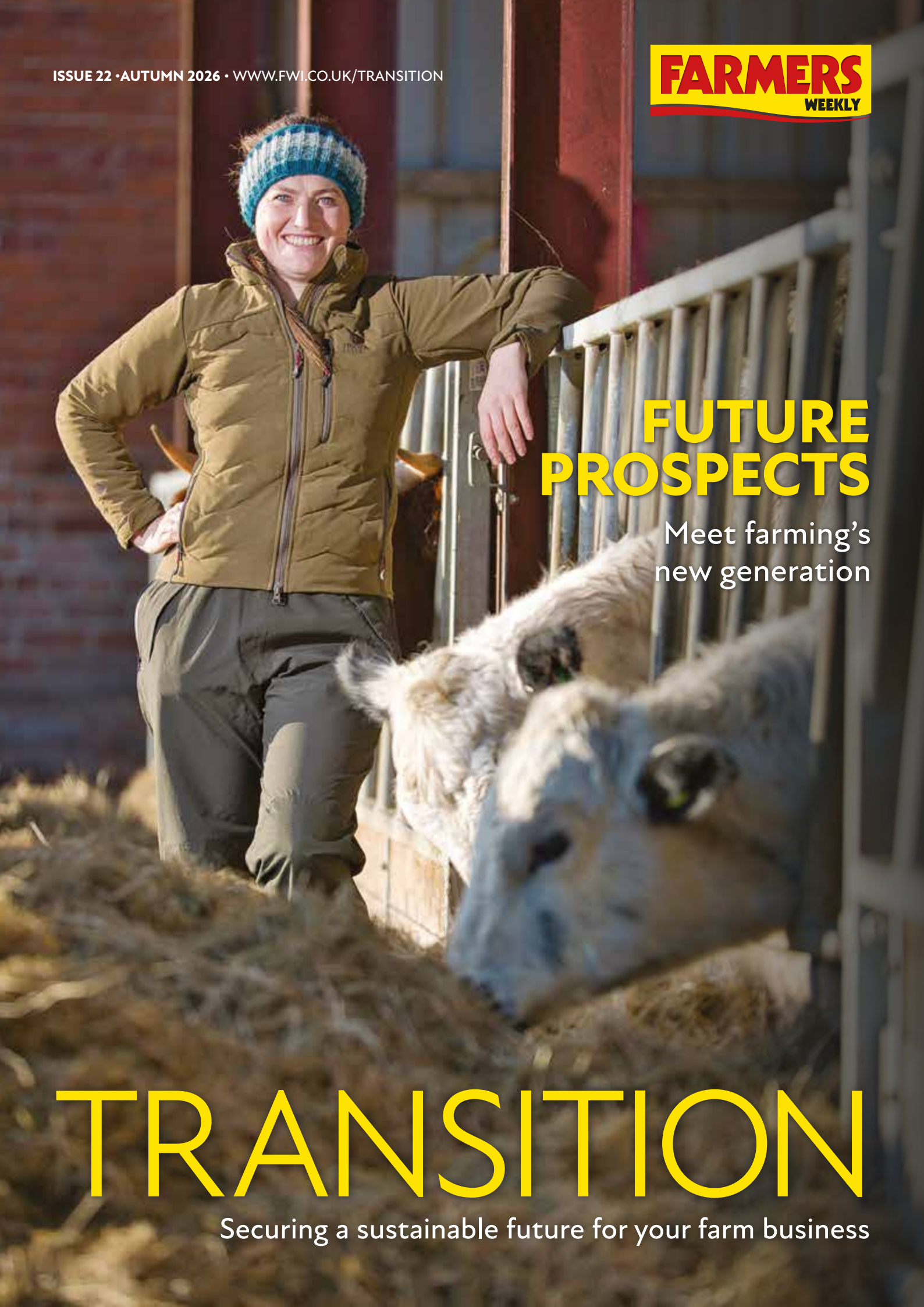
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FARMERS WEEKLY



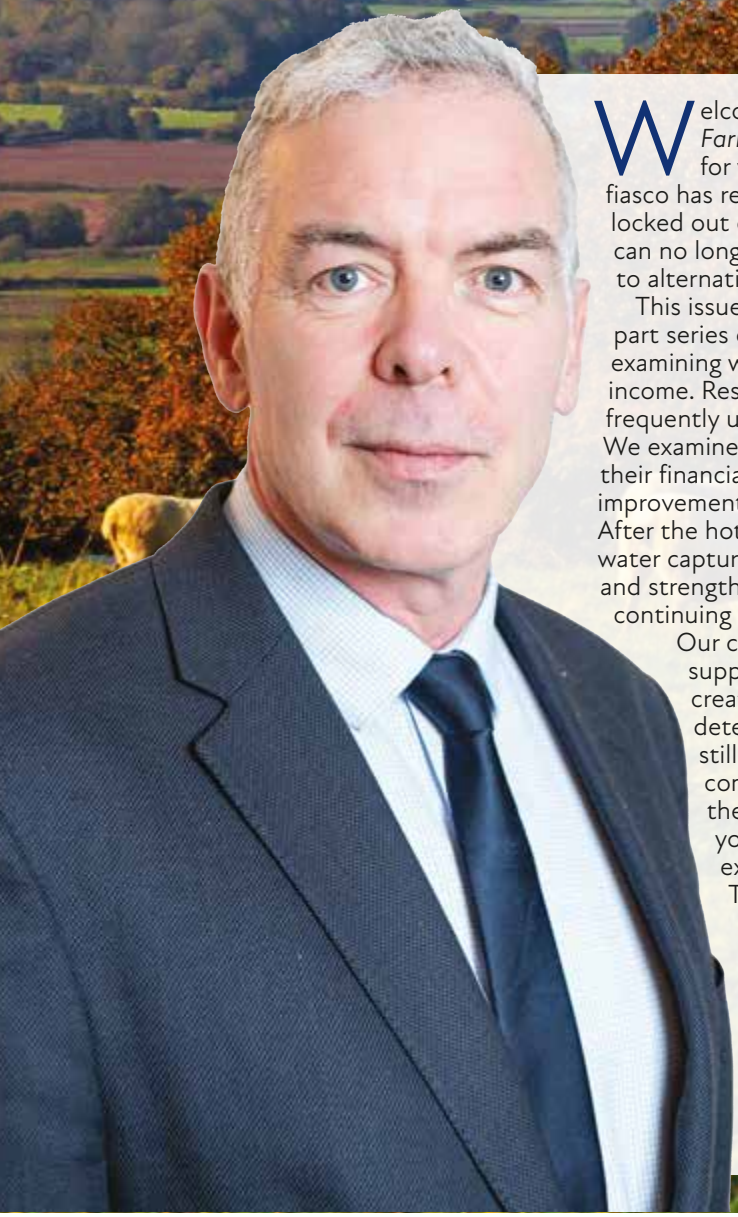
FUTURE PROSPECTS

Meet farming's new generation

TRANSITION

Securing a sustainable future for your farm business

How nature can balance the books



Welcome to *Transition* – the quarterly supplement from *Farmers Weekly* to help secure a sustainable future for your farm business. The fallout from the SFI26 fiasco has reinforced an uncomfortable truth. With thousands locked out of the scheme, growers and livestock producers can no longer afford to rely on Defra support, so transitioning to alternative revenue streams is becoming a necessity.

This issue opens on that theme with the first of a four-part series on how to put nature on the balance sheet – examining ways to turn environmental assets into reliable income. Resilience is another returning theme. It is a word frequently used in farming and deserves closer scrutiny. We examine the key indicators that can help farmers assess their financial and operational strength and identify where improvements are needed. Water is one of those indicators. After the hottest summer on record, we investigate how better water capture and storage can help safeguard production and strengthen long-term business resilience. Despite the continuing upheaval, there are also reasons for optimism.

Our cover story meets enthusiastic young entrants supported by supply chain initiatives that are creating opportunities for the next generation. Their determination is a welcome reminder that farming still attracts ambitious people with fresh ideas and a commitment to the industry's future – even during these difficult times. We would like to say thank you to our Transition Farmers who share their experiences of adapting to changing circumstances. Their successes and challenges offer valuable lessons to us all. We're also grateful to our Transition Partners for sharing their expertise, help and invaluable advice. For more about our Transition initiative – and farm management advice, please visit our knowledge hub at **fwi.co.uk/transition**.

Johann Tasker, *Transition* editor

OUR PARTNERS

The *Farmers Weekly* Transition Partner Network is a UK-wide community of farmers, industry stakeholders and influencers working together to secure a sustainable future for UK agriculture. If you would like to join and want more information, contact Anna Eccleston at anna.eccleston@markallengroup.com

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Farm trials tell sustainability story behind modern breeding

Sustainability is about using resources responsibly to meet present needs, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.



LG Breeding Pathologist, Rachel Goddard



Limagrain's demo farm trials are helping to tell the real sustainability story behind modern plant breeding: how improved genetics can support both economic and environmental performance on-farm. For today's growers, sustainability is no longer simply about reducing environmental impact. It is also about protecting profitability, improving resilience and making every input work harder.

That is why breeding for sustainability is a central focus for Limagrain across its crop portfolio. The common objective is clear - to develop varieties that help growers produce reliable, high-quality crops while using resources more efficiently and reducing risk to yield.

The evidence from Limagrain demo farms shows how this breeding focus translates into practical value. Through improved disease resistance, stronger agronomic characteristics, nutrient-use efficiency and enhanced resilience to weather extremes, modern genetics are helping growers deliver more sustainable crop production without compromising financial bottom line.

Trials results

Recent on-farm trials and commercial results from Atkin Farms in Staffordshire and Dennington Hall Farms in Suffolk, demonstrate how Limagrain varieties are already delivering this balance in real farming systems.

Disease resistance is a key example. Stronger resistance packages help protect yield while managing risks. At Atkin Farms, winter oilseed rape varieties delivered yields of up to 5.63 t/ha for LG Avenger, despite no sclerotinia spray being applied, with total crop protection spend across trial and commercial crops reported at less than £219/ha. The LG Armada achieved a total yield of 4.87 t/ha, with a straw yield of 5 t/ha at £50 per tonne.

Similarly, winter wheat and winter barley varieties demonstrated robust performance in a season characterised by prolonged spring dryness, temperatures reaching 37.5°C and limited rainfall. At Dennington, LG Defiance achieved yields of up to 13.9 t/ha in direct-drilled large demonstration strips, which is excellent given the 6.9 t/ha national average*, and LG Caravelle demonstrated consistency, yielding 10.96 t/ha in the large demonstration strip, and 8.25 t/ha across 125 ha of commercial production.

This ability to maintain performance under stress is becoming increasingly important. Climate volatility can quickly erode both environmental gains and farm margins. Varieties with strong agronomic packages, including disease resistance, strong specific weight, standing power and stress tolerance, help reduce risk and give growers greater confidence in their cropping decisions.

Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE)

NUE is another important contributor to sustainability. Fertiliser remains one of the largest variable costs on farm, making every kilo count. Genetics that convert available nutrients into grain more effectively help maximise returns, while improving overall resource efficiency.

The results from both farms highlight this potential:

- At Dennington, LG Defiance achieved 8.67 t/ha with only 166 kg N/ha, delivering a net margin of £741.58 per ha.
- At Atkin Farms, LG Rebellion produced commercial yields exceeding 9 t/ha from 190 kg N, plus sulphur.

What this tells us

Through continued investment in plant breeding, Limagrain Field Seeds is developing varieties across crops that combine yield, resilience, input efficiency and marketable quality. The demo farm network provides the practical evidence behind that ambition, showing how genetics can help growers reduce risk, optimise inputs and build farming businesses that are both environmentally and financially sustainable for the future.

