

# SANDSTONE RIDGE FARMERS

## Autumn Newsletter



### Dates for your diary

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Drop a line to book onto events, or suggest future activities.

### Trees benefits on Livestock Farms

**Sat 19th Oct 10.30-1pm**

The Hollies, Wem, SY4 5RT

Take a closer look at the benefits of trees for livestock farms with Peter Aspin, silvo-pastoral farmer.

### Cheshire Food & Farming Event

**Thurs 14th Nov 7.30 - 9pm**

The Barbour Institute, Tattenhall, CH3 9PX

New opportunities for Cheshire Farmers in the Food & Drink Industry

### Farm Diversification Road Trip

**Fri 22nd Nov**

A study tour to visit three very successful farm businesses in the National Forest.



## In this edition

This Autumn Edition comes to you in print, as with so much going on, you can read it at leisure over your porridge.

- ♦ Facilitator's Update
- ♦ Autumn/Winter Programme - *Trees on Livestock Farms Visit, Food & Farming Producers Event, Diversification Tour*
- ♦ Summer Events Roundup - *Meadow & Beekeeping Event, CSF & Productivity Grants*
- ♦ The Glover Review
- ♦ Farmer Cluster News
- ♦ Current Countryside Stewardship and Expiring Schemes
- ♦ Environmental Land Management - *what we know so far*
- ♦ What Catchment Sensitive Farming has to offer - update from our local CSF officer, Olivia Duff

Remember to check out the Farmer Network pages on the Sandstone Ridge Website [www.sandstoneridge.org.uk](http://www.sandstoneridge.org.uk)

## Farmer Clusters

The Sandstone Ridge Farmer Network is one of 98 farmer clusters in England supported by Natural England's through its Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Funding, and runs until March 2021.

*The 98 'farmer clusters' cover 453,000ha of land and involve over 2,300 land managers.*

Up to 40 more farm clusters will be funded in 2020.

The aim of these clusters is to deliver co-ordinated advice and training on landscape-scale measures for wildlife, water management, landscape and the historic environment.

After the last Cluster Conference in November 2018, there was a call for a resource to enable clusters to share and learn from each other, and GWCT provided a web forum to support the sharing of knowledge and experiences between groups. You can see what other clusters are up to on this web forum here [www.farmerclusters.com](http://www.farmerclusters.com)



## Facilitator's Update



Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter! We have some really exciting events over the next couple of months, our Food and Farming evening on 14th November will showcase new opportunities for Sandstone Ridge Food Producers, and for those with diversified businesses, or thinking of doing so, our road trip 22nd Nov promises to be an inspiring day. I'm aiming to catch up with all of you over the winter, so I'll be in touch!

If you are a follower of weather records, you may have noted that 2019 has given us the 7th wettest meteorological summer (June, July and August) since records began in 1910. What surprised me was that of the three wettest counties in England this summer, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Northumberland, Cheshire won the prize for a soggy 179% higher than average county rainfall against the 1981-2010 benchmark. It is beyond doubt now that climate resilience has become a real challenge for farming.

Soggy conditions stopped play for many of our local events, so we sadly missed some of our work/social highlights of year. The dialogue around climate change is set to remain high on the agenda, with discussion across all farming sectors on how to conserve soil carbon, water and energy resources, and build climate resilience into the farm business. Despite some inflammatory media around greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, there is a growing understanding that agriculture is the only sector that both emits and stores greenhouses gases, and is therefore also an important part of the climate change solution.

Planting more trees could be one answer, so for inspiration, take a look at our farm visit lined up for Sat 19th October!

Nicky

## Tree Planting Focus



As farmers and land managers on the Ridge, we have good opportunities to increase tree numbers without having to necessarily plant up blocks of woodland that risks the loss of productive area or capital land value.

By planting trees in hedgerows, field corners and areas such as around ponds, the issue of lost BPS area is avoided. Subsidised trees and hedgerow plants are readily available through the Woodland Trust and The Mersey Forest.

