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Healthy soil
Improving productivity and farm resilience

Set up for success
Read more about Kim Brickell's CPD journey

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European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe Investing in Rural Areas
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ISSUE 39 – May/June 2022 | gov.wales/farmingconnect

The Welsh Soil Project – how healthy soil can improve productivity and farm resilience

PROSIECT PRIDD CYMRU
WELSH SOIL PROJECT

Going back to basics and understanding our soils has never been more paramount, as Welsh Government are committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. The Welsh Soil Project across the Farming Connect Demonstration Network aims to gain an insight into current soil carbon stocks on farms in Wales.

Carbon sequestration and storage has a pivotal role to play in meeting this target. With increasing interest in soils, and a surge in input costs, landowners are realising and acknowledging the value of improving/maintaining soil health for the resilience of the farm.

Healthy and well-structured soil is directly linked to improved crop productivity. Methods of increasing carbon sequestration and storage in soils (for example, enhancing soil organic matter, and therefore, soil organic carbon) can reduce the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, but may also provide additional benefits to landowners, such as improved soil quality and fertility, reduced compaction, erosion and nutrient loss.

In mid-February, Farming Connect staff were busy collecting data and soil samples for the Welsh Soil Project from farms across the Demonstration Network, which consists of farms that vary in their farming systems, location, climate and soil type.

The data collected will help explore how soil carbon stocks can differ between farming systems, as well as within a single farm, depending on land use and the management practices implemented.

Once all the data has been analysed, the findings will be summarised and published. This will provide valuable information on current soil carbon stocks and health, in relation to differences in soil types and properties, as well as land use and management.

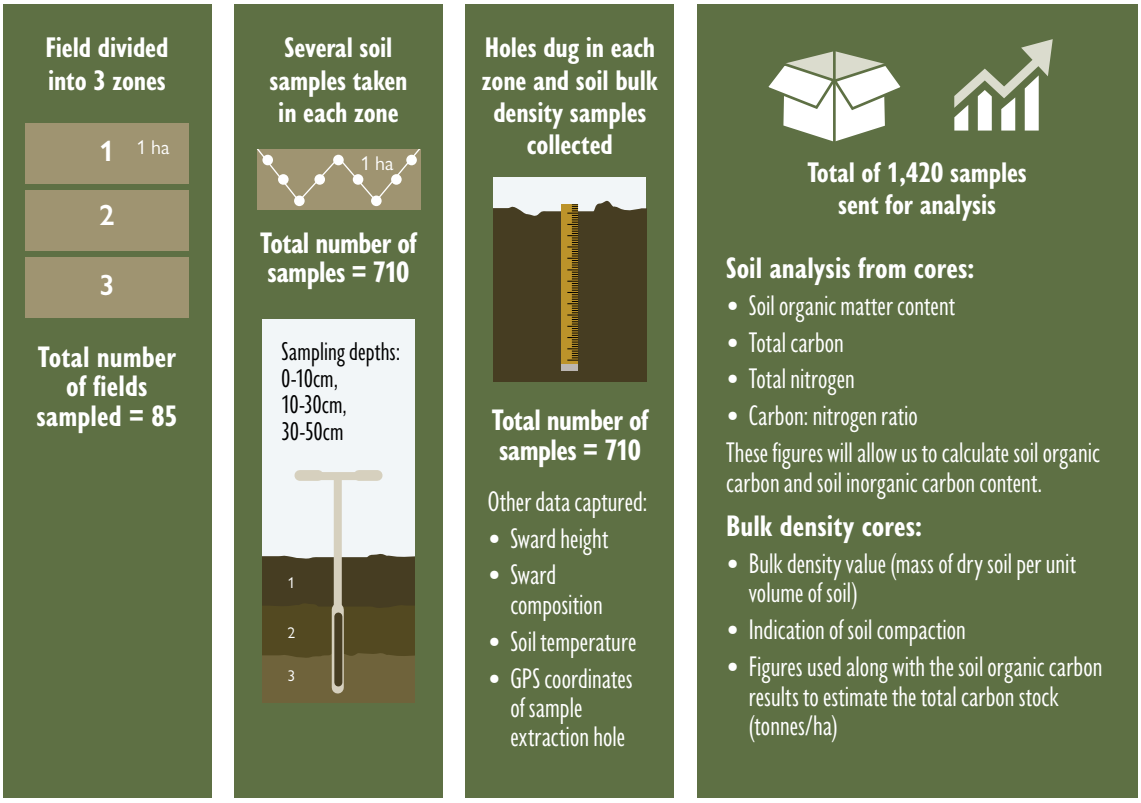
If you are interested in estimating the soil carbon stock on your farm, Farming Connect is currently offering soil clinics, where soil samples will be analysed, providing you with a soil carbon audit. Determining the soil carbon stock on your farm may provide useful figures for benchmarking with future soil carbon levels, and can aid with management decisions on-farm.