*source: AHDB 2026 final harvest report

Meet our Transition Farmers

These 16 farmers are sharing their journeys with us as they adapt their businesses

Beth Speakman
Essex

p14



Farm size 275ha

Enterprises
Mixed arable, beef and sheep

Transition goals
- Bridge income gap
- Fully diversified business
- Widen the rotation

James MacCartney
Rutland



Farm size 162ha

Enterprises
Beef and sheep

Transition goals
- Reduce disease in sheep
- Be better than net zero
- Establish herbal leys

Vaughan Hodgson
Cumbria



Farm size 244ha

Enterprises
Cereals, grassland, broilers

Transition goals
- Support the next generation
- Replace lost Basic Payment Scheme income
- Adapt to uncertain weather

Alan Steven
Fife

p16



Farm size 138ha

Enterprises
Potatoes, brussels sprouts, parsnips, malting barley

Transition goals
- Reduce cultivations
- Improve soil health
- More resilient rotations

Andrew McFadzean
Ayrshire



Farm size 285ha

Enterprises
350 beef cattle, wheat, beans, barley, fodder beet

Transition goals
- Slash finishing time
- Reduce dependence on inputs using solar energy
- Improve grassland

Rachel & Richard Risdon
Devon



Farm size 161ha

Enterprises
300-cow dairy herd

Transition goals
- Secure adequate labour
- Better understanding of Environmental Land Management
- Reduce carbon footprint

Lucy Eyre
Welshpool

p20



Farm size 51ha

Enterprises
Cattle and sheep

Transition goals
- Striking the right balance of livestock numbers
- Reduce inputs and maximise the use of grass
- Re-establish direct meat sales

Eddie Andrew
Sheffield

p25



Farm size 73ha

Enterprises
Dairy, milk delivery service, ice cream parlour and farm shop

Transition goals
- Co-operating to reduce costs
- Establish a new dairy
- Reduce carbon footprint

Irwel Jones
Carmarthenshire



Farm size 375ha

Enterprises
1,500 ewes on owned and rented land, suckler cows and followers, root crops

Transition goals
- Manage natural woodland
- Plant hedgerows
- Rely less on volatile inputs

Andy Bason
Hampshire

p26



Farm size 800ha

Enterprises
Cereals, spring beans, oats, linseed and oilseed rape

Transition goals
- Cut carbon emissions by 30%
- Establish 10ha of agroforestry
- Establish 10ha of woodland

Duncan Blyth
Norfolk



Farm size 2,650ha

Enterprises
Cereals, oilseed rape, sugar beet, pulses, grassland, woodland, wetlands

Transition goals
- Improve soil health
- Develop natural capital revenues
- Achieve net zero by 2030

Fergal Watson
County Down



Farm size 285ha across three units

Enterprises
170-cow suckler herd, beans, wheat, spring barley, oats

Transition goals
- Recruit/retain farm staff
- Restructure suckler herd
- Improve business resilience

Tom Fairfax
Northumberland



Farm size 475ha

Enterprises
Winter and spring wheat, short-term leys, Aberdeen Angus and Shorthorn cattle, Texel, Suffolk and Exlana sheep, agroforestry

Transition goals
- Rebuilding the productive power of the soil
- Enhancing agroforestry around the estate in a holistic, whole-farm approach
- Creating a local food hub

Kate and Vicky Morgan
East Yorkshire



Farm size 1,700 breeding sows

Enterprises
Weaning 1,000 pigs a week – finished on-site and through B&B arrangements with local farmers, 140ha rented out

Transition goals
- Facilitate structural change in supply chain
- Establish more influence over own destiny
- Diversify

Ed Shuldham
Wiltshire

p9 & 16



Farm size 1,800ha

Enterprises
Cereals, oilseed rape, oats, forage and grain maize, peas, solar, biomass, anaerobic digestion, events and property diversifications

Transition goals
- Help shape Sustainable Farming Incentive through participation in pilot
- Make more use of data
- Take natural capital

Matthew Williams
Shropshire

p14



Farm size 1,100ha

Enterprises
Cereals, oilseed rape, winter beans

Transition goals
- Improve profitability and margins
- Continue to improve soil health
- Control and optimise input use

Building confidence in British farming

Co-op backs British farmers and growers through long-term sourcing commitments, investment and practical partnerships that support resilient farm businesses.





British farmers are being asked to deliver more than ever before. Alongside producing high-quality food, they are adapting to changing markets, improving environmental outcomes and building more resilient supply chains. At Co-op, we believe progress depends on strong, long-term partnerships. That means sourcing British products wherever possible and investing in the farmers who supply our stores.

All Co-op own-brand fresh and frozen meat is British, including when used as an ingredient, alongside our own-brand shell eggs, milk, cream and cheddar. This provides a consistent market for British products and helps farmers and suppliers plan with greater confidence.

Investing in long-term farming partnerships

Through our sustainability programme, we have invested more than £1 million in additional payments to farmers in recent years, supporting carbon reduction, biodiversity and animal welfare.

Through Soil Association Exchange, our Co-op Dairy Group receives support to assess biodiversity, water and soil health. In 2025, 99% of out dairy farmers took part in the programme, with each participating farmer receiving a tailored action plan.

Our beef and lamb group includes farmers from all four UK nations and is testing carbon footprinting, habitat mapping and soil planning.

In pork, we introduced a cost-of-production pricing model in 2022 as part of a £19 million supply-chain investment. By linking payments more closely to production costs, it provides greater stability and confidence for farmers to invest in the future.

Supporting British growers

We are proud to support British produce and work closely with UK growers to maximise British sourcing and support resilient domestic supply chains. Several key produce lines are sourced entirely from British farms, while we maximise British sourcing across other produce whenever seasonal availability allows.

We are also working with growers on soil health, biodiversity and water stewardship, while progressing towards 100% LEAF Marque certification across UK-grown fresh produce by 2027.

Supporting the next generation

The future of British farming depends on attracting talented people and showing them the range of careers available across farming and food.

In October 2026, Co-op was a key sponsor of Agritunity, a Yorkshire Agricultural Society event for secondary school and college students. Alongside supply chain partners, we highlighted careers in food and farming.

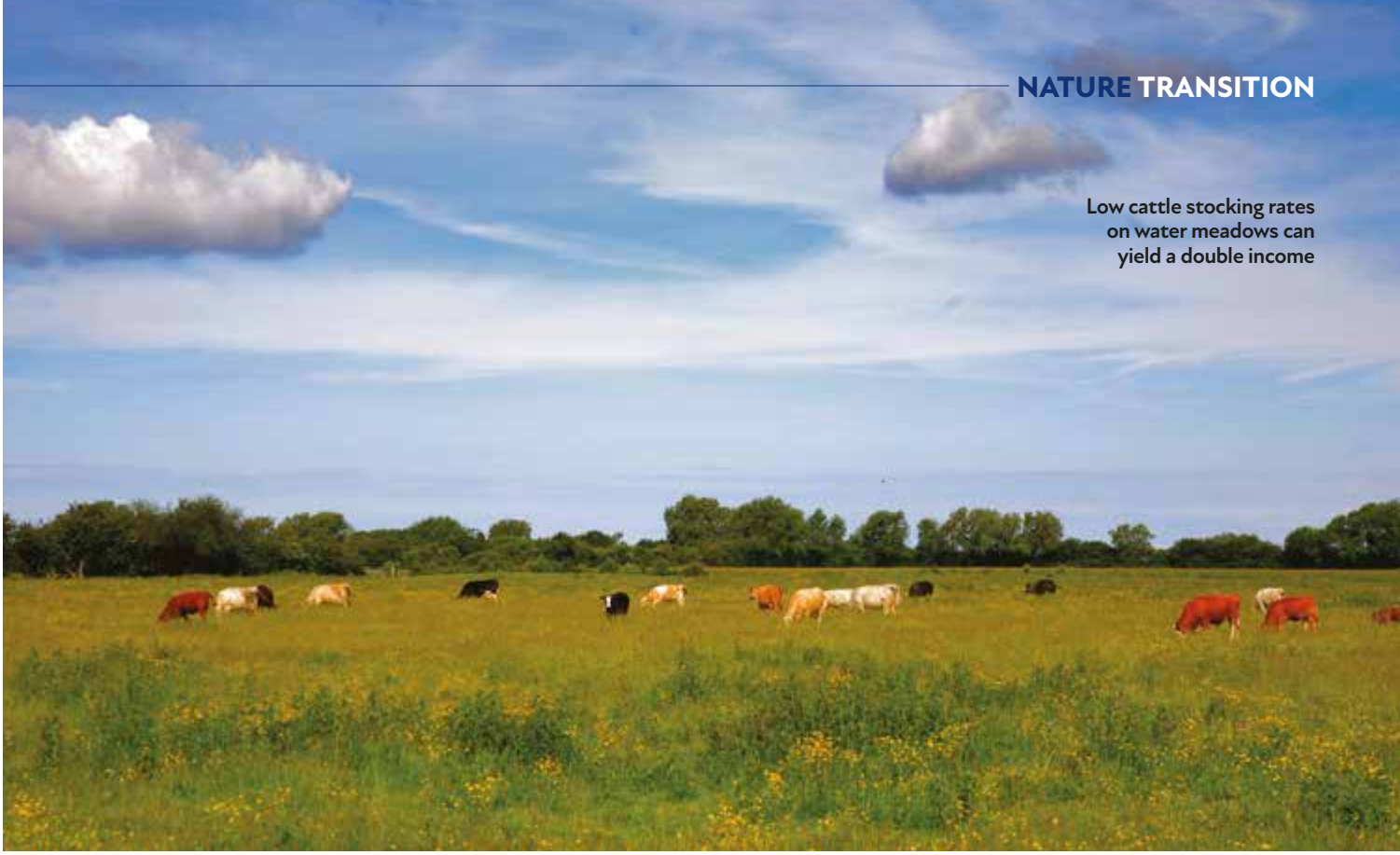
We provide bursaries for school visits, support Countryside Days and sponsor young farmer initiatives. Since 2024, Co-op has supported the National Women in Agriculture Awards and will sponsor the Rising Star Award in 2027.

Supporting the next generation

"Over the coming years, British agriculture will be asked to deliver more than ever before: food security, climate resilience and environmental recovery. At Co-op, we are committed to working alongside farmers to ensure they can achieve those goals while remaining profitable. Our support for British production and programmes such as our sustainability payments give farmers the confidence to invest in the future."

Joseph Keating, Senior Farming & Fisheries Manager at Co-op

By creating stable markets, investing in producers and developing future talent, Co-op wants British farming to thrive.



Low cattle stocking rates on water meadows can yield a double income

How to put nature on the business balance sheet

Government support has all but gone and schemes are becoming harder to access. So **Louise Impey** asks how nature could bolster farm incomes

Nature is an asset, not an add-on, and its value must be recognised in making farm businesses cost less to run, while also helping them access new income streams. Far from being something found around the edges of fields, nature is part of the farm's productive capital and an increasingly crucial part of its resilience – a point that came into much sharper focus after a year of record-breaking temperatures and climate extremes.



Martin Lines

What became apparent in the summer of 2026 is that where healthy and functioning ecosystems are in place, building more productive, resilient and profitable farm businesses is easier – and these are the ones which are generating income from improving their natural assets. With supply chains actively looking for environmental measurements and outcomes from farming participants, those who have taken steps to manage their land in ways that create environmental benefits are in the best position to gain.

As Martin Lines, CEO of the Nature-Friendly Farming Network explains, putting nature on the farm's balance sheet means that factors such as soil health and biodiversity are seen as economic assets rather than externalities. "By doing this, it recognises the economic, social and environmental benefits that healthy ecosystems provide and shows how closely farming and nature are connected." The farming industry has been very good at promoting the value of food produced from our landscapes, he adds, but not so adept at recognising that it can offer other goods and services too.

Funding streams

"It's been very one dimensional. You miss out on investment and other potential funding streams if you stick to just food production. Nature should be part of any contract negotiation now – because it has a value." He points out that the nation needs everything that farms can deliver, from food to healthy ecosystems and resilient landscapes.



"There's a market for these other ecosystem services and we need to make sure that we are delivering them and being rewarded for that." On a typical arable farm, nature contributes value through higher yields, reduced input costs, drought and flood resilience, less pest damage and premium (or environmental) payments, he adds.

"Obviously not every environmental improvement generates a direct payment, but it may bring business benefits in the form of pollination >

PUTTING NATURE ON THE BALANCE SHEET

The first in a series of four articles provides an overview of flexible and innovative financial solutions to help farming deliver nature recovery and bolster business income. In coming issues, Transition will cover the financial cases for nature-friendly livestock, arable and dairy farming businesses.

PHOTOGRAPHY: NATURE FARMING NETWORK, ISTOCK
PHOTO, ADOBE STOCK, KATHY HORNIBLOW



Letting nature run its course while farming around it can produce financial dividends

WHAT ARE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES?

Ecosystem services are the goods and services produced by the natural environment for human wellbeing and quality of life. Examples include:

- Pollination
- Water regulation
- Natural pest control
- Shade and shelter
- Carbon storage
- Erosion control
- Nutrient cycling
- Clean air
- Wellbeing and recreation

< or drought tolerance which are essential for success."

Martin adds that there's no time like the present to make the changes required. "There's been a coming together of two streams – the importance of nature and the urgency for it to be delivered in more resilient landscapes. "The pace has picked up as big business has recognised that nature loss matters."

Incentives

How to deliver will depend on the individual farm and what incentives are being offered, he notes. "On my farm in Cambridgeshire, we altered our approach to cultivations, included cover and companion crops, left straw in the field and bought in muck to lift soil organic matter levels." All of these actions had costs attached to them, so he sought supply chain support for the way that the farm was being run.

Today, the business has four different supply chain contracts, investment from his local water company, as well as input from the local council and his local community. "It's about being proactive," he says. "Find the things that you can do, measure the improvements you are making and look for funding to support that."

