



Jock Gibson

Livestock Farmer
Edinvale Farm,
Scotland

Jock is a livestock farmer in Scotland, who, after inheriting the farm from his father decided to work with nature rather than against it. Jock is currently supporting his local community by adjusting their business model to support local and national deliveries, they are now completing a months' worth of business in 2 to 3 days. They have also teamed up with other local businesses to deliver on their behalf, helping vulnerable people receive the food and goods that they need.

Tell us why you are a nature friendly farmer?

My Dad was a good farmer and he was starting to see the benefits of working with nature but perhaps slightly reluctant to take the right steps and change the practices on the farm. When I inherited the farm, I had the opportunity to do what I want. For me, working with nature as opposed to against it seems an obvious way to go. We're not changing overnight, we do have to do it step by step, but the more we can work with nature on the farm the more enjoyable it is and the better a product we produce.

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

We already have wildflower margins on the farm. The biggest change we have made is with our grazing management. This allows us to have better soil health, management and by leaving large proportions of the farm without cattle on it for extended periods of time allows nature to thrive and we're seeing a wider variety of species come onto the farm – from hare to butterfly species.

We're trying to minimise how we plough and tillage. We've cut fertiliser in half by being clever about how and where we use it. Farmers can be more intelligent with how we use it and by looking at different grass species, we're hoping we can do away with it altogether.

What benefits in nature have you seen on your farm? Any specific impacts would be really helpful.

By keeping areas out of grazing we've seen an increase in the population of oyster catchers on our more marginal grounds and certainly within the grazing areas as opposed to having cattle roam on all the grazing areas, we only have them on one sixth of the area at any given time. So, the animals graze tightly on specific parts of the farm and then moving them around. This allows grass to be left to grow and flora and fauna increases in these areas. Cattle goes back on the areas, but this happens gently. We're not destroying areas of habitat and we're not destroying species that are there with cattle. They're getting the chance to move on, and they're coexisting with the livestock on the farm.

We have seen a big influx of hares and butterflies are abundant. We are generally seeing more species coming through and generally the population is increasing.

How do nature friendly farming methods make you more resilient to climate change?

We are carbon auditing every year and from the last twelve months, we've reduced our CO2 equivalent of dead weight meat by about

40%. This happens by increasing the output from the farm. We're able to carry more animals per hectare and this greater efficiency allows us to reduce the CO2 per kilo of beef that's produced.

By not ploughing the ground we're not releasing carbon into the atmosphere, we're adding a layer of grass and by giving the grass a rest between grazes we're allowing the grass to grow its roots, grow more and this means it can absorb more CO2 and lock it further into the ground.

What needs to change in farming policy to support the future of farming?

On the face of it, public money for public good is a good idea, my concern with the current policy is that people will be paid for doing things like putting in hedgerows, wildflower margins or turning land into sallow, but what happens when all that is done? I'm worried that there will be public money to support these things for a finite amount of time.

Where does the incentive come for continuous improvement? What happens to subsidies as a whole? What happens to the cost of food production? What happens to food security if those subsidies go? We need long term, flexible, and measurable farming policy to effectively address these issues.

How has the Coronavirus pandemic impacted your business and distribution?

Two weeks ago, I was having sleepless nights when people were being told not to eat at restaurants because that was 80% of our business that was going to disappear overnight.

We very quickly managed to realign, and we have been incredibly lucky with the support we have had locally and nationally from people coming and buying from our local shop or ordering online. We are now doing a months' worth of work every two to three days.

Are you involved in any initiatives that support the local community or people?

We are helping the local community by teaming up with local business who don't have the same resources as us and making their deliveries for them. We have also been going to the Co-op to collect milk and butter for people that are self-isolating. That way, vulnerable people who can't leave their homes don't need to wait for weeks to receive their supermarket orders.

What would you like to say to people at this time about the role of UK farms to protect nature?

Farmers and food producers are incredibly grateful for the support that we are receiving at the moment. By supporting local food producers and helping them generate a profit, you are helping them to invest back into their business and do all the things that the general public want farmers to do, like invest in nature.

How can the public benefit from what you're doing on the farm?

With social distancing and self-isolation, it is difficult for the public to get the most out of our farm. But with tools like social media it is great that we can offer people a glimpse of nature while they are at home.

What do you need from consumers?

We need consumers continued support. We want them to know that it is not a hassle to deliver to them. By allowing us to help people, people are helping us in business, and helping us keep our staff employed. I hope that afterwards the support will continue.

What do you need from the government?

Moving forward we need clarity and the truth from the government so that we can continue to make informed decisions.

A photograph of two Highland cows in a field with mountains in the background. The cows are dark brown with thick, shaggy fur. They are standing in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a clear sky. The overall scene is peaceful and rural.

“We need consumers continued support.
It is not a hassle to deliver to people and
by allowing us to help, they’re keeping
local businesses alive.”

JOCK GIBSON, SCOTLAND