You can find out more about one-to-one clinics on the Farming Connect website here: **gov.wales/farmingconnect**

Welsh Soil Carbon Project data collection – what and how?

Samples were taken from the following field management categories on each farm:
Permanent pasture field (>7 years)
Silage and/or hay field
A field that has been reseeded in the last seven years
Grazing-only field
Other – e.g. arable, peatland, herbal ley, stock excluded
Detailed information on soil type, properties and management history, including land use and nutrient inputs, were recorded for each field.

Figure 1: How samples were gathered



EIPWALES
Cydweithio er ffyniant gwledig
Collaborating for rural success

The plots at Llwyn y Brain being used in the project to compare the productivity of different levels of timothy in an upland setting

Grassland award for upland farmer in pioneering grass improvement trial

A lamb producer who is pioneering methods of improving the persistency and quality of grazing leys on marginal land in the Welsh uplands has won a new grassland management award.

John Yeomans, who is involved in a three-year European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Wales project trialling ways of improving grass leys in the uplands, was named Grassland Manager of the Year at the inaugural National Arable & Grassland Awards.

Exclusion cage for measuring grass growth

The award was an acknowledgement of Mr Yeomans' excellent grassland management skills at Llwyn y Brain, near Newtown, where he farms sheep and cattle with his wife, Sarah.

The EIP project is putting those skills to good use, by investigating whether even more can be achieved from the swards at Llwyn y Brain. The project is monitoring the performance of timothy at high-inclusion rates on the highest land – wet, deep peat soil that rises to an altitude of 430 metres.

The project concludes in June 2022, but the results to date have been promising, says Mr Yeomans. Leys established in 2019 averaged more than 12t DM/ha in 2021, providing valuable feed for 58 ewes and lambs per hectare for nearly three months, and extending late season growth considerably.

"It lifted productivity massively from May to late June," Mr Yeomans reports.

The project has demonstrated that good grassland management, even in marginal areas, can result in high-yielding swards, producing over 12t DM/ha and supporting higher stocking rates. In 2021, the percentage of timothy in one of the plots increased to 17% – up from around 10% in 2020.

Independent grassland specialist Chris Duller, who has been providing technical input into the EIP project, says similar small increases in timothy were also observed in some of the other original plots – those that had experienced challenging establishment conditions due to exceptionally high levels of rainfall. However, there was still not sufficient timothy present to have any significant impact on sward performance.

The biggest challenges of establishing the novel grazing leys at Llwyn y Brain are ground conditions and the exposure of the upland site, which limit the grazing window.

"They can often compromise ideal grazing practice, so utilisation can be affected – particularly in early and late season," says Mr Duller.

Ryegrass is still very dominant in the original plots, but with an increasing incursion from meadow grass and creeping bent, especially in the wetter areas. The mineral status of the timothy plots is very similar to the control, and there is no recorded difference in trace element status.

Final sward compositions will be assessed in May/June 2022. However, in summing up the project to date, Mr Duller says a key finding is that timothy had in all but one of the plots grown as well as ryegrass. However, the longevity of timothy (a key benefit of timothy) compared to ryegrass – can only be fully understood further down the line, he adds.

The three-year timescale of the EIP project is one that Mr Yeomans is grateful for: "You have to trial something for at least three years to know whether or not it will work, because in a shorter timeframe, results can be skewed by an exceptionally good year, or an exceptionally bad one."

The award, he says, was one that reflected the input of everyone involved in the farm, and indeed the EIP project.

"Lots of folk have helped and advised and given us opportunities, from the Farming Connect Management Exchange, which gave me a chance to look at how farmers grow and manage timothy in Finland, to the meetings and discussions I've had with others.

"We are also grateful to Nick Rider from OPICO, who nominated us for the award. An OPICO air seeder was one of the methods of surface treatment establishment in the project."

The results gathered to date from the EIP project have been analysed, and in the final year, these findings will be used to grow a ley that performs the best in the farm's conditions and farming system.