Cluster groups are another avenue, suggests Martin. "What farmers need is consistent funding over the long-term in order to be able to deliver what the market needs." **FW**

NATURE AS AN INCOME STREAM

Where farming practices have been aligned with nature restoration and protection, there are various ways that they can make money. Some markets are still in their infancy, while others are moving on at pace:

- **Government agri-environment schemes** – payments for various actions in the Sustainable Farming Incentive and more targeted agreements in Countryside Stewardship
- **Biodiversity net gain** – create and enhance habitats and sell units to developers
- **Nutrient credits** – prevent nutrients entering protected water bodies
- **Carbon credits** – increase carbon storage in soils, woodland and biomass
- **Flood risk/water management** – floodplain restoration, river re-naturalisation
- **Nature-based tourism** – visitor experiences based on food, nature, heritage and the environment
- **Other private funders** – local companies, water companies, developers and so on seeking specific services or credentials input
- **Reductions** – reduced spend on fertiliser, fuel and sprays due to greater resilience

PRIVATE SECTOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Private sector finance for nature recovery on farms comes in many forms. That's good news for farmers who missed out on the latest round of SFI 26 funding, after all the money was allocated in under six hours and valid claimants were locked out.

Where farms can deliver on environmental objectives, they may be able to access bank loans and capital packages at discounted rates, receive premium payments from food companies and retailers or sell ecosystem services such as carbon improvements to private buyers. There are also joint initiatives, in which companies across food and non-food supply chains, pool their investment to support farmers who change to more sustainable systems.

A good example is the Food and Nature Resilience Fund from Lloyds Bank and Wildfarmed, which was launched earlier this year. It differs from others in that it incentivises farming with nature without taking land out of production, supporting the principle that nature recovery and food production aren't competing.

Upfront costs

As Ben Makowiecki of Lloyds explains, there can be upfront costs, yield impacts and operational difficulties when farms are changing, so the fund has been developed to help to provide a buffer and scale regenerative agriculture across the UK's arable land. "This fund will reward farmers for delivering nature and resilience while growing food, not instead of it." Bringing together businesses with a stake in resilient farming provides a more reliable financial model for farmers and should accelerate the change, he adds.

The Soil Association Exchange Market is another corporate-backed funding scheme that rewards farmers for reducing emissions, with participants receiving £60/t of CO2e reduced. Some 50% of that is paid upfront, to help de-risk the transition, with the remaining 50% paid after verified positive change.

In certain parts of the country, Landscape Enterprise Networks (Lens) is another business model that brings organisations together to co-fund regenerative agriculture and nature-based solutions. The programme aims to protect entire catchments and sourcing regions, by pooling the funds from 16 major commercial and public investors. These companies benefit be reducing scope 3 emissions, increasing carbon removals and achieving nature goals within their supply chains.

TRANSITION FARMER ED SHULDHAM

Nature projects sit alongside arable farming and energy production at Wiltshire-based JM Stratton & Co, in an integrated approach which taps into different funding sources to achieve the best outcomes.

Transition farmer Ed Shuldham points out that some of the projects have very little obvious financial value to the business while others represent significant new income streams, but that none of them have happened by chance.

"To get income from the likes of biodiversity net gain [BNG] you have to pursue it," he says. "You also have to recognise that many of these private markets are taking time to get going and often incur considerable entry costs, as well as coming with risks."



Habitat bank

East Farm Habitat Bank, the business's new BNG project, has just gone live. Having registered 394 biodiversity units across a range of habitats in a 30-year timeframe, the units are now being actively marketed and a couple of small deals have been secured. The project spans four fields, each of which can be activated separately, across a total of 80ha, offering woodland pasture, grassland, scrub and watercourse habitats. A winterbourne chalk stream has also been re-wiggled to provide some of these natural assets.



"There is demand for BNG," says Ed. "The fact that from November this year it will be mandatory for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) will add to that demand, as they have to demonstrate at least a 10% increase in biodiversity." As founder members of the Environmental Farmers Group (EFG), the business has a ready-made marketing partner for its BNG units. Having been involved with EFG for five years, Ed is made aware of other natural capital opportunities as they arise and whether the farm is eligible. "A good example is that EFG is active in the nutrient offset market in this part of the country. We don't have the right soil type to be able to deliver, so that's not relevant here."

Equalisation income, which is a benefit of being part of a larger group, means that the revenue from every trade is shared with the membership. "There are a number of deals just happening, so we will soon see that money flowing through." Another way in which the business is being rewarded for nature is through its participation in government-backed agri-environment schemes, with an ambitious Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship agreement running as well as an existing SFI scheme."The Higher Tier scheme has been fantastic and has really allowed us to deliver for nature over a considerable area of specialist habitat that isn't cropped," continues Ed. "Our in-house ecologist Robin manages that for the best possible outcomes."

An SFI agreement covers environmental delivery within the cropped area, he explains. "That money helps to support actions such as companion and cover crops, which have time and cost implications but help to make a difference." Ed stresses that the £100,000 cap that applies to new SFI agreements will have far-reaching implications for the business and may restrict its ability to provide for nature in the future. "Larger farms are going to be really disadvantaged. In our case, we have been able to employ a full-time ecologist and do much more for nature, as well as use his expertise to introduce measures across our cluster group.

Supply chain

"Capping the businesses that have gone above and beyond and made good use of the funding seems very short-sighted." Supply chain sustainability contracts are also being embraced on the farm, with oilseed rape being grown for Frontier Agriculture attracting a premium where certain farming practices are in place. "We've done a few of these schemes, they work well and I quite like them, but I'm not sure about their longevity," says Ed. "It will be interesting to see how long the market will support them." In the same way, growing for Wildfarmed has also been attempted but the scheme proved too ambitious for a farm that doesn't normally grow milling wheat.

"The learnings from it were really useful and as they are expanding into other crops, we will watch with interest. The focus on plant health to achieve end results is something that we will be looking at in more detail."

New woodland has been investigated for its carbon sales potential but taking one of the least productive fields out of production to plant trees didn't stack up, reports Ed. The existing 200ha of woodland on the farm was mostly planted for amenity reasons, so much of it doesn't have any forestry value. The farm is also part of a 20 strong group that has put in a Landscape Recovery bid, with a decision expected imminently. The submission centres on making the River Wylye more natural and, if successful, will take up 20ha of meadowland.

"We will still be able to graze these meadows at very low intensity but that would be primarily for conservation purposes, although it would support some food production."

Ed is keen to stress that the farm does plenty of other things for nature, most of which don't have any income attached but are the right thing to do. A good example is the planting of disease-resistant elm trees, which support a certain butterfly species. His final point is that 140ha of the farm are used to conduct trials, through a collaboration with the Hutchinsons Helix Farm initiative.

A particular focus is being given to improving nitrogen use efficiency, which will bring both financial and environmental benefits. "That's a key point. Nature can be part of a farm's underlying profitability and resilience, even when it doesn't appear in the farm accounts."

● See p5 for more on our Transition Farmers



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How to measure farm business resilience

Experts are calling on farmers to gauge the sustainability of their businesses using key resilience indicators. **Jonathan Riley** asks how KRIs work in practice

Transition experts are urging farmers and growers to think again about the data they use to gauge the health of their businesses.

In addition to the conventional performance measures, they are calling for the wide-scale adoption of resilience indicators that better represent a business's ability to withstand change.

KPIs v KRIs

Farm businesses monitor performance through a range of long-established indicators – gross margins, yields, lambing percentages, feed conversion ratios, growth rates and profit. These are referred to as key performance indicators or KPIs, and it is a term that has become part of the modern farming vernacular. However, while KPIs are a guide to current performance they don't paint the full picture of a farm's resilience to challenges such as increasing market volatility, climate change and staffing issues. Used alone, KPIs could even mask business risks such as increasing debt. For example, a farm might produce rapid growth rates, high yields, solid gross margins and healthy profits. But those growth rates may be achieved from expensive, imported feed, the high yields might be grown on soils propped up by artificial fertilisers and all of the output could be produced by an ageing or unstable workforce.

Strutt & Parker head of farming Natalie Gaibani explains the important point to note is that resilience is not the same as productivity or profitability. Profit is a relatively short-term indicator of performance while resilience is a factor that underpins a business's ability to cope and adapt to ensure it can stay solvent in the long-term, says Natalie. One way to establish the level of resilience is to monitor indicators that better set out the business's ability to cope with future challenges, she says. The value of a key resilience indicator (KRI) then is to highlight a potential or developing weakness before it undermines the ability to continue trading.



Do lone workers follow safety rules?

KRIs point to

- The financial leeway if costs and prices change
- Dependency on income from a key enterprise
- Soil health and ability to withstand weather extremes
- Dependency on key individual workers
- Whether the business can invest to maintain productivity

Here our Transition Partners set out some of the most important KRIs, the questions to ask and the warning signs that can point to a potential challenge.

Economic and financial

Profit levels are important but indicators such as cashflow and financial headroom often matter more when challenges occur.

KRIs include:

- Profit levels
- Cashflow
- Debt and interest costs
- Working capital
- Breakeven output and price
- Reliance on overdraft facilities
- Dependence on a single enterprise
- Ability to withstand a price drop and input costs
- Number of significant customers and suppliers
- Contracts versus open-market exposure
- Supply chain involvement

PROFIT NEEDS

Natalie Gaibani, head of farming Strutt & Parker

Financial resilience starts with being clear about what profit the business needs to generate, rather than simply aiming to maximise profit.

Ask yourself: What average figure over five years does the farm need to provide for the people who depend on it and allow for reinvestment back into the business? Are you making that level of profit? Is it achievable with your current system, or do you need to look at fundamental changes to the enterprise mix? How much will you be relying on everything going to plan, and choosing exactly the right investments to make? Is there a contingency for bad years?

Warning lights: The danger signs tend to be where there are no financial controls or oversight, along with wider unresolved succession issues.

Farms that use monthly management accounts have a much better oversight of spending, which helps to avoid straying wildly from budget. A financially resilient farm understands what >

PHOTOGRAPHY: GNP, TIM SCRIVENER.



< return it needs, monitors that against actual performance and makes investment decisions based on clear, realistic gains. Knowing how much profit is enough profit, can also prevent people from continually striving for more at the expense of their physical and mental health, where there is a choice.

CASHFLOW

Michelle Nuttall, head of knowledge exchange Frontier Agriculture

Cashflow is often one of the earliest indicators of a threat to farm resilience. Unlike other business sectors, farming requires significant expenditure on seed, fertiliser, crop protection and other inputs long before the final return is known.

Ask yourself: Is there sufficient cashflow to cope with the impact of weather, low yields, market and policy changes?

Warning lights: Cashflow becoming tight, increased reliance on short-term borrowing, delays to investment, inability to respond to challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Financially resilient farms take a proactive approach to managing both cashflow and risk. They understand where pressures may occur, plan for different scenarios and consider how public and private funding can support productivity, sustainability and long-term growth. They also monitor markets and look for ways to reduce uncertainty through marketing strategies, supply chain partnerships and production decisions that provide greater certainty around key business choices. While risk can never be removed entirely, maintaining sufficient financial flexibility is key to navigating difficult seasons, seizing opportunities and investing for the future.

INPUT MANAGEMENT

Michelle Nuttall head of knowledge exchange Frontier Agriculture and Natalie Gaibani head of farming Strutt and Parker

Effective input management is a key part of running a resilient farm business. The best return is not about spending less, but about investing in the right products, at the right rate, at the right time.

Ask yourself: Does the business regularly review results? Does it benchmark performance and use data to inform decisions? Do you speak regularly to your advisers, agronomists, vets and other farmers to challenge your thinking? Do you make time to keep up with new ideas?

Warning lights: Reacting to short-term price movements without considering the wider impact on crop performance or business returns. Purchasing the same inputs year in, year out regardless of conditions.

The goal is to maximise the value of every pound spent. Targeting inputs more effectively can help maintain productivity, improve margins and support long-term business resilience. At the same time, look for ways to build the underlying resilience of your farm so you are less dependent on purchased inputs. The strongest decisions are based on robust data, crop need and field-specific requirements. Businesses can strengthen their decision-making by regularly reviewing results, benchmarking performance and using data.

MARKETING

Michelle Nuttall head of knowledge exchange Frontier Agriculture

A resilient farm business understands that growing the crop is only part of the job. Profitability depends on knowing what it costs to produce, identifying where value can be added and understanding the opportunities available within the market.

Ask yourself: How much influence do I have over the prices achieved? How often do I analyse markets and the factors affecting them? What links do I have beyond the farmgate and with other farm businesses?

Warning lights: Little co-operation, poor supply chain integration and limited use of market analysis.

While farmers cannot control global commodity markets, they can influence how they respond to them. Understanding the options available and making informed decisions throughout the season can help businesses capture value, reduce exposure to market volatility, provide greater confidence and create more flexibility for the future. Potential value can be lost when grain is sold without a clear understanding of production costs, premium opportunities are overlooked, or different marketing options and routes to market are not fully explored. Marketing is most effective when considered within the whole-farm plan and throughout the season. Keeping up with market developments can help to identify opportunities through contracts and sustainability programmes. Delegating crop marketing to an expert, for example via grain pools, can cut the time spent watching commodity markets.



