Farming for our future:
The nature friendly climate solution we urgently need
With over 70% of the UK being agricultural land, the Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) believes that with the right support, our sector can play a key role in reducing UK carbon emissions and reversing wildlife declines.

This report demonstrates, through farmer case studies and surveys, the potential for farming systems that are sustainable both for farming and the environment.

Food and farming need to change on a large scale to support a sustainable future for us all.

However, over 90% of farmers surveyed think that the farming industry is currently ill-equipped and under-resourced to build the movement and transition to sustainable food production, at scale.

This is where the NFFN can help.

We are an ever-growing community of farmers, organisations and the public providing a strong voice for sustainable farming. The NFFN is committed to securing farming policies that support wildlife, mitigate climate change, will support sustainable agriculture and provide fairness for farmers.

We believe agriculture needs to be profitable and sustainable, and farmers should receive adequate payments for undertaking environmental and nature friendly activities.

The NFFN is committed to demonstrating to the wider public what farmers can do for wildlife, whilst still producing plentiful quality produce. We will seek to build markets for nature friendly farming products. We encourage transparency in food supply chains to allow people to make informed sustainable food choices. We demonstrate to decision makers the value of sustainable nature friendly farming to ensure there is support within government and the supply chain.

We are building a knowledge base to share research and offer advice, support, and training. We are producing a guide on practical ways farmers can help achieve net-zero carbon targets.

The NFFN is calling on foundations and other funding organisations to recognise this opportunity to help support farmers during these challenging times – and make a positive difference for farming and the environment.

Act now and be part of the solution.

Our climate is in crisis. Our soils are degraded. Wildlife is threatened. Habitats are declining. Now is the time to act - can you help us?

Foreword by Martin Lines
“Now is the time for nature friendly farming to become mainstream. Unless we urgently transition to a farming system that produces sustainable food, reduces emissions, restores habitats and sequesters carbon, farmer livelihoods and future food production will be threatened, and the impacts of climate change will escalate.”

Martin Lines
Farmers across the UK need urgent support to respond to the climate emergency and transition to a sustainable farming system that will deliver long-term food security and protect biodiversity.

A survey of NFFN farmers reveals that an overwhelming majority (95%) believe that farming with nature will play a critical role in addressing and mitigating climate change, and 99% see nature friendly farming addressing environmental protection and improving biodiversity.

However, 90% of farmers surveyed think that the farming industry is currently ill-equipped and under-resourced to build the movement and transition to sustainable food production, at scale.

These findings follow the State of Nature report earlier this month, that found a quarter of mammals and nearly half of birds are at risk of extinction.1

The intensification of farming has had the greatest impact on UK’s nature, with wildlife population declines of 60% since 1970.

A recent report from the Environmental Funders Network shows that agriculture and food currently receive under 10% of UK-directed grants from foundations to provide support to transition to more sustainable agriculture and climate friendly farming practices.2 And yet the latest IPCC report shows that better land use is a critical resource to tackle climate change.3

It’s clear that farmers across the UK feel ill-equipped and under-resourced. The Nature Friendly Farming Network can play a pivotal role in upskilling farmers but we need financial support to do so. We are calling on foundations and funders to release the capital we need to support farmers during these challenging times so they can adapt.”

Farmers are key to addressing climate crisis and wildlife decline - but urgent financial support is needed to take nature friendly farming to scale.
Farmers want continued and increased support from the NFFN, to influence policy and to connect with the public, to jointly demand UK food is sustainably sourced. They want a knowledge base to share best practice and explore innovative techniques to support farmers’ transition to nature friendly based farming at scale:

- **81%**
  Strongly believe that the NFFN should support farmers by raising awareness of nature friendly farming to the public to increase the demand in the marketplace.

- **76%**
  Feel strongly that the NFFN needs to support farmers by lobbying and meeting with politicians to secure pro nature friendly farming policies – that supports wildlife, sustainable and climate friendly farming, and fairness for farmers across the UK.

- **74%**
  Feel strongly that the NFFN should support farmers by creating a knowledge base for farmers to share best practice, research, insight and experience with other farmers.

- **73%**
  Strongly believe that the NFFN should support farmers by exploring and educating on new innovative techniques that can support farmers with achieving agronomic, environmental and social benefits, while retaining valuable aspects of traditional farming.

- **92%**
  Believe that the NFFN needs to support farmers by reaching out to other farmers across the country to help them understand their carbon footprint and how they can meet net-zero and climate targets, support biodiversity and improve water, soil and air quality.

- **64%**
  Strongly believe that the NFFN should support farmers by developing new partnerships with conservation organisations that can support the farmers in transitioning to more sustainable farming methods.
In the survey 98% of farmers thought that maintaining high environmental standards should be a key requirement of future trade deals post-Brexit.

