

WILDFARMED

Wildfarmed Mission

Just yesterday we learned that the U.K. has lost half of its pre-industrial biodiversity and is in the bottom 10% of countries worldwide.

"Across the nation, woods and grassland have been ripped up and fields of single crops planted in their place. Over two-thirds of the UK is now used for agriculture".

A sorry state, but also one of huge potential.

If we can get grasses, trees, perennial plants of all kinds back into the "fields of single crops" that cover two thirds of the country, we can make agriculture a solution to our biodiversity and climate crises rather than a contributor.

That's our mission.

The UK consumes over 12 million loaves of bread a day - we are working to ensure that those loaves can be good for the planet and nutritious for all those bread lovers and beyond.

So, we wanted to take a moment to clarify our farming method, company mission and ongoing commitment to collaborative innovation.

...and whilst we are at it, we want to clear up some confusion that has been buzzing around.

Wildfarmed Method

Wildfarmed is about how we grow our food. It is not about heritage grain.

All of our products are grown without the use of chemicals, in a system that prioritises soil health, increasing soil biodiversity, drawing carbon from the atmosphere and producing nutrient dense food.

Our pasture cropping method developed by Andy and now being adapted and perfected by the growers in our community, allows arable crops to be grown amongst perennial plants.

Previous iterations of the system required long-straw wheat varieties to achieve this.

However, innovations in our method have eliminated this restriction, allowing us the opportunity to trial a variety of grains (including oats, barley, and rye) from a range of breeders across the EU, with the intention to find the most diverse, resilient, and nutritious mix for our farmers and customers.

Test...

Combining perennial plants with annual crops is tricky.

Andy has been through 15 years of setbacks but with them has come significant progress. 'Test and learn' is central to everything we do, as is sharing our work with our community of growers to enable the application of pasture cropping techniques on farms across the country.

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Our growing community in France is a big part of our story and was Andy's home until the National Trust recently awarded him the tenancy on a farm in the Cotswolds that now serves as his family home and Wildfarmed HQ. Last year we grew wheat in Norfolk, Surrey, Sussex, Yorkshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Herefordshire and France.

A site in Surrey has attracted particular interest.

As part of our commitment to innovation, we wanted to test the limits of the Wildfarmed system.

Could 15-year-old pastures full of matted couch and brome grass be brought into cultivation using the strip system?

At the time we were using the wider crop row spacings we had used in France - these allowed plenty of margin for the manual mowing of the grass strips.

Phase one went very well. It was challenging but we managed to get the seed in the ground; establishment was good, and we were somewhat optimistic.

Then came the perfect storm. We had no animals available to graze the crops pre-winter. This meant the wheat was quite advanced by the time it was hit by incessant rain, followed by frost up until May 1st. These late frosts meant the soil food web was dormant whilst our 'too-well developed' plants were trying to grow. We did manage to get some wheat out of the ground in Surrey, but the harvest at this farm was a disappointment.

...and Learn

From every setback comes progress. Dealing with the invasive grass growth obliged us to look at how to optimise the inter-row mowing using the most up to date GPS technology. We were able to set up auto-steer guided mowing so as to mow quickly and to within an inch of accuracy.

This has far reaching consequences because the removal of 'mowing-by-eye' in turn removed the need for wide row spacings. As a result, the whole system has been reconfigured so as to be on spacings that should give the optimum chance for yield whilst still preserving over half the field in permanent pasture. The introduction of GPS guidance brings a significant gain in efficiency and ability to work at scale.

Going Forward

This year we have a further 38 farmers in the UK growing with us from Cumbria to Cornwall, including some of the leading lights of the U.K. regenerative movement. For all of these farmers we're providing support, access to equipment, knowledge and crucially, a farm-gate price for their harvest which makes it viable for them to embrace change.

To help some of our farmers transition in an economically sustainable way we have established an adaptation process over a two or three year period. This means that while some farmers in our network are not yet using the full strip till, mixed system, all will be using a system that prioritises soil health and never uses any chemical inputs.

Systemic Change

The finish line is making sure as many of those 12 million daily UK loaves come from land that is healing. We are not there yet.

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We want to engage with as many people in our community to join us in that mission. As this community expands, so do the grains and crops we grow as well as the techniques we use to grow them. We believe this collective experience will create the quantum leap required for this kind of agriculture to become predominant in the UK.

Only by working together will we be able to have a meaningful impact on the environmental challenges that face us all, while making nutrient dense food widely available throughout the country, not just in localised pockets for the lucky few.

If you would be interested in visiting one of the farms and see what some of these individual stories of transformation look like, please contact Harriet at farmvisits@wildfarmed.co.uk.

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George, Edd and Andy