Is your machinery fit for purpose?

People

The people who make the business tick are one of the most overlooked resilience factors. A farm can be highly vulnerable if only one person can make critical decisions or knows how to operate key machinery or manage livestock health and welfare.

KRIs include:

- Age and availability of the workforce
- Staff turnover
- Skills coverage
- Training
- Succession planning
- Number of critical tasks dependent on one person
- Availability of contractors or relief labour
- Staff wellbeing and workload

STAFFING

Paul Harris CEO Real Success

A resilient farm needs a sustainable workforce.

Ask yourself: Are people regularly working excessive hours? Does too much knowledge or responsibility sit with one individual? Could someone else step into a key role tomorrow? Are your people developing, engaged and likely to still be with you in three years' time? These are indicators of human sustainability – whether your people can continue performing well without becoming exhausted, disengaged or deciding to leave.

Warning lights: Increasing absence, long hours, poor communication, falling morale, repeated recruitment problems or a business that simply couldn't function without one key person.

A resilient farm doesn't just protect its land, livestock and finances, it protects and develops the people on whom the whole business depends. Regularly review how workloads, knowledge and responsibilities are shared. Encourage open feedback and make time for development. A sustainable team is one where everyone understands their role, feels valued and can step up when needed.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Paul Harris CEO Real Success

Are you preventing accidents or just reacting to them? A resilient farm needs people who can work safely, confidently and consistently. Health and Safety is not simply about paperwork or compliance – it is about protecting your people and your ability to keep the business running.



Key staff are one of the most overlooked resilience factors

Ask yourself: Do people understand the risks associated with their work? Are safe practices followed when nobody is watching? Do employees feel able to speak up about a concern or near miss without fear of blame? And are you confident that new or inexperienced team members receive the training and supervision they need?
Warning lights: Shortcuts becoming the norm, repeated near misses, tired people taking unnecessary risks, outdated risk assessments, or safety becoming something discussed only after an incident.

A serious accident can have enormous human consequences, but it can also expose how dependent a business is on particular people. Build safety into everyday conversations. Encourage people to challenge unsafe practices and learn from near misses.

SUCCESSION

Paul Hardman solicitor Shakespeare Martineau
Having a documented succession plan is a key indicator for the long-term resilience of a farm business. A plan will set out how the business transitions smoothly from the existing generation to the next, providing continuous strategies and avoiding legal consequences that could interfere with the business operation or even break it up.
Ask yourself: Are family members consulted on how decisions are taken? Is the next generation excluded from business data and information? Are younger members given opportunities to take responsibility?
Warning lights: No documented plan for handover or contingencies built in for events such as death, divorce and family member departures.

Poor succession plans are ones where the consequences are not fully thought through. A family charter and the wills of parents/grandparents and children should be reviewed and, if necessary, the shareholders agreement and articles of association/partnership agreement. Good communication and consensus building are key to successful planning through open dialogue where decisions are taken following a consistent process which is respected by all stakeholders.

Operational

Modern farms depend on a huge array of operational factors from soil and water to machinery, buildings, electricity, telecommunications and digital systems.

KRIs include:

- Soil health
- Water management
- Age and reliability of key machinery
- Machinery utilisation
- Dependence on contractors
- Condition of buildings, roads, yards, fences and drainage

MACHINERY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Natalie Gaibani head of farming Strutt & Parker
A resilient farm treats its physical resources as critical infrastructure, not just something to repair when there is a problem. This means thinking about how well – or badly – land, drainage, tracks, buildings and handling systems have been coping with the increasingly extreme weather patterns. In terms of machinery, it is about giving careful consideration to issues such as reliability, adaptability and affordability.
Ask yourself: Is machinery breaking down more frequently? Is there a contingency for a major machinery failure? What is the potential financial consequence if I don't make an investment?
Warning lights: Breakdown frequency, repair bills rising above the cost of a new machine, over-dependence on critical machinery or single contractor.

Risk management needs to be integral to any decision-making around infrastructure. As part of any analysis, stress test both your physical and financial performance according to a hot year, a drought and flood. Investment in things such as renewable energy, water recycling and storage, cooling equipment for livestock sheds and irrigation, are becoming increasingly valuable, or even essential, as risk mitigation and for farms to remain viable in future years.

SOIL HEALTH

Martin Lines, CEO, Nature Friendly Farming Network
Soil underpins all grazing and crop enterprises so understanding its ability to maintain its production potential is vital – it is a crucial part of resilience. We should treat healthy soils as we treat other farm infrastructure, that is, something that needs investment, care and maintenance.
Ask yourself: Do you carry out soil sampling and structure analysis across the farm? Are soils spongy in texture with high levels of organic matter? Do soils absorb heavy rain and retain it for extended dry spells?
Warning lights: Patchy growth across fields and declining crop yields, slow growth rates and poor fertility in stock, flood-prone areas in fields, erosion damage and increasing reliance on artificial fertiliser.

For arable farms, cover cropping and nature-based nutrient solutions should replace synthetic or chemical options to improve soil health and quality. Overall, the five key principles of regenerative agriculture – protecting the soil surface, promoting diversity over monocultures, integrating livestock, minimising soil disturbance and maintaining living roots in the soil – remain a good guide for farms looking to build future resilience in a time of climate crisis. Reducing dependence on external inputs such as bought-in feed is also a key indicator.

WATER

Chris Hewis Anglian Water and Martin Lines CEO Nature Friendly Farming Network
Water resilience encompasses effective management supply, usage, capture, storage and drainage. A resilient farm needs to be managing all water effectively and efficiently, whether it's from the mains or from the sky.
Ask yourself: Do you face yield and crop losses due to drought or wet weather? Do you see runoff and erosion? Are there controls and storage to manage flows and capture water?
Warning lights: Water shortages becoming more frequent, little storage or contingency capacity, single borehole supply, drainage system failures, inaccessible field areas.

The most resilient farms tend to look beyond summer drought and winter downpours and instead have a year-round, holistic system to manage the collection, retention and use of water across a farm. View water like you do energy and look for efficiencies and savings. Something as simple as locating and mapping water pipes can be useful, to help with repairs and avoid future damage. Increasing soil organic matter, reducing compaction and maintaining structure will improve resilience by aiding water infiltration in wet seasons and increasing the capacity and nutrient availability in dry ones. **FW**

Marketing helps grain price and green target rowback

Our arable Transition Farmers have seen yields drop in tough growing conditions this summer. **Debbie James** reports from Shropshire and Essex



FARM FACTS
Criddon Hall Farm, Shropshire
- Size: 1,100ha
- Rain: 724mm
- Soil: Sand to medium, loamy clay

Matthew Williams

An early autumn uptick in grain prices will allow Matthew Williams to hit his cropping budget even though his wheat yield was down by 20%. Weeks of searing temperatures and no rain took its toll on Matthew's combinable crops, but since he only forward-sold 15% of grain, he could capture an enhanced price of up to £30/t with later sales.

"We played the market and sat on our hands with the balance of our tonnage and that has worked in our favour," he says.

His decision-making on sales is informed in part with analysis by an independent grain marketing consultancy he subscribes to. Matthew started using that service two years after he first established his arable farming enterprise and, by acting on the advice, he calculates that his business was £60,000 better off, making a note in his dairy of when he sold grain and when he would otherwise have. Gut instinct plays a part too, but that independent advice means he can keep track of markets.

"It's a big driver behind grain sales for me," he says. The cropping plan will see all but 100ha of the 971ha farmed sown to winter crops, even though it will mean a higher spend on herbicides.

TRANSITION GOALS
- Improve profitability and margins
- Continue to improve soil health
- Control and optimise input use

However, as Matthew points out: "It is a risk worth taking to get a crop in the ground and fill the sheds with grain next year. We will be quite robust with pre-emergence treatments to get on top of grassweeds so we are not chasing a weed burden in the spring, because when you do that, you are on a hiding to nothing, you might as well be burning £50 notes."

A Vaderstad Rapid drill is being used to establish the crops and, when conditions dictate, they bring in a Claydon drill that Matthew has used more widely in other years. He has some reservations about losing potential yield from the inter-row gaps left by the Claydon, concerned that he could be missing out on potential yield. "If there was another row of wheat between the rows we would have more wheat in the field and less risk of losing moisture," he says.

TRANSITION GOALS
- Bridging the income gap after stewardship
- Creating an integrated farm business
- Increasing grass and widening the rotation

Beth Speakman

Economic reality is forcing the Speakman family to scale back their environmental ambitions. After a tough year for the farm's combinable cereal crops, they are rowing back on their timescales for environmental objectives. "Farming is less financially viable at present, with low commodity prices and high input costs, so it is hard to justify spending money on trying to reduce our carbon footprint when we are not breaking even," says Beth Speakman, who farms with her father, Kit, at Little Braxted Hall Farm, Witham, Essex.

With their Countryside Stewardship agreements coming to an end in December 2026 followed by two Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) contracts terminating in 2027, they are pinning their hopes on securing an agreement in the latest round of SFI funding. In September, they applied for a low-input cereal option to grow more spring barley to derisk that enterprise – the payment of £354/ha is the equivalent of income received from over 2t/ha of spring barley at current prices, Beth calculates.

"Spring cereals are quite a challenging prospect if droughts become more frequent, but the opportunity to have guaranteed income from the SFI makes it worth the risk for us. We don't farm on amazing fen land capable of yielding 12t/ha; ours is light, gravelly land, so a low-input cereal is a way of guaranteeing income," she says.

In the past 12 months she has planted an additional 1.2ha of willows to extend the existing plantations grown to produce cricket bats. This is grown on marshland that would otherwise have little value. The next ambition is to increase the area of grassland used for seed production.

"Grass for seed is the most profitable arable crop we currently grow, while willow is our most lucrative overall," says Beth.

For the beef enterprise, the strong performance captured in 2025 has persisted through 2026, but straw and feed cost pressures could affect profit. She is hoping to secure a straw-for-muck agreement to reduce the cost of winter bedding. "We produce muck throughout the year and although we spread it on farm, we could reduce what we use to get straw at a decent price."



FARM FACTS
Little Braxted Hall Farm, Essex
- Size: 275ha
- Rainfall: 610mm
- Soil: Light gravel

● See p5 for more on our Transition Farmers

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD STANTON, PHIL WEEDON

Helping farms make the right decisions on rooftop solar

Renewable energy can help farming businesses to reduce their exposure to the volatility of energy markets. Strutt & Parker offers consultancy advice on all types of solar schemes.



@Adobe Stock

At a time when electricity prices for businesses remain volatile, rooftop solar is a proven way of helping farming businesses to lower energy costs and potentially generate income from surplus power.

But the success of a project depends on getting the fundamentals right: choosing the right-sized system, making sure you are on the most appropriate tariff, and exploring the full range of opportunities for how it should be funded.

"Volatility in energy prices is one of the main reasons farmers should be looking at rooftop solar if they have not already done so," says Anthony Field, Head of Energy at Strutt & Parker.

"Everyone knows that farming is tough at the moment and finding ways to reduce your exposure to volatility is an important part of risk management."

The starting point is understanding how much electricity the business uses, when it uses it and how much generation can realistically be used on farm.

"You need to understand how much electricity you are likely to use yourself, how much could be exported and whether battery storage makes sense," says Anthony.

This is particularly relevant for businesses with significant electricity demand outside daylight hours, such as dairy farms. While battery storage will allow electricity generated during the day to be used when it is needed, the economics will depend on the individual business.

Choosing the right tariff

Import and export tariffs will have a significant impact on the returns generated by a solar installation.

Farmers should shop around for the best rates for electricity they buy from the grid, as well as the rate received for surplus electricity which is exported.

"If you do not have the right export arrangement in place, you could end up sending electricity to the grid without getting the best possible return," says Anthony.

Funding options

Farmers should not assume they necessarily have to fund the whole installation themselves.

For tenanted farms, a conversation with the landlord could be particularly worthwhile.

"We have worked on projects where the landlord has been willing to fund the installation of solar panels and battery storage infrastructure, with the tenant buying the electricity generated at an agreed rate through a power purchase agreement. This can give the landlord a return, while potentially providing the tenant with cheaper, fixed-price electricity without the upfront capital cost."

Third-party developer arrangements may also be an option for schemes where a farming business has high electricity demand and substantial roof space.

The economics of a scheme will vary. "Every farm is different, so there is no single cost or payback period that applies across the board," says Anthony.

But a client recently invested £85,000 in a solar PV system, which is generating 130,000 kwh of electricity per year, leading to an annual saving of £23,000 in their energy bills. On this basis, the payback period will be 3.7 years.

"Our role is to take into account the wider context and provide independent advice on the options, enabling informed decision-making."

