



Research Note

Further paths to embracing trees on farms: The role of social and cultural values

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What leads some farmers to dramatically increase the number of trees on their land? What role do social and cultural values play? And how do values and behaviour interact?

This Research Note examines the potential for increasing tree cover on farms across England through acknowledging and working with social and cultural values that are relevant to farmers. The research centres the narratives of farmers in four farming households to explore how these values influence their decisions around tree cover on their land. Four new insights were found that cut across the experiences of the farmers we spoke to: (1) *New or returning farmers see managing agricultural land as an opportunity to act on their values.* (2) *Farmers may reinterpret existing values after pivotal experiences, leading them to rethink whether existing farming practices align with these values.* (3) *Support from like-minded individuals can prove essential when farmers seek to farm outside of the norm, but this sense of affinity can take time to develop.* (4) *Whether farmers are able to farm in line with their values is influenced by a range of other factors.* This Research Note aims to illustrate the diversity of farmers' approaches to and reasons for integrating trees on farms, and aims to prompt discussion about the importance of considering personal, social, and cultural values when seeking to influence this.

This report follows and complements a previous [Research Note](#).

Background

Trees and woodlands offer many benefits to the environment, such as climate change mitigation and nature recovery. As such, the UK government has made increasing tree cover across England a key priority, and the Committee on Climate Change (2020) has recommended increasing tree cover in the UK from 13% to 17%. This study is part of a wider Forest Research [project](#) on farmers' values in relation to tree cover expansion. It was informed by earlier research, which identified 30 social and cultural values that have the potential to influence farmers' attitudes and behaviour regarding trees. These values were grouped into seven domains: farm business, social influence, food production, farm health, environmental values, landscape relationship, and farming identity. Complementing this existing work, this Research Note explores: how values might change over time; when values may drive behaviour change; and when and how farmers are able to farm in line with their values. It builds on evidence presented in a previous publication, which explored these questions with a different set of farmers (McConnachie, Pearson, and Spencer, 2023).

Methods

We adopted a biographical research approach for this study. This qualitative method uses semi-structured interviews to elicit participants' reconstructions of their life histories. This approach was valuable for two reasons: firstly, it allowed us to explore how farmers see and understand their farming practice within the context of their wider lives; secondly, it allowed us to address the wider project objective of exploring potential triggers for shifts in values when farmers might be more likely to consider growing trees.

In this Research Note, we present four case studies from research undertaken between October 2023 and April 2024. Our participants were chosen to build on and increase the diversity of farmers from the previous research phase. This was done in order to develop original in-depth insights and rich narratives, which could inform policy and practice conversations, as well as identify future research questions. To complement the previous phase, we included female farmers, farmers who have been farming for less than ten years, and farmers who are not the sole decision-makers on the farm. As for the previous case study participants, the farmers we spoke to all believe that they have substantially increased the numbers of trees on their farm.

We spent between four and eight hours speaking with four farming households or agricultural businesses, i.e. two individual farmers and two farming couples. For each farming household, one interview took place on the participant's farm and further interviews were by phone or video call. This methodological approach enabled detailed and iterative discussions about the history of the farm. This included discussions around how the farmers' objectives, approach to farming, and their perception of what it means to be a good farmer have changed over time (including specifically in relation to trees), as well as how trees have factored into their farming journey. The first interview focused on farm history and farming objectives, while the second (and third) explored key events, influences, or trigger points that were central in influencing behaviours and values. Transcripts were analysed following each interview, identifying missing information and themes that would benefit from further exploration. These were built into subsequent interviews. For two of the farming case studies, the researchers felt they had sufficient information after two interviews. For the remaining two, a third clarified and expanded conversations around trigger points and values.

On completing the interviews, all transcripts were reanalysed deductively, drawing on the seven value domains and focusing on values relating to trees and trigger points/key events that were central in influencing or changing behaviour and values in relation to tree cover. The researchers drew out sections of text corresponding with these themes of interest and wove them together to form case study accounts. This process of iterative analysis, both between each discussion and when drawing the discussion data together for the final analysis, was part of a purposeful methodological commitment, as when undertaking biographical research 'it is important to interpret the significance of experiences, activities, or actions not in isolation but in the context of the biography as a whole' (Bogner and Rosenthal, 2023 p. 569). For the final cross-cutting themes section of the Research Note, two social scientists collaboratively determined insights that emerged from across the case studies.