For further information on this EIP project, please scan or click on the QR code, or visit the EIP Wales page on the Farming Connect website:
gov.wales/farmingconnect

Focus Site: Glebelands Market Garden, Cardigan

Technical Officer: Dr Delana Davies

Project Title: Evaluating the benefits of the Terrateck wheel hoe with Bio-Discs for weed control in vegetables

Adam York using the Terrateck wheel hoe with Bio-Discs

Glebelands Market Garden is a 4ha organic enterprise supplying a farm shop on-site, plus local restaurants and shops. All produce is grown to Soil Association organic standards, using well-established techniques such as on-site composting, crop rotation and green manure crops to maintain soil fertility and plant health.

Weed control is a constant challenge in small and medium-sized vegetable growing ventures, which routinely depend on hand-hoeing techniques that require considerable time and labour input. The business currently deploys two Glaser wheel-hoe models, which are used alongside hand-hoeing, but wanted to explore how to reduce or eliminate the hand-hoeing altogether.

The 'Terrateck Market Gardening Hoe' is a multi-purpose cultivator tool that can be used to mechanise seedbed preparation, hoeing, weeding and ridging work. The hoe was fitted with Bio-Discs that have two settings: one for mulching a row of vegetables, and the other for precise weeding. Using the ridging position, the Bio-Discs cover the row with earth, thereby stifling the weed plantlets – making it ideal for bean, onion, and leek seedlings.

What was done

Leek transplants were chosen as the trial crop, and alternate triple row beds of 200ft (61m) length were labelled, with two treatments applied using five beds per treatment:

1. Existing practice of hand-hoeing intra-row with stirrup hoes followed by wheel hoeing between rows, using a Glaser hoe (GH) set up with a stirrup hoe blade, followed by cultivating tines
2. A single push pass using the Terrateck hoe with Bio-Discs (TBD)

Results

Weeding operations and data collection were conducted on 8, 15 and 30 June 2021. It was dry and sunny throughout this period, with the last significant rain on 23 May.

The drought conditions were ideal for killing small weeds, but less favourable for steady crop growth. The tilth achieved on the trial area was not ideal, with some lumpy soil over much of the beds, due to slightly wet conditions at ploughing, followed by drought. As the Bio-Disc relies on a fine tilth for soil to be readily pushed inward to the crop, the operator's job was difficult. Subsequent usage on beetroot transplants, with a much finer soil tilth, made the Bio-Disc a much easier and quicker tool to use.

The Bio-Discs were used to move soil into the base of the leeks for the first cultivation. The second cultivation required additional

hand-hoeing to remove weeds too large to bury, and the third resumed with Bio-Disc cultivation only.

No obvious differences were noted in weed density and species or crop yield and growth rate between the two treatments. However, the labour time consumed was measurably different between the two treatments (Table 1).

Table 1: Weeding time and labour costs for five treatment beds, each using the Terrateck wheel hoe with Bio-Discs (TBD) versus the Glaser hoe (GH) and hand-hoeing.

	TBD			GH		
Date	**8 Jun**	**15 Jun**	**30 Jun**	**8 Jun**	**15 Jun**	**30 Jun**
Weeding time per bed (minutes)	11.8	75.0	11.4	78.0	45.0	63.0
Total treatment weeding time (hours)		8.2			15.5	
Labour cost for 5 beds £*		82			155	
Cost saving %		47% less				

*Labour costed at £10 per hour

Following the trial period and rainfall resumption, it proved necessary to Glaser wheel-hoe all the rows. Dormant weed seed amidst mature leeks meant the Bio-Disc tool could not be used, due to the crop height conflict at this stage. Having the ability to apply adequate rain gun-type irrigation would have forced greater weed appearance early enough to enable destruction during the three trial cultivations (this is because more tiny weeds are no greater effort to kill).

Conclusions

This is a valuable tool for cultivation of upright crops. A sufficiently fine tilth is critical for efficient operation and getting reliable results. The hoe is particularly suited to small and medium-scale operators with row crops of higher value, but of insufficient scale to justify the machinery cost, set-up or training time for tractor-mounted versions. A typical dilemma on small to medium farms is whether to get a tractor out and set up the relevant cultivator, or pick up a lower-tech manual tool for more immediate use (but lower efficiency) as the area worked on increases.