The survey revealed that the farmers believe that nature friendly farming is essential to address the following issues: 99% believe it supports environmental protection and biodiversity, 98% thought it was critical being able to build a sustainable food system, 82% for increasing food security in the UK, 83% for animal welfare standards.

Farmers are asking for urgent increased support from the NFFN to help deliver a sustainable food and farming future. Nearly three quarters (72%) think that support from organisations, like the NFFN, will be critical to help scale nature friendly farming and deliver net-zero carbon targets.

The UK government promised to reward farmers for public goods – including environmental protection of the land under management. Over half (54%) of farmers don’t trust the government to deliver on the public money for public goods policy and 36% are not sure. Half of farmers (49%) do not believe that £3 billion, which is hoped British farmers will receive under new legislation, is enough to support nature friendly farmers to deliver public goods and ensure that they protect the environment.

Farmers are calling for more funding and resource for the NFFN. The now 1,000-member strong farmer network is not only a lobbying organisation for farming with nature and the environment, they also connect and support farmers across the UK. Just this month they launched a practical guide for farmers to help achieve net-zero carbon emission targets.

Farmers face significant threats post-Brexit as environmental standards come under threat and there’s a lack of certainty on future policies.

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Charlie Cole
Rose veal and goat kid farmer
Broughgammon Farm
Moyle, Northern Island

How important is nature friendly farming and why?
Nature friendly farming is essential. Not only to conserve nature but also to secure the long-term future of farming itself. We are facing huge problems globally and locally regarding soil health, water quality, the loss of wildlife from our landscapes and climate change. If sustainable, regenerative farming practices become mainstream, farmers could be the solution to these challenges.

How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK?

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How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK?
We need to encourage new entrants into farming, support innovation and mainstream agroecological practices within our agricultural colleges.

How will we get farming to change?

We must showcase a positive vision of what can be achieved through nature friendly farming. We need a long-term commitment from government to support this transition and to build on the environmental successes that have been secured through current policy, whilst avoiding the mistakes of the past.

Farmers play a variety of roles; from producing food and managing landscapes, to providing employment and contributing to local communities. For years our focus has been increasing yields, which has led to a lost connection with the end user and consequences for the landscape. But we now have a huge opportunity to fully realise the multifunctional benefits that farmers provide.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?

Since taking the farm on, we’ve accomplished a lot to benefit nature and improve the underlying sustainability of the business.

We have species-rich acid grasslands which we graze sensitively to ensure optimal conditions for plants and wildlife. We’ve restored a network of hedges and pockets of woodland around the farm. We’re in the process of establishing a farm rotation through our good fields to benefit soil health and contribute to carbon storage. Next year, we’ll be implementing an agroforestry project, which will make a huge contribution to wildlife - attracting beneficial pollinators that will increase yields and the business’ bottom line, all whilst enhancing the carbon storage capacity of our farmed landscape.

We’ve shown that it’s possible to farm sustainably and survive. It’s a work in progress and there’s much more to learn, but we’re proud of where we are.

Will Brexit affect you and how?

Brexit will affect us massively. We’re from Northern Ireland, so we’re heavily reliant on the Republic of Ireland market which has traditionally been easier to access than the UK. As a small business, all of our planning has been within the EU framework so any change in that framework will be costly.

In regard to our environmental policy, ‘public money for public goods’ is just an echo of the CAP 2020 proposal - we just need to ensure it becomes a reality post-Brexit and that farms retain the financial security in their businesses to actually implement those proposed public goods.

What do you think of farming policy – what needs to change?

Ultimately, food & farming policy has led us down an unsustainable path and the environment has lost out. Environmental objectives and adequate funding must be incorporated into all aspects of food and agricultural policy, so that farming businesses view the environment and sustainability as a core aspect of their business, rather than something that is ‘nice to do’.

What do you need from government?

Government needs to commit to putting nature at the centre of policy and there needs to be clear guidance and timescales for farmers. Transitioning towards a progressive, profitable and sustainable farming sector will require long-term investment, but the rewards will be worth it.

What do you need from citizens – how can they help?

Consumers have a vital role to play. Currently, there’s a disconnect between customers and farmers and a lack of understanding on what is good or bad for the environment. We need to educate people where their food comes from and how it’s produced. Our model works because we build relationships with our customers, who value the products and buy directly. This isn’t achievable for all businesses, but more can be done to create a connection.

What nature friendly farming methods do you need financial support for?

There’s so much more that we want to do on the farm to help benefit nature. For example, we are currently without support for the maintenance of our species-rich grasslands. These are vital habitats, which have experienced a 98% decline in the last 50 years, so we will continue to manage these as it’s the right thing to do for nature. Support for farmers who manage habitats like this is desperately needed and should be a priority.
How important is nature friendly farming and why?