To find out more
Call 07918 363530
Email anthony.field@struttandparker.com
Visit www.struttandparker.com

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Extreme weather woes and crop grazing boost

Our *Farmers Weekly* Transition farmers are striving to secure a better future for their businesses. **Debbie James** reports from Fifeshire and Wiltshire

FARM FACTS
Hillhead Farm, Kingsbarns, St Andrews, Fife
- Farm size: 138ha
- Rainfall: 710mm
- Soil: Loam
- Crops Potatoes, sprouts, parsnips, malting barley and wheat



Alan Steven

If there was ever a year for Alan Steven to establish whether scaling back field cultivations could improve the moisture-retaining capacity of his farm soils, it was 2026. Two years ago, Alan replaced a Sumo one-pass stubble cultivator with an Agriweld Multi Till 5T low-disturbance machine, opting to reduce cultivations instead of pursuing his original Transition goal of direct-drilling crops. He has since fitted a seed box to the top of that cultivator to sow cover crops in one pass, the seed is now blown onto the soil and rolled in. After a summer of severe drought, the benefits of reducing cultivations are a grey area, he admits. "Some fields that were stubble and ploughed, perhaps retained moisture lower down in the profile better than those that were winter grazed by sheep and had puddled."

His highest-yielding spring barley crop was in a field that followed sprouts, one that was nearly too wet to cultivate after weeks of rain.

"We shallow-cultivated to let the soil dry out for a week and followed that with a proper cultivation," Alan explains. "I think we almost need to go back to early winter ploughing to slowly get down into the soil profile to where the roots need to grow. If there is good soil structure and stubble has been left, and you let the moisture get down into that stubble, you only need to cultivate the top couple of inches to get a good-enough seed-bed for sowing."

It has been a challenging growing year, but two days of showers in June, delivering 50mm of rain, were enough. All but one field of barley hit malting spec, with screenings of 1-2% compared to 15-20% in 2025. "The rain stopped crops from going into shutdown mode and we had more showers in July to help them along," says Alan. Malting barley yielded an average of 7.5-8t/ha and wheat 10t/ha. "We are growing all seed potatoes and may burn them earlier to avoid a surplus, but perhaps this year could be the year for having a surplus."

TRANSITION GOALS
- Reduce cultivations
- Overcome long distance to markets
- Improve resilience to coastal climate

FARM FACTS
East Farm, Codford, Wiltshire
- **Farm size:** 1,800ha
- **Rainfall:** 900mm annual
- **Soil:** Light to medium chalk with clay cap patches

Ed Shuldham

Grazing sheep on wheat and oilseed rape in the autumn and winter is giving arable grower JM Stratton & Co a cleaner crop with fewer disease challenges and more resilient soils. A Helix trial farm partnership with Hutchinsons was the catalyst for testing this approach and, with lessons learned about stocking density, when to graze and for how long, the business is rolling out this policy across its entire arable acreage. Sheep are turned out onto OSR in early autumn and later on onto cereal crops, with all stock removed before Christmas.

Ed Shuldham, JM Stratton & Co's business development manager, says working with a grazier who is willing to be reactive is key. If the flock is in the field too long or the ground is too wet, any benefit is wiped out. "You have to get the stocking rate right too – that's where you need a really good and reactive shepherd who is able to move sheep quickly and move the fences every few days," says Ed.



His objective is to regulate growth, to enter the spring with much lower disease pressure, because the disease-susceptible leaf area is not overwintered in wet and mild conditions. The trials are a good fit for the farming company's Transition goal of making more use of data. It has also moved forward with its objective of taking natural capital opportunities by creating 394 biodiversity net gain (BNG) units on arable reversion and by realigning a stream to the route where it had naturally flowed.

In the 1950s the watercourse had been integrated into a ditch in order to drain a meadow to make it suitable for arable production, but that ambition was never truly realised, as the field underperformed compared to other cropping land. "We moved the stream back into the field using maps and satellite imagery of when it was in flood to identify its natural location, removing the gravel from the bed and the topsoil, and rerouting it as a natural meandering stream through the meadow rather than a ditch at the side of an arable field," says Ed.

The BNG units were added to the Natural England register in September in readiness for grading.

● See p5 for more on our Transition Farmers

TRANSITION GOALS
- Make more use of data
- Take natural capital opportunities

PHOTOGRAPHY: KATHY HORNIBLOW, ANGUS FINDLAY

What is Landscape Recovery – and how can it help my farm?

Since the first round opened in 2022, over 1,000 ambitious farmers and land managers have participated in the development of the Landscape Recovery scheme – one of three of England's Environmental Land Management schemes.





What exactly is Landscape Recovery, and how can it benefit farm businesses? Landscape Recovery (LR) is based on the principle that nature and farm resilience are intrinsically linked. The work delivers benefits for farms, for the environment, and for communities alike.

There are 4 main features of the scheme:
1. Large-scale projects
2. Long-term public funding (for example, for 20 years or longer)
3. Bespoke agreements
4. Blended funding (projects need to explore options for both public and private funding)

To date, there have been two pilot rounds of Landscape Recovery, with 56 projects involved in the development phases. Three projects are now in the delivery phase.

LR in action: restoring habitats and reducing flood risk in the Upper Duddon Valley

One of the first projects to start delivery, the Upper Duddon Landscape Recovery Project, began in July 2025, across c,2,800 hectares of uplands in South-West Cumbria. Led by the University of Leeds, this project brings together tenant farmers, landowners and environmental organisations in an ambitious, 20-year project.

The project is helping to preserve the longstanding tradition of fell farming in the valley area, at the same time as supporting species and restoring a mosaic of habitats. It will restore and re-naturalise parts of the River Duddon and its tributaries to improve water quality and river health, helping to slow the flow and contribute to natural flood management. The project will also create jobs and provide opportunities for the local community to contribute to nature recovery through a vibrant volunteering and education programme.

What can LR principles do for me?

- Restoring native habitats means attracting more pollinators, boosting natural pest control and improving soil health – all things that support good crop yields
- Re-meandering rivers and restoring natural wetlands can help keep valuable nutrients in your soil, and reduce the risk of your land flooding during high rainfall
- Native animals and insects provide free, natural services that improve agricultural productivity, whether through grazing the fields or burrowing the soil
- Entering a LR project means working with people who understand the local area and who tailor a project specifically to the nature and businesses that reside there.

Mark Hodgson of Blackhall Farm, who is involved in the project, spoke of his experience getting the project off the ground:

"The development stage was really useful. Having other farmers there who could help introduce you to all these organisations made everything a lot easier. As a farmer, you're often stuck in the hills and don't really get chance to speak to these people. It's opened a lot of doors for me. You can grow your network with people who encourage you, who can help to make your vision happen."

Find out more about the scheme and its ongoing projects by searching "Landscape Recovery" on the Defra Farming Blog.

To find out more
Visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england

NATURAL ENGLAND

FARMERS WEEKLY

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VISIT THE TRANSITION HUB



Young farmer schemes help bring fresh approach to farming

Young people continue to enter farming, often with the help of schemes. **Debbie James** hears how that support is helping them adapt to challenges

Pressure on farm incomes and diminishing financial support from governments is not deterring young entrants from choosing to work in the industry. Many of them have no background in farming, but are individuals with forward-thinking ideas and an upbeat attitude.

Initiatives established to help the next generation get a foothold are helping with that pull factor; some schemes are funded by governments, others by business, and all deliver high-quality support. These are drawing in a new breed of farmer and helping them to develop strategies for achieving long-term financial, practical and environmental sustainability in their businesses.

HOLLY ATKINSON

Tesco/Harper Adams Future Farmers Programme

As an animal lover, Holly Atkinson wanted to farm or train as a vet, but with no family background in agriculture, careers advisers didn't encourage her to pursue her farming dream. Agriculture was considered by those advisers as a job for school leavers who weren't destined for university or had a family farm to return to.

"I come from a family of artists. No one at my school sat me down and gave me advice on the ways I could get into farming – it felt completely inaccessible to me," says Holly. She instead took up a place at Bristol Veterinary School and qualified as a vet, but her love of farming was undiminished. That passion was ignited as a teenager, volunteering or working on local farms and reading Farmers Weekly as a medium to educate herself. An important mentor was beef and sheep farmer Murray Garrett, a Farmers Weekly columnist for many years. As a 15-year-old, Holly worked on his farm on the Bedfordshire-Buckinghamshire border, where she got hands-on experience in lambing and calving.

"Murray was so passionate about farming, he really ignited that in me too," says Holly. After graduating, she joined a veterinary practice in the south-west of England, drawn to the region by its high concentration of dairy farms. "I loved being part of the team on the farms I visited; it was very satisfying to play a part in supporting the food supply chain," she says. Adam, her future husband, was a manager at one of those farms, a 1,000-cow, year-round-calving system in Somerset. After they were married, the couple relocated to Devon, where Adam managed another large-scale, block-calving dairy farm, and after their two sons were born, Holly stepped back from her veterinary job to manage the calf rearing, later taking on the overall management of youngstock.



Holly Atkinson

Career change

"I planned to go back to veterinary, to only work on the farm temporarily, but it dawned on me that what I really wanted to do was to farm, because I could use my knowledge as a vet but see it all the way through by implementing changes, directly influencing the outcome for those calves."

With a formal vet education but a knowledge of agriculture acquired only through practical experience, Holly was keen to gain more through structured learning. The Future Farmers Programme, sponsored by Tesco and delivered by the Harper Adams University School of Sustainable Food and Farming, offered that. With visits to farms, processing plants and retailers, and a series of tutorials, she says the programme gave her a wide-ranging insight into the entire agricultural process.

"We had the privilege of getting access to places and people we would not otherwise have had; it was a great opportunity," says Holly, >

PHOTOGRAPHY: ISTOCKPHOTO, HOLLY ATKINSON, RICHARD STANTON, KEPAK





< who was part of the 2025-26 cohort. "The unexpected part of it was that I also made some lovely friends in like-minded people."

While she was participating in that programme, she and Adam received confirmation that their application to become tenants of a 51ha Devon County Council farm had been successful. They are now milking 100 year-round-calving cows on a grass-based system on the farm near Newton Abbot, renting a further 11ha forage block also owned by the authority. The couple had wanted to farm in their own right, but didn't have the capital to buy land – the county council farm system provided a route to establishing that business.

"It took quite a few years to get that opportunity. It seemed fitting that the tenancy offer came when I was on the Future Farmers Programme," says Holly. The couple practice regenerative farming principles in their new business, supplying milk to the Naturally Better Dairy Group. They are in the process of converting their system to organic, and once that is completed their buyer will be Yeo Valley. Holly says the Future Farmers Programme could not have come at a better time for her. "It has given me those extra bits of knowledge. It offered such a comprehensive understanding of the whole agricultural process, of milk contracts, for example, and I now have a fuller picture of what supermarkets and consumers want from us as farmers."

LUCY EYRE

Farming Connect Agri-Academy and county council farm tenancies

County council farms are a valuable route into agriculture for aspiring farmers without land of their own. Transition Farmer Lucy Eyre wanted to farm from early childhood, but with no family connections to agriculture, she instead studied veterinary medicine. However, she couldn't shake off the farming bug, so she rented small parcels of land to keep sheep in tandem with her job as a vet. Lucy took a bigger and bolder step when she applied for the tenancy of Wern Holding at Wern, near Welshpool, a 51ha Powys County Council farm, where she now farms beef and sheep. Without the county council farms system, she doubts she would be farming at the scale she is now. Farming rented land can have its limitations, though – Lucy says the length of tenancies is a principal one, as agreements have progressively got shorter. She has a 12-year agreement with break clauses and the potential to extend it by eight years, longer than many farm business tenancies (FBTs), but even with that duration she feels time is against her.

"I have been on this farm since the summer of 2020, so I am now six years into my tenancy and only after that number of years am I starting to get a handle on the land. It will take more time to get it performing as I think it should be, and by then my tenancy could be over."

Conversations

Lucy believes it would be beneficial for tenants and landlords to have more conversations about their mutual aims. "It might be about biodiversity or soil health, but whatever those aims are, there should be a reasonable plan going forward. Not one that restricts the tenant, but one that results in more of a legacy going into these farms to protect the land and to make that process easier for future tenants. "Tenants can sometimes be left feeling that as long as they pay the rent, it doesn't really matter how they farm it." There can also be challenges with securing finance from lenders to invest in capital improvements on a rented holding.



Lucy Eyre

"If I wanted to replace a crumbling old building with a new shed, I would probably struggle to get the money based on a tenancy like mine, because the break clauses wouldn't offer a bank the security it needs. "Also, even if I did get the money, if I had to leave the farm I would have a big debt but nothing to show for it. But I also understand why a landlord wouldn't want to spend £100,000 on a new shed that wouldn't give them any direct financial benefit." Her own landlord, Powys County Council, is being more proactive than some local authorities, though. It has just released a new strategy to work more closely with its farm tenants, and tenancy lengths could also increase if there are mutually agreed targets and investment is made. Lucy sees it as a very positive step. "I have invested not far off £70,000 in fencing here, and still have lots to do.

