Agricultural Universities Council UK retreat

AGRICOLOGY

Bore Place
18th July 2023

Janie Caldbeck

AGRICOLOGY
SUSTAINABLE PRACTICAL FARMING

What we'll cover:

- What Agricology is and what does it do?
- How it works
- How you can use it; an overview of the breadth and types of content
- Summary

AGRICOLOGY
SUSTAINABLE PRACTICAL FARMING

What is Agricology and what does it do?

AGRICOLOGY
SUSTAINABLE PRACTICAL FARMING

www.agricology.co.uk

- Independent **knowledge platform** supporting farmers and growers to transition to more diverse and resilient farming systems using agroecological practices.
- Focus on a whole system, holistic approach.
- Linking research with farmer practice, exploring practices that restore the farm ecosystem.
- Providing a ‘toolbox’ for farmers.

Aim to inspire farmers with science-based evidence and encourage farmers to share their experience to bring about changes in farming practice

- Currently delivered by the Organic Research Centre (ORC). Founded in 2015 by the Daylesford Foundation, ORC and Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust Allerton Project.
- Encompasses all production systems and a wide range of farming approaches; from ‘conventional’ or integrated farming to organic, biodynamic etc.

‘Practical, sustainable farming, regardless of labels’

Data shows that the website has a wide reach, with over half of our audience being farmers, the remainder being largely advisors, agronomists, and researchers.

320,000+ users since launch, 2,690 newsletter subscribers

(July 2023)

Collaboration with organisations from across the industry on website content and events, helping steer direction.

- Work closely with farmers and growers communicating innovative practices, successes and failures, showcasing trials, collaborating in events.
- An initiative with a community created through the network of researchers, farmers, advisors, students and ‘audience’ or ‘users.’
- Response to increasing UK and global challenges and a need to back up what is going on in the field with rigorous science-driven research, spanning different farming approaches and sectors.

Our vision

All farmers will be using agroecological and regenerative practices to deliver productive, profitable, and resilient farming systems that enhance the environment and ensure a vibrant sustainable future of farming in the UK

Our mission

To inspire all farmers with research evidence and farmer stories to instill changes in their farming system

Sharing knowledge online and in the field

- 56 farmer profiles, 440 resources on practices and principles from across the sector, videos, podcasts, over 200 guest blogs and research project pages. Exploring topics, sharing expertise, promoting events.

All content approved, referenced, and includes past and current research.

- Field days, discussions, workshops, on-farm, at events, and online, collaborating with partners, providing a space for demonstration and discussion, sharing ideas and experiences, linking to relevant research.

Talks / webinar recordings on our YouTube channel and in our resource library
https://www.youtube.com/@Agricology/videos

How can you use it?