The time savings recorded suggest that the Bio-Discs are a cost-effective tool. Over five treatment beds and three weeding operations, use of the Bio-Discs saved 7.3 hours of labour at a cost of £73, compared to the Glaser hoe and hand-hoeing, which is a 47% reduction. If this is factored by use on other crops, then the Bio-Discs purchase price (<£200 at 2021 prices, wheel hoe not included) could be recouped very quickly.

For more information on this Focus Site project, please visit: gov.wales/farmingconnectourfarms

Diversifying growth for environmental and economic benefits

As farmers look for alternative enterprises that could help with farm income streams, Dr David Cutress from the Farming Connect Knowledge Exchange Hub at IBERS, Aberystwyth University, has looked at some potential alternative crops. As he explains, some of these also have potential benefits in terms of reducing farm carbon footprints and spreading risks associated with unpredictable weather.

High-yielding pasture systems and crop species options are under pressure from increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather events, leading to annual yield instabilities and the heightened need for strategies to reduce environmental impacts. Climate change is linked with this increased frequency of extreme conditions, and long-term options require consideration to ensure the viability and ultimate sustainability of farming. Diversifying a farming enterprise is one way to spread economic risk. It is worth considering, when developing a diversification plan, what options are available, and which can have environmentally beneficial impacts, alongside economic ones.

Diversification into species-rich grasslands ensures that some species within a population will be adaptable to the climate of any given year (through variability in drought or flood tolerance, for example). This acts to buffer