Nature friendly farming provides many of the solutions to the challenges currently faced by farmers, businesses and society in general. It helps us to address the environmental impact of how we grow our food and how that affects the climate.
How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK?

Traditionally the role of the farmer has been to grow food, as government agricultural policy has been focused on food production. But the role of the farmer is changing to include providing solutions to climate change and improving environmental diversity.

What specific role do farmers play in tackling climate change?

Arable farmers are seeing huge benefits from using cover crops in between cash crops. In the intervening 6-month period between harvesting our wheat crop and sowing our next crop, we grow a diverse mix of plant species which pulls carbon and nitrogen from the air, improves soil health and provides a great habitat for wildlife, including wading birds, lapwings and curlews.

Will Brexit affect you and how?

Brexit presents both threats and opportunities. The biggest threat to farming is the implications for trade – the uncertainty is killing us. Our trade relationship with the EU has been fantastic but now our trade borders will potentially be opened up to cheaper food produced at lower environmental and welfare standards, which will be a big threat to our own food production.

But there is a flip side. We will have a blank canvas to create a new, modern agriculture policy, providing fresh solutions to the problems faced by the farming community. It designed correctly, it could be of huge benefit to both farmers and wider society.

What do you think of farming policy – what needs to change?

Farmers are reluctant to engage in environmental schemes now because they’re worried they won’t receive payments on time. When farmers sign up to a scheme, they need certainty that they will be paid or they lose trust in the system and ultimately it is wildlife and the climate that suffer.

What do you need from citizens – how can they help?

All of us as consumers have a responsibility to pay the environmental cost of their actions. When consumers buy cheap food that is produced with low environmental standards, at no point do they pay the environmental cost of that food.

An equivalence payment would counter this, rewarding farmers who produce food using more sustainable systems such as species-rich grass fed beef, sinking carbon into the soil. We need to transfer money to the farmers that are working with nature, which doesn’t happen in a natural market, and we must create a mechanism whereby consumers pay the true environmental cost.

What nature friendly farming methods do you need financial support for?

Much depends on the Brexit outcome. If we see challenges to exporting crops due to trade barriers, we will see prices drop and we will suffer financially despite having world leading welfare and environmental standards. Arable farms need help to incorporate cover crops into their rotation, manage diverse boundary habitats, and with providing hedges and trees which are under-resourced. The natural habitats already exist – they just need to be managed in a way which supports wildlife.

What is the value of the NFFN?

The NFFN is centred on enabling a common-sense approach by taking grassroots ideas to government and communicating what does and doesn’t work. It’s also a really useful network in the long-term. Many changes we make won’t be commercially driven, such as ending our reliance on certain agrochemicals and innovation, so that’s where the farmer-level exchange support is so important.

Any other comments?

I’m cautiously optimistic about the future. If farming policy allow us over the next 5-10 years, we could become a world leader in finding solutions to the problems we face. Climate change is something which needs addressing globally. It’s got to start small and grow from there.
How important is nature friendly farming and why?

Nature friendly farming is the direction we should be moving in, to restore ecosystems and safeguard the landscape for future generations. In order to rear good quality food and have a positive effect on our environment, farmers must harness the potential of nature.
How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK?
To continue to make good quality food for society, manage the countryside and natural habitats, and champion the successes that can be achieved for the wider public benefit.

What role do farmers play in tackling climate change?
Farmers are perfectly positioned to combat climate change. Farming needs to include protecting soils, carbon storage, water sequestration, water protection, renewable energy and planting trees, as well as educating the public on the positive impacts of farming systems and reconnecting people with the landscape.

Here in the Elan Valley, we see the positive impacts that our traditional farming system has on the landscape – not just the quality of the water and the soils, peat bogs and upland habitats that store carbon, but also the rich varieties of rare wildlife.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?
We’ve planted a Ffridd habitat for the Welsh Clearwing moth, introduced fruiting trees for the wintering birds and installed a pond which is home to water voles. We have peat bogs which capture carbon and our stock is grass fed all year round which reduces our carbon footprint.

Will Brexit affect you and how?
Brexit is an opportunity to positively change and move forward with a long-term, big-picture vision for the environment. But I fear that we could lose people in the upland landscape and this will have a knock-on effect on wildlife.

What support do you need from Government to tackle climate change?
We need stronger planning policies in place to protect water courses and hedgerows. Farmers need officers that provide advice on water management, protecting rivers and other conservation activities. In Mid Wales we are at risk of losing our freshwater pearl mussel in the River Wye because of silting up and nutrient enrichment.

We also need support to promote quality products – for example wool can help tackle pollution from synthetic fibres. Finally, we need to rear quality, pasture fed meat, which has a lower carbon footprint but is affordable to everyone.

