

Increasing tree cover on dairy farms in England: The role of farmers' values

Understanding the range of values held by farmers in relation to trees allows us to learn how, when, and where farmers may embrace having trees on their land. Explicit consideration of these values will better enable those working to design policies, incentives, tools, advice, or other communications to do so in ways which are more likely to succeed in delivering enduring tree cover expansion on farms. To investigate these questions, our research used a values map divided into seven categories (figure 1) and drew on survey questionnaire responses from 44 UK dairy farmers to guide in-depth interviews with nine dairy farmers operating in the UK.

General findings

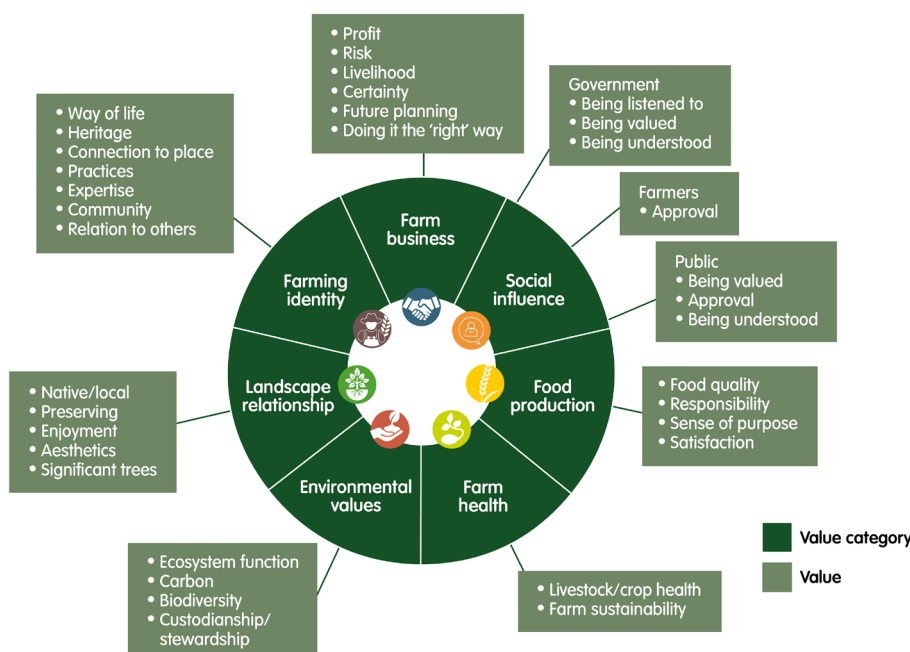
- Tree planting, establishment, and maintenance is likely to have greater permanence if aligned with dairy farmers' existing values.
- The dairy farmers we interviewed are future-oriented, demonstrating a strong concern for the sustainability of the farm and the business.
- A broad range of things matter to the dairy farmers we interviewed, including farm health, the environment, and their relationship with the land.
- In our survey, 68% of 44 dairy farmers indicated a likelihood to plant trees within the next five years (23% 'extremely likely').
- The dairy farmers we interviewed see growing trees as complementary to dairying and not as a replacement livelihood strategy.

'You're constantly thinking about it. Seasonally and also annually you review what you've done and you're looking to the future, thinking what you can do to improve things and also that you're doing the right thing.'

Ian

'I suppose we are custodians of the countryside. We want to keep it in as fine fettle as we possibly can.'

Julie



Map of farmers' values relating to trees.

What matters to dairy farmers?

The table below shows the mean scores dairy farmer survey respondents assigned to the seven value categories when considering tree planting (on a scale of 0-10).

Value category	Survey wording	Score
Farm Health	The ongoing sustainability and functionality of the farm	8.8
Farm Business	Running a good business	8.4
Environmental Values	Concern for the state of the wider environment	8.3
Landscape Relationship	How the landscape looks and feels and how it should look and feel	8.3
Farming Identity	The farming way of life, being part of a farming community, respecting tradition and ways of doing things	7.3
Food Production	Producing food	7.3
Social Influence	Caring what others think, feeling valued, being listened to	7.0

Opportunities to align tree cover expansion with farmers' values

- The dairy farmers we interviewed care deeply about the health of their cattle. Appealing to this value (e.g., highlighting the shelter, shade, and natural flood management benefits), may provide opportunities to increase tree cover.
- They value trees as part of a visually pleasing landscape aesthetic. This offers opportunities to enhance and expand tree cover, especially hedgerows, in-hedge trees, and where trees have been lost to disease.
- Supporting wildlife and being a custodian of the land and environment is important to the dairy farmers; they see hedgerows and tree cover as contributing positively towards these areas.
- How the public view dairy farming is valued by the dairy farmers we interviewed, and they recognise that planting trees could be a strategy to demonstrate to the public their care for the environment and their commitment to farming the 'right way'.

Potential barriers to dairy farmers increasing tree cover

- The dairy farming way of life is particularly demanding, limiting the time and labour available to consider, plan for, plant, or maintain trees.
- Dairy farming is central to the identity of those we interviewed and they highly value their role as food producers. Trees offer limited interest as a potential livelihood compared to dairying.
- Tree planting incentives may not align with the size and scope of dairy farmers' tree planting aims and are experienced by some farmers as too complex and time consuming. It also helps to raise awareness of green finance investment opportunities among potential investors.

'We manage so much of the landscape that we have to take responsibility for what people think of what we do.'

Sarah

'So, when I've got two things: A, time and B, money, I plant trees and look after them. When I don't have money and I don't have time, I don't. You have to look after them and that's time you haven't got. There's lots of barriers to planting trees.'

Henry



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To find out more about this and related research, go to: forestresearch.gov.uk/research/social-and-cultural-values-and-trees-on-farms-in-england/