



# FLOWER POWER

*Think the only market for flower growers is florists and supermarkets? If so, you may be surprised at two growers who have found niche markets for their produce*

## Natural confetti – Shropshire Petals

**T**he sun is in the sky, the days are long and warm: it must be wedding season. OK, we're in Britain, so it's not warm, it's probably raining, but it's still the most popular time of year to get hitched - and that's something that's provided one Shropshire farm with a successful diversification opportunity.

Shropshire Petals in Newport supplies wedding parties with natural confetti made from the petals of flowers grown on the 1,400-acre farm.

The diversification business was started by farmer Michael Bubb and his wife Rosemary, who originally saw the business as specialising in dried flowers. However in recent years it's diversified into wheat sheaves and natural confetti, growing a range of flowers including delphiniums, cornflowers and calendula on 40-acres of the farm.

Today Michael's son Jim helps run Shropshire Petals while his other son, John, looks after the other side of the farm that predominantly grows potatoes.

But as Jim goes on to say, whether growing wheat, rapeseed, potatoes or flowers, the biggest challenge is always the same.

"It can all be tricky as you are so dependent on the weather," he said. "A few years ago the weather was really bad and other natural petal confetti growers struggled to get a small harvest.

"We were lucky enough to have planted later in the season and so by the time our crop was in flower; we had missed the bad weather and had a really good harvest."

This, Jim adds, demonstrates the importance of planning ahead to help ensure the business can meet ever-increasing demand. One way the business does this is to harvest more petals than is needed, to ensure there is always a healthy stock to meet demand.

But that in itself is no small ask. Last year the farm harvested two tonnes of petals and expects to harvest more this year, all of which is done by hand.

"Our petals are incredibly delicate, so are handpicked and carefully packed to minimise bruising," Jim explained.

While paper confetti has never been officially banned, most venues and churches won't allow it to be used as it is not 100% biodegradable. Natural confetti does not even need to be cleared up after the wedding as it quickly degrades, making it much more manageable for wedding venues.

"The demand for natural petal confetti continues to increase year after year, especially with wedding trends changing," said Jim. "The summer is of course the most popular time for weddings and therefore we get a lot of orders during this time. However, weddings now take place all year round, which means that demand is fairly even throughout the rest of the year."

But while the confetti business has gone from strength to strength, Jim points out that the move into it wasn't only driven by economic opportunity.

"As part of the farming community we always recognise the benefits of growing sustainable, environmentally friendly products whilst maintaining a farming practice that's kinder to the countryside, so we decided to launch our natural petal confetti," he added.

