

Rose Dale - Manor Farm, Buckinghamshire

Rose: I decided to restore the fields as I'm keen on increasing biodiversity across the whole farm really and feel that these old floodplain meadows are a unique habitat and it would be wonderful to have a good diversity of plant species within them and then all the soil life and insects and everything else that will come from that.

Well I've only had the management of the farm for the last two and a bit years. So the first thing I did was I bought some green hay from the local wildlife trust, that's the BBOWT one for our counties and that was from Meadows Farm. Before that came the ground was scarified to really try and expose about 50% bare earth. I did it on certain areas of the meadows not on my very best hay bit. Then the hay was brought over and chopped and spread all on the same day, because that's how you get the maximum benefit from the seed apparently. That was done but I haven't seen a great diversity arriving straightaway, but maybe one has to wait a few years. Then it flooded quite soon afterwards and I was wondering whether actually a lot of it was washed away. But you could see the hay there.

Now I'm planning to certainly make hay on one of the fields every year which will be stored in a barn. We don't necessarily want to make hay on all the fields because of barn space and we need it for livestock as well. We also do quite a lot of silage making for the livestock and also we do a lot of herbal leys which are good for silage. Then we need to be able to graze the meadows reasonably early in the year otherwise we run out of meadow space.

The calendar date of hay making will vary because it will depend on the season and the rain and all that sort of stuff. But I think it's an art that's rather been lost.

So I'm a fairly new farmer and I do have a lot of sympathy with farmers who are pushed to really maximise production, which often means that there isn't much ability to leave space for nature. I think most farmers want to have nature on their farm and they love it if orchids appear or birds are nesting and that sort of thing. But that's why I do think that the countryside stewardship funding is so important for small, less intensive farmers so that they can actually make a living from their land.

For me as a farmer to really be able to maximise the biodiversity and say revert to the old ways of doing things I would need help. It might be some financial help to make up for lost production and perhaps capital schemes as well for putting up infrastructure like barns to make the hay.