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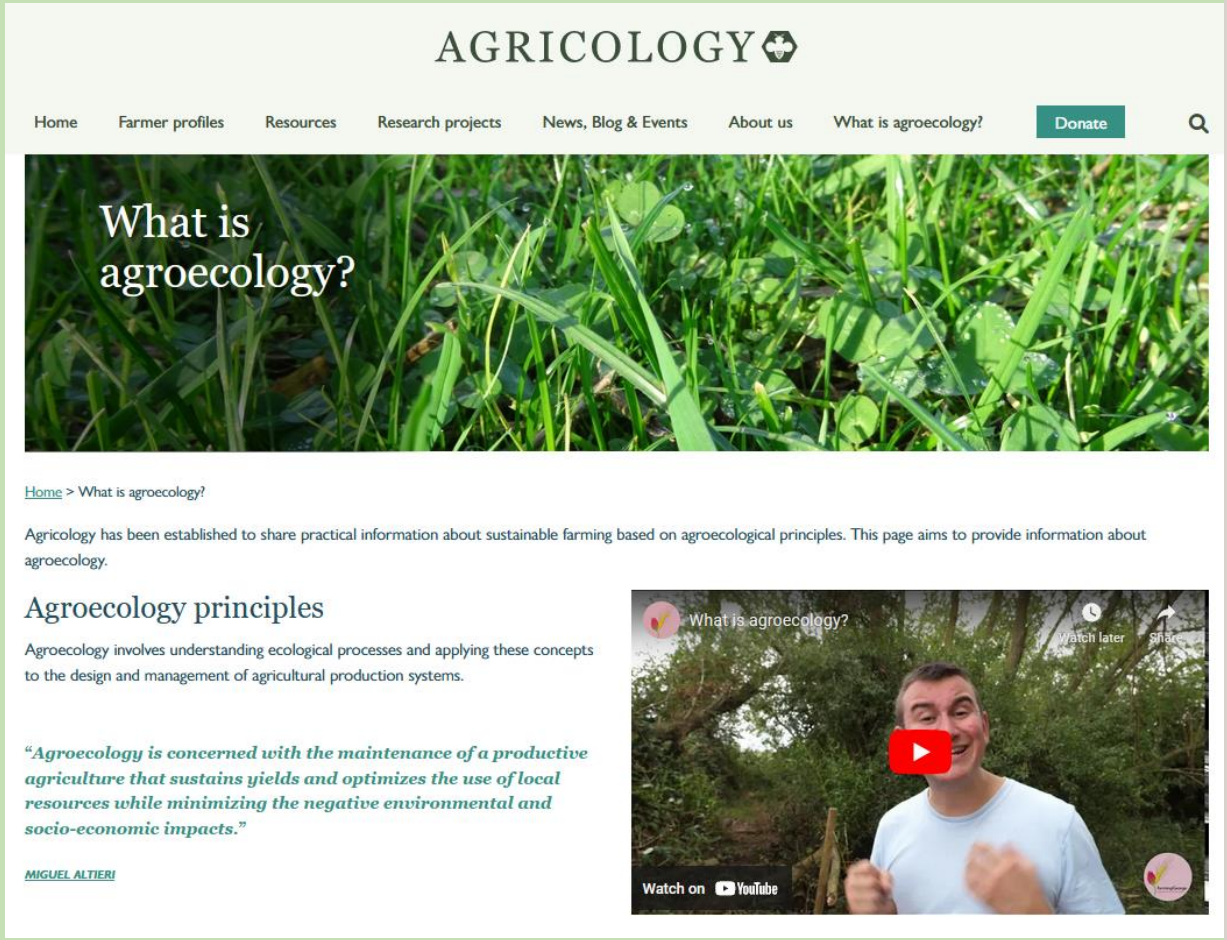
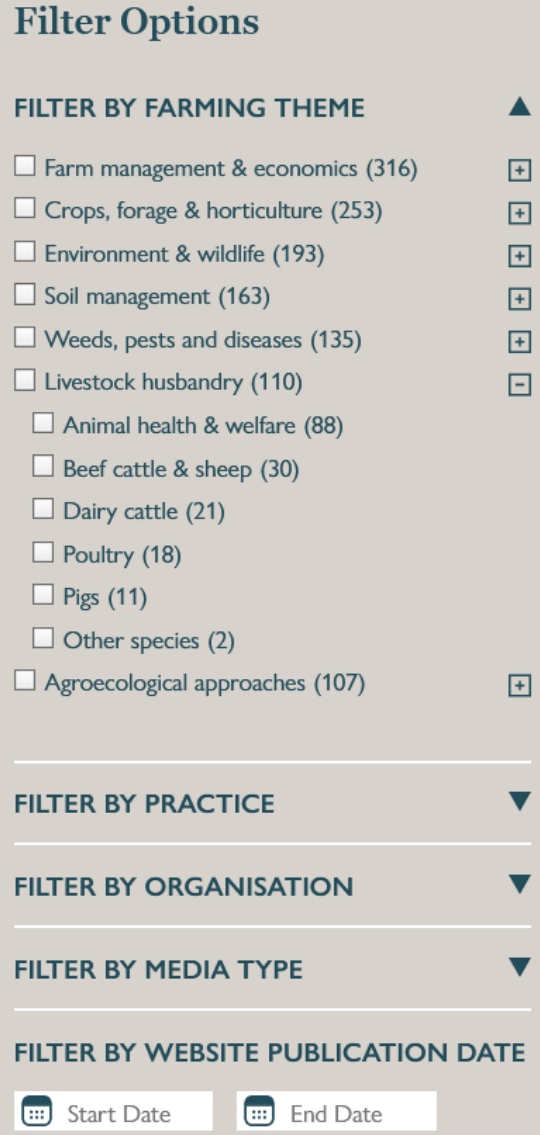




- Definitions of agroecology…

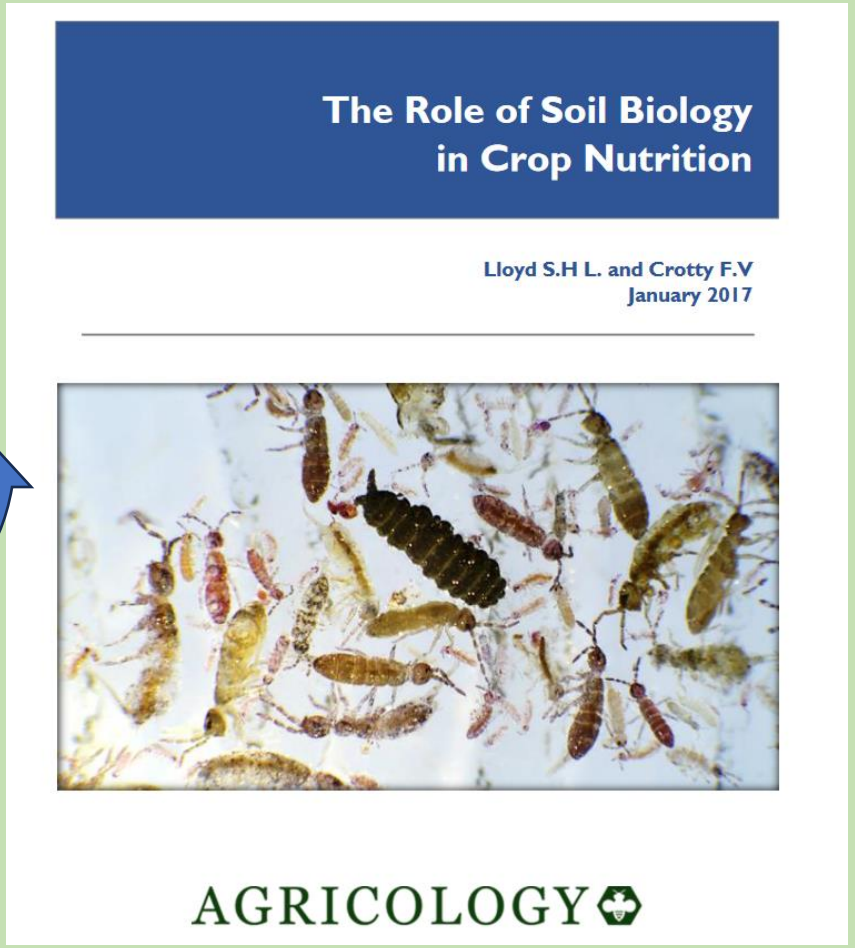
  https://agricology.co.uk/what-is-agroecology/