What help do you need to understand your climate impacts and the opportunities to deliver mitigation?
We need advisory officers with the ability to deliver advice and listen to the ideas on wildlife, habitats, climate change and water protection on farm and to see potential connectivity across a specific landscape.

What is the value of the NFFN?
The network brings together farmers championing sustainability and provides us with a united voice to ensure nature is at the heart of the future of farming. It is vital because we share projects and support other farmers, but we also engage with the public about the ‘good’ that farmers are currently doing.
How important is nature friendly farming and why?

Nature is the most efficient system for farming businesses. Building a business that complements and enhances natural processes will ensure the long-term sustainability of our business. The more we work against nature or try to control naturally occurring aspects of our land, the more costly it will be for our business and our health.
How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK?

A farmer’s role is to produce food, steward the land and be a hub for the community. Currently, the latter two aren’t associated with farming and that needs to change if we are going to effectively tackle climate change and reverse biodiversity loss.

What role do farmers play in tackling climate change?

Farmers are critical in the fight against climate change because healthy soils are continually building organic matter and sequestering carbon. If you are a good farmer with good soils, then you are minimising the impacts of climate change and protecting the environment.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?

We take a holistic approach to farming and avoid chemicals: that means no fertilisers, no pesticides and no herbicides. We use regenerative grazing practices to improve the health of our soil and ensure we only have breeds that are suited to our land.

Will Brexit affect you and how?

Brexit is both a threat and an opportunity. We are concerned that Brexit could bring an influx of low welfare, higher intensified produce into the UK. If that does happen, we would hope to see citizens using their purchasing power and buying from local producers that farm sustainably.

What do you need from citizens?

We need consumers to re-evaluate and re-assess the value they place on their food. If you are aware of the deterioration of the environment and conscious of biodiversity decline, one of the most powerful ways you can help is by buying from a local, small scale, regenerative farm business. By making these farms a success you create the model for others to follow. The power is in the consumer’s pocket.

What nature friendly farming methods do you need financial support for?

We need more funding for agroforestry projects, including more hedgerows, more pasture trees and more scrub creation in fields. This would allow us to protect habitats, avoid erosion, manage climate risks and capture carbon without reducing the agricultural productivity of our land.

What help do you need to understand your climate impacts and the opportunities to deliver mitigation?

We need support in monitoring and understanding our systems so that we can identify the individual and collective impacts of climate emissions. For example, we recently undertook a carbon audit which didn’t acknowledge increased tree cover or soil health, both key to carbon cycles and carbon sequestration. Having a more holistic understanding of farming systems can help inform farmers how to maximise their impact.

How will we get farming to change?

The current system is largely driven by subsidies which incentivise food production – rather than the benefits that farmers can provide to soil, water and biodiversity. To change the farming industry, we need to educate farmers on the benefits of nature friendly farming and ensure we all receive subsidies that will help us to restore and protect the environment.

What is the value of the NFFN?

The NFFN has a united voice in the industry, advocating for nature friendly farming, which is critical to building a nature-based farming system that can mitigate climate impacts. Farming with nature is good for your bank balance and good for your health.
Nature friendly farming is the only sustainable way to farm to ensure long-term food security and protect farming businesses. It supports wildlife across the farming landscape, protects soils and water courses, and gives us the ability to produce sustainable and healthy food.
How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK?

Farmers manage over 70% of the countryside, so we have a tremendous responsibility to deliver sustainable food from a landscape that restores and protects ecosystems.

Intensive farming practices have had a huge effect on biodiversity and the environment, but farmers can and must be part of the solution. By transitioning to a more sustainable farming system and making use of the green infrastructure and innovation that’s available, we can drive positive change.

What nature friendly practices have you implemented on your farm and what have the impacts been?

We have delivered over 4km of new hedgerows, providing a network of new habitats and improving water courses and soil health. By working with nature, beneficial insects and pollinators have boomed which means we have stopped using insecticides and our yields have still increased. The move to direct drilling and the addition of cover crops has greatly benefited the soil because the bacteria is kept alive and leaching to water courses is prevented. Significant savings have been made - fertiliser and pesticide use has dropped by 30% and we have reduced our fuel use by over 60%, all of which has had a positive impact on air pollution and the landscape.

“Nature friendly farming is the only sustainable way to farm to ensure long-term food security and protect farming businesses.”

What do you think of farming policy and what needs to change?

We need a clear action plan and assurance that the marketplace will support nature friendly food. I want to see a sustainable production system that reduces food waste, reduces food miles and produces healthy food for local markets.

What is the value of the NFFN?

The NFFN gives an important voice to those farmers already delivering for the environment. We are now a large body of farmers who have the know-how to tackle the climate crisis and deliver a sustainable farming system. The NFFN is working closely with NGOs and politicians to ensure we’re all moving in the right direction.