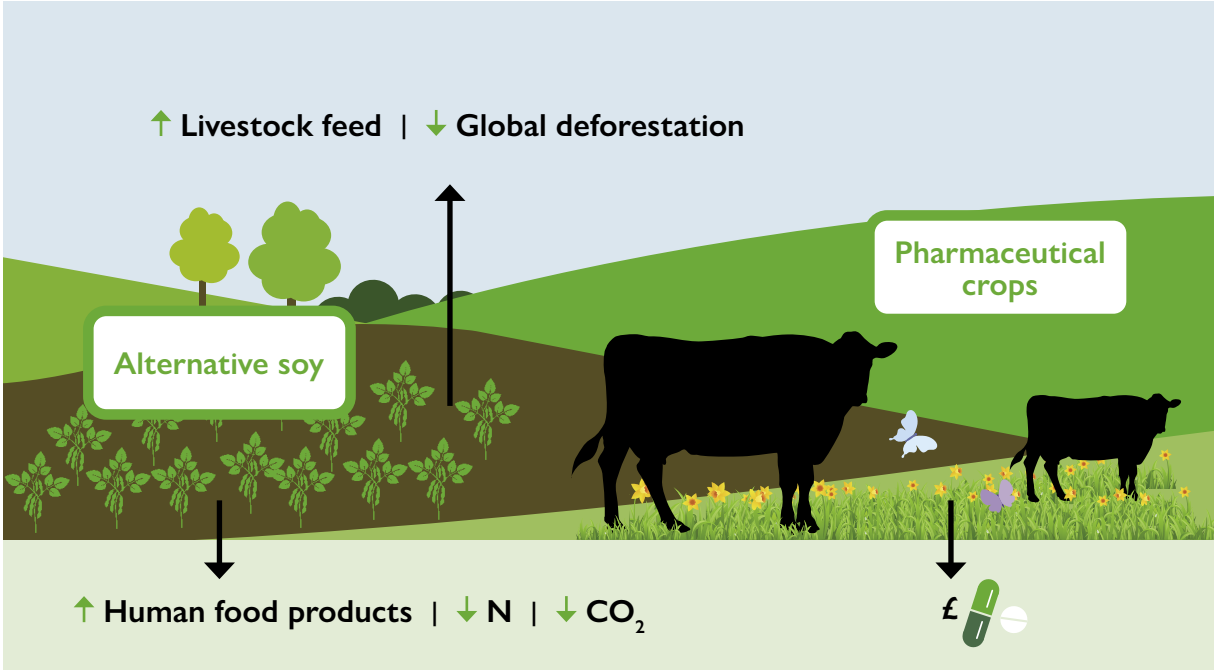


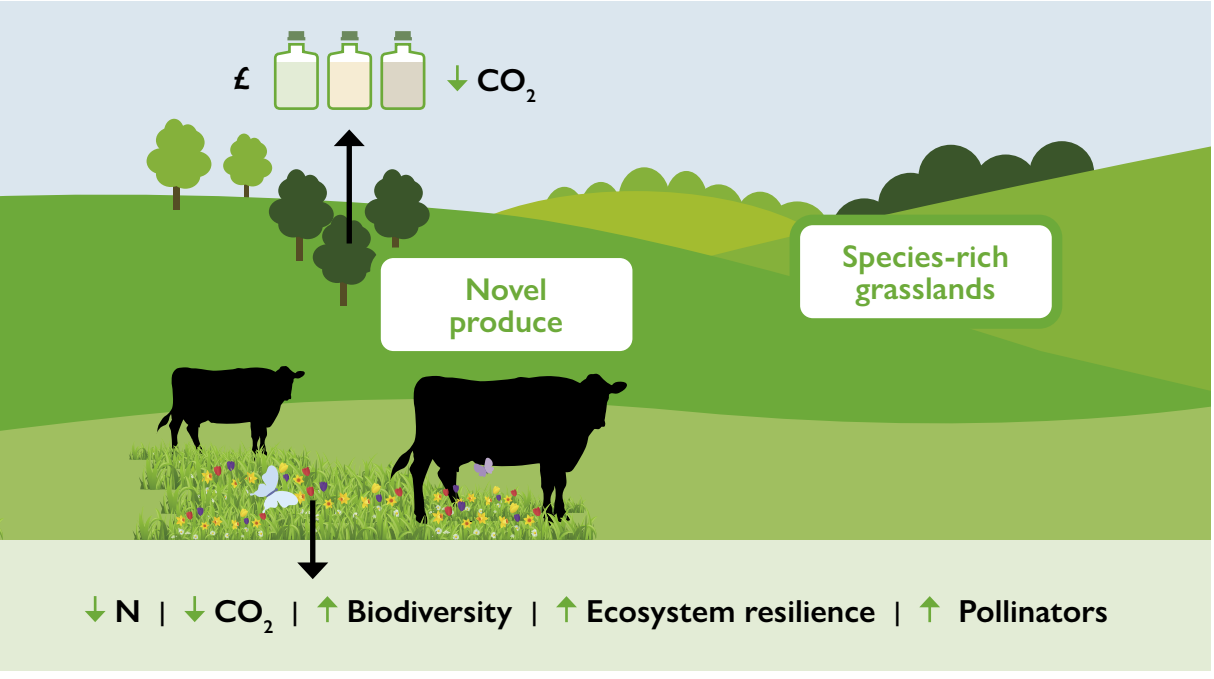
Figure 2: Alternative crops and pasture

yield losses, which are far more common in monoculture pastures or less diverse sward mixes. Additionally, well-designed species-rich grasslands bolster ecosystem biodiversity, can incorporate multiple nitrogen (N)-fixing species, further reduce environmental impacts by lowering N fertiliser inputs and improve soil health and carbon storage potential.

Soya, common in livestock rations, is controversial due to heavy emissions associated with land clearance and transport (much occurring in South American rainforests). As a possible resolution to this global issue, breeders continue to produce soya species able to grow in cooler UK climates. Growing such high-protein produce locally would open access to both human and animal consumption revenue streams, whilst reducing controversial import considerations. Additionally, soya is leguminous, helping to fix N in soils – and thus needs fewer N inputs.

Underutilised resources may also be available for growers to make use of. Some of these that could be 'tapped' into include gourmet syrups from indigenous carbon-sequestering tree species, such as birch. Equally, daffodil harvesting could produce important revenue due to its role in synthesising galanthamine used in Alzheimer's treatment, and crops designed for other pharmaceutical extracts (such as cucurbits and squill) could also provide interesting revenue streams; this is provided that market demand is first assessed.

For more information (including identification of Welsh projects that are already looking at such options), read the article, Unlocking the potential of alternative crops, available on the Farming Connect website: gov.wales/farmingconnect



Cath Tudor from ProStock Vets, one of the practices involved in the workshops

Need to improve lamb performance post-weaning? Concerned your suckler cows are not as productive as you hoped?

Farming Connect has added two additional modules to its fully-funded Animal Health & Welfare (AH&W) training workshop provision.

The newest modules – 'Improving post weaning lamb performance ' and 'Maximising suckler cow productivity' – will both be rolled out from early April, bringing the total number of topics currently available up to 16.

All Farming Connect AH&W course content is developed in conjunction with NADIS (the National Animal Disease Information Service) and delivered by participating veterinary practices throughout Wales. The interactive workshops will be available either in regional face-to-face group workshops (which last up to three hours) or online.

