



CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE

*NFU Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust
have developed an exciting initiative*

‘CHAMPIONS for Change’ highlights the positive action some farmers are already taking, such as creating woodland, improving soil health, reducing inputs and restoring peatlands.

This project also sees Scottish Wildlife Trust and NFU Scotland jointly calling for the wider benefits that farming can provide, which go beyond food production, to be better recognised and rewarded.

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NFU Scotland



Scottish
Wildlife
Trust

Andrew Barbour on
his farmland →



Sheep benefit from being near trees.



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ANDREW BARBOUR

WE farm at Mains of Fincastle in Highland Perthshire. The farm is a family affair. We run cattle and sheep, and we also grow trees. As the ground sits on a limestone ridge, it's botanically very rich. Much of the farm is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. This nature value is at the core of how we run the farm, so as well as being organic, we view the cattle as being absolutely vital to our whole approach.

We run the cattle on a low input extensive grazing system. They spend the summer on the hill, keeping the sward open for the flowers and sweet grasses, and feeding the insect life and soil with their dung. We keep the cattle out for as long as possible, bringing them off the hill to the more sheltered parts of the farm, before bringing them to the shed for the winter. This is where trees come into their own. Cows love trees, and use them for itching, shelter and shade, and they

selectively browse the leaves, especially in the spring.

Our sheep also utilise the trees. At over 1,000 feet, we see great benefit in the spring when grass is in very short supply. It's great to be able to put sheep and lambs in round the trees where young grass comes away sooner than anywhere else on the farm. Likewise, in snow, sheep will find open ground under trees.

Mixing cows and sheep and trees is an old story. Cattle, especially, are historically a woodland animal. What is new is planting in a pattern so the animals can graze through the trees instead of crowded round the edge of a traditional,

12'


OF GRASSLAND

impenetrable shelterbelt. We grow dense strips of oak, rowan, and other hardwoods clean and straight for a timber crop. Between the trips is 12 feet of grassland which can be grazed by stock. With this approach, we have a developing timber crop, shelter and shade, grazing and a rich wildlife habitat. Trees also contribute greatly to making the farm carbon neutral – something that is, quite rightly, an increasingly hot topic.

For too long, farming and forestry have been at loggerheads.

Andrew Barbour has brought farming and forestry together



“We have seen here that growing trees on a farm is not just possible, but positively beneficial”

Willie Thomson's farm benefits the environment



WILLIE THOMSON

I AM the NFU Scotland Combinable Crops Chair and I farm near North Berwick. I am in the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme. Over the winter, I have a field of overwintered stubble which is then sown in a green manure mix that has a lot of pollinators in it. It will have phacelia and at least two types of clover, and probably vetch in it as well. That has the great benefits of giving extra flowers for the pollinators to feed on, but it also improves soil health, increases fertility and sequesters carbon at the same time. It really is ticking a lot of boxes for not just the pollinators, but the environment and the wider biodiversity that we're trying to encourage on the farm.

I'm very proud of what we do. We're very near North

Berwick and people stop and take photos of the vibrant flowers that are in full bloom in mid to late summer. There is a wall-to-wall field of purple flowers, phacelia and vetch, so it is something very visible that the public can see. It enhances the landscape but the benefits to wildlife are obvious as well.

We don't always have the best reputation as an industry but schemes like the Agri-Environment Scheme are a great way of trying to repair some of the damage to



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Certain types of farming and certain types of forestry are incompatible, but we have seen here that growing trees on a farm is not just possible, but positively beneficial. You have a slow-growing plant which enhances the welfare and profitability of your stock, which is great for biodiversity and carbon capture, and it is a viable crop in its own right. ♦



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our reputation, and I think these schemes should be encouraged. We have 40 beehives on the farm. Two years ago, when we were first in the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, I had a knock at the door from a beekeeper who has a honey business. He was amazed at what we were doing on the farm and approached us to see if we could have some hives. We were happy for the hives to come on to the farm, but it shows that the beekeeper could see that we were on track with what we were doing. All I get as payment is a few jars of honey per year, but I'm delighted if the beekeeper wants to come and work with us.

Are we typical of what we are trying to do? Not everyone has got into an Agri-Environment Scheme because it is a competitive scheme. The landscape across Scotland would look a lot different if these schemes weren't competitive and



40 BEEHIVES



we could all dip in to take these biodiversity measures, although I appreciate the budget isn't there for everyone.

Another thing I would like to do on the farm for pollinators is to start growing beans. That would be another flowering plant after

The bees are part of the farm's biodiversity measures

the oil seed rape but before the agri-environment green manure, so there would be a continual food source for the pollinators. Sadly, some of the rules around growing beans on Environmental Focus land make it nonsensical. Like organic producers don't have to do greening, I would propose that if you're in an Agri-Environment scheme, you wouldn't have to do greening as well because you're already going above and beyond on your farm with the environmental measures you're doing. If I could grow beans without the additional restrictions that are placed on EFA that would help my rotation, help my farming business, but it would also help the pollinators.

Scottish farmers are doing a lot, although we probably could do more. We need to get buy-in from all concerned to make the countryside even more vibrant than it already is. We're all working towards a common goal, but we need to make it an easier decision to do the right thing. ♦



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