

Increasing tree cover on cereal 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 domains (Figure 1) and drew on survey questionnaire responses from 70 cereal farmers in England to guide in-depth interviews with 10 cereal farmers operating in the country.

General findings

- Tree planting, establishment, and maintenance is likely to have greater permanence if aligned with cereal farmers' existing values.
- The farmers interviewed value their role as food producers and custodians of the land, showing concern for both business and environmental sustainability.
- A broad range of things matter to the farmers interviewed including farm health, farm business, the environment, and relationship to the landscape.
- In our survey, 59% of 70 farmers interviewed indicated a likelihood to plant trees within the next five years.
- The farmers interviewed value trees on their land but prefer them in field margins or unproductive areas where they will not disrupt farming operations.

'We're thinking several generations ahead because we want our children, our grandchildren, to be able to do the same job that we're doing and if we've destroyed it, there's not much for them to do. We feel like we're custodians.'

John

'Every farmer recognises that we have an impact on the environment and every farmer wants to reduce that. Because we live here, it's our environment.'

Murray

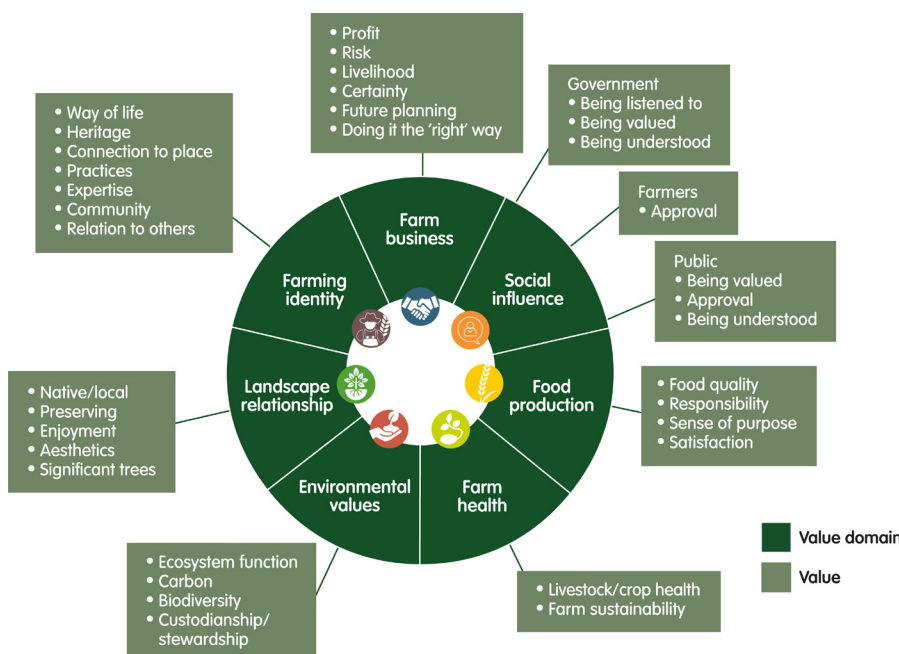


Figure 1: Map of farmers' values relating to trees.

What matters to cereal farmers?

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

Value domain	Survey wording	Score
Farm health	The ongoing sustainability and functionality of the farm	8.3
Farm business	Running a good business	8.1
Food production	Producing food	8.1
Environmental values	Concern for the state of the wider environment	7.8
Landscape relationship	How the landscape looks and feels and how it should look and feel	7.5
Farming identity	The farming way of life, being part of a farming community, respecting tradition, and ways of doing things	7.0
Social influence	Caring what others think, feeling valued, being listened to	5.7

Opportunities to align tree cover expansion with farmers' values

- Soil health is key to cereal farmers' understandings of farm health. Clearly communicating the benefits of trees for soil health both now and in the future could encourage farmers to increase tree cover.
- Cereal farmers value trees as a way of providing and connecting habitats which encourage the presence of wildlife. Farmers' enthusiasm for wildlife and its contribution to farm health may motivate them to expand tree cover.
- The cereal farmers we spoke to were open to changing practices when advised or informed by trusted sources, including agronomists, Farmer Cluster groups, and consultants. These interactions could provide routes for sharing information on how trees can mitigate some of the challenges facing farmers.

Potential barriers to cereal farmers increasing tree cover

- Trees may be perceived to 'get in the way' of arable farming operations and food production. There are limited opportunities for growing trees on arable land that do not disrupt in-field operations. Tree planting may be seen to incur financial loss or be lacking in financial benefit.
- Some cereal farmers expressed uncertainty about the impact of trees on crop health. They felt that trees could have a negative impact on crops by increasing competition for sunlight and water, as well as encouraging the presence of pests.
- Trees take time, money, and effort to establish and maintain. These costs can be prohibitive for some cereal farmers, particularly those with smaller farms. Some cereal farmers perceived increased risks of loss on investment in trees due to the impacts of disease, drought, or grazing pressure from deer.

'I think enhancing the pathways and the habitats that we have will help beneficials and, hopefully, be part of the reason why we can use less insecticides.'

Callum

'We're not a very big farm. So, to lose stuff to trees long term, you know, if you haven't got enough acres, you've got a job to make the figures stack up for investment into machinery and stuff.'

Niall



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To find out more about this and related research, go to: [Social and Cultural Values and Trees on Farms in England - Forest Research](#)

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