"A lot of councils are taking the approach of selling – at least Powys County Council is trying to work out a way of making its farm tenancies work for both parties."

Without opportunities to rent, she would not be farming the acreage she is now. "I don't even know if I would be farming in any meaningful way, because you need to try it out first, and buying land is a big financial commitment. If you haven't



established whether it is something you want to do and can do well, you might not want to buy."

Various initiatives have helped Lucy develop as a farmer. She was a member of the 2025 Farming Connect Agri Academy. "It was a brilliant programme; I saw some amazing things that really inspired me and I learned so much. Farming Connect is a valuable resource that we are lucky enough to have access to in Wales. It was nice to take a break from the farm to spend time with others farmers. We all forged a really good bond."

Lucy has also taken advantage of the Farming Connect skills and training courses and is a member of its Farming with Trees Group, with monthly meet-ups on different farms. She has gained a great deal of knowledge too by engaging with the Natural Friendly Farming Network.

JOSH AND HARRIET MILLICHAP

Kepak Young Farmer Forum

As the next generation stepping into a Welsh family farming partnership, Josh and Harriet Millichap are grateful for the freedom they have to take that business forward. Josh's parents, Colin and Amanda, have advanced the business in the years they have farmed across two holdings. "My parents' approach has always been to look at ways of improving things, and they have allowed us to come in and take things forward, giving us the freedom to have an input – for example, in breed selection," says Josh.

He and Harriet are based at Yscirfawr and his parents at Llwynnoyadd – 500 acres in Powys, and all farmed as one business. "It's a good working relationship, we discuss ideas and bounce those off each other," says Josh.

Opportunity

The family farms 100 beef suckler cows, mostly Stabilisers, and 1,000 breeding ewes, mainly Welsh Mountains. Lamb and beef is supplied to Kepak, and through that relationship Josh and Harriet joined the Kepak Young Farmer Forum. This has given them the opportunity to spend time at Kepak's St Merryn processing plant in Merthyr Tydfil, and participate in a training day. Those opportunities have been extremely useful, says Harriet.

"We now understand exactly what Kepak is looking for in terms of specification, so when we are getting our lambs and cattle ready for sale, we know what our buyer expects. "As a farmer, when you see lambs or cattle in a field it can be difficult to visualise how they will grade on the hook, but the training has given us a good handle on that."

It has helped the couple gain confidence, especially Harriet, who doesn't have a family background in farming. As a member of the Young Farmer Forum, Josh was a speaker on the stand of Kepak buyer Tesco at the 2026 Royal Welsh Show, a "nerve-racking" experience. "We are used to talking to other farmers, but the stand was full of members of the public. It was interesting to talk to our customers, they were a very engaged audience. There are enough negative stories about farming, but by talking to a few consumers for 10 minutes, I now feel more emboldened to promote what we do, as well as Welsh farming more generally."

Josh has spent the past 18 months saying yes to new opportunities that present themselves. "Schemes come out and it can sometimes be easier to not make the effort to get involved, but by saying yes and being proactive, doors do open and other opportunities come along." **FW**



Josh and Harriet Millichap

RESOURCES

Tesco/Harper Adams University Future Farmers Programme
A programme designed to help up-and-coming British farmers develop their skills in sustainable agriculture. It runs for three years and each year 75 farmers under 40 receive face-to-face and live online training on how to implement sustainable agriculture practices and protect biodiversity over nine months. There are also events and mentoring sessions on business operations and personal development

Kepak Young Farmer Forum
This group is made up of farmers from Brecknockshire, local to the Kepak hub in Merthyr Tydfil. The hands-on programme is open to farmers under 40, giving them the chance to see what happens beyond the farm gate and gain a clear understanding of the entire beef and lamb supply chain. It includes farm walks, technical sessions and visits to the Merthyr site to see grading, efficiency and sustainability in practice.

Scottish Land Matching Service (SLMS)
A free service funded by the Scottish government offering independent advice and facilitation to people who are considering joint ventures in farming and crofting in Scotland.

Farming Connect Start To Farm
Farming Connect matches new entrants with landowners who want to step back from the industry. The service guides each party through the key steps they need to find a potential business partner. It offers a package of support, including mentoring, business planning and legal advice, and guidance at each stage of establishing a joint venture.

Regenerative inspiration for young livestock farmers

Young Welsh farmers are exploring practical ways to improve livestock productivity, integrate regen practices and understand the wider beef and lamb supply chains to strengthen farm resilience.



Ffion Havard said learning more about lamb grading, market specifications and the journey from farm to consumer was particularly valuable.



Members of the Kepak Young Farmer Forum explored practical approaches to livestock productivity, soil management, biodiversity and farm resilience.

A group of young Welsh livestock farmers have undertaken an inspiring Kepak study tour to Ireland, to experience opportunities for pioneering regenerative farming practices, improving efficiency of their beef production and forge closer collaboration with the meat supply chain.

The participants were part of the UK Kepak Young Farmer Forum, which brings together young farmers to share knowledge and better understand the beef and lamb supply chains.

The programme included visits to Irish farms, the Kepak Farm Research Hub in County Meath and Kepak's beef processing facility at Ballybay. The group explored regenerative initiatives for grassland and soil management, biodiversity and efficient resource use, along with new technology supporting livestock performance.

For Ffion Havard, from Llwynrhys near Sennybridge in mid-Wales, the study tour gave the chance to compare Irish and Welsh farming systems, and see what elements could help to develop both productivity and regenerative practices on their mixed beef and sheep family farm.

She's focused on meeting retailer and Kepak sustainability requirements, alongside preparing for the Sustainable Farming Scheme through work on animal health, grassland and soil management, biodiversity and efficient resource use.

The tour also highlighted how decisions made on farm can influence processing efficiency, product quality and market requirements.

Practical ideas for the farm

At the Kepak Farm Research Hub, the group saw regenerative practices in action, including reduced tillage, cover crops designed to retain nutrients and protect soil, and measures to support biodiversity.

Frances Thomas, Kepak Sustainability Officer in the UK, said: "The tour gave the group a valuable insight into the journey from farm to consumer. Participants saw practical ideas and innovations that they can now consider in the context of their own farms.

"As farming businesses evolve, relatively small changes can support better productivity and sustainability. Hearing directly from farmers and seeing these practices in operation made the experience particularly valuable."

Connecting the supply chain

The visit to Ballybay helped participants understand how livestock production, processing and market expectations are connected, how consistency, specification and on-farm decisions can affect outcomes further along the supply chain.

Discussions also explored how regenerative farming practices can support the wider supply chain, while helping farmers better understand evolving customer and market expectations. Young farmers had the chance to present and share experiences of regenerative and sustainable farming practices already implemented on their farms.

Tom Finn, CEO Kepak Meat Division UK, said: "Investing in the next generation is essential. Their ambition and fresh thinking will help shape the future of livestock farming.

"Through the Kepak Young Farmer Forum, we want to give young farmers opportunities to exchange knowledge, understand the wider supply chain and build viable, resilient businesses for the future."

To find out about supplying Kepak

Kepak Merthyr: 01685 354800, ext. 2

Kepak Bodmin: 01208 78155, ext. 2

Kepak McIntosh Donald: 01224 780381, ext. 2

Visit www.kepak.com

KEPAK



Water capture and storage: What to consider

The hot, dry summer has put on-farm water use under even greater scrutiny. **Jonathan Riley** asks how management of this vital resource could be improved

The UK climate has already changed. Weather patterns are now characterised by heatwaves and extended dry periods, interspersed with downpours and followed by weeks of rain. This summer was the hottest since records began and for large parts of the country, the driest too. But earlier in the year, some regions endured relentless rain, recording more than 50 days of consecutive precipitation.

These more extreme weather patterns are becoming common and water can be scarce when crops and livestock need it most, but in excess when soils are already saturated or too hard to absorb it. And yet, despite the flood, drought and record-breaking heat of 2026, still very few farmers and growers take a strategic approach to control water flowing on and off the farm.

Water sector experts want to see that change and are urging all farmers to adopt a strategy to manage flows and see water as a vital resource. One element of that wider strategy is to even out the peaks and troughs by being prepared to capture water in times of plenty so that it is available when demand rises.

Here, we ask Catchment Sensitive Farming land management adviser Charles Chantler, Water Resources East stakeholder lead Teresa Meadows, Anglian Water catchment adviser Chris Hewis, and Adas principal consultant John Gadsby for their tips and advice on how to capture and store water.



Rain water is a vital resource

WATER MANAGEMENT

In the past, water was an occasional operational challenge, but it has fast-become a key resilience factor, says Teresa. However, while nutrient and soil health management plans are already established on a farm business's agenda, there is still no equivalent for water, she points out. "If you think about water as a resource in its own right, it quickly becomes more apparent that water, climate and business resilience are all closely linked," adds Charles.

Cost

Water is a paid-for resource, just like feed and fuel, says Chris. Treated, mains-supply water, costs farm businesses each year so it makes sense to reduce bills by harvesting and retaining rainwater for cleaning, irrigating, using in the sprayer and watering livestock.

Legislation

As water has become a scarcer resource, legislators have tightened the rules on who can have what. With drier weather forecast to become the norm, there are suggestions that abstraction rights may be halved within the next 25 years. In the future, arable and vegetable growers may face tough constraints when abstraction demand is at its highest, says Charles. Retaining water on-farm would reduce the pressure on abstraction.

Pollution and nutrient retention

Downpours and flash-flooding carry away costly nutrients and pesticides, soil and run-off from livestock yards and buildings, potentially causing pollution incidents and legal issues. Having the infrastructure to withhold water and reduce peak overland flows would help retain more nutrients in the field, improve soil health and crop performance, reduce slurry volumes and cut the risk of penalties, but most importantly, reduce losses from the farm, suggests Chris.

Flooding risks

Controlling flows by building and installing structures that will divert and retain water at key areas on the farm can reduce the impact on flood-prone fields and access points. It may also reduce flood risks to on-farm infrastructure and downstream settlements. Together, or even singly, these factors make the case for investment in capture and storage extremely strong, says John.

Assessing needs

Before investing in infrastructure, the first step should be to assess the farm's needs and aims for capturing water. The capital costs, planning pitfalls and licensing requirements can be considerable especially with reservoir construction, says Teresa. It's vital then to seek advice at an >

early stage and plan carefully, she suggests. Think about the problems you are trying to solve with water capture. For example, are you trying to reduce flooding or retain sufficient quantities of water to help alleviate pressure on abstraction or be more self-sufficient, says John.

It is important not to underestimate the amount of water that will be required, not just today but in the future. A reservoir could still be operating effectively 50 years from now, so use Met Office forecasts for potential climate change in the long-term, advises Charles.

OPTIONS TO CAPTURE WATER

There is a wide range of options that can be taken to capture water, from tanks on drainpipes to scalping rivers for reservoirs, says Charles.

Roof rainwater capture

Rain is soft water and so prevents mineral deposit build-ups in sprayer tanks and allows active ingredients to work more freely. Livestock watering is a possibility, but run-off can contain particles from the roof and guttering material, while plant deposits and bird droppings act as contaminants. That poses disease risks for housed livestock, and milk contracts may rule out unfiltered water use.

Charles advises making an initial inspection, starting at the top of the building and systematically working down. Look at the roof material and its state of cleanliness. Then follow down to the gutters and downpipes and assess whether they are blocked or leaking and need repairing or replacing, he says. Gutter guards and leaf screens are required to prevent large organic matter from entering the water storage while first-flush diverters discard the initial surge of dirty roof run-off that can contain physical and disease-laden contaminants.

For stock watering quality water, ultraviolet (UV) light sterilisers are needed to deactivate bacteria, viruses, and pathogens.

Surface water management

Aside from the roof collection, broad, shallow ditches known as swales can be dug to collect and channel water from other surfaces. Running next to yards or alongside farm tracks, swales collect considerable amounts of non-drinking water that can be retained in dirty water tanks or ponds. Cutting cross-drains into tracks at intervals, facilitates the flow.

As well as collecting water, swales are useful for directing flows away from farmyards and gateways in heavy rain to prevent flooding, says John. Storm flows can be slowed further by siting berms or planting vegetation in the channel. The water collected can then infiltrate more slowly into the soil, retaining the moisture rather than allowing it to run off. The amount of water that infiltrates depends heavily on the soil type, points out John. Where heavy clays are present, with limited infiltration rates, the water can instead be channelled and captured.

Scalping

For large-scale projects such as reservoirs, farm businesses divert and pump water from rivers during periods when it is abundant in a process known as water skimming or scalping. The process involves heavy engineering and automated water management that is strictly regulated through licences. High-flow Winter Abstraction Licences are granted by the Environment Agency with river levels and flows monitored using telemetry. Once the level rises above the threshold, water enters an intake structure built into the riverbank. These can be gravity-fed channels but high-capacity pumps are more likely to be used to capture the large volumes required, says Teresa.