- Search / filter via farming themes categories and sub-categories, practices, authoring organisations, media types, publication dates.

Resources

- Accessible via individual resource pages with brief summary, key points, fully referenced, peer reviewed.
- Platform for communicating research, sometimes produced specifically for Agricology i.e. factsheets / practice abstracts.

https://www.agricology.co.uk/resources/role-soil-biology-crop-nutrition



Resources

- Collaborating with organisations, turning research into practical guidance.

https://www.agricology.co.uk/organic-management-techniques-project

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Home > Research Projects > Organic Management Techniques Project

Organic Management Techniques Project

Opportunities, Barriers and Constraints for Organic Management Techniques to Improve Sustainability of Conventional Farming

Project Background

British farming businesses are facing a number of challenges, such as uncertain weather and volatile markets. The Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, the Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, set out ambitions for the UK to be a world-leading food and farming nation that provides a cleaner and healthier environment, benefiting the economy. A consortium of farming organisations therefore came together to explore the extent to which the application of agroecological techniques, widely adopted in organic agriculture, could help to achieve these goals. This Defra-funded project (OF03111) which ran from 1st February 2018 to 30th November 2018, has shown that the UK has an excellent opportunity to drive the uptake of practices that can enhance the production efficiency and resilience of farming systems.

The project investigated the viability of transferring agroecological practices more widely across UK agriculture. Agroecological techniques are not exclusive to organic systems and are increasingly being applied by progressive farmers in the non-organic sector. For example, leys are being incorporated within conventional arable crop-rotations to help control blackgrass.

1. Mixed farming through collaboration
2. Use of diverse crop rotations
3. Manure and compost as a fertiliser
4. Feeding livestock on pasture-based diets
5. Use of mechanical weed control
6. Biological control (indoors)
7. Integrating leys in arable rotations
8. Encouraging natural predators (outdoors)
9. Use of green waste compost
10. Outdoor access for animals all year round
11. Diverse/herbal sward mixtures
12. Increasing use of legumes in crop rotation
13. Novel forages (e.g. chicory)
14. Use of complementary therapies
15. Undersowing of leys in crops

Summary provided by the Organic Research Centre, **access the final project report here.**

Associated Agricology Partner Organisation(s):

ORGANIC RESEARCH CENTRE

SRUC

LEAF LINKING ENVIRONMENT AND FARMING

Soil Association

OF&G ORGANIC

Game & Wildlife CONSERVATION TRUST The Allerton Project

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Home > Resources > Novel forage crops

Novel forage crops

Organic Management Techniques to Improve Sustainability of Non-Organic Farming

Resource explained

This abstract was composed as part of a Defra-funded project looking at organic management techniques that could be applied on non-organic farms and help improve sustainability. It describes information on novel forage crops, listing the main agronomic, economic and/or ecological value you can expect to gain from growing sainfoin, chicory and lucerne. It includes practical recommendations such as the time of year they should be planted, suitability according to your farming system, and equipment required. It also includes a case study of a farmer who is applying the practice. Potential benefits and potential barriers you would need to consider and financial implications are also listed.

