



Welcome to your Farm Cluster Update

Here's what we've been up to in the last month - if you have any questions about the stories in this newsletter or suggestions for future articles, please contact [Ross](#) or [Christine](#).

Farming Futures Conference - Follow Up

Our 'Farming Futures' conference for AONB farmers and landowners took place in Crowborough at the end of October, with 12 out of 65 Farm Cluster members in attendance.

What did I miss?

The event focused on 'Regenerative Agriculture'; a farming approach which enriches soils, stores carbon and mitigates climate change while working in tune with nature. The practices improve farm productivity and are low risk and sustainable.



The line-up of inspiring speakers included national farming pioneers:

- **Graham Harvey**, food and farming author and former agricultural story editor of 'The Archers'
- **Stephen Briggs** who operates a successful agro-forestry farming system
- **Charlie Burrell** who advocates making space for nature through wilding
- **Tim May** who runs a diversified low-input farming system.

The event was opened by long-term High Weald farmer, **John Marland**. Discussions focused on how Regenerative Agriculture can build productive, profitable and resilient businesses in the mixed wooded and pastoral landscape of the High Weald.

Farm Cluster member **Will Davenport** said:

"Meeting some other farmers that have such a wealth of experience was an unmissable chance. I will be changing one or two things on the farm since the meeting, particularly how we manage hedges and wildlife corridors."

Jason Lavender, Co-Director of the High Weald AONB Partnership, said:

"I am overjoyed so many farmers came to our event on regenerative agriculture – the first of its kind in the area. It was sold out, which tells me that interest in regenerative agriculture is growing and gaining a lot of momentum."

How do I find out more? All the PowerPoint presentations from the day are available to download [on our website](#). Please do take a look and follow up with Ross or Christine if you have any further questions or ideas.

This [short video featuring Australian farmer Charles Massey](#) gives a concise introduction to the principles of regenerative agriculture.

Group News

Welcome to new member Chris Jeffries of Northover Farm. We're delighted to have you on board Chris, and look forward to seeing you at upcoming events.

Farm Cluster Advisory Group: The last meeting took place on 10 October. Group members had some really good ideas including an **informal online survey** of all Farm Cluster members to find out what environmental or habitat work they are doing and a **WhatsApp group** (*already in action and proving very popular*). The next meeting is in March and any members are welcome to attend.

Event round-up:

The damp weather has produced an excellent crop of fungi this autumn. Farm Cluster members had a wet but great time with Martin Allinson (right) looking at waxcaps and other soil fungi at Burwash and learning all about the underground web of fungal and plant communication.



The event ran alongside the national waxcap survey, which returned to the AONB for the second year in a row. The High Weald's undisturbed soils harbour a host of rare fungi, in particular waxcaps, making the area of special interest for national surveyors. Initial findings indicate that species numbers have more than doubled this year, including weird and rare earth tongues and the elegant ballerina waxcap.

Upcoming Events

15 January 2020: Sussex Lund Drop-in clinic, Ashdown Forest Centre. The High Weald team will be on hand to provide guidance and advice on your Sussex Lund application. To book a slot, contact Sam on 01424 723011 or email sussexlund@highweald.org.

TBC, Farm Cluster AGM. The date of the next AGM will be announced early in the New Year, so keep your eyes peeled for an email with all the details.

24-25 June 2020: Groundswell 2020, Lannock Manor Farm, Hertfordshire. As reported in our Summer newsletter, AONB team and Farm Cluster members attended last year's excellent event and hope to do so again in 2020. Register for updates at groundswellag.com - see you there.

Other news

Southeast Water is offering capital grants of up to £10,000 per holding per year for infrastructure improvements to help reduce the risk of water pollution from agriculture. Contact Ross for more details and an application form.

Article: "*Organic Farmers & Growers report looks at redefining productivity and efficiency of UK farming systems*", [Read more in Food & Farming Futures](#).

Article: "*Livestock are not the global warming enemy*", [Read more by ffinlo Costain](#).

About

The Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster helps farmers, foresters and other land managers work together to improve farm profitability and benefit soil, water, wildlife and historic features not just on their individual farms, but across the area. It has over 60 members covering over 3,500ha. [View map](#)

The Cluster is helped by the High Weald AONB Partnership with financial support from Natural England's Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund, the Environment Agency (Giant Hogweed control), and the Woodland Trust (deer management).

For more information, visit the Farm Cluster page on www.highweald.org.