We now present brief accounts of each farmer or farming family, drawing on their own words as much as possible. In the case of Sam and Claire, the interviews were almost entirely carried out with Sam only. For all of the case studies presented, the accounts necessarily lose a lot of the detail from our conversations. The farmers have given permission for use of their real first names and each has reviewed their own story. Following the four stories, we expand on the cross-cutting insights.



David

'My kids and my grandkids come out and help on the farm and if they weren't enjoying it and they weren't seeing the value of what we were doing, I probably wouldn't want to continue. But they do - they really enjoy what we're doing with the trees.'

David's grandparents bought their 90-acre farm in 1933. His grandfather had a small herd of Friesian cows: 'He would milk the cows and take the milk and deliver it around the villages on a horse and cart. My gran would pick berries, fruit, and apples and sell them in the local market.' Since the 1930s, the farm has gone through a series of transitions, including a period of intensive agriculture followed by a move towards less intensive methods. David now runs the half-rented, half-owned, 450-acre mixed farm. He feels that 'that connection they had with the community and the reliance on farming has now come back around again, all these years later'. Today, the farm is a diverse land-holding that includes agriculture, agroforestry, and multiple community-inspired and community-led initiatives, many of which rely on the trees David has planted over the past 20 years. David is proud of the '70-100 acres of the farm that we've got real tree projects on'. This includes agroforestry planted between 2016 and 2017, an edible woodland planted between 2017 and 2018, and strips of trees for biomass and willow and hazel stakes for hedge laying. He continues to lay hedges and increase tree cover on other parts of the farm as he remains adamant that 'there's still loads more we can do'.

When David took over from his grandfather, agriculture on the farm had already been intensified. He continued to expand this enterprise, feeling that 'an economy of scale was the only way agriculture was going to go'. He entered into a collective with other local farmers to help manage costs by sharing machinery and labour. David explained, 'I was guilty of following the trends of the day and feeding the plant and not looking after the soil.' He remembers this 'large-scale farming from the edge of the

field to the other edges'. In order to do this 'we'd decimate hedges. We were chucking on chemicals and fertilisers without really understanding what we were doing. We were following large corporate advice.'

Through a chance conversation with another farmer, David 'was very lucky in the year 2000 to find something called the Nuffield Farming Scholarship'. Accepted as a Nuffield Scholar, David proposed and received funding to undertake a two-year research project 'understanding the supply chain'. Talking about the project, he says that when 'I say that it's changed my life that's an understatement'. The Scholarship was pivotal to David deciding to take land out of intensive agriculture, and so he left the farming collective and began diversifying and planting trees. David remains strongly involved with Nuffield and, over his years as alumni officer, he has seen things 'all changed from direct drilling to precision farming, now to looking more at carbon, the environment, and new technologies of how we can work with nature'.

Following his time at Nuffield, David helped set up [Farming Online](#). The website made live weather forecasting and grain pricing quickly accessible to the farming community and 'it gave people the opportunity to chat and to share'. As David further expanded his network, he engaged with non-farming individuals and organisations interested in environmental stewardship, such as the late Caroline Drummond, the founder of [LEAF](#) (Linking Environment and Farming), as well as advisors from the Woodland Trust. David became an ambassador for the Trust, which is something he 'felt very pleased about'. David

feels he would not have increased tree cover on his land without these networks, all of which were catalysed by his time at Nuffield: 'We wouldn't be planting trees if I hadn't done a scholarship.'

For David, 'you just feel different when you're walking around, and the hedges are full of fruit and the trees are growing and you can remember planting that 20 years ago'. David's grandchildren are an important part of why he enjoys farming today: 'we were just moving

sheep and pigs, going through those trees, and I was thinking, "how lucky am I that I've got this opportunity to be working with my grandkids and in a beautiful environment?" And seeing something that we were creating for a legacy for them to take forward hopefully.'

These benefits are not only aesthetic and personally

emotive: the 'trees have been a great way of linking with the community and creating us an income'. David is particularly passionate about the number of regular volunteers who benefit from visiting the farm. Moving from planting trees in unproductive corners to agroforestry 'felt like a big leap, and still feels like a big leap', however, in supporting other farmers on this journey and reflecting on his own journey so far, he has been able to feel 'very proud of what we've achieved'. 'Yes, we were part of the problem, but we're now starting to rebuild and put agriculture back on the map that we actually can take forward and be proud to hand over to the next generation.'