WATER STORAGE

Tanks

Above- or underground tanks store rainwater captured from surfaces or swales. As with all water capture projects, the first step is to assess the needs and the scale of storage needed. Rainfall figures and run-off calculations should be matched against estimates of daily usage for the required tasks. Also consider whether the tanks will be used to buffer dry periods and so require greater capacity. Water storage may come under increasing pressure as climate change continues, so a larger tank may well be needed and the feasibility of site expansion should be thought through before the project starts.



Reservoirs have the capacity to transform water security



Above ground tanks can capture thousands of litres of rain water

Above-ground water tanks

Above-ground water storage can range from smaller plastic tanks holding thousands of litres, to large-scale linked tanks designed to contain hundreds of thousands of litres. They are well suited to sites where water demand is close by, there is unused yard space, and a storage system is being installed in stages. Compared with underground storage, above-ground tanks are:

- Cheaper
- No excavation is needed
- Simpler to inspect, clean and repair
- Easier to extend with additional tanks.

However, the potential cons of above-ground storage include taking up yard space, damage risk from farm vehicles and exposure to freezing weather and sunlight that can promote algal growth.

Costs: Estimates reflect the wide range of tank sizes available and differing site factors. As well

HOW TO WORK OUT WATER AVAILABILITY

To work out the potential water capture, calculate the roof area and multiply the result by the local rainfall figure, explains John. Variable losses due to different roof materials, overflows, evaporation and the filtration process must be accounted for, he says. This is done with a run-off coefficient figure. The co-efficient can be found in British Standard technical codes for the different material types.

Example run-off coefficients are:

- Metal sheets 0.9-0.95
- Slate/tiles 0.8-0.9
- Flat 0.5-0.8.

It is worth noting that certain roofing materials such as cement fibre and asbestos can absorb significant rainfall before they are saturated and water runs off. This can equate to the first 4mm of rain, says John. Moss-covered roofs will also reduce run-off so these factors must be considered when designing a system. A further adjustment used by Adas and others includes potential losses during the filtration process with a filter collection efficiency figure set at 0.8.

The final equation then is:

- Volume = Area (m²) x rainfall (mm) x run-off coefficient x filter collection efficiency – for example, a 1,000sq m roof receiving 1,000mm of annual rainfall theoretically receives: 1,000sq m × 1,000mm = 1,000,000 litres or 1,000cu m
- Then multiply this by the co-efficient for the roof type – a metal roof at 0.9 x 1.000cu m = 900cu m
- Apply the filter collection efficiency of 0.8 – 0.8 x 900 = 720cu m of available water

PHOTOGRAPHY: KODACHROME25/ISTOCKPHOTO, ADOBE STOCK, GNP, RICHARD STANTON, NATHAN STIRK



as the tank itself, consideration must be given to the cost of the installation, foundation, pipes, gutters, pumps, electrical supply, filtration, systems controls, insulation and protection from damage. Generally, costs start at about £5,000 for a small tank to well in excess of £20,000 for larger systems requiring groundwork, pumps filtration systems and pipework.

Underground water tanks

Underground storage beneath yards or buildings has several benefits, including:

- Less surface space required
- Water is kept cooler
- Sunlight and temperature extremes are avoided
- Protection from farm vehicles not needed
- Tanks are visually unobtrusive.

Because there are extra construction requirements to site a tank below an existing yard, underground storage is particularly suited to incorporation into a new building project (see case study). Other challenges include regular maintenance and repairs that are made more difficult. The site must be well planned with inspection hatches and easy access to pump motors and electrical controls, John points out.

Costs: The installation process and generally larger scale mean underground systems cost substantially more due to earth and groundworks, and installation features such as inspection covers, pumps and electrical controls. Smaller rainwater systems are commonly £10,000, but larger-scale tanks can start in excess of £50,000.

Ponds

Ponds are an effective way to capture and slow flows of non-drinking water from yard and track run-off via swales or drains. Excavating a pond can reduce the risk of flooding and erosion at times of heavy rain, while also acting as a store for uses such as yard and equipment cleaning, or firefighting should an emergency arise.

Costs: Costs vary hugely according to scale, the need for liners and the equipment or contractor time needed for the excavations. An extra cost to factor in is the potential outlay for pumps if water is to be drawn off and used for cleaning.

TRANSITION FARMER EDDIE ANDREW

Transition Farmer Eddie Andrew has completed the construction phase of a 30,000-litre underground water tank at Cliffe House Farm, near Sheffield, Yorkshire. The aim is to reduce the farm's reliance on mains water to cut the costs and even out peaks and troughs in rainwater supply, says Eddie.

The tank was installed during the build of new cow housing with the frame and roof erected before the floor was dug out to create space for the water storage. Sealed concrete flooring and wall panels were installed to line the tank, which was then covered with a metal deck, capable of withstanding housed cows and machinery.

Cattle are already using the housing, which acted as a feeding site and shelter during the extreme drought conditions in the summer. "We brought cows into the house during the day for feeding and to relieve pressure on grazing," says Eddie.

Despite the lack of rainfall, tank-filling is under way with water captured from the new shed's 50x60m pitched roof, he explains. Guttering and pipework has been installed but a UV filtration system, to reduce contaminants, is yet to be added. "Our primary aim is to capture water that we can use to wash down yards and equipment, saving the cost of mains water supply," says Eddie. "But we are considering a filtration system that will create drinking-quality water for the cows," he adds.



Eddie Andrew

● See p5 for more on our Transition Farmers

RESERVOIR CONSTRUCTION PHASES

Water Resources East suggests there are four key stages from concept to completion:

- Define the need Estimate water requirements, factoring in additional needs if weather patterns continue to change.
- Feasibility Check the site constraints and water availability. There is no point in building a reservoir that cannot be filled or where planning barriers exist
- Permissions Once the feasibility of the site is established, the third stage can begin by securing abstraction licences, planning permission and environmental assessments
- Construction and operation Only begin this final phase once the need, feasibility and permissions have all been secured.

Source: WRE Planning Farm Reservoirs

Also bear in mind the timescale for the process, which is likely to be 18-36 months but could vary according to the catchment, planning, regulatory procedures and the environmental sensitivity of the site, suggests Teresa. It is vital to understand that a reservoir is a significant, engineered earth structure and not just a large hole in the ground, she says. The geology, water table and drainage infrastructure must be factored in among a list of potential causes of leaks and failures.

Costs

Costs are incurred during the planning and regulatory phase, construction and ongoing operation of the reservoir. Construction costs vary according to scale with price per cu m reducing as volumes increase. A key cost-versus-risk decision is whether to line the reservoir. Reservoirs are either unlined in areas where clay can provide sufficient impermeability or lined with a synthetic membrane.

Suggested construction costs for an unlined reservoir are £2-£5/cu m of water storage, while lined reservoirs are likely to cost as much as 40% more. Design, investigations and certifications then typically add 15% for this. On top of these costs, operating costs can lie between 1-2% of the build cost for maintenance and water pumps.

Reservoirs

Scaling up from roof capture, tanks and ponds, on-farm reservoirs have the capacity to transform water security, particularly for arable and field-scale vegetable units that rely on irrigation. Looking ahead to potentially drier summers and tougher abstraction rules there is increased interest in reservoir construction.

The benefits include huge storage capacity of 10,000cu m to more than 500,000cu m. Because of their scale, the relative cost per cu m is low compared with other storage options. However, the construction, stringent planning and complex regulatory hurdles mean projects have lengthy timescales and require a large capital investment.

There are further, ongoing costs incurred through pumping and distribution of the stored water. The decision-making process must therefore be carefully considered with advice sought at every stage. **FW**



How Transition Farm businesses are adapting to change

Two of our original Transition Farmers have had to make big changes. **Louise Impey** finds out why and what strategies they have put in place to progress

Whether it's a different direction, a new business arrangement or a shift in focus, farms across the country are making changes to the way that they are structured and run. In this article, *Farmers Weekly* caught up with two of our original Transition Farmers, to find out how they are preparing for the roller coaster ride ahead and what the current industry uncertainty means for them.

Andy Bason, Oxdrove Farming

A restructuring of the business means it's all change at Newhouse Farm in Hampshire, although Transition Farmer Andy Bason will be remaining at the helm and is looking forward to the future. Oxdrove Farming is now the trading name of the business, as Andy moves from being the manager to becoming the contractor, having reached a new agreement with the owner.

As such, he will be continuing with the regenerative farming approach that is established across 610ha – the combined area of Newhouse Farm and nearby Chilton Manor Farm. He is being joined by his son and his stepson in the new venture and says that he is going into it with his eyes wide open.

"I know the farm and I know the figures," he says. "I have worked here for 37 years and a great deal has been achieved, so it was an easy decision to make – albeit a fairly nerve-wracking and expensive one." Making money for both parties really concentrates the mind, he adds. "We negotiated terms that we are both happy with but have enough flexibility within the agreement and will review it where necessary. It has to work for everyone."

Since deciding to become the contractor, he has been busy buying machinery and getting ready for the new cropping year. Oilseed rape is already in the ground, having been drilled on 7 September – once there was some soil moisture. "It's gone in with buckwheat as the companion crop and is growing well," he reports. "It was drilled about a month later than last year, due to the conditions, but that's the same for most growers in the south of England.



Andy Bason

"It's a crop that needs to get a good start. Luckily, it's been making the most of the warm soils and the sunshine." Combinable crops will continue to be the focus at Oxdrove Farming, but Andy recognises that some change is inevitable. Winter barley has been dropped from the rotation, as it didn't pay, but spring cropping is remaining for now.

"We may have had two bad years with our spring crops but I'm taking a longer-term view before making sweeping changes. They help with the rotation and with the workload spread, while local markets for regenerative spring barley are available." He is also committed to growing a small area of winter beans, despite the crop struggling in the 2026 heatwave.

"I'm reluctant to farm entirely based on last year. Let's see how they do this year before consigning them to history." Otherwise, he will be putting 260ha of winter wheat in this autumn, as well as some oats. "It's all change in some respects with the restructure but business as usual in others." Andy admits that he is deliberately keeping things simple in the first year but intends to try out different crops and techniques as time passes and market requirements change.

Resilience measures

"We are operating in a changing climate and we know that resilience measures are going to

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD STANTON, RICHARD LEE

be more important. Despite the past two years being dry, our agroforestry enterprise has survived and should really come into its own in the next two years. Pruning needs to take place this year for the first time, so they should really start to produce fruit."

Agri-environment schemes, both Mid Tier Countryside Stewardship and the Sustainable Farming Incentive, are in place on both farms and still have some time to run, giving him some breathing space. "They bring in useful money but are also good from a farming point of view," he continues. "We have used the relevant actions to complement our farming activities, rather than replace them, so we have been able to commit to farming with nature and delivering for wider society."

Being a finalist in both the Silver Lapwing Award and the Rase Natural Capital Award this year was welcome recognition and proves that this approach – where nature recovery works alongside commercial farming – is working, believes Andy. "I was runner-up in both of these awards and it shows what can be achieved when we put our minds to something. I'm a firm believer that farmers should be shouting about what they're doing, especially given recent funding turmoil and policy changes." Turning nature into income streams is more difficult, he acknowledges, despite having established an agroforestry venture and planted 10ha of new woodland in the past five years.

Sustainability

"The agroforestry is coming with me as the business evolves. It doesn't bring in any additional revenue yet, but it could do in terms of carbon and fruit sales. It was the right thing to do and part of a long-term plan." Supply chain sustainability contracts are another area of interest, as Andy is aware that the regenerative practices used on the farm are in demand from food manufacturers and consumers. "These are things that we are doing anyway so it makes sense to be rewarded for them."

He is also a member of a local cluster group, so is keen to understand more about any collaboration opportunities for landscape change and ecosystem delivery. For now, uncertainty in the Middle East means that the biggest challenge is the fuel price, he notes. "Fuel and fertiliser are the two biggest expenses on this farm and we've done what we can to reduce our reliance on both of them."

Reduced tillage has helped bring fuel use down by 40% while a focus on soil health has got nutrient cycling working well, with a resulting 18% reduction in fertiliser use. "We will keep chipping away at these as there are compelling business reasons, as well as environmental benefits, for doing so," says Andy.

He also hopes to remain as a Leaf Demonstration Farm, having enjoyed the interaction it involves and the opportunity to inform and educate, as well as to address public concerns about farming. "My role is changing but my commitment to the farm remains," concludes Andy. **FW**

● **See p5 for more on our Transition Farmers**

RABY ESTATE'S CHANGE OF DIRECTION

With leisure and tourism providing a better return than farming, Raby Estate is capping its farmed area to suit existing infrastructure and expanding its visitor offer with wider activities and experiences. This involves putting more land down to grass – much of which is marginal for arable production – and altering the existing livestock enterprises, so that they can add value to the estate's hospitality offer and become part of the tourism experience.

