

LEADING FIGURES GATHER TO LEARN HOW 'REGENERATIVE FARMING CAN BOOST FARMER PROFITS AND LOCAL ECONOMIES' AT NEW SUSTAINABLE FARMING CONFERENCE LANDALIVE

Nature-friendly, 'regenerative' farming isn't just good for nature – it can kickstart Britain's economic revival by making farms more profitable and improving the nation's health with foods that are higher in nutrients.

This was the conclusion of speakers and delegates gathered from around the country for LandAlive this weekend, (over 80 speakers, 50 exhibitors and 550 delegates) across two days at the Bath & West Showground in Somerset, a new regenerative farming and sustainable food conference for the South West, with representatives from across the food system, from farmers to policy makers to community food volunteers.

This was also the conclusion of a new study, funded by DEFRA, highlighted at LandAlive by its author Merrick Denton-Thomson, former president of The Landscape Institute. It looked at the impact of farming on a single English county (Hampshire) and concluded that the cost of 'clearing up' after conventional farming - particularly excessive nitrogen use - is more than the value of the food produced in the county. The conclusion: conventional farming is a drain on the local economy and the public purse, in ways that regenerative farming would not be.

Merrick was on a Plenary panel with Sue Pritchard of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, whose own recent report ['The False Economy of Big Food'](#), had a similar thrust to his, but instead of focusing on the environmental cost of the food system, looked at the health, social care, welfare support and productivity costs attributable to poor food, estimated to be £268 billion every year in the UK. The report suggested that it would cost much less than this figure to establish a 'new food economy' based on regeneratively farmed food, which, because of its greater nutrient density, can help prevent ill-health.

Sue reported that the FFCC had undertaken hundreds of ['Food Conversations'](#) this year (citizens assemblies to underpin their advocacy work on food systems reform), and found that, far from being against Government intervention as the media often suggests, given the choice, citizens want better, healthier, more sustainably produced food, with farmers supported better and Government action to tackle power imbalances in the food system, so that 'Big Food' can't continue to externalise the environmental and health costs of poor food onto the rest of society.

"A wholesale switch to regenerative farming would be a lifeline to our struggling NHS and produce the 'sustainable economic growth' this Government says it's looking for" says LandAlive Programme Director, Graham Harvey. "So, why isn't the Government doing more to help farmers adopt the new methods?"

The LandAlive conference was conceived as an opportunity for farmers to get up-to-speed on the huge changes going on in farming in the context of the whole food system, Graham Harvey explains: "Paying attention to soil quality, rebuilding biodiversity and reducing dependence on chemical inputs is very much in the mainstream now. Given the bottom-line cost of inputs, and rising consumer

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demand for planet-friendly, gut-friendly food, it's simply good business sense to look at more nature-based solutions.”

Carol Paris, Chief Executive of the Royal Bath & West of England Society (co-hosts of the event) said: “Our aim was to represent the whole food system, not just farming, but because farmers are busy people and of course, pivotal to everything, we really wanted to make the experience as worthwhile and enjoyable as we could for them, and we knew that peer-to-peer learning would be critical to that. Getting so many pioneers of the regen movement - actual practitioners - ‘in the room’ for farmers to interact with and challenge, really seemed to work. I think it's been inspirational.”

“LandAlive is a true collaboration. We have launched LandAlive with The Bath & West because we truly believe that a partnership with a longstanding and highly respected agricultural organisation offers the best possible way of supporting farmers, and the agriculture and food sectors, to transition to regenerative farming and food systems”, said Tamara Giltsoff a co-founder of LandAlive.

The event featured talks on a huge variety of topics from leading practitioners, advisors, soil and nutrition specialists, food policy makers and entrepreneurs from across the food supply chain. Speakers covered the nuts and bolts of regenerative farming practice as well as what's new in soil, plant and nutritional science, technology, changing supply chain dynamics and the shifting subsidy landscape. It also covered broader ‘systemic’ issues such as how to build regional food security and improve nutrient levels in food and make good food more affordable.

With dairy and cattle for beef accounting for over 40% of total output from farming in the South West, regenerative approaches to herd and pasture management were a key focus for the event, drawing on evidence that grazing animals play an essential role in restoring soil fertility and biodiversity. A related theme was how to ‘weatherproof’ farms going forward, with farm advisor Niels Corfield leading a session on this with farmer Silas Hedley-Lawrence identifying poor soil and pasture health as a cause of systemic weaknesses in grazing operations, leading to lost productivity and unnecessary costs - but easily remediated once identified.