'It's really changed over the years, from 1933 right through to an intensive age of agriculture where we didn't have anybody working on the farm really, we just had contractors come in, to now, where we've got a fully engaged community back onto the farm, producing food, which is still very important.'



Oliver and Molly

'There's something powerful about planting trees and waiting for them to come up, seeing them change.' (Oliver)

Molly grew up on her grandfather's smallholding. He advocated 'self-sufficient living' and Molly remembers doing 'a lot of growing our own food and producing our own animal products'. Farming was not a large part of Oliver's childhood, however, despite both of his parents coming from sheep farming families. Oliver's father left to study at 16 and 'his family farm got sold. Ever since then I think he's wanted to regain that land and be able to pass it over to his kids'. Similarly, Molly and Oliver found that they 'had a dream to have some land', after having pursued alternative careers as well as agriculture and sustainable agriculture. In 2022, they bought their first 56-acre farm, which was previously a dairy. Farming on this land feels significant for them as Oliver 'grew up just across the hills, a few miles away'. Oliver's father has worked hard to buy more land in the area and, with Oliver, Molly, and Oliver's three brothers also contributing to this effort, 'altogether we've got about 120 acres now'. Reflecting Oliver's parents' passion, the land is 'almost exclusively sheep', with arable crops and some areas of conifer and broadleaf woodland as well.

Oliver and Molly's farm was once home to a large number of trees and 'definitely had a traditional fruit orchard'. Their conversations with the previous owners revealed that 'when [the previous owners] came, they were being encouraged to create more pasture, so they took out all the old trees'. For Oliver and Molly, the way the farm had been run reflected a general shift in agriculture towards 'simplification, maximising, and going large on everything'. Feeling that this kind of farming 'is not compatible with life' as 'you're mining the soil', they 'decided to leave everything to grow as much as possible' when

they took over the farm. As such, they are undertaking an agroforestry trial on seven acres of Oliver's father's land and have just received local authority funding to replant the historic orchard with 100 fruit trees. Additionally, they have received a Countryside Stewardship capital grant to plant 280 m of 'native hedgerow, six trees a metre', and are developing ideas for an 'experimental hedgerow' that they have nicknamed a 'mega hedge' as it will be three metres wide.

Before working on the farm, the couple spent a decade working in East Africa. For Molly, who helped to design productive garden systems over there, seeing different elements fit together on small farms, including food production and carbon sequestration, is why 'these kinds of agroforestry systems appeal to me'. Oliver found it 'really good to see examples of multi-layered complex farm systems which are working' and noticed 'they don't call it "agroforestry" because they just do it all the time'. Given Oliver's father's 'strong attachment to sheep farming, in a cultural and slightly sentimental way', Oliver and Molly think agroforestry 'appealed to [Oliver's father] because we said, "look, we can do sheep here, plus let's have a go at something different [...]". We built it around the sheep being integrated into it.'

Oliver's previous work in wind energy has led him to think deeply about the climate crisis and land use. Instead of living in a state of 'concern', which he feels is 'quite a hard thing to keep in your mind all the time' because 'you're holding onto something that's quite dark and quite negative', he wants to use 'my skills and my opportunities, which I feel can have a positive

benefit towards the future'. For Oliver, 'there seems like quite a short list of things which seem incontrovertibly good. And planting trees is on that list for me.' While visiting Groundswell and the Agroforestry Show, Molly noticed and was enthused by

'I think that to make a change in any walk of life, but especially a change which is a break from the past of something that you're used to, that you need two things. You need the motivation to do so, and you need the means to do so.' (Oliver)

'this kind of buzz around farmers feeling important because they can make a difference to something as big as climate change through their practices'.

Although Oliver and Molly are farming differently to many of

their neighbours, they are 'very respectful of people who have worked all their life in farming and made their living out of it, because it's really hard'. They see their place in the local farming community as part of a process of 'conversation and learning'. One local farmer who they have employed as a contractor uses more traditional methods and has 'helped us with everything. He can do so much and he's so generous with his knowledge and time.' After they 'planted up the tree lines with him, he was saying that he was quite interested in putting in some fruit trees, maybe trying it out with the cattle as well'. While Oliver's parents are not necessarily interested in taking a participatory role in the changes he and Molly are initiating on the farm, Oliver thinks that 'they're just happy that we're back farming, really, rather than off doing something else'. However, 'because on the old maps there was traditionally always a strip of woodland on this one field, [Oliver's father] wants it planted. I think it's to do with wanting to leave a bit more space for nature and the fact that it was there, it's a traditional thing.'

