

Event title: Planning for the Future with Environmental Stewardship

Date of event: Monday 28th November 2022

Host: Stumble Inn, Boyton, PL15 8NU

With changes to farm subsidy payments, there is some uncertainty as to what will replace them. A group of farmers met at the Stumble Inn to discuss the future of environmental stewardship and the options available to them. This event was made possible with thanks to the [National Lottery Community Fund](#) who fund the [Farm Net Zero project](#).

The talk started with an introduction by Hannah Jones of Farm Carbon Toolkit. This explained that while environmental schemes have traditionally been paid on an income foregone basis, farmers should also recognise the hidden benefits of environmental practices for their farm businesses. These can include providing pollinator habitat to benefit crops, providing shelter for livestock in inclement weather and preventing soil erosion. Hannah also mentioned the carbon sequestration value for different stewardship options, which are included in the [Farm Carbon Calculator](#).

Next, we heard from Tim Dart, FNZ Monitor Farmer and Head of the Farm Advisory Team at [Devon Wildlife Trust](#). Tim suggested that with the reduction and eventual removal of the Basic Payment Scheme and the volatility in farm inputs and farmgate prices, farmers should consider joining the new [Sustainable Farming Incentive](#) (SFI). This can provide a stable income for practices such as taking soil organic matter samples, writing a soil management plan, maintaining ground cover and growing diverse leys or cover crops – many of which are practices that the FNZ Monitor Farms are already undertaking or are interested in.

James Ruddick from Cornwall Council then gave a talk on the new [Daras](#) website, developed by Cornwall Council to provide a “one-stop shop” for agricultural funding opportunities and advice. By registering for free, farmers and landowners can see what funding opportunities are available to them for various activities funded by a mix of government and private finance.

[Forest for Cornwall](#) is a Cornwall Council initiative aiming to increase tree cover in Cornwall through the creation of woodland, copses, shelter belts, orchards and wood pasture. Project Officer Jenny Rogers explained the various ways that farmers can get involved through the Woodland Creation Partnership, Woodland Trust MoreWoods and MoreHedges grants and the England Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO). The EWCO in particular will provide financial support of up to £8500 per ha for development costs and £300 per ha per year for maintenance costs for 10 years. Forest for Cornwall are also aiming to establish 10 fully funded agroforestry sites in Cornwall to demonstrate best practice and the diversity of options for integrating trees into farming systems. Jenny highlighted the range of benefits that trees can provide in agriculture including diversifying income, protecting soil from wind and rain erosion and providing shelter and forage for livestock.

The discussion turned to the experiences of some of the monitor farmers present at the meeting. Ben Thomas, who farms at Warleggan and manages the Belted Galloway herd on Goss Moor National Nature Reserve, spoke about the benefits he has seen of allowing cattle access to woodland on the moor. Willow was preferentially grazed over what Ben thought was “good” grass, with faecal egg counts showing a low parasite burden and good growth rates. Ben also mentioned his experience of the [Farming in Protected Landscape](#) (FiPL) grant that allowed him to invest in electric fencing to better manage grazing at the Warleggan farm. The FiPL grant is available to farmers in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and is far less prescriptive than other grants. A wide variety of activities can be funded as long as they are approved by a local board for their contribution to nature, climate and the public. Dairy farmers, John and Sue Nattle and mixed farmer, Martin Howlett have also benefited from FiPL grants through the Tamar Valley AONB for herbal leys and a wildlife pond respectively. Martin had also made use of the Countryside Stewardship Mid Tier to support school visits for children from Plymouth to learn about farming and nature. Unfortunately, as suckler beef farmer Jonathan Chapman pointed out, FiPL only applies to farms within an AONB. Jonathan’s farm directly borders an AONB and his application was refused, opening up a conversation on whether FiPL-style grants should be made more widely available to extend their benefits.

New entrant dairy farmers, Bradley and Nicole Davey, then spoke about their experiences of farming within constraints set by their landlord's stewardship agreement. GS4 herbal leys have been planted and are being successfully grazed by the Davey's dairy herd, as well as benefiting soil health and biodiversity. Bradley encouraged others to try to find stewardship agreements that suit their farm system, a sentiment echoed by fellow dairy farmer Phil Kent, who has also found GS4 herbal leys to be of value on their own farming merits as well as stewardship payments. Arable and beef farmer Jon Perry rounded out the meeting by bringing up the important point of food production being a public good worth supporting. Jon also commended the younger farmers in the room for both their farming ambitions and commitments to environmental stewardship.