Cath Tudor, a partner with specialist farm animal veterinary practice ProStock, which has branches throughout South West Wales, explains that the aim of both the latest sheep and suckler cow modules is to improve and maintain animal performance and productivity. Ms Tudor said that a strong emphasis will be put on disease awareness and prevention, as well as the importance of record-keeping, to assess performance and aid production and management decisions.

Improving lamb performance

The main focus of the new 'Improving post-weaning lamb performance' module will be on weaning management, identifying and managing infectious diseases, parasite control and nutrition. However, health planning, biosecurity and the responsible use of antibiotics and anthelmintics will also form an integral part of every workshop.

"We need all farmers to understand the basic principles of the economics of rearing lambs for either fattening or breeding, and the importance of weighing lambs and body condition-scoring the ewes to aid weaning decisions.

"This training will cover all the key factors that should influence any decisions made about weaning management, despite these sometimes needing to vary year by year according to ewe body condition, feed availability and lamb growth rates, and will also help them set realistic targets," said Ms Tudor.

Improving suckler cow performance

The 'Maximising suckler cow productivity' workshop will cover all aspects of management affecting suckler cow productivity and profitability, with a particular focus on nutrition, fertility, parasite control and infectious diseases. The workshop will also address the importance of health planning, biosecurity, responsible antibiotic and anthelmintic use and environmental impact.

Ms Tudor said this workshop would ensure that farmers understand the basic economics of suckler cow production and be able to identify areas where productivity can be improved.

"They will learn how to define a productive suckler cow, and discuss how best to achieve or improve on performance and productivity.

"The aim is to have a cow that gets in-calf easily, calves with ease, rears a healthy calf and then gets back in-calf, whilst she remains healthy and free from disease."

Attendees will gain an understanding of the impact of nutrition on fertility, including minerals and trace elements, and appreciate the advantages of body condition-scoring in nutritional management of breeding cows.

To find out which veterinary practices will be delivering these AH&W training modules and for locations and dates, scan or click on the QR code below, visit **gov.wales/farmingconnectskillsandtraining** or contact your local development officer.

Folly Farm Manager Kim Brickell (right), with Rebecca Summons, Farming Connect Animal Health & Welfare (Training) Manager

Folly Farm manager Kim Brickell always turns to Farming Connect when she wants to learn a new skill!

Earlier this year, Pembrokeshire-born Kim Brickell was awarded the Farming Connect Animal Health & Welfare trophy at the annual Lantra Wales awards ceremony. The award was in recognition of her outstanding commitment to continuous professional development (CPD) and effectively applying her new knowledge and skills to what she describes as her 'dream job'. Kim is a farm manager at one of Wales' most popular family destinations, Folly Farm Adventure Park and Zoo, near Tenby, which attracts more than 500,000 visitors a year.

Kim says that Farming Connect's fully-funded e-learning courses have enabled her to 'keep up-to-speed in my own time and at my own pace', which has not only increased her skillset, but enables her to impart that knowledge to other members of the Folly Farm team coming up behind her.

"The range of support services available through Farming Connect, including Animal Health & Welfare workshops, open-day events and the very wide range of farm-related topics I've studied through e-learning has given me new skills and knowledge I use every day."

The world-class Folly Farm zoo is home to more than 100 species of exotic animals, birds and many other creatures, but alongside that, there are also more 'mainstream' stock and a farm business to manage. Working alongside a co-manager and six support staff, Kim's role is to look after the health, welfare and general husbandry of the farm's flocks of rare sheep and goats, and speciality breeds of pigs and poultry, as well as a large number of small petting animals. She's also involved in the farm's soil and grassland strategies.

To hear Kim talk about the benefits of e-learning and how she's using Storfa Sgiliau to plan her CPD journey, visit: **gov.wales/farmingconnect**

Kim's CPD journey:

E-learning modules completed	
Abortion in ewes	Improving soil health
African swine fever	Injurious pecking in laying hens
Anthelmintic resistance on sheep farms	Lambing – docking, fostering, castration
Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)	Liver fluke control in sheep
Biosecurity & quarantine	Nematode infestations in sheep – parasitic gastroenteritis (PGE)
Biosecurity for pig smallholders	Poultry vaccination
Bovine TB	Respiratory disease in poultry
Estimated breeding values	Sheep scab
Ewe nutrition	Trace elements in sheep
Eye diseases in sheep	Tree identification
Grassland species	Worms in pigs
Health and safety	

Animal Health & Welfare workshops/webinars
Animal health planning
Antibiotic resistance
Lambing losses (Parts 1, 2 & 3)
Sheep lameness
Sheep parasite control

Demonstration site events
Maintaining ewe health pre-lambing
Sustainable fluke control in sheep and cattle

Focus Site: Ffosygravel, Borth (Martin Griffiths and family)

Technical Officer: Gwenan Evans

Project Title: The potential of satellite pasture measurement for managing grazing

Project Period: February – November 2021

Satellite imagery offers a potential tool for measuring grass to aid farmers in decision-making regarding grass allocation and utilisation.