COMPATIBLE WITH ORGANIC STANDARDS

DOWNLOAD RESOURCE

Author(s):
Alford, J

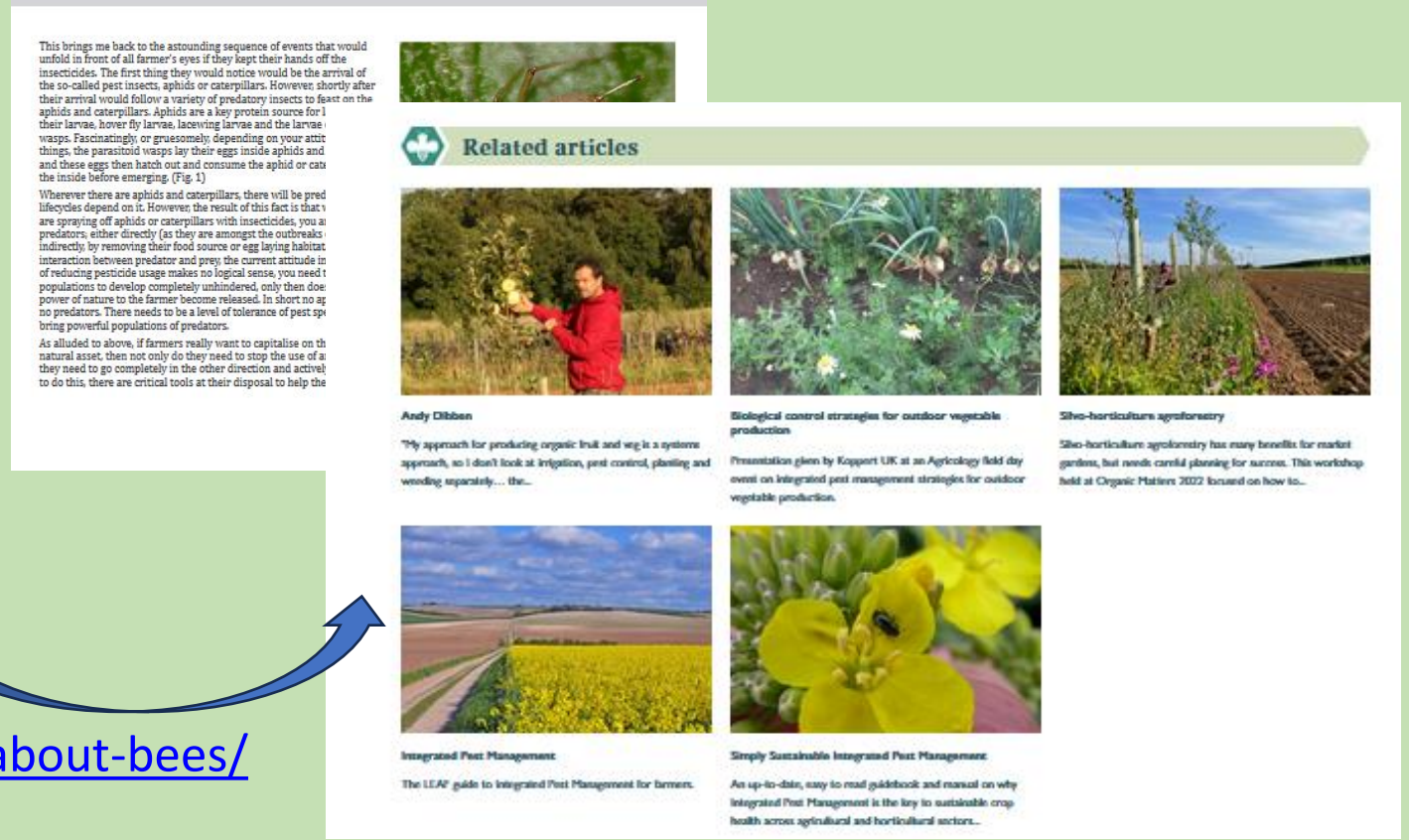
Funders:
Defra

Organisation(s):
- Agricology
- GWCT

Findings & recommendations

- Modern forage crop cultivars do not always provide the yield or management benefits required on all farms. Lucerne, sainfoin and chicory have the potential to fill these gaps, and with correct management supply high quality, drought tolerant feed for cattle and sheep.
- They are deep rooting legumes capable of producing high yields of high protein forage. Lucerne is suited to a multi cut system, sainfoin can be cut and grazed, chicory is commonly grown in mixtures – it can be selectively grazed so needs to be managed,