What do you need financial support for?

I needed support 10 years ago and I’m worried we are running out of time. The climate emergency is not a future problem to fund, farmers in the UK are already experiencing the devastating impacts.

We urgently need this money to deliver climate mitigation methods. I have no income stream to make the bold changes that are required, which means I can only do the bare minimum and that is not good enough.

What can citizens do to help?

The relationship between farmers and consumers must change. We need people to buy local, sustainable and seasonal produce from wildlife friendly farms that are delivering for our environment and protecting our climate.

What farming policies do you need to tackle climate change?

Farmers must first understand their climate impacts to mitigate the crisis we’re facing. It’s imperative that new policies fund solutions, provide investment for new technology and support methods that reduce carbon footprints and capture carbon. New policies must provide financial support for this because farmers cannot do it alone. I would also like to see a policy that ensures all food is clearly labelled with its carbon footprint.

Will Brexit affect you and how?

Whether Brexit will be an opportunity or a threat depends on the exit deal and the trade deals that will allow the movement of produce. My biggest concern is a reduction in the quality of imported products. Standards must be increased, not decreased.

What help do you need to understand your climate impacts?

I need a clear assessment tool so I can understand the carbon footprint of my entire operation and the steps I need to take to become net-zero or carbon negative. In the future, I think there will be an opportunity for farmers to sell carbon credits to other industries to offset their footprints.

What do you need financial support for?

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We urgently need this money to deliver climate mitigation methods. I have no income stream to make the bold changes that are required, which means I can only do the bare minimum and that is not good enough.

What are the impacts of climate change?

Reducing the carbon footprint of my entire operation and the steps I need to take to become net-zero or carbon negative. In the future, I think there will be an opportunity for farmers to sell carbon credits to other industries to offset their footprints.

What can citizens do to help?

The relationship between farmers and consumers must change. We need people to buy local, sustainable and seasonal produce from wildlife friendly farms that are delivering for our environment and protecting our climate.
How important is nature friendly farming and why?

In a world with a growing population, farmers have a critical role to play in the future existence of humanity. I believe nature friendly farms are the most resilient and productive farms.
How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK?

Farmers need to produce high-quality food that optimises the use of finite resources, in a way that minimises environmental impact and embraces and enhances nature.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?

We have implemented a mixed farming approach, trying to be as self-sufficient as possible. Growing red and white clover minimises the amount of fertiliser we need to buy and protects the soil.

In a way, we’re following the traditional methods that were used until 60 years ago. Mixed farming tends to be nature friendly – it creates variety in space and time, and a greater diversity of habitats.

What have been the impacts of nature friendly practices on your farm?

We are surrounded by intensively managed grassland, so growing 15 acres of unsprayed spring oats and leaving the stubble over winter has created a valuable winter food source for farmland birds. This activity has produced a financial benefit of about £3,000 per year from savings in bought in feed and straw and the Glastir environmental scheme payment it attracts.

Will Brexit affect you and how?

In one way, Brexit is a threat, as agricultural products from parts of the world where the cost of production is lower and the environmental cost is higher could flood the UK. This would drag down prices and create a ‘race to the bottom’, which is worrying. Our farm relies on the European mainland as a significant outlet for what we produce.

On the other hand, it could be an opportunity to create a UK agricultural policy that uses public money to reward nature friendly farming.

What do you think of farming policy and what needs to change?

Historically, farming policy has encouraged production at all costs and any funding for delivering environmental benefits has been miniscule in comparison. Policy has favoured the large, established farmer and discouraged the younger generation who want to do things differently.

Giving money to farmers just because they farm needs to stop. Future schemes need to be outcome-based, rewarding farmers for enhancing biodiversity, improving water and air quality and capturing carbon.

What do you need from citizens – how can they help?

I think the main driver for change will come from the consumer. We need the consumer to create the demand for food produced using nature friendly methods. We are already seeing large supermarkets influencing standards. The consumer needs to be sufficiently well-informed, have an interest in the provenance of food and consider the consequences of the choices they make.

What nature friendly farming methods do you need financial support for?

We need immediate support for things that do not deliver instant financial benefit to the business, such as the restoration of hedgerows. There is a massive cost involved in establishing them and as time and money is short, this will not happen unless funding is provided.

How do your farming practices make you more resilient to climate change?

As we are more self-sufficient, we are less exposed to the volatility of input costs that climate change is exacerbating. By having mixed crops and livestock, it’s not a huge disaster if an extreme weather event occurs.

How will we get farming to change?

If we use a three-pronged approach from government, the consumer and from farmers themselves we can create the change we need to see. Government needs to incentivise and fund nature friendly and sustainable agriculture. The consumer needs to create the demand and farmers need to understand the benefits of farming in a way that is good for nature and the environment. At the moment, there’s a lack of awareness of the impact that industrial farming is having on nature, soil, air, water and animal welfare. There needs to be more emphasis on teaching the next crop of farmers a more holistic approach to food production.