Measuring grass using hand-held devices and walking the fields is extremely time-consuming, and one of the main barriers to farmers wanting to collect data on grass growth. This technology offers the option of collecting the data without needing to set foot in the field. Every additional tonne of DM used per hectare is worth £334 per annum to dairy farms (AFBI), highlighting the benefits of accessing this data to inform management decisions.

At Ffosygravel farm, in North Ceredigion, a significant amount of the grazing platform is on sloping and free-draining land. The effectiveness of satellite imagery in predicting grass quantities (Average Farm Cover) available in paddocks through the season was trialled using the Ruumi tool and compared with plate meter readings.

Overall, the satellite imagery measurements gave a good representation of the Average Farm Cover, with an average difference of 82kg DM/ha (Figure 3). However, the results from individual fields showed more variation between the two methods of measuring, making management decisions more difficult. More research needs to be carried out to look at the effect of slopes on satellite readings, which could have a bigger impact on the accuracy.

Martin Griffiths said, "Being part of this Farming Connect project has brought many benefits, highlighted challenges and emphasised the opportunities for this type of technology."

For more information, and to view the final report for this Focus Site, visit: **gov.wales/farmingconnectourfarms**

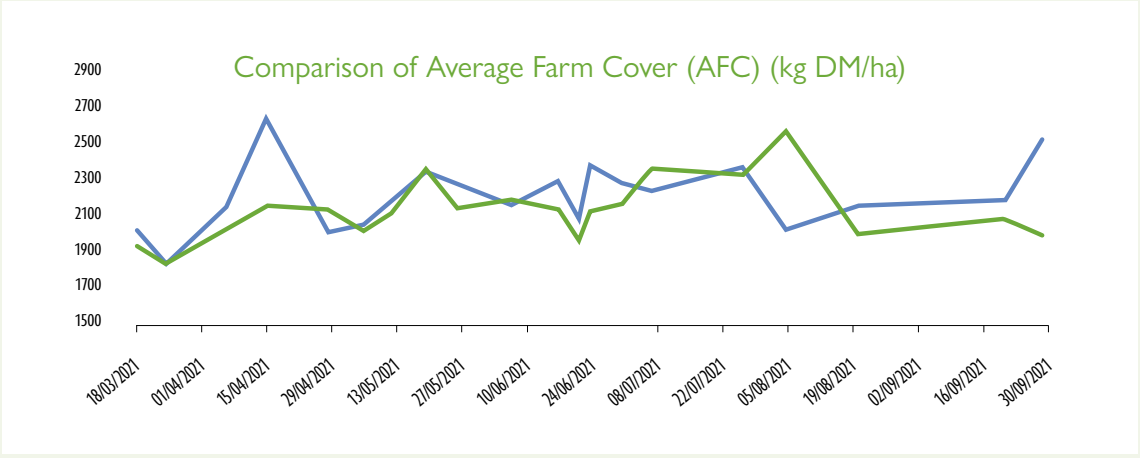


Figure 3: Comparison of the average farm cover measurements from satellite software and platemeter readings from 18 March to 2 October 2021

FUNDED TRAVEL

STUDY VISIT

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- Spend a period of up to 4 days travelling and exploring the UK's agricultural industry




Study Visits are the perfect opportunity to discover improved methods of working, see best practice in action and develop new ideas to innovate your enterprise.

Each group must submit an application form to request funding, and is expected to keep a record of the trip to produce a report upon their return.

For support planning your trip and assistance with the application process, contact your Local Development Officer.

Don't miss out! The final date to submit an application is **Tuesday 31 May 2022.**

For further information, including the Terms & Conditions, and to download the application form, scan or click on the QR code below, or visit gov.wales/farmingconnect

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Silage being prepared

Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations

Storage of silage

The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021 have been introduced to reduce losses of pollutants from agriculture to the environment by setting rules for certain farming practices.

On 1 April 2021, the Regulations replaced the existing 'SSAFO' standards for silage-making, storage of silage effluent and for silage storage systems, which apply to all farms.