Oliver and Molly have reflected on what brought them back to farming: 'Either I'm not very imaginative and think that you should go back to what you know, or it's something deeper and more important that's drawing me back.' It would seem that the latter is driving their return, as both are determined to continue experimenting, and learning from failures along the way, to

'Well, knowing that there's trees that I planted last year, that won't be mature for another 100 years, or certainly 60-70 years. They'll be quite lovely trees and perhaps my boy will sit under them and appreciate them in a way I won't.' (Oliver)

restore tree cover to their farm. Molly is particularly interested to use their farm 'to have more interaction with the local community... the villagers here... allowing people to be involved in growing if they want to be'. Becoming parents has also impacted how Oliver reflects on their tree planting: 'Just being engaged in long-term projects is lovely. And having a child makes it even more poignant and powerful.'



Sam and Claire

'I guess it's like all these things, it's sort of addictive once you start going.' (Sam)

Sam and Claire left their office-based engineering jobs in 2017, moving from London to Cumbria to take over a farm Claire's grandad had bought in the 1970s which, according to Sam's research, had previously been a royal hunting ground. They initially farmed sheep but have made 'massive changes' in the last five years and now focus on raising and growing a herd of beef shorthorn cattle. The cattle remain outside year-round in an 'adaptive multi-paddock grazing' system, which includes keeping them within woodland. Diverse income streams include rearing rare-breed pigs, making leather, and hosting education courses, while Claire continues to do some work remotely for her old employer to make ends meet. They recently entered a Higher Tier Stewardship scheme (their main income source) through which they've planted 10 000 trees. Their aim is to restore 200 acres of wood pasture. Today, the land includes 386 acres of grassland, 150 acres of woodland, as well as a 200-acre commercial forestry plantation. This plantation is on land Claire's grandfather previously sold to a group of businessmen who planted it with Sitka spruce, and which her grandfather was able to buy back a few years later.

For Sam, being a good farmer means 'balancing the food production with managing the ecology, [the] ecosystem of your particular farm'. He feels that some land managers have moved too far from food production, saying, 'It's all very well having this rewilding but ultimately what are we going to eat?' He went on to say: 'I think being a good farmer in a context where trees are part of your landscape, then the trees need to be healthy and happy and regenerating, just as much as your grassland and just as much as the cattle... it's all part of the environment.'

Sam and Claire are looking to create as much value from their land as possible in a sustainable way. Sam would like to make more of the woodland: 'There's just so many interesting products that can come out of well-managed woodland and if it is a sustainably managed woodland as well, that then can feed into the farming.'

Sam's idea of good farming is heavily informed by history: in part, reading about farming, but also his experience of visiting his great uncle's farm, which his parents took on with no prior experience when Sam was a teenager. He said: 'Wouldn't it be lovely if we could return to a more mixed farming thing where there's more people and happiness on farms.' People remain key: 'It's part of being a good farmer, keeping as much value as you can within the rural community, to give as much opportunity as you can to your local economy.'

One incident which pushed Sam towards leaving engineering was a talk at his office from an environmental journalist and campaigner. Sam said, 'He absolutely slammed sheep. He absolutely slammed meat-eating. I was just like, "I can see what he's saying," but at the same time I was like, "I don't entirely agree with this," because the way my parents managed the farm, they didn't put fertiliser on. The sheep were just eating grass that just grew back again.' He is determined to demonstrate how it is possible to produce food sustainably: 'I know that there are ways that we can manage farmland... grassland with livestock.' Sam believes a farm managed in such a way can be 'incredibly good for biodiversity... carbon neutral, basically. In fact, we're going to be carbon negative.' Listening to

the campaigner's talk crystallised a feeling of discomfort in Sam. Having spent time on farms when he was young, sitting in an

'I just feel like we are at the point where more people need to know about this way of farming and managing land.' (Sam)

office bored him: 'Really, I don't want to be sitting in an office for my whole life.' In addition, 'this whole movement about climate change, biodiversity loss, soil

degradation... All of these things were happening, and I was in an office building, working on skyscrapers. I was like, "This is not... I don't really want to do that. I want to be going to try and fix these problems."