What is the value of the NFFN?

The NFFN is the one of the only organisations that brings farmers from all parts of the country and all farming systems together, be it large, small, conventional, organic, arable, livestock, lowland or hill. What unites us is our passion for farming in a way that benefits nature and the environment. The network also has a good influence over how agriculture policy is formulated and educating the public.
How important is nature friendly farming and why?

The wildlife and landscapes we cherish today are dependent on sustainable farming to protect and enhance the current habitats and populations of resident and migrant species.
How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK?

Continuing to maintain our landscape and provide habitats for our wildlife. We need a range of farming activities – grazing, woodland and arable – to retain the wide range of habitats and landscapes that are integral to nature.

Food production runs alongside this, as does carbon capture, flood alleviation and other ecosystem services.

More recently farmers have become major players in the production of green energy, from solar and wind, another contribution to reducing fossil fuels.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?

We’ve planted over 5km of hedges and around 1.5ha woodland with 2,000 trees. We manage our grasslands with zero artificial fertiliser input and delay cutting to protect the Irish hare. Recently we’ve incorporated a 20kw solar farm to produce will support local heritage, nature and landscapes.

“Focus on short local supply chains and how investing in local produce will support local heritage, nature and landscapes.”

Public support for environmental land management has provided a valuable additional income stream, and we bring in around £30,000 per year from beef weaned calves, pedigree cattle and increasingly from finished quality meat sales.

Implementing renewable energy has provided £5,000 per annum from ROCs, as well as considerable savings on farm electricity costs.

As a result of moving to a low input grazing regime, we’ve achieved a reduction in contractor costs for artificial and slurry spreading of £4,500 per annum. Our hardy native breeds are more resilient, allowing for a reduction in veterinary bills. We’ve developed a growing market for our grass-fed beef through direct sales to high end users including hotels, restaurants, cruise ships and private sales.

Will Brexit affect you and how?

Being in Northern Ireland, I have concerns regarding agri food balance with competition from neighbouring farmers in the Republic of Ireland who will receive more subsidies and will not be subject to beef export tariffs. There’s also the risk of competition from other countries with lower welfare and environmental regulations, depending on future trade agreements. I’m also worried about the dilution of our laws regarding environmental protection for wildlife and the potential of a rise in costs for essential inputs.

What do you think of farming policy and what needs to change?

Current policy is still too focused on production and increased output with not enough emphasis on working with the environment. Northern Ireland is currently in the process of developing future policies regarding both agriculture and the environment, and Government need to make the most of the opportunity to create policies with a central focus on environmental delivery through nature friendly farming. It is essential that future farming policy reflects the role that the protection of natural assets has in underpinning our landscapes and cultural heritage. Food security and sustainable production are important and in a post Brexit climate may bring opportunities for more locally sourced foods and supply chains of quality products from our natural environment.

What do you need from citizens – how can they help?

Consumers must demand quality and be aware of food security and good production methods and systems. There must be added value for products which respect animal welfare and are positive for the environment. Focus on short local supply chains and how investing in local produce will support local heritage, nature and landscapes.

What nature friendly farming methods do you need financial support for? And how urgently do you need this support?

Further support to build a herd of native breed cattle up to a critical mass with enough product to meet demand.

Additional support for farming in High Nature Value Areas, which have the potential to deliver so much for society in terms of carbon capture, water quality, resilience to flooding and of course nature. There needs to be more support for tree planting in the right places to help lock in carbon and build resilience.

Support for the farming industry to ensure young blood and new starts can enter the farming industry and lower the average age of what is a very mature workforce. This will be key in ensuring that farming has a sustainable future.
How important is nature friendly farming and why?

Biodiversity loss is a massive global issue, alongside the climate emergency. Restoring nature and biodiversity is now crucially important to global society and to human survival.
The role of a farmer in the UK is a combination of food production, carbon capture and delivering biodiversity. There is a mountain of evidence that suggests farms are able to capture carbon, so we must manage farms in a way that helps us meet our net-zero carbon targets. We must be responsible both in terms of reducing the emissions which we produce and mitigating emissions through our own farming innovation.

We make sure we leave sufficient time before we mow to allow the ground to support a rich mixture of flowers and grasses and provide valuable nesting habitat for birds.

We have created hay meadows, which support a rich mixture of flowers and grasses and provide valuable nesting habitat for birds.

We have mixed grazing of cattle and sheep, which aids biodiversity on the farm. We have also eliminated antibiotic usage, which can have detrimental effects on the food chain and water.

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We make sure we leave sufficient time before we mow to allow the ground nesting birds to lay eggs and give the fledglings time to fly away.

