



The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN) is a farmer led, independent organisation established in November 2017. We are uniting farmers who are committed to managing their land for wildlife and the delivery of public goods, as well as growing and providing healthy and nutritious food. We are an UK wide movement, with an established NFFN Cymru Steering Group.

The NFFN has over 1,800 farmer members (over 250 from Wales) and we also have over 8,000 public members who support our manifesto.¹

The landscape in Wales is shaped by farming. Yet not all change in recent times has been desirable; soils have been depleted, water courses degraded and nature has struggled to cope with the pace of change. The State of Nature 2019 Report highlights that **1 in 6 wildlife species in Wales is threatened with extinction**.

However, many farms are bucking this trend, and many farmers are playing an incredible role in helping wildlife flourish on their farms - we believe that they should be better supported and rewarded for their good work. If more follow this lead, we can reverse these declines.

Summary

- Nature friendly farming has a big role to play in ensuring a Green Recovery following Covid-19
- Central to this is adopting the *Less is More* principle
- Future agriculture policies in Wales should be targeted at mainstreaming nature friendly farming
- Rewilding is one of many conservation management tools, and should be viewed within a broader land use approach, tailored to local contexts.
- Rewilding can be beneficial for biodiversity in some instances, however in some scenarios it may be detrimental to the cause.
- As such, we must avoid a one size fits all/ blanket approach to rewilding.
- The term *rewilding* is somewhat divisive and needs to be better defined.

Biodiversity and the green recovery

Nature friendly farming has a big role to play in ensuring a Green Recovery following Covid-19. It can help improve public health, rural economies and communities as well as underpin food security and tackle the nature and climate crises. We believe that nature friendly farming is not only better for nature, but is also the most productive, sustainable and economically viable way of getting food from our land.

The NFFN endorses the *Less is More* principle², an approach that is centred on farming *with* nature and the environment. This essentially means implementing sustainable livestock levels based on the natural productive capacity of the land i.e. the amount of grass/ crops that can be naturally produced to feed animals (without having to use lots of bought in feed and artificial fertilisers). This is also known as the Maximum

¹ <https://www.nffn.org.uk/>

² <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Hill%20of%20farm%20profitability%20report%20-%20FINAL%20agreed%2015%20Nov%2019.pdf>

Sustainable Output (MSO). Evidence shows this can help achieve a more profitable, resilient business model for farming alongside a thriving natural environment - all of which are central to Green Recovery.

Whilst intensive farming systems can also be financially profitable, this is short term thinking due to its negative impact on our natural resources - the very building blocks of food production. The NFFN recently published a report, titled **Nature Means Business**,³ which showcases real life examples of farmers implementing the *Less is More* approach, and how this has helped biodiversity, the environment and farming businesses.

Nature Means Business

We farm on a low input organic model which avoids using any imported fertilizers or feeds - quite a sustainable way of farming. When it comes to food security, I believe that producing food with a low input model where you are farming within the natural carrying capacity of the land, which can be maintained for decades if not centuries, is food security. And the beauty of this system is that it's profitable.

There is another benefit. This system has created a farmed landscape which appeals to a variety of wildlife. We have regenerated heather on the mountain, which is now full of bees and other insects and is home to golden plover. The hay meadows are alive with moths and butterflies - so I know that it's actually working.

As a farmer I am producing food, but I'm also producing biodiversity, carbon sinks, clean air and water. These environmental goods should be viewed as a product, like we view beef, lamb or dairy. I believe future farming payments should build on the success of existing schemes but also incorporate some of the public goods that we deliver but we aren't actually paid for.

Tony Davies, Henfron Farm, Elan Valley

This shift towards a more nature friendly approach also delivers broader benefits to the public, including flood protection, water and air quality, and access to thriving natural landscapes. Land well managed for nature also stores carbon and helps mitigate climate change. Simple nature-based solutions such as tree and hedgerow planting, improving soil health and encouraging grassland biodiversity, as well as more complex management like peatland restoration can play a big role in tackling climate change. Our report, **Farming for our future: The nature friendly climate solution we urgently need**⁴ demonstrates how nature friendly farming can help tackle the climate emergency.

For more information about Nature Friendly Farming and a Green Recovery, please see **NFFN Cymru's Manifesto**⁵ that outlines our 6 key asks.

- 1. Maintain and redirect payments towards mainstreaming nature friendly farming**
- 2. Commit to zero carbon agriculture by 2040**
- 3. Maintain strong environmental and animal welfare standards**
- 4. Build markets for nature friendly farming products**
- 5. Invest in local food systems**
- 6. Educate on food, farming and nature**

With over 80% of Wales farmed, nature friendly has a huge play to role in achieving a Green Recovery (of which biodiversity restoration is key). Committing to these 6 asks can help set us on this path.

³ <https://www.nffn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/20012-NFFN-Report-Nature-means-business-DIGITAL-1.pdf>

⁴ https://www.nffn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/NFFN_report_v7.1.pdf

⁵ <https://www.nffn.org.uk/nffn-cymru-a-green-recovery-how-farming-can-be-the-solution/>

Biodiversity and rewilding (in the context of the future of land management policy proposals)

Rewilding is a somewhat divisive term. We believe this is because it is a poorly defined concept that means different things to different people. As such, we don't think the term should be included as a component of a future *Sustainable Farming Scheme*. In our response to the Sustainable Farming and our Land consultation, we welcomed plans to align future agricultural support with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. These pieces of legislation, particularly the objective of **sustainable management of natural resources**, should guide our approach to farmland nature conservation.