Sam and Claire initially farmed sheep, thinking 'that would be a nice thing to do because that's what Claire's grandad did'. Sam's parents had farmed organically, and he struggled with the idea of using inorganic fertilisers. However, this was the approach they initially took, both because Claire's grandad had done so and because 'everyone round here was putting fertiliser on... We were told that the grass wouldn't grow if we didn't.' When they started to work through the accounts, however, they could 'quickly see that this was just not going to work'. Sam 'managed to persuade Claire's parents that we didn't really need to do that'. Going against the grain hasn't always been easy, and so engaging with more experienced farmers and advisors has been key for Sam and Claire to find ways to develop a viable farm business while remaining true to their values. A visit from a Woodland Trust advisor

helped Sam learn what healthy trees look like, inspiring him to change their approach to include growing more trees.

He also recognises the importance of joining Pasture for Life, a pasture-fed livestock association, 'because you feel like you're not on your own'. Visiting a Pasture for Life farm 'was great because he was just

'That got me thinking, "All these alders that look lovely and were providing the cattle and the sheep with shade in the summer, they're all going to die essentially unless we do something." I just started to think: "Okay, how can we change that then?" Then we started thinking, "Right, well let's just not graze it in the summer."' (Sam)

on the same mindset as us and so it was really nice to go and talk to somebody who was thinking about a similar way of farming'.

Sam doesn't think his values, or the things he cares about, have changed much since they took on the farm. What has changed as they have learned more about farming in this location is his understanding of the realities of what is possible: 'Even when I first started, I thought, "We can do all this, it will be fine," but the more I do it, I think, "No, you can take on too much."' He also recognises their good fortune in taking on a farm with a mature commercial forestry plantation, the income from which provided capital for a new water supply that 'unlocked' the

possibility of rotational grazing. Sam recognises that managing the farm in ways that fully align with his values may be unrealistic. He said: 'It's a bit of a dream, I suppose, but at the same time I just think, I want to try and break these systems of extractive commodity and economics and break it down and just be like, "No, I don't want to be a part of that anymore."'



Liz

'I think what's interesting is actually when you start talking to normal farmers, or who would be seen to be conventional farmers, if you dig a bit, they've all got little bits of folklore about trees or plants.'

Liz grew up on a family mixed farm of 'beef, sheep, and arable'. The farm today comprises 130 hectares each of owned land and rented grassland. In the 1950s, her grandfather, a farm worker, was 'given an opportunity to buy some land very cheaply and then it built from there'. Liz farms alongside her 'two sisters and my mum and dad'. There has always been tree cover on the farm including hedgerows, in-field trees, and 'traditional belts' that were part of an ex-parkland and 'would've been for shooting purposes'. Their farm is unusual for the area: 'six percent of our farm area is wood, which is quite high.' This relatively high percentage is partly due to a shared family sense of the importance of tree cover: 'It's always been a massive part of the family values, which is there are loads of hedges. And whenever we plant a hedge, we put trees in it.' It also reflects Liz's growing interest in regenerative agriculture and her desire to integrate tree cover as part of the business strategy for the farm.

Tree cover has been important to all three generations that have shaped the farm as it is today. Liz's father 'did a lot of woodworking... it's always that idea that there's a cycle of wood that grows on the farm, then becomes a table or gate posts'. However, her parents and cousin (responsible for their arable contracting), have a more traditional farming approach in comparison to Liz's interest in regenerative farming. Her father believes that maintaining their farm and farming approach 'as it is' is important. Liz recognises that for her father 'there's a huge bit of legacy in that', and, although he feels positively about existing trees and hedges, he is not keen to see tree cover significantly increased or further incorporated into their farming

approach. Liz says that 'his concern is he doesn't want to take good land out [of production], because we're producing, we're feeding the world'. Further, Liz's father is somewhat distrustful of government policy, including tree planting ambitions. Liz says that he always expects 'U-turns', predicting that 'soon enough, they'll be paying us to plough stuff out'. She understands his scepticism: 'When you've been farming for 60 plus years, you've seen the cycles, haven't you?' Liz says that her cousin, whose background is in agronomy, dismisses regenerative farming as 'just fashionable'. Liz disagrees with this and feels that 'what we're doing isn't working' and, speaking for herself and her sisters 'as the next generation coming in, [we] want to do things slightly differently'.

