

# Standing out from the crowd

PAMELA WELSH

THE Co-op is Britain's biggest farmer – turning over £50m a year, farming 50,000 acres of land and employing hundreds of people.

And thanks to a Macclesfield businesswoman the once-ailing arm has been transformed into

a highly-profitable division.

Christine Tacon was drafted in 10 years ago and now oversees 17 farming units across the country – from Aberdeenshire to Kent.

She said: “There’s a tendency to want to protect the small family farm and this sort of idyllic

way of life. Everybody seems to want to think that’s where their food comes from.

“But they forget that actually the majority of the food – particularly the cheap food – is coming from very large commercial farms.”

Her expertise in agriculture earned her a CBE in 2004 and she is often asked to speak at farming conferences.

The Cambridge graduate, 51, was picked up by the Manchester-based Co-operative group in 2001 after a glittering career at Mars and Anchor Foods.

Christine oversaw the Co-op withdrawing from its dairy farming – once the largest in Europe – because it was not profitable and boosted other areas of its commercial farming operation instead.

And she believes the Co-op still stands out from the business crowd.

Christine said: “In the year that RBS lost its money, Co-op Bank made £28m more profit than RBS, because we believed in only lending money that people had deposited with them.

“Yes, we looked old-fashioned but when the chickens came home to roost, we were still the stable business, which was doing business the right way.”



**SUPREMO** Christine Tacon, head of Coop farms