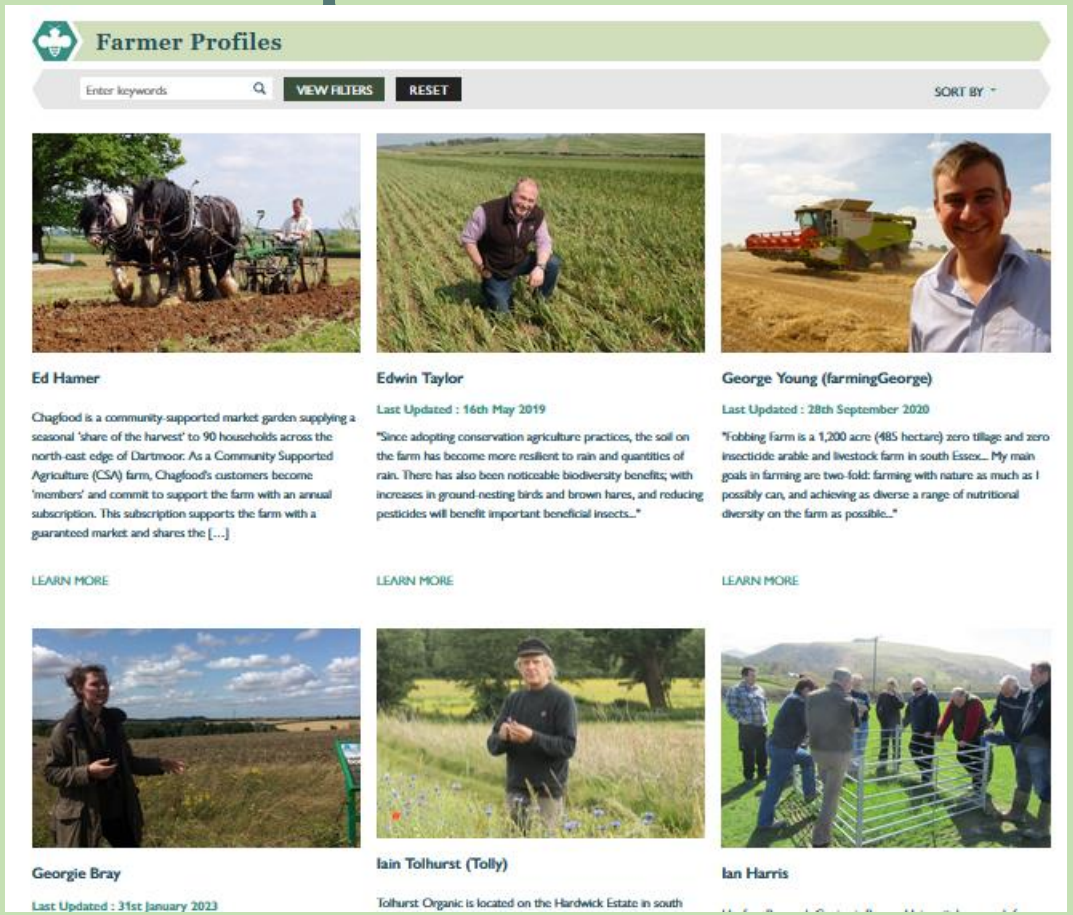
Resources

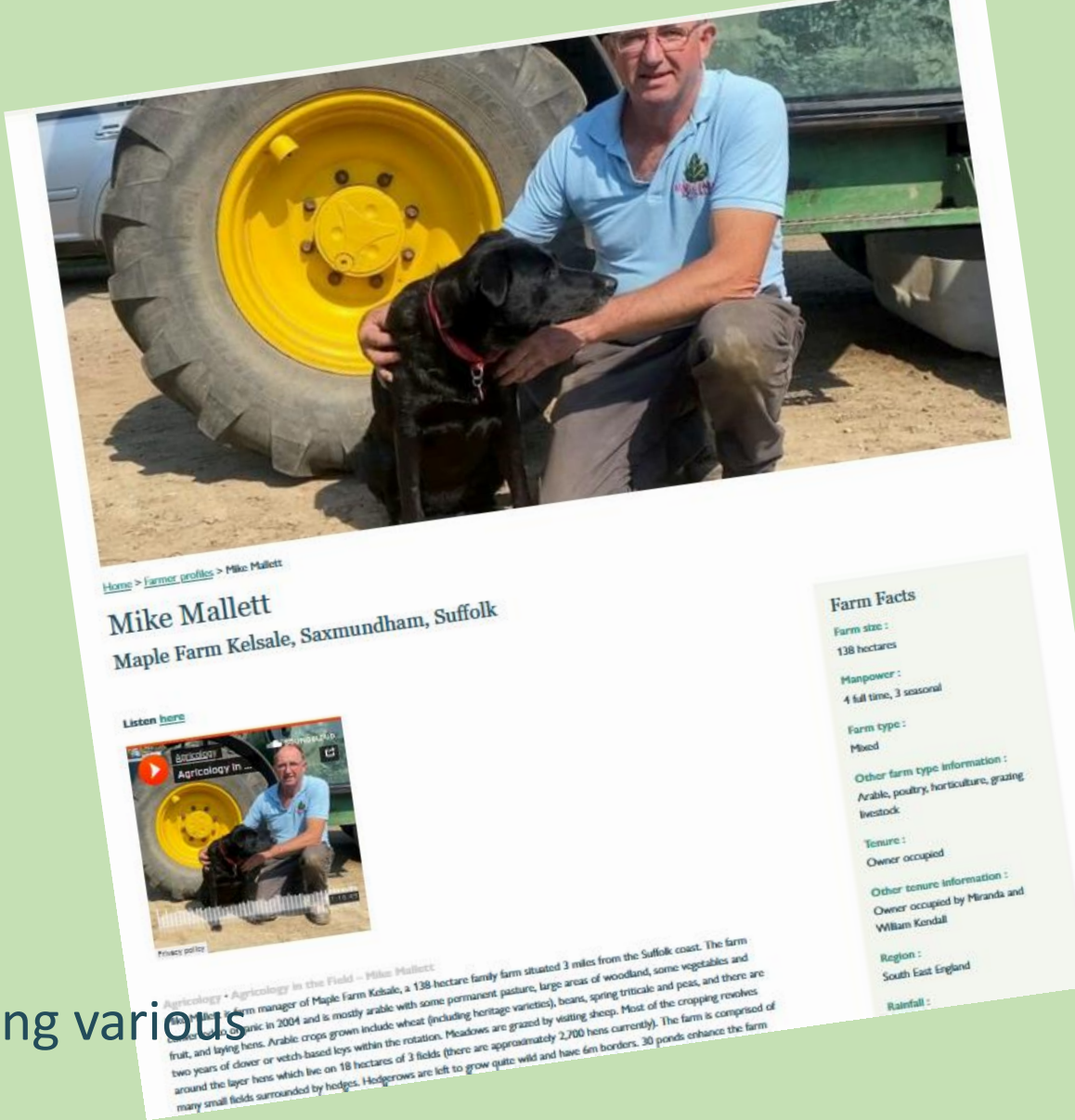


Linking to other relevant content…

https://agricology.co.uk/resource/its-not-just-about-bees/

Farmer profiles





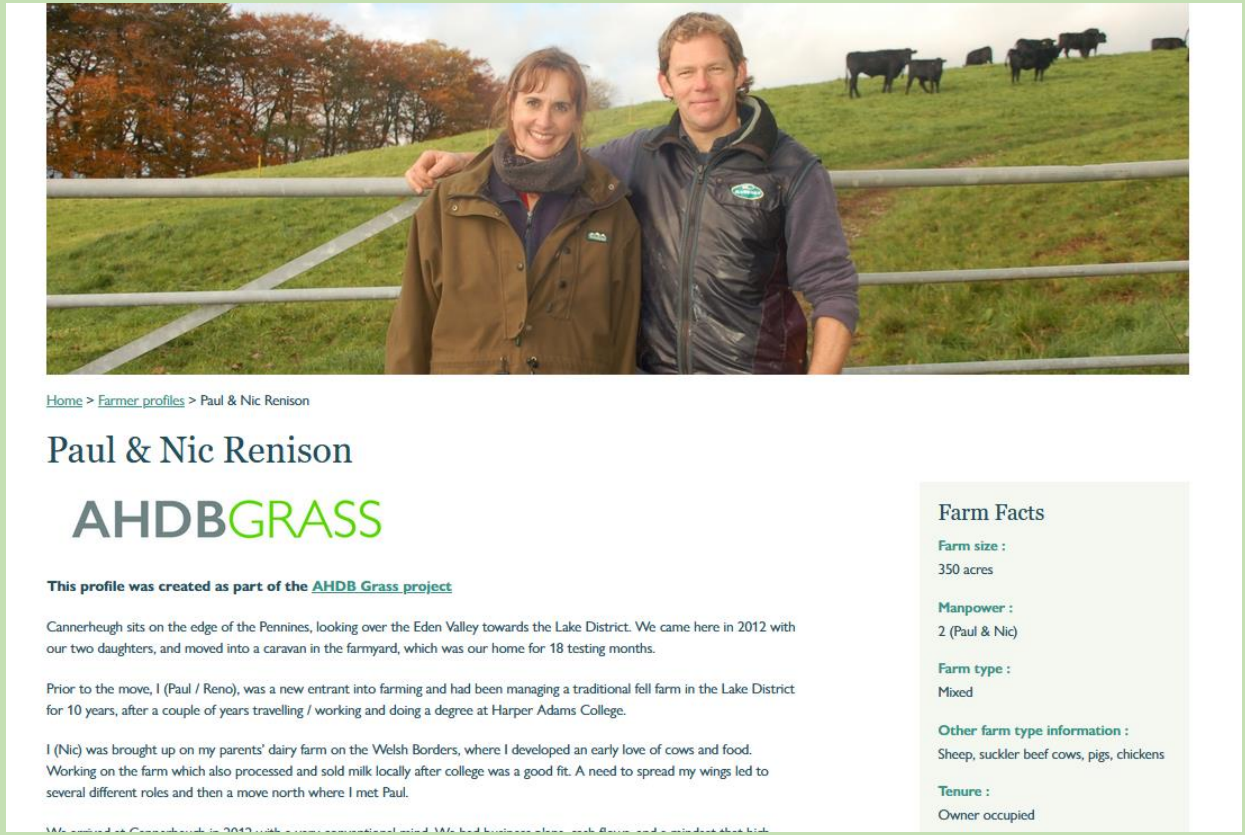
- Different farming approaches and farm types, using various media.
- Drilling down into the finer details of practical application, referencing environmental / economic / community impacts.

https://agricology.co.uk/farmer-profiles/mike-mallett/

Farmer profiles

- Unique to Agricology.

https://agricology.co.uk/farmer-profiles/barbour-family/



https://agricology.co.uk/farmer-profiles/paul-nic-renison/

- Some commissioned by contributing organisations.

Research project hubs

Providing a platform to share farmer-facing project outputs and linking event outputs with useful resources…

Home > Research Projects > Encouraging Habitat Management and Conservation Methods that Positively Impact Farmland Biodiversity

Encouraging Habitat Management and Conservation … Positively Impact Farmland Biodiversity

Project Background

The overarching aim for this project is to demonstrate that food production and … possible to reverse species decline; particularly when farmers consider the needs of … accordingly.

The 2019 State of Nature Report found 41% of the UK's wildlife species have declined, threatened with extinction, and 37% of species have decreased in distribution in the last … lost wildlife habitats and food sources associated with industrial scale farming and increas… species are farmland birds – the abundance of indicator species has fallen by 54% since 19… in the last century.

This project set out to show how the Duke of Norfolk's Peppering Farm in Arundel, West S… across 15% of their land, without detrimental effect to the 85% of land dedicated to food pro… farmers in the county to adopt a similar approach with at least 7% of their own land. Conserv… greatly increased populations of insects, wildflowers, skylarks, yellowhammers, corn buntings, li… mammals.

