

Manor Farm Floodplain Meadow Restoration – Tim Thompson

Tim: We started to go organic in 2016 anyway just as a natural process of the way we are farming because we're part of the Pasture-Fed Livestock Association. We're driven absolutely by trying to make it biodiverse. That's our reason for being here to some extent, is building soil health, which will in turn create biodiversity. So yes that's all we're about really, as regenerative farmers that's what we do.

We want to make the whole of the floodplain more species-rich because when we arrived it was probably 3 or 4 grass types and that was about it. Since we've stopped applying anything to it, we're already seeing more diverse species coming into the mix. But it'd be nice to try and revert it back to what it might have been at one other point in time. Up to date we haven't done enough to do that. So that's what we want to do with it really.

I think it works perfectly with our farming model. We're low input anyway so our only real cost is the haymaking costs actually, it's making forage for the winter. If we could do that and help bring back those meadows to what they might have been, then it works perfectly within our system. We'd then graze it afterwards. It floods sort of November onwards anyway, so we could never get on it. It works perfectly for us actually.

We don't have any of our own equipment because we don't have enough to make it worthwhile. So I use a contractor and we book him in and he comes in and does it when he thinks the time is ready. Restoration of the meadows in an agri-environment scheme makes far more sense than us just to try and launch to do it ourselves. We don't have to do a lot more but there are fields that are far more inaccessible for big contractors which means for us to do it ourselves it's a much more manual enterprise and that's much more expensive. Until we get better forage off those fields it's not really economical to do it right now. In 3 or 4 years' time it probably would be, but right now, it's probably not. We've got far easier alternative fields to cut.

The agri-environment scheme really would help us and allow us to take hay off those fields where otherwise we just couldn't make a financial argument stack up really without some sort of payment I don't think, because we have far cheaper alternative fields to cut is the reality of it.

Given how much we've lost in terms of certainly meadow and all the rest of it, the only way we're going to get it back is more income, more money. There's no other way. We can do tiny pockets, but it has to happen at landscape level and that needs money.