

# Is your farm computer fit for purpose?

Today computers are an important piece of kit on any farm —whether it's sending emails, registering calves, managing robotic equipment or maintaining spray records. As in any other farming job, having the right equipment in the office is important.

## Do I need a new computer?

Whilst it might be obvious that a new computer is overdue, some farmers would benefit from upgrading or replacing their computer, **even if it still works** because their operating system is no longer supported.

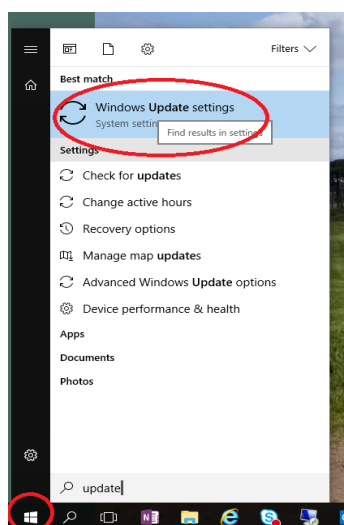
Version	Release Date	Support Status
Windows 98	1998	No longer supported
Windows XP	2001	No longer supported
Windows Vista	2006	No longer supported
<b>Windows 7</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>Will be unsupported from 14 January 2020</b>
Windows 8	2012	No longer supported
Windows 10	2015	<b>Supported</b>

Every computer has an **operating system** —the most popular is Microsoft Windows. Microsoft release a new version of Windows regularly, each version an improvement on the last in terms of security and useful features.

On an ongoing basis Microsoft produce regular updates that your computer downloads from the internet. These small improvements to the software help to protect your PC from viruses and other malicious software. They are important because hackers will constantly try to find weak spots in the system—the updates plug these holes.

**Older versions are not 'supported' forever and when Microsoft stop providing security updates then this is definitely time to upgrade your operating system.**

Depending on the age and specification of your current computer it may be possible to upgrade to a new operating system without replacing the machine, and normally when a new version of Windows becomes available there is a short window during which users of the previous version are eligible for a free upgrade. A suitably qualified local computer engineer will be able to tell you if you need a new machine, or if an upgrade to your existing equipment is possible.



To access information about updates on your computer click on the 'Windows' symbol on the bottom left hand side of the screen, type 'Update' and select **Windows Update Settings**.



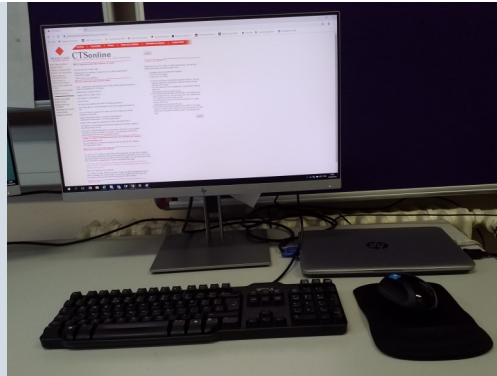
# If I do need a new computer—what should I buy?

Farmers use many specialist software products but relatively few of these will require more than a fairly basic modern computer. You are more likely to exceed a basic entry level spec if you want to use the computer for personal use also such as watching movies, editing photographs or gaming.

Depending on the brand and type of computer you can expect to pay around £300—£500 + VAT for a basic laptop capable of basic farm business functions. You should also budget an additional £150 + VAT for a large widescreen monitor, keyboard and mouse.

## Why would I want a monitor—isn't laptop is designed to be mobile?

if you regularly use a laptop at the farm desk then you should seriously consider investing in a monitor, laptop and keyboard. These are relatively inexpensive and can make navigating around programmes easier and quicker as well as being better for your back. Entering data is much quicker if you use a keyboard with a numerical keypad—useful when bookkeeping.



## Laptop or Desktop?

Nowadays laptops are becoming increasingly popular. They can have the same advantages of a desktop machine—you can still use a monitor, keyboard and mouse, but with the added flexibility of being able to move them around easily. For basic entry level machines there isn't a huge difference in price.

## Where should I buy a new computer?

Broadly your choices are to buy online, in a national chain of stores, or from a local independent computer shop—each has advantages.

Shopping online, provided you do your research carefully and you're confident that you can set the machine up yourself, can be an inexpensive way to buy a new computer. However there can be significant advantages in buying a machine locally, particularly when it comes to getting help. A local computer supplier can set up the machine for you initially and then provide any ongoing technical support you might need (for instance help with updating your operating system when an upgrade becomes available). National chains can be a good place to buy the computer initially, but these may not be suited to providing ongoing support, and if your computer develops a problem they may not be able to help you in-store immediately, being more likely to send your computer away.

## Basics of Computer Specification

There are a few important considerations when choosing a computer (though a reputable supplier should help to match you to an appropriate machine).

The **CPU (Central Processing Unit or 'Processor')** is the brain of the computer. There are two numbers of significance, the first is the speed measured in gigahertz (GHz) - the higher this number the faster the computer, particularly things like exporting large files like photographs. The second is the number of cores—the more cores (e.g. dual core, quad-core) the more things your computer can do at once without slowing down. You would see the benefit of a more powerful processor if you have lots of programmes running or lots of open web browser tabs.

The computer's memory is also very important. There are two types: **RAM (Random Access Memory)** is needed by computer for routine function, it's what allows it to remember where you are as you flick between programmes. The other type of memory you have is the **Hard Drive** which is where information, such as programmes, files, documents, photographs, videos etc are stored. If you want to store more information on your computer (for instance if you want to store photographs rather than using a virtual 'cloud' based storage system then you will need a larger hard drive than if you rarely save photos or videos onto your computer.

