



# Gethin Owen

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**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 sping 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. These schemes need to be for the actual person managing the land and not the landowner, and should incentivise the

landowner to give security of tenure to the person who is actually managing the land.

## 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.

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