEY Accounts in 2001 since when, as with many businesses, the structure has changed to accommodate new generations and business opportunities. The farming side is now run by Jonathan, whilst the office, accounts and property business is run by his sister Jo Houchin, who is kept busy as a new mother running an expanding property portfolio. She says: "The development around Ashford, partly influenced by the Euro tunnel link, has provided opportunities for us to convert buildings and increase our portfolio of residential and commercial properties."

"We have a good rapport with Landmark," says Jo. "Over the years I have found the helpline very useful, the guided help and support is never patronising which means that you don't dread that your question is silly."

On the recent purchase of KEY Property software Jo comments on how easy it is to forget that KEY Accounts has a sister product: "Despite receiving all the

mailings (and of course reading them!) we had started investigating an alternative route when with perfect timing another Landmark flier dropped through the door. The fact that we could link a property program to our existing accounts software was fantastic.

"It is not until we started entering the property information that we realised how many additional, small rentals there are alongside the obvious offices and houses – it is a great way of stepping back and drawing together all the information in one place."

Jo is currently expanding her use of the program at a time when she is also coping with an increasingly active baby but she likes the idea of the Works Manager module as she is the only person in the office to deal with property issues: "It is good to have a system where I can record maintenance issues and tenant requests and centrally log them. It is a one step process to email the contractor and the diary means I don't miss

the follow up. Scraps of paper are a thing of the past."

Jo has used the Landmark on-site 'Field Services' to help set up the tenancies, service charges, demand processing and rent receipts in KEY Property. She is happily moving on to expand her use of the software as a management tool rather than purely as a basic diary by adding additional individual property notes and action dates such as boiler inspections and burglar alarm details.

"All it hasn't managed to do so far is to feed the baby," Jo comments!

## NEW LOOK WINTER WORKSHOPS

The Landmark Training team will be taking to the road during November on KEY Accounts swiftly followed by KEYPrime Accounts early in 2012. The morning sessions are split this year so for busy owners/managers an early session focuses on the latest in Management Reporting and later in the morning the theme is TIPS AND HINTS FOR DATA ACCURACY. Attend both sessions if you can as they include new features and the latest developments but take a look at the website or email [donna.curry@landmarksystems.co.uk](mailto:donna.curry@landmarksystems.co.uk) to book your place.



Early Learning - our software manual!

## LANDMARK OUT AND ABOUT...

### Good Memory!

This year Landmark was delighted to sponsor The English Arts Chorale 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Concert. Mary Collis, whose day job is Director of Sales and Training at Landmark, sang in the choir and we were treated to The Verdi Requiem at the Royal Festival Hall as part of an ambitious programme; there was not a music score in sight - impressive?

### Countdown to the Olympics

Who knows when the next UK Olympics will be? The Landmark directors decided to make the most of this unique event and invited members of staff and their

partners to visit the heart of the East End to see the 'legacy bid' in action. There were some fascinating stats and facts from our guide during the day spent exploring The Woolwich Arsenal and shooting ranges, the revived waterways, Olympic Park and Greenwich. The structures are all in place in the Olympic Park and there is some serious landscaping taking place including an order for golden flowers from Suffolk!



Team Landmark