"It's about playing to our strengths," explains Robert Sullivan of GSC Grays, who has been overseeing operations since farm manager Phillip Vickers moved on.

"We are changing direction slightly as we want to share and explain how we farm, how our business is relevant to people's lives and how we care for the land. We believe this will interest our visitors and enrich the offer at Raby Castle. Even with this slight change of direction, farming will still be a key operation here."


Robert Sullivan

A regenerative approach remains in place across 810ha of combinable cropping, with 2026 harvest results reflecting the efforts that have gone into building soil health and creating a more sustainable farming system. "We had a decent harvest," confirms Robert. "Soil type had a bearing but our wheat, oilseed rape and barley crops fared well. It was only the spring cropping that struggled."

That area of cropping fits in with the current infrastructure, labour and machinery, with the remainder of the land currently in various stewardship schemes to deliver nature recovery – some of which have another two years to run. "Given recent events, we don't know what's going to happen to that funding," Robert stresses. "A decision will be made nearer the time as to what we do with the land. Some of it may be let."

Key decision

The location of the farm's grain store and dryer has been a key consideration in the new direction, as both facilities are based at the home farm, which also happens to be in the main tourist area. "When you appreciate there were 300,000 visitors to Raby Castle and The Rising tourism project last year, we are looking to reduce the impact of farm traffic around this area," he explains.

"We don't have sufficient infrastructure elsewhere on the estate for storing and drying grain we historically produced. So we need to manage how we operate." As with most farms, cropping is weather dependent and flexibility is key, adds Robert. "We will always aim to get winter crops in, but if conditions change and we can't continue drilling through the autumn, we have the ability to switch to spring crops."

Both Longhorn cattle and sheep numbers are increasing, with the intention that meat from both enterprises can be supplied to the restaurants and hotel on the estate. At the same time, agri-tourism type ventures are being developed, giving an opportunity to showcase what's being done on the farm and provide farm-to-fork hospitality to visitors. "These tweaks are about getting the most from our investment," summarises Robert. "The returns from tourism are far greater than those from farming at the moment, so we are cutting our cloth accordingly. Of course, that may change in the future, which is why we have retained flexibility and remain open-minded."

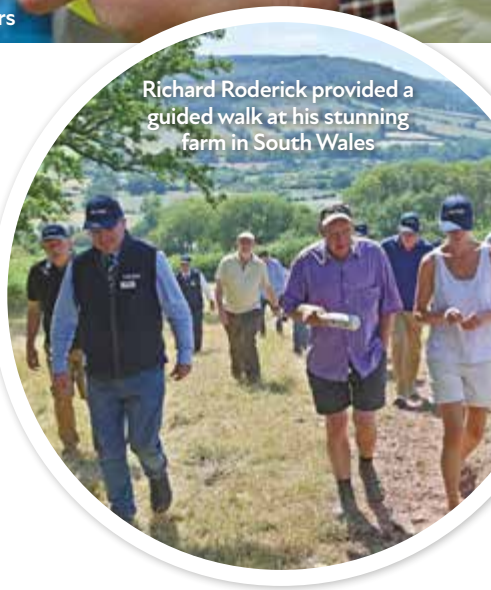

Tourism revenue at Raby is far greater than crop returns



Locally sourced beef has a strong market appeal


Beef cut appearance is a key driver for customers

Red meat supply chain benefits from working together


Richard Roderick provided a guided walk at his stunning farm in South Wales

Working more closely with the supply chain can improve resilience, marketing experts say. **Johann Tasker** reports from a Transition Project Beyond the Farmgate event

Sharing more value across the supply chain will help secure a resilient future for the red meat sector, according to industry experts. Processors and retailers say domestic beef and sheep producers remain central to the sector's success. Working more closely together will create a more robust supply chain that will benefit everyone, they argue – including consumers.

Collaboration was a key topic among more than 50 farmers and industry stakeholders who attended a Beyond The Farmgate visit to Kepak's meat processing facility at Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales. Price and appearance dominate consumer decisions when purchasing red meat, visitors were told. Provenance remains important, but concern about environmental credentials has fallen as household budgets tighten. Expanding on this, there was often a difference between what consumers claimed mattered and what influenced them at the point of purchase, listeners heard.

"When you really observe what the consumer does rather than ask them, they think about two things: price and how it looks," said José Peralta, chief executive of Welsh red meat levy body Hybu Cig Cymru. Price had become increasingly important as beef and lamb competed against cheaper chicken. But support for locally produced meat had strengthened, he said.

"We've managed very well as a supply chain to correctly convince the consumer that domestic meat is better, fresher and something you want to have as well as support your farming industry and so on," Mr Peralta said. Environmental concerns had become less influential as shoppers focused on affordability. "When people have very tight purses and they struggle to afford the product, they think more about feeding themselves."

Shared returns

Beef farmer and Kepak supplier Richard Roderick said he was striving to produce livestock as efficiently as possible. Falling cattle and sheep


Kepak workers explain how the state-of-the art processing plant operates

PHOTOGRAPHY: RICHARD SWINGLER



ABOVE Visitors to Kepak farmer Richard Roderick heard how family farms underpin the beef supply chain in Wales

numbers could threaten processor viability – and that would leave farmers with fewer outlets, he warned. "We've got three really good processors in Wales. You don't want to lose a processor, because that will mean we have less choice," he said. The industry needs profitable family farms to attract younger people into the sector.

Tom Finn, CEO of Kepak Meat Division UK, said consumers interpret value differently. A higher-priced steak could represent value to one shopper, while another might choose a burger. "Affordability doesn't necessarily mean cheap," he said. "It doesn't mean a product has to cost less than everything else. It's about delivering what a consumer perceives as good value for money." Processors and retailers are spending heavily on new product development and working together to achieve this – although many concepts never reached sustained commercial success.

"We probably have an 80% failure rate in terms of getting the right products to market," said Mr Finn. "But when we get ones that do work, we're able to deliver on the volume."

Demand for protein is expected to remain strong. Health trends and the increasing use of GLP-1 weight-loss drugs could create further opportunities for smaller portions and high-protein products. "Our outlook on protein is really, really good," said Mr Finn. "But the question is what protein the consumer is willing to pay for, or what protein the consumer perceives as value for money."

Market challenge

The strongest warning concerned increasing imports of cheaper beef from Australia, New Zealand and South America. Mr Finn said overseas supplies are already changing the market and will continue to affect British agriculture. It is the biggest challenge facing the UK sector. British farmers might need between £6/kg and £6.50/kg to generate a sustainable return, while Australian and New Zealand beef could enter the UK at about £4/kg. "It's really important that the retailers support British farming," said Mr Finn. "If you think about it, without the retailer to support British farming and to support beef farming, who else is going to support it?"

Tesco agriculture manager for beef and dairy, Tom Atkins, said each part of the supply chain remained dependent on the others – from the farmer at one end through to the processor and retailer and, ultimately, the end consumer.

As a retailer, Tesco is working with farmers, processors and the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board to improve on-farm sustainability and help ensure that its products are more appealing to customers. **FW**



Kepak supplies local meat to a wide range of retail outlets

Where to find project articles

The Transition initiative offers a vast bank of practical articles, which can be downloaded for free

Business resilience

- How to make rotations more resilient – Summer 2021 (p15)
- Advice on building climate resilience into business plans – Winter 2023-24 (p7)
- How to stress-test your farm business – Summer 2022 (p10)
- Why better planning can reduce machinery costs – Winter 2023-24 (p30)
- How to boost financial resilience – Winter 2024-25 (p7)
- Five ways to build resilience on arable farms – Winter 2024-25 (p24)
- Raby Estate embraces change to secure future – Summer 2025 (p17)
- How family charters could strengthen farm businesses – Autumn 2025 (p23)
- How to transition from price taker to price-maker – Winter 2025-26 (p??)

Supply chain

- How supply chain is helping farmers work with nature – Summer 2022 (p15)
- How TCFD will hit farming – Spring 2024 (p36)
- Supply chain funding – what's on offer for regen farming – Spring 2025 (p18)
- How looking beyond the farm gate can secure a better future – Summer 2025 (p7)
- How market insight can guide Transition strategy – Spring 2026 (p16)
- From field to drink carton: Linking the supply chain – Summer 2026 (p26)

Carbon management

- Measuring and managing carbon: What to consider – Autumn 2021 (p11)
- The carbon trading conundrum: Risk or revenue generator? – Autumn 2022 (p23)
- Trading carbon and natural capital – a lawyer's eye view – Autumn 2022 (p29)
- How to get a carbon-based income from woodland – Autumn 2022 (p31)
- Is there money to be made from carbon farming? – Autumn 2022 (p41)

Collaboration

- How collaboration cuts costs and increases efficiency – Winter 2021-22 (p47)
- Local farmers unite to clean up polluted river – Winter 2022-23 (p45)
- How collaboration delivers landscape-scale change – Summer 2023 (p19)
- Hot cut fixed costs with innovative restructure – Summer 2026 (p18)

Data and tools

- How data helped transform beef herd efficiency – Autumn 2022 (p10)
- How to take a data-led approach to sub-field costs Spring 2025 (p7)
- AHDB baselining project hailed as game changer – Summer 2025 (p12)
- How to get the most out of farm data – Winter 2025-26 (p17)

Diversification

- The benefits of Paulownia trees for net-zero targets – Spring 2022 (p47)
- Expert advice for making trees work on your farm – Autumn 2023 (p32)
- How trees can enhance and support your business – Summer 2025 (p28)

Emissions management

- How livestock farmers can cut greenhouse gas emissions – Autumn 2021 (p19)
- What arable farmers can do to reduce emissions – Autumn 2022 (p12)
- The vital role of soil in emissions reduction – Spring 2023 (p27)
- How pig producers can strive towards net zero – Spring 2023 (p29)
- Project shows how farming can hit – or better – net zero – Autumn 2023 (p17)
- Tips to tame emissions from housed systems – Winter 2023-24 (p22)

Inputs

- How to get the most from nitrogen fertiliser – Spring 2023 (p11)
- What to consider when replacing farm machinery – Summer 2023 (p24)
- Zero subsidies puts focus on cost control – Summer 2023 (p16)
- Zero grazing switch helps reduce dairy feed costs – Summer 2023 (p22)
- Grassland dairy adopts low-input system – Autumn 2024 (p28)
- Low-input farming in spotlight as costs rise – Spring 2026 (p7)

Natural capital

- How farmers can benefit from biodiversity net gain – Spring 2022 (p44)
- Opportunities for livestock farmers from natural capital – Spring 2022 (p51)
- How 'mega-cluster' project benefits farming and nature – Winter 2023-24 (p16)
- How to prepare your business for private funding – Summer 2024 (p31)
- Generating income from the environment – Autumn 2024 (p18)
- How to cut losses in newly planted trees – Winter 2025-26 (p20)

Productivity

- Why better productivity is all about the right balance – Winter 2021-22 (p41)
- Five ways to increase farm output and maintain margins – Spring 2022 (p64)
- Six challenges on your Transition journey – Spring 2024 (p18)
- How to manage crops and soil after a washout season – Summer 2024 (p12)
- How stacking could secure a sustainable future – Autumn 2025 (p7)
- Using a business review to set a new direction – Winter 2025-26 (p11)

Renewable energy

- How alternative fuels are helping to reduce emissions – Spring 2023 (p21)
- Experts outline on-farm renewable energy options – Summer 2023 (p30)
- Renewable energy systems: Which is right for your farm – Autumn 2023 (p26)
- UK farms could profit from biomethane revolution – Spring 2026 (p11)

Staff issues

- Tips to retain staff in a tough market – Winter 2023-24 (p26)
- Eight ideas to help you recruit staff – Summer 2025 (p21)
- Look to new recruitment areas to beat the labour crisis – Autumn 2025 (p19)
- Better mental health can bring business bonuses – Winter 2025-26 (P24)
- Staffing doubles as farm tackles labour challenge – Spring 2026 (p24)

Support schemes

- How to start your journey towards the phase-out of BPS – Autumn 2021 (p34)
- How optimising inputs can help meet SFI targets – Autumn 2023 (p23)
- NI support scheme – all you need to know – Spring 2025 (p13)
- Wales Sustainable Farming Scheme – Spring 2026 (p19)
- Advice on how to apply for SFI26 – Summer 2026 (p12)
- Scotland EFAs under scrutiny – Summer 2026 (p21)

Water management

- How growers are de-risking maize production – Winter 2022-23 (p63)
- Why farmers must act to secure adequate water – Winter 2022-23 (p41)
- How harvesting rainwater can reduce farm costs – Winter 2022-23 (p53)
- How to plan for water security and drought resilience – Summer 2024 (p17)
- Water quality: Preparing for tighter rules – Spring 2026 (p27)
- Farmers explain how they tackle climate change – Summer 2026 (p7)

Download the articles

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