Aims & Approach

1) To share (in person) learnings on habitat management, conservation techniques and legal pred… have increased farmland bird populations and biodiversity at Peppering Farm, Sussex, with other f…

2) To document the insight and experience gained from the work undertaken, promoting it more b… farmers nationwide to adopt these methods.

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Project Outputs

Sussex farmers were hosted at a **peer-to-peer workshop involving a farm walk at Peppering Farm**, showcasing conservation techniques and predation management, and exploring the impact, benefits and relevance on a farm and landscape scale, to encourage them to adopt these methods. It covered the '3 pillars' – habitat management, provision of food sources, and predation management. (View a summary below)

A summary guide to the three key pillars of the conservation approach and how to implement these, together with existing materials on food sources, insect identification and the findings of the PARTRIDGE Project at Peppering Farm was produced.

Access the guide here: Conservation of Farmland Birds Handout.pdf

- Biodiversity
- Business management
- People & skills
- Pollinators & ecological services
- Recreation & rural pursuits

Key Farming Practices :

- Diverse rotation
- Encouraging beneficial insects
- Habitat creation
- Undersowing

Funders : Ernest Kleinwort Charitable, The Lawson Trust

Research Type : Project

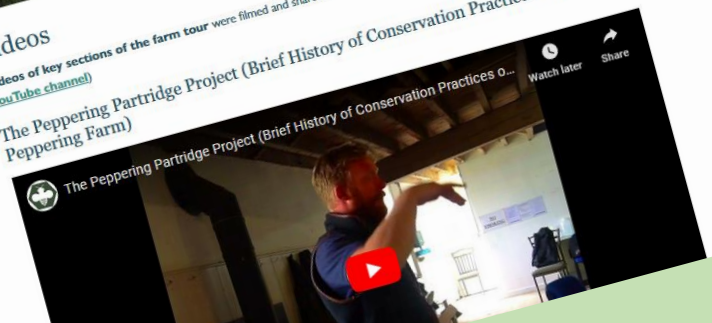
Organisation(s):

- Agricology
- Game & Wildlife

Videos

Videos of key sections of the farm tour were filmed and shared. Explore the footage below (or access via the … YouTube channel)

The Peppering Partridge Project (Brief History of Conservation Practices on Peppering Farm)



Conservation of Farmland Birds

This guide comprises notes to support the Conservation of Farmland Birds workshop at Peppering Farm, Sussex, in June 2022; a collaboration between GWCT and Agricology and made possible by the generous support of The Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust and The Lawson Trust.

UK Farmland bird indicators have fallen by 54% since 1970. Modern farming techniques have created challenging conditions for farm ecosystems and birdlife in particular, reducing insect numbers and the nesting habitats they need to survive.

Peppering farm, in partnership with GWCT, lead partner in the Interreg PARTRIDGE Project, have successfully developed a scalable solution for increasing farmland bird populations whilst maintaining farm profitability. In recent years they have laid 9 miles of new hedging and currently dedicate 12% of their farmland to conservation, with the remainder farmed as before.

This approach has been developed primarily to ensure grey partridge populations, an indicator species for a healthy farm environment, thrive, but has also demonstrated a significant positive impact across other farmland birds including a 57% increase in skylarks, 71% increase in lapwings, 20% increase in yellowhammers and 30% increase in corn buntings. Small mammals such as voles and hares are also visibly abundant.

© GWCT

The Three Pillars of a Successful Conservation Approach

Extensive research across Europe has identified three pillars of an approach that can successfully reverse the decline in farmland biodiversity, supporting more varied flora and fauna

NESTING AND OVERWINTER HABITAT

Grey partridges are ground-nesting birds, with nests in shallow scrapes hidden in dense vegetation in field margins, crops, or the bases of hedges. They pair up in late winter/early spring and search for suitable nesting sites, looking for cover to protect their nests and the incubating hens from the weather and predators.

Provide suitable habitat by:

- ✓ Cultivated arable margins (which also allow less pesticide drift into nesting areas)
- ✓ Leaving hedges uncut during the nesting season (May - July), and cutting in rotation (3 years) to allow a dense base to develop and ensuring plentiful nesting habitats for other farm birds
- ✓ Introducing wildflower margins/plots in field corners that remain uncut during May - August to provide overhead protection from predators and insect food for chicks
- ✓ Rotating crops throughout the year and leaving winter stubble where possible to ensure consistent cover
- ✓ Creating 'beetle banks' for additional nesting habitat and sustainable food sources