What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?

One of the most important things we’ve done is reduce stocking rates and rebalance our livestock so we have mixed grazing of cattle and sheep, which aids biodiversity on the farm. We have also eliminated antibiotic usage, which can have detrimental effects on the food chain and water.

We have created hay meadows, which support a rich mixture of flowers and grasses and provide valuable nesting habitat for birds.

We make sure we leave sufficient time before we mow to allow the ground nesting birds to lay eggs and give the fledglings time to fly away.

What have been the impacts of nature friendly practices on your farm?

Perhaps the most noticeable change has been the growth of plant life on the farm. There were plants that I didn’t even know existed until we started putting some of our nature friendly practices in place. These plants provide a habitat for invertebrates, allowing birds to follow. We regularly see red-listed species including curlew, lapwing and skylark.

Will Brexit affect you and how?

I don’t know how Brexit will affect the farm. I’m a staunch remain and I think Brexit was a terrible decision, especially regarding the environment. But regarding nature friendly farming, I think the future could still be bright, if certain promises are kept by the Government. Brexit could be an opportunity – but we must keep going in this positive direction of policies that support payments for public goods.

What support do you need from Government to tackle climate change?

Support is exactly what we need. Take carbon capture as an example - if we can measure the amount of carbon we capture on the farm, and are paid per kilo or tonne, then we are being paid for providing a service to the Government. I see this as no different to producing a lamb, except we are paid by the government rather than the open market. The same principle can be applied to biodiversity, though this is slightly more difficult to measure. Fundamentally, we need the Government to pay us to help our farm become a carbon-neutral, biodiversity-rich environment.

What do you think of farming policy and what needs to change?

Being paid simply for owning an area of land, as happens at the moment, isn’t a sensible way to pay farmers. It doesn’t provide enough justification for the work we do, when we have to compete with the NHS, education and other departments. We need to find a better way of valuing the work that farmers do. Policies that support farmers to manage their land for carbon storage, water quality, biodiversity and other public goods is the way forward.

What do you need from citizens – how can they help?

We need citizens to be aware of how the produce they buy is farmed. We need to provide them with the facts so that they can make their own informed decision. They need to understand that there are different methods of food production, rather than just putting us all into one great category of ‘farmers’. We need consumers to support nature friendly farming through their buying choices.

What nature friendly farming methods do you need financial support for?

We currently get support via the Basic Payment Scheme, but this doesn’t provide much help for carbon capture and biodiversity. The real urgency here is climate change; the government needs to change the emphasis on its farming priorities, so that we receive the financial support to help us tackle the most important issue facing us.

How will we get farming to change?

There is an increasing number of farmers who are becoming more aware of climate change. But to achieve serious change in farming, it comes down to Government policy.

The Government must drive change and put the right mechanisms in place to lead farmers in the direction of nature friendly and climate friendly practices.

What is the value of the NFFN?

The NFFN has achieved amazing traction in just two years’ existence. The network has come to fruition at just the right time, and by influencing and lobbying the government in the way that it has, we have really seen a difference. The NFFN’s role in getting our message across to government has been crucial.

*Restoring nature and biodiversity is now crucially important to global society and to human survival.*

The role of a farmer in the UK is a combination of food production, carbon capture and delivering biodiversity. There is a mountain of evidence that suggests farms are able to capture carbon, so we must manage farms in a way that helps us meet our net-zero carbon targets. We must be responsible both in terms of reducing the emissions which we produce and mitigating emissions through our own farming innovation.
Mixed organic tenant farmer
Slade Farm, St Brides Major, South Wales

How do you see the role of the farmer in the UK? What role do farmers play in tackling climate change?

The farmer’s role has become disconnected from production and the end user. We need to reconnect with consumers. By doing that, farmers will understand the requirement to be more environmentally friendly and to reduce our impact on climate change. Our current impact is significant, so we must change the way we’re currently living.

Polly Davies
What nature friendly farming practices have you introduced on your farm?

Through the provision of overwintered stubbles for birds, red clover fields for bees and wild mouse drips for small mammals, we support farmland wildlife so it can flourish. The farm is organic so we don’t spray pesticides or herbicides and we reduce our impacts by managing nutrients through farm land manure and green waste.

By managing hedgerows on a two-year cycle, the red-listed yellowhammer populations have increased significantly.

What have been the impacts of nature friendly practices on your farm?

We’ve been running agri-environmental schemes with the Welsh government for 20 years, and over the last 10-15 years nature has increased exponentially. The larger predator birds at the top of the food chain are very evident and large flocks of red-listed species including linnets, choughs and yellowhammers have appeared, which is a sign that we’re improving their habitats.

Will Brexit affect you and how?