In another presentation, vet and regenerative dairy farmer Lucy Noad, who works with LandAlive sponsors First Milk and farm data specialists Terrafarmer, revealed why her focus on improving soil health and biodiversity has come with a “massive boost of job satisfaction” as well as a ‘regen premium’.

Other event highlights:

- Announcement of The Royal Bath & West of England's new prize fund offering two farmers or farm advisers in South West England £2,500 each towards a two-year regenerative farming programme called Roots to Regeneration (R2R). The prize fund, sponsored by the Worshipful Company of Grocers, aims to stimulate innovation in farm business models in response to climate change, biodiversity loss, soil health, animal welfare, and – importantly – supporting farmer wellbeing.

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- Professor Andy Neal, Rothamsted soil scientist, FarmEd's Ian Wilkinson and veteran regen farm Tim Parton took on the 'Spraying vs. Tilling' debate in light of a new understanding of the impact of each on soil and wider biodiversity, asking "How can we kick our Glyphosate habit?" Tim Parton said he believes we are leaving 'the chemical century' behind: at the start of a new era of more restorative and profitable 'biological farming' instead;
- Tom Tolputt of Terrafarmer made the case for baselining and mapping improvements to soil health and biodiversity on farm, especially for dairy, backed up by Lucy Noad, a Wiltshire-based dairy farmer, as well as Francis Clarke, director of Trewithen Dairy, who described their regenerative journeys and the critical role of data informing them.
- Martin Lines, CEO of the Nature Friendly Farming Network and farming consultant Tim Williams (Earth Farmer) showed how biodiversity and profitable farming fit together, with Tim looking at ways to increase productivity on regeneratively managed farms; whilst Nikki Yoxall, grazer and Head of Research at Pasture For Life, joined Ian Wilkinson of FarmEd to talk about 'the magic of diverse pastures';
- Regenerative agriculture investor Paul McMahon of SLM Partners, Simon Crichton from Triodos Bank, cotswold farmer cluster director Tim Coates and Alex Godfrey of Octopus Investments discussed new funding models for farms (which have traditionally relied on debt) such as equity investment, with farms increasingly seen as 'stacked enterprises' with income coming from environmental outcomes alongside food production, processing and distribution, energy generation, environmental tourism etc.
- Zoe Gilbertson, Luke Middleton and Pauline Laurent discussed opportunities for integrating fibre production (hemp, flax etc) in regenerative farm business models as the market grows for locally sourced, sustainably produced textiles, construction materials and packaging, with opportunities for enterprise stacking alongside food crops.
- Vet turned nutritionist Lucy Williamson pointed to evidence that intensive farming has caused a steady loss of nutrition levels in common food crops since the 1950s, but regenerative farming offers to reverse this because its inherent focus on soil health and biodiversity means more nutrients are formed within soils, producing more nutrient-dense crops (300 times more Omega 3s in 100% grass/pasture fed organic beef than grainfed for example). "Perhaps Regen could be the saviour of our creaking NHS?" she suggests.

The conference is a collaboration between Sustainable Food Somerset and The Royal Bath and West of England Society, supported by DEFRA'S 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' (FIPL) fund through Mendip and Quantocks National Landscapes and Exmoor National Park, with 'in kind' support from Somerset Council.

It was sponsored by First Milk and Your Eco.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

Regenerative Farming

Regenerative or Agroecological Agriculture is a system of farming principles and practices that increases biodiversity, enriches soils, improves watersheds, and enhances ecosystem services whilst reducing the use of (fossil fuel derived) inputs such as pesticides and artificial fertiliser.

Sustainable Food Somerset (SFS)

A charity promoting more nature- and climate-friendly food, best known for founding the Somerset Food Trail Festival, an annual showcase of local, sustainable food.

The Food Trail Festival is taking a fallow year in 2024, but will be back in the last two weeks of July 2025. Sustainable Food Somerset recently merged with Somerset Community Food.

The Royal Bath & West of England Society

Set up in 1777, the society is the oldest agricultural charity in Britain. Its objective is to encourage agriculture, arts manufacture and commerce.