The requirements of the regulations in relation to silage also form part of cross-compliance. In practice, the requirements have not changed; however, you must ensure all structures comply with the relevant construction standards.

Silage safety zones

- Silage stored in silos must not be made or stored within 10 metres of any waterbody.
- Baled silage must be sealed in an impermeable membrane, or bagged, and not made, stored, opened or unwrapped within 10 metres of any waterbody.
- Field silage (silage stored on open land) must not be made or stored within 50 metres of a 'protected water supply course'. You must also notify National Resources Wales (NRW) 14 days before the field site is used.

Managing silage effluent

- Care must be taken to collect and store silage effluent without causing pollution.
- Silage effluent can be used for feeding to livestock or, following dilution, may be spread onto agricultural land as a fertiliser. The silage effluent will also be subject to the Regulations on the storage and spreading of organic manures that have high available nitrogen.

Silage storage construction requirements

- You do not need to store baled silage (wrapped or bagged) on a specially constructed base, but you must ensure that if it is stored directly on the ground, it does not leak effluent into water.
- You must ensure any silage storage system meets the construction requirements of the regulations (see the Welsh Government guidance for further information).
- NRW can serve a notice requiring action to be taken to improve existing installations where it considers that there is a significant risk of pollution.

Constructing or modifying a silage store

- If you need to build a new store or silo, or substantially enlarge or reconstruct an existing store, a minimum of 14 days' notice must be issued to NRW in writing before construction begins. NRW have an online form available.

Detailed guidance can be found at on the Welsh Government website at gov.wales/land-management. Technical assistance is available from the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations Helpline on 01974 847000.

Common silage clamp issues

- Lack of external channels
- Lack of adequate effluent collection
- Damage to silage clamp floors
- Poor maintenance
- Earth bank clamps are non-compliant if built after 1991

Example of a poorly maintained silage clamp without appropriate drainage, allowing effluent to leak, risking pollution to the environment.

FARMING CONNECT MENTORS

15 hours of fully funded mentoring service

Farming Connect has an approved network of 65 mentors located throughout Wales.

A Farming Connect mentor can…

- ✓ Provide an independent, unbiased and confidential perspective
- ✓ Discuss your issues, concerns and aims for the future
- ✓ Provide a sounding board for your ideas
- ✓ Share their experiences with you, both successes and failures
- ✓ Challenge you to justify your proposals
- ✓ Help you identify problems and find solutions

To find out more about each mentor's background, skills and expertise, browse through the detailed 'mentor directory', which can be found at: **gov.wales/farmingconnectmentoring**

TOP 5 TIPS
FOR REDUCING THE RISK OF OVERTURNING AN ATV

PARTNERIAETH DIOGELWCH AR FFERMYDD CYMRU
WALES FARM SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

ALL RIDERS must be trained and competent

ALWAYS wear a helmet

NEVER carry passengers

Carry out routine, regular MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY CHECKS

Stick to PLANNED ROUTES

For further information, visit **www.gov.wales/farmingconnect** or **www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture**. Alternatively, look up @farmsafetywales on to find out what free resources you can access to make your farm a safer place.

Farming Connect skills funding. Apply now to...

...develop your skills, develop your business ...plan ahead now

The skills funding application window is open between:

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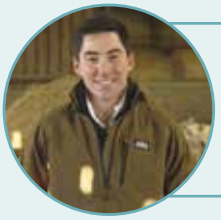
All training courses subsidised by up to **80%** for registered individuals

More than **70 courses** available

Network of **approved training providers** located throughout Wales



"Farming Connect's subsidised training provision is targeted at those working at a grassroots level of farming. It has added a huge amount to my skillset, giving me essential skills and knowledge I use every day, so I'm able to take on more responsibilities for the family I work for."

Tomas Ernie Richards, shepherd, Clyro

"I have undertaken training for a range of farm-related, business and ICT skills that I put into practice every day. I can now carry out many practical tasks that I no longer need to outsource, and have had the skills and confidence to set up a successful farm, tourism and accommodation enterprise."

Tracey Price, farmer and tourism operator, Llanidloes

*If you intend to apply for training funding during the May window, and are not already personally registered as an individual, call the Service Centre on **08456 000 813** before **5pm Monday, 23 May 2022**

For a full list of courses and/or support on how to apply, contact your local development officer, call the Farming Connect service Centre or use the QR code to visit our website.