



# Sally-Ann Spence

**Mixed Farmer**  
**Berrycroft Farm,**  
**Wiltshire,**  
**England**

Sally-Anne Spence is an entomologist and farmer based in Wiltshire. Berrycroft Farm is a family farm, run by Sally's husband and brother. It produces wheat, barley, oats, and beans - the rapeseed oil goes to McDonalds for frying, the wheat goes to Warburtons for bread. Around 100 acres of grassland is grazed by native breed livestock that actively restore the grassland. Sally's an enthusiastic science educator who also runs an education and research centre on the farm.



### **Why did you sign up to the network and why are you a nature friendly farmer?**

I come from a livestock and mixed farming background and I know that farming and conservation must go hand-in-hand. 71% of land in the UK is farmed. As a conservationist I need to be working with farmers. As a farmer, I want to see conservation on farms. Nature friendly farming is great for biodiversity and means that we can pay the bills.

### **What nature friendly practices have you introduced on the farm?**

The farm is part of the Higher Entry Level Scheme and we're involved with a farmland bird project. We work hard to support farmland birds, by; feeding and ringing them to monitor numbers, putting up feeders and nest-boxes for tree-sparrows and barn owls, leaving bigger field margins, and putting out songbird posts for corn buntings who won't mate unless they have song perch.

Our permanent grasses are grazed by native cattle breeds, which restore the soil. We fluctuate the numbers of stock on grass at

different times of year, according to how the grass is growing, which means we decrease animals when flowers are ready to set seed.

We are also working with a local mental health charity by bring people onto the farm who benefit from being outside. I also organise ecology and wildflower walks to help people understand about farmland birds and how we can protect them, as over 70% of farmland birds in arable areas are ground nesting.

### **How has this impacted nature?**

The wildlife count has gone through the roof. A good example of this is the huge increase in gentians and bee orchids. There is a phenomenal number of insects on the farm that are on the species red list species. We are also working hard to restore certain species, including the brown hare, water vole and otter.

### **How do these methods make you more resilient to climate change?**

Healthy soils are crucial to climate resilience. No tillage or minimal tillage drilling makes sure our

soil structure is as untouched as possible, which is good for the invertebrates. Dung beetles are really important because they break down dung quickly, which means it isn't fermenting and producing methane that would otherwise enter the atmosphere.

Permanent grassland like ours sequesters carbon at a good rate. Planting hedgerows and woodland increases our resilience to future climate events and by leaving winter stubble on the ground we are not leaving bare ground open to soil erosion.

### **What do you think needs to change in farming policy to make sure future of farming supports nature friendly farmers?**

Policy needs to focus less on intensive output and more on farming with nature. We must see a reduced reliance on chemicals and increased value in habitats, wildlife and beneficial insects. Technology also has an important role to play to help us farm efficiently without using as many chemicals.

We have to be more sympathetic to the natural world, so policy should incentivise farmers to

produce food on farms that work with high animal welfare and environmental standards.

### **Why do you think that the NFFN is important?**

The NFFN allows us to showcase that farmers are conservationists as well. Farmers are custodians of the land – they take joy in seeing nature. The NFFN is a great way to get people to understand that farming isn't detrimental to the landscape and that many farmers are producing food, whilst embracing nature.

Family farms that have a connection to the land, communities and wildlife are being pushed out by giant estates. These farms must be supported by the public and the NFFN can help with this

### **How has the Coronavirus pandemic impacted your business and distribution?**

My own personal business, which is the nature education centre, is dead as it involves people coming here. However, we're lucky in that the food distribution has not yet been affected.

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

I have also organised a street coordinating group in my local community, to make sure people are registered for food aid. There are over 600 people within parish, I know everybody and have direct contact with the district council, so I set up a coordinated group before lockdown to make sure those who needs extra help can get it. We are now bringing all the medicine to the village, which I do when it snows anyway, and we're working with the village shops to coordinate online and phone orders. Everybody is supported, there is not one person in parish who hasn't go someone to look after them.

I regularly post videos of nature on the village Facebook and share updates. Normally, the lambing barn is open to the village, so I have been trying to share videos with local groups so that the children can still feel involved and close to nature. We also removed our sheep from the nearby fields and did a leaflet drop telling people to go up there, let dogs off the lead and enjoy themselves.

### **What is the role of farmers to provide food for people now?**

The UK imports a lot of food and this could be affected as countries may alter their exports. People are now realising how important our own farmers are in providing healthy and sustainable food, and now that farmers are doing deliveries, people are paying a decent price for good quality product. It's locally sourced, sustainable, ethically produced and environmentally sensitive.

### **Focusing on ways in which consumers and support farmers. What do you need from customers and consumers at this point?**

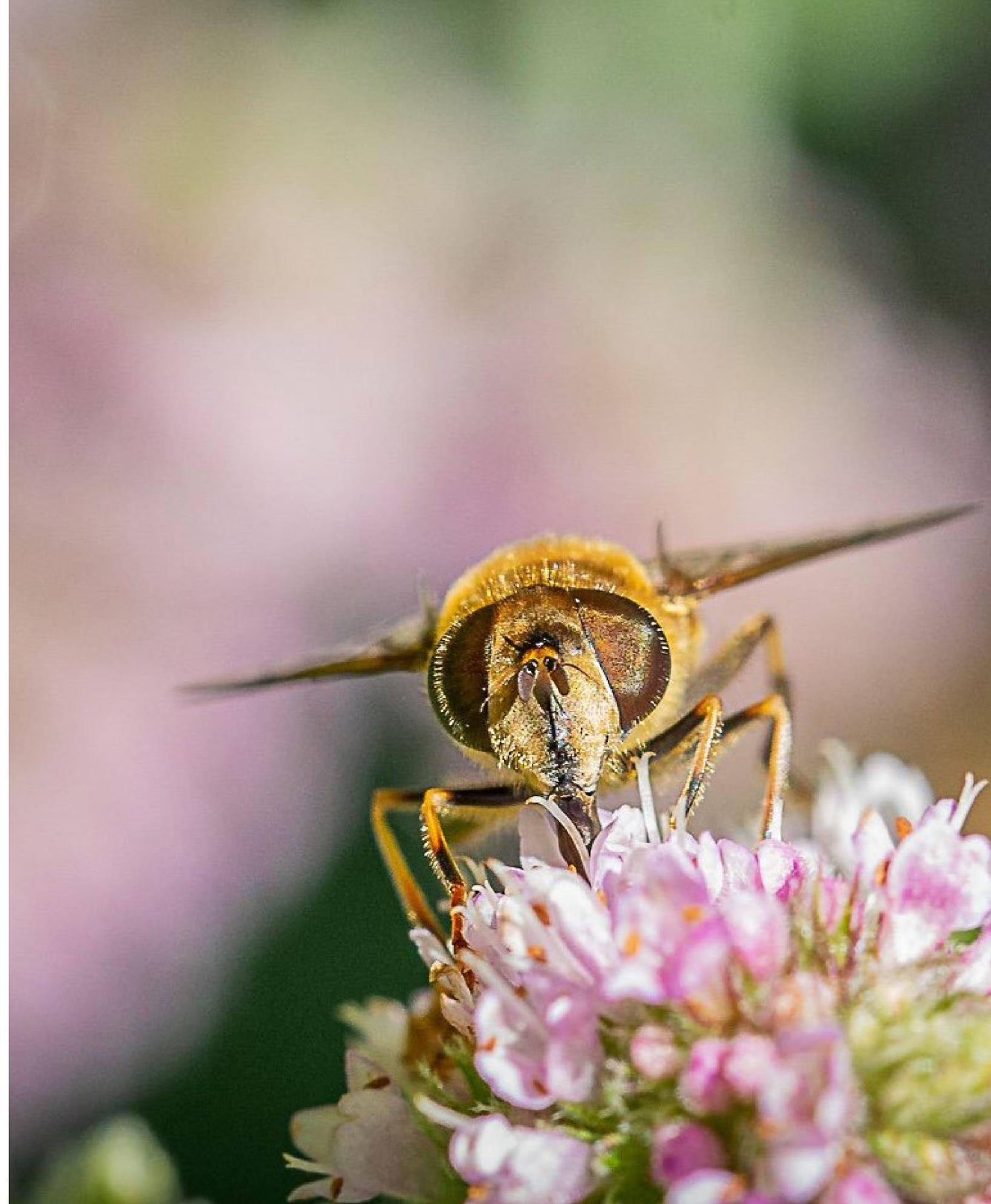
Farm diversification businesses have been hit hard. For example, farms that host weddings, glamping and workshops wildlife safaris. Consumers can support farms when they start running these businesses again by re-booking and visiting when it's safe to do so.

This is a time to support farmers' great produce, you can buy it online and get it delivered.

### **What do you need from government?**

Support. An understanding and reassurance for the future. We need to see some recognition for what farmers do as key workers producing food, and improved financial support so that we can continue producing food in a sustainable way. We need fair markets and fair price for a good product.

Covid has revealed how important farmers are to our economy and livelihoods. There's also a huge gap between the consumer and the farmer. The government should be thinking about adding agriculture onto the school syllabus so that people better understand where food comes from.





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