NFFN are open to considering evidence for *rewilding* within a broader land use approach, where nature friendly farms form part of a mosaic of habitats in the landscape. Habitat restoration is a core aspect of nature friendly farming, and farmers play a vital role in ensuring natural habitats and carbon stores are returned to good condition. In some areas, *rewilding* can deliver a host of benefits, such as carbon capture, flood prevention, water quality and soil health improvement, and biodiversity enhancement. For example;

- Fencing off areas of unproductive land and allowing it to regenerate naturally
- Peatland restoration
- Reducing stocking density/ agricultural management to allow regeneration of heather moorland or restoration of hay meadows.
- Encouraging agroforestry farming practices i.e. livestock/ crops and trees. Habitats such as ffridd and pasture woodland are special habitats in the uplands of Wales; these have their own unique biodiversity and can assist in connecting habitats together. They also offer shelter and shade to livestock once established.

On the other hand, *rewilding* or the reduction/ cessation of agricultural management can have a negative impact on biodiversity. For example;

- Vegetation becoming too rank, which stifles other flowering plants. *Molinia Caerula* grassland is a good example of this, because if it is not kept in check, it will dominate and discourage the growth of other plants.
- Furthermore, ground nesting birds such as the golden plover nest on shorter swards, therefore a reduction/ cessation in grazing could threaten their nesting grounds.
- Afforestation near areas utilised by ground nesting birds (such as curlew) can have a negative effect, as they prefer more open habitats.

Afforestation

Rewilding is often synonymous with afforestation. It is without doubt that Wales (and the UK) must significantly increase its tree cover in order to tackle the nature and climate crises. Tree planting can be an effective nature and climate friendly on-farm solution, but needs to be done well to ensure positive benefits. Ensuring the increase in tree cover meets both climate and nature aspirations, as well as working in harmony with farmers and food production, will require a radically different approach than has been taken in the past with inappropriate blanket afforestation. It's vitally important that we plant the **right tree in the right place**, so as to avoid the negative impacts of inappropriate tree planting.

NFFN encourages farmers to create woodier landscapes, alongside and within farmland, with native trees that do not damage other habitats or soils. Woodland grants for farmers should support both the management of existing woodland resources and new tree planting in appropriate locations which can even benefit farm businesses.

Trees can also help reconnect our landscapes. Working together on a landscape-scale farmers can help deliver a corridor for wildlife across Wales via hedgerows, woodland and ffridd.

Silvopasture, silvoarable and agroforestry systems are also positive options which can diversify and spread risk by providing an alternative tree crop in the form of fruit, nuts or timber, and provide shade, shelter and fodder for livestock. Such systems can deliver environmental goods: preventing soil erosion, improving water management and providing habitat for pollinators and beneficial insects. Such systems should be rewarded by future farming schemes and farmers should be supported to implement these. The current Basic Payment Scheme discourages farmers from planting trees (due to a reduction in subsidies) and future policy should rectify this.

Specific reintroductions of species, such as beavers, have the potential to benefit nature friendly farming and the wider landscape by delivering public goods such as natural flood management, but should be context appropriate and considerate of local impact on a case-by-case basis. It is not within the scope of NFFN's current work to comment on more significant reintroductions, such as wolves, but we are open to discussions and evidence on these scenarios and individual nature friendly farmers may have their own independent views to contribute.

Rewilding is one of many conservation management tools, and should be viewed within a broader land use approach, tailored to local contexts. We must avoid a one size fits all/ blanket approach to rewilding. It's got to be locally appropriate, so involving and working with those who know the area is incredibly important.

A future agricultural policy should be centred on a public money for public goods, of which biodiversity is a key component. It should **reward nature friendly farming** and the multiple environmental benefits it provides. Some of our other key asks relating to a future agri policy are listed below;

- There needs to be **sufficient long-term funding** to support farmers in their transition to nature friendly systems and continue to reward public goods production.
- Appropriate **advice and guidance** are essential in order to help farmers during this transition period and beyond.
- Future schemes should be made **accessible to more farmers** with no limits on uptake based on the size of the land holding. All farmers have the potential to provide environmental goods and services and this can be encouraged without prejudice to any one sector.
- We'd also welcome **financial support to invest** in infrastructure, machinery, equipment and technology to help make **food production more sustainable**.

Every farm in Wales can deliver for biodiversity; be it upland or lowland, livestock or mixed, arable or dairy, organic or conventional. Establishing wildflower field margins, planting and appropriately managing hedgerows, tree planting, restoring hay meadows, retaining winter stubbles, planting multi-species leys and bird cover crops are examples of measures that can be adopted on any farm in Wales. As such, we advocate a land sharing approach, where food is produced in harmony with nature. Of course, there is room for *wilder* areas within that farmed landscape - however we need to avoid an extreme land sparing scenario, which promotes the segregation of agricultural land and protected areas for biodiversity or nature conservation.

Conclusion

Thriving biodiversity and a healthy environment is central to a Green Recovery. Nature friendly farming has a big role to play in securing this. The NFFN would welcome the opportunity to work closely on drafting policies and developing initiatives to help mainstream nature friendly farming in Wales. For further information, please contact info@nffn.org.uk