Game & Wildlife CONSERVATION TRUST

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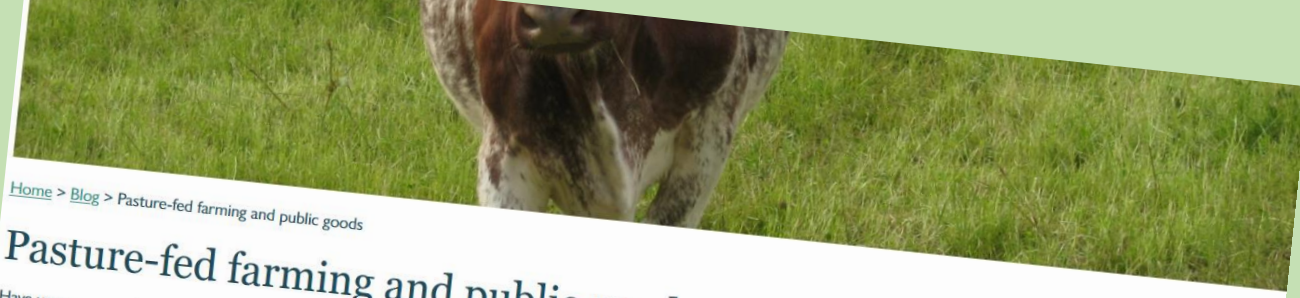
https://agricology.co.uk/research-projects/encouraging-habitat-management-and-conservation-methods-positively-impact-farmland-biodiversity/

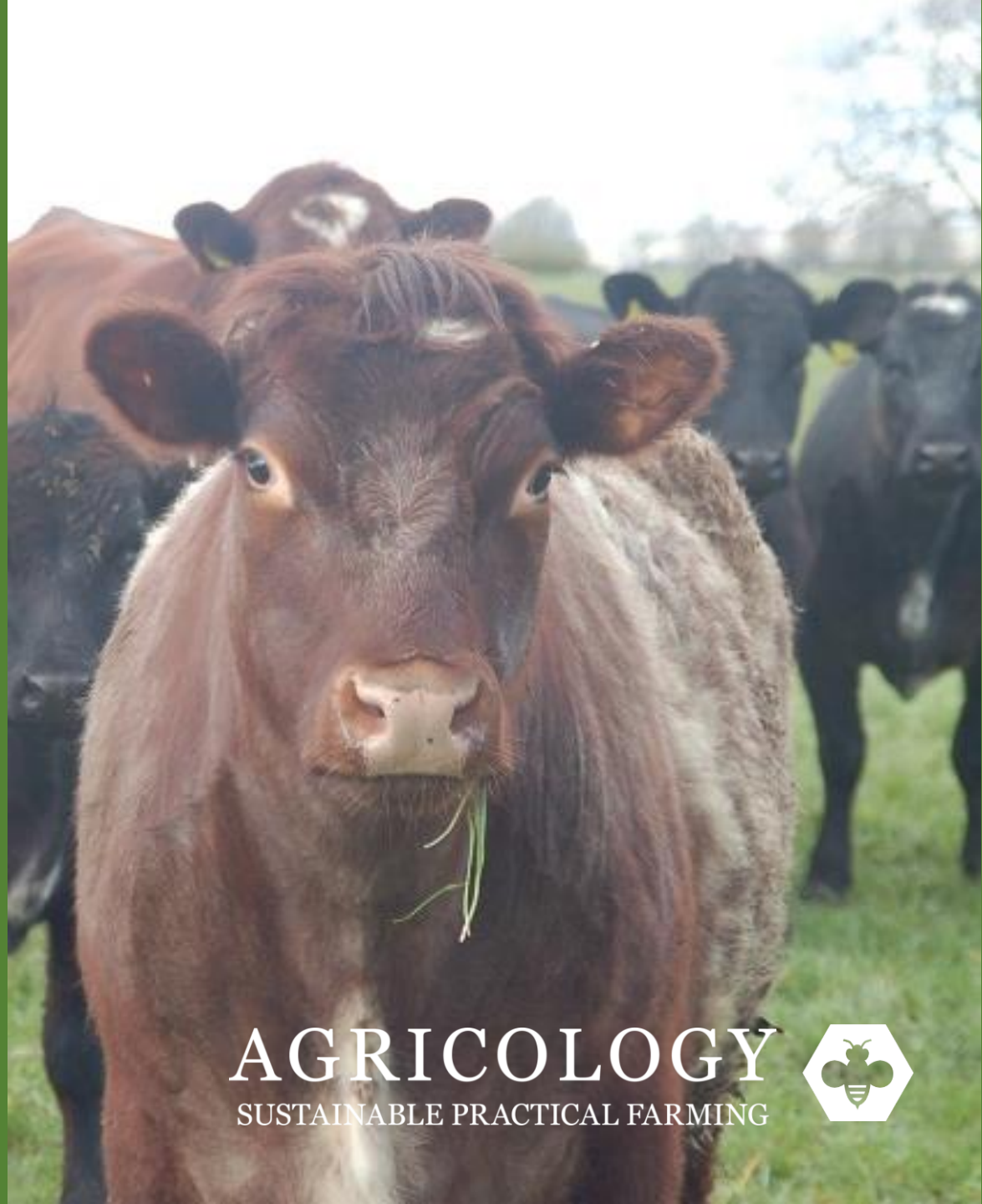
Informal space **for all** to share and explore topical issues, events etc.

Blogs



In summary

- Primary audience is farmers.
- Applicable for various stages of farming journey.
- Plenty to chew over! Explore potential practical solutions to fit individual circumstances.
- Focus on farm business benefits and the wider environment.
- Dynamic and exciting teaching tool. Keeping it alive!
- Possibilities to contribute to the content and make connections in the farming industry / wider network.



Get in touch: enquiries@agricology.co.uk

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THANK YOU FOR LISTENING