Liz's animals 'have always had access to a hedge', so this was something she had taken for granted. Over the years, however, through her farming experience, agricultural science degree, PhD in farm animal welfare and behaviour, and 13 years' employment at the Meat and Livestock Commission, she has begun to see their importance. Throughout this time, she found that she 'was starting to be introduced to that way of thinking, particularly on grass and forest systems, thinking about it as a yearly cycle'. This approach to grass and forest systems was cemented for her when engaging with consultants from New Zealand because 'that was a really massive part of how they worked'. Liz enjoys that grasses and trees afford 'animals choice'. She says, 'it's sometimes just nice when you see an animal chewing on a hedge... I think from a welfare choice, diversity of diet [perspective]'. Continuing to build relationships and learn from farmers who are also experimenting with browsing, Liz

feels that 'this interplay between trees and, actually, performance on animals is starting to become more obvious'.

Alongside an interest in increasing tree cover for animal health, Liz's current work as a farming consultant has influenced her desire 'to want to transition' towards 'regenerative biological farming systems'. She first heard about regenerative agriculture at Groundswell farming festival. Meeting farmers from further afield was pivotal as 'not that many people locally actually are "on the bus", as we would refer to it. But yeah, I've got a lot of friends who are in it and people who are a lot further on, that are really happy to share experience.' More recently, she has been asking 'how does it all interconnect?' and has been able to see examples of regenerative agriculture working for the farms and farmers she works with: 'it starts to bring in that connection piece to land, people, food, health.' Further awareness came when she saw how many products were being sprayed on their arable land: 'Twenty-five different products going onto a field, I wasn't even aware. I just assumed there might be six and suddenly you go "we've been complicit in this"'. Liz has been determined to continue changing practices and does so in tandem with others by organising 'events and conferences, trying to get farmers engaging with slightly different ways of farming.' She thinks having a vision is crucial and believes that receiving coaching from other farmers on similar journeys is instrumental to achieving this.

'I remember going to a conference years ago, and there was a guy talking about tree fodder, and I just thought he was insane.'

Liz feels herself to be 'in a privileged situation', saying 'we own land, no mortgage... my interest and curiosity in experimentation comes from not having this financial stress associated, that a lot of farmers would have'. She is able to experiment and learn from mistakes: 'There is this element of concern that you're going to make mistakes or things are not going to work, and actually, that is part of it... the [regenerative farming] community then drives this, "well you've got to share that." That's then valuable to the other people within the community.' Liz feels that in standard farming meetings 'it's all just like a stream of negativity, where these [regenerative agricultural meetings] are more positive, most of the time'. While she recognises that many farmers are scared to not conform, her belief in the value of this more holistic farming means that she is now much less concerned about what other farmers think of her.

To some extent Liz manages the land she rents differently, as her landlords are not necessarily aligned with her way of farming. She feels that one landlord has 'probably gone a bit too eco' and the other is 'just waiting for the land to get developed, so his investment in that as an environmental thing

is, like zero'. With the former she remains convinced that 'if we work together, we could achieve both of our aims, which is he would get more diversity and we would get more production'.

For Liz, it is an ongoing challenge to bring together the multiple decision-makers on the farm and try to convince them that changing farming practices to incorporate more tree cover, as part of a regenerative farming approach, can benefit animal wellbeing and farm business productivity. All of the farm decision-makers care about trees and value them, but their ideas on the role and place for trees across the farm landscape sometimes diverge, which has left Liz 'in this sort of weird hybrid at the moment, where I want to do stuff, but it's being brave enough to do it... I can control the bits I can control, but it's the other people that's the challenge'.

Cross-cutting insights

Our intention in selecting farmers who have already embraced trees on their farms was to understand how their values and tree expansion activities interrelate and identify shared ways of thinking, feeling, behaving, and communicating (or social and cultural values) in relation to trees on farms. The in-depth research approach we adopted lends itself to uncovering participants' understanding or interpretation of their own experiences. Having focused above on the farming journeys of the participants, we now suggest some insights that cut across their stories and build on those outlined in the previous publication (McConnachie, Pearson, and Spencer, 2023).

New or returning farmers see managing agricultural land as an opportunity to act on their values

For the two farming couples we interviewed, specific life experiences brought to the fore their values around land use and their belief that agriculture can be part of environmentally sustainable land management solutions. In both cases, a desire to act on these values led to them beginning a new career in farming. For Oliver and Molly, they were compelled to take on a farm because of their experience working in agriculture in Africa, Oliver's subsequent work in the climate sector, and a sense of responsibility for helping to tackle climate change as new parents. While this was a new endeavour for them, their 'return' to farming has been warmly welcomed by their farming families. Similarly, Sam decided to try out a new career in farming after listening to a talk by an environmental campaigner and feeling like he was not fulfilling his environmental values in his engineering job. He and Claire, who was also keen to undertake this venture, were able to take over her family farm and thus had an opportunity to act on their values. In both cases, farming was seen to offer an opportunity to act on values that, from the beginning, included increasing tree cover as part of good agricultural practice.

Farmers may reinterpret existing values after pivotal experiences, leading them to rethink whether existing farming practices align with these values

For the two farmers who have been farming for longer, influential or 'pivotal' experiences shifted how they understood the role of agriculture and made them want to change practices on their farms. This did not necessarily mean that the things they valued changed, but how they understood those values and the potential to realise them did appear to shift. David began to rethink his values around what makes a good farming business after undertaking a Nuffield Scholarship and working with LEAF. This experience allowed him to see increasing tree and hedgerow cover as part and parcel of good farming and custodianship, and not in opposition to food production. For Liz, her formal education, time working at the Meat and Livestock Commission, and role as a farm advisor allowed her to observe others' successful strategies for incorporating trees and reducing inputs. Thus, while Liz still values food production as part of good farming, she believes this value can be better realised through using less chemicals and the incorporation of trees for grazing and fodder.

Support from like-minded individuals can prove essential when farmers seek to farm outside of the norm, but this sense of affinity can take time to develop

As with the previous set of case studies, all of the farmers we interviewed identified the importance of interacting with and getting support and inspiration from peers who are also pursuing less conventional farming practices. This includes other farmers who have significantly increased tree cover on their land. However, this second set of case studies adds nuance to our understanding of the impact of other farmers: the farmers we interviewed did not necessarily see these individuals as 'like-minded' others, at least not at the beginning of their journeys to increasing tree cover. As Liz explained, she thought the first person she heard talk about trees as fodder was 'insane'. However, what Liz's story shows is that farmers can come to trust in and realign themselves with others who are farming differently, developing a sense of like-mindedness over time. For Liz, this has been through regenerative agriculture meetings;

for David, it started with the Nuffield Scholarship and continued through Farming Online and the connections he made at LEAF; for Oliver and Molly, this has been catalysed through events such as Groundswell and the Agroforestry Show; and for Sam and Claire, this has been through visiting Pasture for Life farms. Thus, these networks are instrumental to farmers changing their practices and better aligning with values that have led them to increase tree cover.

Whether farmers are able to farm in line with their values is influenced by a range of other factors

Both case study publications have shown that farmers are not always able to align their practices with their values. However, while concerns over financial viability, such as those expressed by Sam, were foregrounded by farmers in the first publication, farmers from the case studies presented here focused more on familial relations and the negative impact that changing practices and increasing tree cover might have on those relationships. This potential for tension weighed heavily when they made decisions and so, while many were still able to increase tree cover, there was necessary diplomacy involved. For Oliver and Molly, this meant keeping sheep as part of the farm business for Oliver's father. For Sam and Claire, as well as for Liz, persuading parents and other family members to move away from more conventional practices has not always been easy and has at times caused conflict. Liz indicated she would have taken regenerative agriculture practices further and faster were she not managing the farm in tandem with family members who were not convinced of their benefit.

Final remarks

Adopting the method which was successfully used in our previous case study publication (McConnachie, Pearson, and Spencer, 2023), we have intentionally foregrounded the stories of the interviewed farmers, rather than offering our own interpretations or suggested implications for tree cover on farms. In doing so, our intention remains to challenge readers' thinking and to provoke discussion. Through this second round of case studies, and the inclusion of a different demographic of farmers, we have been able to add to and build on the insights outlined in the previous publication. These combined insights will be used to develop resources to support those engaged in face-to-face delivery with farmers, with the aim of helping them plan for more meaningful conversations about increasing tree cover on farms, which reference farmer values. We will also use

this learning to develop research questions which can be used to test whether explicitly incorporating an understanding of farmers' values into tree cover expansion initiatives can lead to greater success.

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