Brexit is largely a threat in the short-term, due to the uncertainty around commodity prices. However, in the long-term it will be easier to make improvements to the landscape and my farming business. If I had a choice, I would stay in the EU because of the amount of risk that farmers are facing in terms of prices. We don’t know what’s going to happen. The supermarkets are stockpiling and it disrupts the whole system, which is disastrous for farmers.

What do you think of farming policy and what needs to change?

I’m quite happy with farming policy in Wales, it focuses on environmental goods in various ways. I’d like for the more advanced or more complicated schemes to be promoted because they can have the biggest environmental impact. But as long as we don’t run out of money and we actually get paid then I don’t have a problem with current policy.

What support do you need from Government to tackle climate change?

I urgently need support for all of my farming methods, to deliver a landscape that benefits wildlife and reduces climate change risks while producing sustainable food. Without financial support for farming practices that make us more resilient to climate change, I can’t put them into practice. They need to be viewed as economically viable so that we can get the support.

What help do you need to understand your climate impacts and the opportunities to deliver mitigation?

The Welsh government’s consultation document is proposing a sustainable advisor to advise farmers, which seems sensible. I personally prefer advice from NGO’s because they have the specialised knowledge of bird and plant life which leads to tangible outcomes.

What do you need from citizens – how can they help?

Citizens need to be more aware of their buying power and I’d encourage them to always buy local, or organic if they can’t buy local. That way, they can have a full understanding of where food comes from and its environmental impact.

What nature friendly farming methods do you need financial support for?

I urgently need support for all of my farming methods, which is totally and utterly different to small-scale British beef production. Pushing people towards pork and chicken, which has a very high cereal requirement, is very environmentally damaging because the process is linear and not circular. We all need to eat less meat, but there needs to be an understanding that British beef, especially organic, is environmentally friendly and can have a positive effect on climate change, not negative.

What help do you need to understand your climate impacts and the opportunities to deliver mitigation?

The Welsh government’s consultation document is proposing a sustainable advisor to advise farmers, which seems sensible. I personally prefer advice from NGO’s because they have the specialised knowledge of bird and plant life which leads to tangible outcomes.

How will we get farming to change?

It’s not right to only ask the farming community to change. The consumer needs to be engaged first, so that the demand for nature friendly food is there. Putting the blame on farmers is not practical.
We need to scale up the nature friendly farming movement to tackle the climate emergency and ensure long-term food security.

1. **Farmers** – join the movement of nature friendly farmers
2. **Funders/investors** – support the movement of nature friendly farmers
3. **UK Governments** – drive policy and deliver on public goods
4. **NGOs** – increase the levels of support and advice for nature friendly farmers
5. **Citizens** – support local sustainably grown food and sign up to the NFFN to support farming with nature
“This timely report demonstrates again that farmers and growers are part of the solution to global heating and the biodiversity crisis. Together with NFFN and over 60 other civil society organisations we are calling on Government to deliver an ambitious cross-departmental food and farming strategy that supports farmers to provide healthy food through sustainable methods.”

“The RSPB applauds the NFFN for the vital role it’s playing in raising awareness of and taking practical action to tackle the nature and climate emergencies. The NFFN recognise the urgency of the challenge and are pushing for action on the ground and sufficient funding to support farmers as part of a fair transition to a future farming system which delivers great food, wildlife friendly areas and practices which are compatible with climate targets.”

“We welcome this very timely report which sets out just how farmers would like to play their part in developing nature friendly farming systems that are sustainable both for farming and the environment.”

“The NFFN is showing how agriculture can help fix the climate emergency, reverse nature decline and produce high quality food. By adopting nature friendly solutions such as more trees on farms, less intensive and better-quality meat and dairy we can work towards a farming system that is better for the planet.”

“Farmland is vital for wildlife and wildlife is vital for farming. It is crucial that the right habitats are created in the right place across farmland, that those habitats are safe for wildlife including pollinators and other invertebrates and those habitats are managed long-term for wildlife. To create a network of nature friendly farmland, farmers need ecological knowledge, skills and advice - and financial support.”

“It’s vital the Environment Bill and the Agriculture Bill are strongly linked with a firm focus on rewarding land managers for delivering environmental public goods, like improved habitats for nature, carbon sequestration, clean air and flood alleviation. Increasing tree cover will be a key part of delivering these benefits and the Woodland Trust is committed to working with the Nature Friendly Farming Network to drive forward our shared ambition for net-zero carbon emissions.”

Simon Billing
Executive Director
Eating Better

Thomas Lancaster
Head of Land Use Policy
RPSB

Liz Bowles
Associate Director, Farming and Land Use, Soil Association

Nick Rau
Campaigner
Friends of the Earth

Dr Catherine Jones
Buglife

Darren Moorcroft
Chief Executive
Woodland Trust

The following partner organisations welcome and advise the NFFN: