



REFOREST

Living Lab 7: United Kingdom

***Wood pasture
creation and
restoration at
Gowbarrow***



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Living Lab 7

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The farm

Gowbarrow Hall Farm is a family run upland pasture farm situated on the south facing shores of Ullswater in the Lake District.

Before we started managing it in 2017, it was on annual grazing licences to predominantly sheep farmers. We now have beef Shorthorn cattle (currently 60 head), 5 Kunekune pigs who spend a lot of time in the wood pasture and roaming in and out of the woodland, and 4 fell ponies. We are Pasture for Life certified and have been farming organically for 3-4 years but have just started the certification process. We also have a small market garden that currently supplies The Quiet Site with vegetables and herbs.

From the fell to the valley bottom, we have about 385 acres of grassland ranging from heather moorland, ancient wood pasture and meadows. We also have many different types of woodland; from ancient oak and deciduous to a big block of commercial plantation, a lot planted in the past 20 years (woodland creation), and a few smaller pockets of ancient coppice woodlands. There is a 200-acre block of wood pasture creation and restoration which we have just put in Higher Tier Stewardship.

The woodlands are integrated into the farming system predominantly through grazing as wood pasture. Our livestock live outside all year round and thrive if given access to shelter and diverse forage provided by the woodland. We combine livestock production with trying to promote the regeneration of woodland and different plant species. The pigs and cattle turn the ground over and create pockets of opportunity for pioneer species. The cattle are mob grazed through our meadows during the growing season; predominantly from April through to November / December, using electric fencing and moving the cows every day. This gives the woodland and wood pasture a full summer to recover before the winter.



The way to agroforestry

We focus on trying to reduce the livestock numbers we're carrying through the winter and making sure we're not over grazing or overstocked and don't need to buy in feed or straw. The trees are part of this picture. We want to be able to demonstrate the benefits of woodland grazing. Cows are brilliant ecosystem engineers - they move together as a herd and aren't in one place for very long. The biodiversity value that wood pasture brings is also very important to us. Most ecologists would agree that wood pasture is an ideal habitat for so many different species.

We have a lot of woodland on the farm and historically there would have been a lot more... We saw the benefit of trees soon after taking over management of the farm. The first year, the 'beast from the east' storm hit, and we hardly suffered from it because the sheep were so well protected in the wood pasture.



We have and do acquire knowledge via various sources i.e. Isabella Tree's book 'Wilding' and regenerative graziers such as Joel Salatin and Greg Judy. Caroline Grindrod from Wilderculture CIC (a not-for-profit company set up to support farmers who want to transition to regenerative farming but are more based in the uplands) has been very instrumental in helping us figure out our farm system. We also have good contacts in Cumbria Woodlands who offer guidance and support.

We would like to pursue integrating more productive fruit and nut trees, there are not many others doing it on uplands farms that we know of, so it is an area where we have a gap in knowledge.

We like to do coppicing and make charcoal products from it and would also like to produce fencing - we have trees that could be used on the farm, but it is the practical time and experience needed to do it, along with having readily available equipment to use, that hinders us.

Agroforestry in practice

The first few years of us trying to establish regeneration naturally we predominantly had alder coming through, with little evidence of other species, which we think is an indication of the land being quite degraded from previous farming practices, along with too much browsing and a large deer population. It is possible to achieve quite a lot just by properly managing grazing and by using electric fencing, without spending much money. But it's only going to get you so far, if you want to progress faster, it needs investment, help, and support. We've been proactive at speaking to the likes of the Woodland Trust, Cumbria Woodlands and Ullswater Catchment Management CIC to get support in relation to guidance of what to plant where, funding, and where to get trees from.

We have observed benefits of having trees, both in winter and summer, for cows to use as shelter from the sun, and for forage - when they are put into a field, they will often go straight to the hedgerow. It is important to us that encouraging more diversity is a main focus, particularly with so many species being under threat and declining. Wood pasture is one of the most biodiverse rich habitats - you can only get support under Stewardship if land is already earmarked as a wood pasture area. We did all our Stewardship applications ourselves, and would recommend looking into the history, at what your farm was, and perhaps could or should be again, you can learn a lot by doing that.

When planting trees, we'd recommend making sure you consider what you're going to want to do in 20 years' time and think about the long-term impacts of where you plant them.



What is ahead?

We've just started a 10-year Countryside Stewardship scheme, which is going to help give us have a bit of fixed income, but we have three 'innovation' fields where we can do more and would like to plant some agroforestry strips with productive fruit and nut trees that would allow us to integrate rotational grazing with them and potentially bale grazing nearby. This is our long-term plan.

Integrating commercial woodland with the food producing area is our dream, we are trying to use everything as much as we possibly can. We would like our market garden to eventually become a community garden (including fruit and hopefully nut trees).

As part of the living lab, we hope to share knowledge and experience and be inspired and learn from others primarily about how both established and developing woodlands can contribute to the economics of a farm, the benefits of agroforestry for livestock and vice versa, and different ways of managing land we don't currently do much with.





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