*As a Community Group, we can put together a bulk application to the Woodland Trust for free trees. So I'm asking all members to get in touch to let me know how many trees you can plant this winter.*

## Autumn/ Winter Events

At our steering group meeting in the summer we discussed focus areas for the group over the Autumn and Winter. A key area of interest is opportunities for farm diversification and food production, and tree benefits for livestock farms. With that steer, we have worked with relevant organisations to bring together a fantastic food focussed event and two study trips. We'll be doing the Big Farmland Bird Count again (7 - 16<sup>th</sup> Feb) but this time with some training in advance for those of you who would like to brush up your bird spotting skills ahead of doing counts on your farms.

## Trees for Livestock Benefits



### Farm Visit: Saturday 19th October 10.30 - 1pm

Location: The Hollies, Soultton, Wem, Shropshire, SY4 5RT.  
Turn off A49 at Prees Green onto the B5065 Wem Road, half a mile on left. *Text or email numbers to Nicky, all welcome.*

We have a very exciting opportunity to visit Peter Aspin who farms near Wem using a silvo-pastoral land management system, to benefit both livestock and the farm environment. Peter has taken tree planting to another level at The Hollies, in a way which allows him to retain land use status as agricultural and supporting his dairy youngstock rearing business. The silvo-pastoral system is a method of land-use whereby trees, perennial ground cover crops (in this case grasses, clovers and herbs) and livestock (in this case bovines) are produced on the same piece of land.

*Cont...*



## The Glover Review

The independent 'Glover Review' of Landscapes was published on 25<sup>th</sup> Sept and contained statements of high importance for the future of the Sandstone Ridge in the quest to achieve recognition as a landscape of national significance.

The Review wants 'our National Landscapes to work together with big ambitions so they are happier, healthier, greener, more beautiful and open to everyone'.

In the early summer Dr Jim Dixon, who sits on the review panel, spent a day with the Sandstone Ridge Trust to learn more about the ambition to achieve recognition as an important National Landscape, which would help secure funding and open opportunities for farmers, landowners, visitors and residents on the Ridge.

The Glover Review gives us a special mention, stating that

*"The Sandstone Ridge in Cheshire made a persuasive case and deserves further consideration".*

## Cont....

The Hollies Farm project has allowed Peter to learn first hand how using trees within the land helps to regulate the farm climate, protecting from extremes of cold and heat. He experiments with grasses and herbs that co-habit well in a silvo-pastoral system, and observes the benefits of diverse browse on bovine health. His expertise was even called on by the BBC's researchers for The Archers, when they did their agroforestry storyline!

Peter's observations the on livestock benefits include:

- ♦ Lower food demand as shelter and better microclimates encourage more lying down and lower metabolic demand
- ♦ Higher soil temperature in field and early grass growth
- ♦ Preferential tree browse as grasses diminish in quality throughout season



To read more about Peter's farm, visit [www.silvaspin.org.uk](http://www.silvaspin.org.uk)

## Priorities for Tree Planting on the Ridge

At 13% woodland cover, the Sandstone Ridge is fairly well wooded, compared with less than 4% for Cheshire as a whole, largely due to some larger woodlands such as Delamere. Tree planting is nevertheless a key priority for the Sandstone Ridge, but the focus is on three areas:

- ♦ To create and manage areas between woodland and habitats such as ponds and scrub to benefit biodiversity and landscape connectivity.
- ♦ To increase the diversity of tree species to improve resilience to the effects of tree pests, diseases and climate change.
- ♦ To increase the area of wet woodland for the benefit of flood water management

## Farm Diversification Road Trip

*Friday 22nd Nov*

8.15am Bickerton Village Hall, return approx 5.30pm. Lunch provided

We are joining forces with the Lower Dane Farmer Cluster to visit three successful diversified farm businesses located in the National Forest.

Beehive Farm runs a camping and glamping business, caravan storage and fishing ponds

[www.beehivefarm-woolandlakes.co.uk](http://www.beehivefarm-woolandlakes.co.uk)

Cattows Farm has a farm shop and tea room, woodland walk, outdoor activities, hosts weddings

[www.cattowsfarm.co.uk](http://www.cattowsfarm.co.uk)

Garlands Farm runs a clay pigeon shoot alongside a hunting and shooting supplies business

[www.garlandsshootingground.co.uk](http://www.garlandsshootingground.co.uk)

I'm sure you'll agree, that's a selection with a lot to inspire! Free to Sandstone Ridge Farmers, limited



## Food and Farming Event Opportunities for Cheshire Farmers in the Food and Drinks Industry

Thurs 14<sup>th</sup> Nov Barbour Institute, 7.30-9pm

Tattenhall. CH3 9PX. Doors open 7pm, talks start at 7.30pm

Our rolling Cheshire countryside is perfect for producing great quality dairy produce, beef, sheep and poultry, and growing potatoes, vegetables and orchard fruits. This event looks at new opportunities for Cheshire growers and producers in the food and drinks industry.

Led by Taste Cheshire, and supported by NoW Food, the team will outline current food and drinks trends, route to market answers, and opportunities for farm produce in an increasingly challenging farming context, from reduced subsidies to climate change and flooding. The evening also provides an opportunity to find out about forthcoming equipment grants for producers, ERDF Business Support funding, and other resources available to support farm businesses. Not to be missed!



### Agenda

- 7.30pm Stephen Wundke CEO Taste Cheshire introduces the evening and provides a local context about Food and Farming in Cheshire and the UK
- 7.45pm Craig Beck, ERDF Funding Officer, Reaseheath College explains the opportunities available within the Regional Defra framework
- 8.05pm Jeff George details where NoW Food fits within the production hub and how food and drink producers can benefit from engagement.
- 8.25pm Stephen Wundke presents Taste Cheshire and explains routes to market and how these can benefit Cheshire producers.
- 8.45 Questions from the Floor
- 9.00 Summary and Close

This event is being hosted by the Sandstone Ridge Farmers but is open to farmers, growers and producers across Cheshire. Book early!

## Beehive Network Update

Many of you expressed an interest in hosting Karl's bee hives on your farms.

Karl has been in touch to say that the summer's rain had quite an effect on the bees, saying *"A single raindrop weighs about half a bee's weight so they don't enjoy having to forage in the wet!"*

As a consequence, food stores and brood (baby bee) production was below usual levels which held up the bee breeding



programme this year.

Karl has been out to visit a few of the Sandstone Ridge Farmers after the meeting and agreed numbers of hives and locations with each farmer. If he hasn't already been in touch, he'll be out over the winter. Karl is aiming to get the empty hives in place before next spring with the bees to follow afterwards.

## Summer Social Evening Social gathering with meadows and beekeeping

At the beginning of the Summer we had a great turnout for our Summer Social evening, looking at the stunning hay meadows at Broomy Bank, kindly hosted by the Midwood family. While admiring the wildflowers in the meadow, we also learned a huge amount about locally adapted native honey bees and their importance for sustainable bee keeping, courtesy of bee farmer Karl Colyer. Like other livestock, bee colonies need high quality forage from farms to thrive and provide pollination services to crops. We are fortunate on the Sandstone Ridge to have hay meadows and unimproved pasture that provide excellent nectar and pollen sources for many pollinators.



If you are thinking of sowing a wildflower rich meadow, many seed companies now make excellent blends specifically for bees and

butterflies, and can advise on plants to suit your soil type. Our improved grasslands can also support pollinators, with the right cutting and grazing regime. Field margins along ditches and hedgerows, cut late into mid-summer after flowering and seed set, provide good insect forage as well as important flyways across the landscape. Karl told us that honey bees will fly several kilometres to collect nectar, and that our hedgerows provide important nectar sources particularly in the early and late parts of the year.

Good hedgerow species for nectar include early flowering willows, crab apple, damson and late flowering ivy. We will look out for the Hedgerow & Boundary Grants later this year which provide useful funding for gapping up and restoring hedgerows to add diversity and structure.

## Cluster Conference

As the facilitator of this group, I was asked to give feedback on the successes and challenges of the farmer cluster programme, and it seems that I am not alone in finding it frustrating that the two activities seen by group members as most important (one-to-one advice, and capital funding) are not permitted under NE rules.

That said, there is an impressive level of support both nationally and within farmer clusters, which is testament to the willingness farmers show for working together to benefit local landscapes and environments. And of course, we are all waiting to see this transforms into benefits for farm businesses after direct payments are phased out and new schemes introduced.

The next opportunity to be part of the national dialogue is likely to be the Farmer Cluster Conference in early 2020. It is important that we attend with good representation from our members. I will share the date with you when it is announced.

## Grants for Water Quality and Productivity

Our May gathering focussed on grants and support available through the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme and Countryside Productivity Scheme, and how these can support nutrient efficiency, land management or herd health and productivity. Dave Perry CSFO attended, to outline the application process and criteria, and applications were made by many of you who now await news of grant funding. Although as yet unconfirmed, we assume that these grants will be available again in 2020.

## What Catchment Sensitive Farming Offers

By Olivia Duff, CSF Officer Mob. 07554226112  
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CSF works closely with local farmers and landowners to reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture, to help save landowners money and to keep farming profitable. All services are confidential, FREE of charge and carried out by qualified advisers.

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) offers free advice to farmers to help improve water quality in various high priority areas for water quality issues. In Cheshire this covers various waterbodies including the Aldford Brook and the Bickley Brook (Bar Mere Catchment).

We as CSF Officers can help with applying for water capital grant items under Countryside Stewardship for those in high priority areas and approve capital items that require CSF approval. In addition to our help and advice towards Countryside Stewardship, we are able to provide access to free one-to-one advice through visits to carry out Farm Infrastructure Audits, draw up Nutrient Management Plans and look at Water Pathway Management.

To find out if you are in a high priority area see Magic maps and choose the 'Countryside Stewardship Water Quality Priority Areas' layer. If you would like any more information, or would like to arrange a free visit from one of our CSF officers in Cheshire, please contact Olivia Duff.



## Current Schemes Update

It is likely that some ELS or HLS agreements expiring in 2020 will be offered an extension and we are aware of farms with HLS schemes around Cheshire where this is starting to happen.

Natural England are assessing suitability of targeted schemes, so if your scheme is due to end in 2020 and this is of interest, it would be worth getting in touch to discuss whether your scheme meets the criteria. Bear in mind however that there will be no scheme amendments or allowance for new or additional capital works, so a new CS Mid Tier scheme may still prove more appealing.

A new Environmental Land Management scheme will begin being rolled out from 2021 in theory, but countrywide roll out is not expected before 2025, so it's likely that there will be a few more rounds of Countryside Stewardship in the meantime to keep land under an agri-environment scheme.

## Environmental Land Management

### *What we know so far*

The new Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs) is in the early stages of development by Defra. At the moment there are a number of Tests and Trials looking at specific components of how schemes are put together, ahead of a National Pilot which is planned to commence in 2021, which is designed to phase in over the withdrawal period from current subsidies.

In summary, what we know so far is that the vision for ELMs is to go above and beyond the agri-environment schemes (Countryside Stewardship), through the creation of a holistic plan for the farm, meeting objectives for the following priorities:

- ✦ Clean air, and clean and plentiful water
- ✦ Thriving plants and wildlife
- ✦ Protection from and mitigation of environmental hazards
- ✦ Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change
- ✦ Beauty, heritage and engagement (including recreation)

The priorities are highlighted in the Government's 25 year Environment Plan and ELMs will be the main delivery mechanism.

Each agreement will be based around an initial Land Management Plan covering the whole holding, focussing on the priorities above and incorporating local priorities. These will include soil health, carbon sequestration and flood mitigation, as well as the current scheme objectives of biodiversity conservation, improving water quality and protecting the historic environment.

There is also a strong emphasis on land-scape scale working and will operate through a collaboration between farmers, DEFRA and third parties (conservation charities, agents, agronomists etc). The vision is for plans to be workable and flexible, and therefore reduce punitive action. Rather than inspections, annual audits will be carried out by certified professionals to work with the farmer, check compliance and offer advice.