

FARMER ADVISORY BOARD SESSION

WEDNESDAY 22ND MAY

ATTENDEES INCLUDED FARMERS, NGOS, CAMPAIGNERS,
MANUFACTURERS, PROCESSORS AND BRANDS

MEET THE FARMERS

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ANDREW COURT
MIXED BEEF & ARABLE



ANNA JACKSON
ARABLE



BEN WILLIAMS
DAIRY



FARMER ADVISORY BOARD
MEET THE FARMERS



CHRIS MANLEY
BEEF CATTLE & SHEEP FARM



CHRIS WOODHEAD
BEEF CATTLE, LAMB & GOAT



FLAVIAN OBIERO
MIXED FARMING



JACK PEARCE
ROOT VEGETABLES & PRODUCE

THE FARMER ADVISORY BOARD

The third of our bi-monthly meetings took place on 22nd May, which brought together farmers, campaigners, NGOs, manufacturers, processors and brands to address critical industry issues, provide a space to discuss opportunities and hear from the wider supply chain. Guests took a citizen view on a vision piece.

The previous session culminated in the creation of a first draft multi-stakeholder vision aimed at addressing systemic issues in our food system for future generations.

1. Regaining **respect** for the food we eat and the people who produce it
2. Helping the public understand the **true value** of food
3. Education, beginning in schools, should highlight the impact of **healthy food** choices on personal health and the health of the planet.
4. **Policy adjustments** to support: high levels of food availability, regenerative approaches and subsidies and tax incentives to support local growers and producers.
5. Minimise **food waste** for a better future food system, at all levels.
6. Everyone in the food chain to get a **fair** share with sustainable incomes.

In our May session, the focus was on the theme of "**Regaining Respect**" for the food we eat and those who produce it, aiming to bridge the disconnect between consumers and producers.

Group breakout rooms facilitated discussions on necessary behaviour changes within the UK food system and actions individuals can take within their roles to support this initiative. Attendees included senior representation from: Act4Food, Cool Farm Alliance, Future Food Movement, Greencore, Hilton Foods, Map of Ag, Nestle, The Billington Group, The Food Foundation.

THIS REPORT DETAILS:

- 1) An update from the farmers
- 2) The groups response to: What behaviour change do we need to see in the UK food system to bridge this disconnect?
- 3) The groups response to: What can your business or you in your role and sphere of influence to support this?

NEXT FARMER ADVISORY BOARD MEETINGS:

Wednesday 17th July 3:00 – 4:30
Wednesday 23rd October 3:00 – 4:30
Wednesday 27th November 3:00 – 4:30

Please email emma.victor-smith@Veris-Strategies.co.uk if you'd like to attend.

AN UPDATE FROM THE FARMS



ANDREW COURT
MIXED BEEF & ARABLE

[FIND OUT MORE
ABOUT ANDREW](#)

Andrew Court shared his experiences from a regenerative farming conference organised by the Crop Space in the region, highlighting the positive outcomes of the event.

He has been training their cows to understand fencing and transitioning them into a rotational grazing system to minimise fertiliser usage and mimic natural grazing patterns seen in buffalo on the prairies.

However, he expressed concern about the current state of their crop fields. Excessive rainfall has led to soil crusting, causing runoff into rivers instead of benefiting the crops. Despite this, the crops themselves appear healthy, although rust on wheat has been a significant issue.

A sprayer is set to arrive, allowing Andrew to shift the pesticide strategy towards a more nutrition-based approach. This aims to enhance crop health to the point where it can withstand pests and diseases without external intervention.

The positives:

- The sheep are now 100% pasture-fed. According to the shearer, they were so well-fed that they struggled to fit up the ramp, which was surprising.
- With the introduction of herbal lays for the sheep, they no longer need to use their mineral bar, indicating their mineral levels are optimal.
- They have successfully set up a foliar nitrogen shed, which offers a cheaper and slightly more environmentally friendly method of applying nitrogen, despite its general environmental concerns.

Now, the challenges:

- Despite success in growing beans and oats, and the grass for seed with clover, they have faced significant disease issues. Their wheat blend, which should theoretically reduce disease due to its variety, has been affected by septoria.
- They are dealing with black grass, a problematic weed in wheat that can severely impact yields.
- Their oilseed rape crop has failed this year for unknown reasons, resulting in two fields not generating income, which is quite concerning.



ANNA JACKSON
ARABLE

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[WATCH ANNA IN SIX IN INCHES OF SOIL](#)



[@annaracheljackson](#)

[@thepinkpigfarm](#)

AN UPDATE FROM THE FARMS



CHRIS MANLEY
BEEF CATTLE &
SHEEP FARM

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ABOUT CHRIS](#)

In good news lambing is finished, and the sunny weather has lifted everyone's spirits on the farm. However, the slightly hotter and still somewhat moist weather has brought about issues like fly strike and maggots in the sheep. They are awaiting the sheep shearer to remove the ewes' coats to mitigate these risks. Additionally, some sheep tend to get cast after scratching, so constant vigilance is necessary.

From a success standpoint, Chris's farm has achieved a Countryside Stewardship Capital Grant, allowing them to permanently fence significant portions of the farm, particularly around the hedgerows. This grant supports their previous efforts, and the improved hedges look fantastic, providing a big boost to their infrastructure.

Regarding opportunities, Chris noted that while beef and sheep farming can be challenging, the current high prices for lamb are particularly noteworthy—the highest he has seen in her lifetime. This is partly due to the transition between old and new season lambs, and cattle prices are also high.

He is interested in insights from those in the supply chain, regarding price sensitivity on the shelf. He wonders if the high prices are affecting demand and expresses concern about potential price volatility when more lamb enters the market. He emphasized the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing in this area.

The farm had recently experienced a challenging but successful lambing season, with both sheep and cows thriving.

However, their biggest current challenge is securing long-term land tenancies for farming. Chris mentioned having a promising opportunity in the pipeline to address this issue.

Despite his overall positive outlook, he expressed frustration with the UK situation regarding lamb supply contracts. He believed that with better contracts, British farmers could provide a steady and sustainable supply of lamb throughout the year, rather than relying on imports.



CHRIS WOODHEAD
BEEF CATTLE, LAMB & GOAT

[FIND OUT MORE
ABOUT CHRIS](#)

 [Instagram - @thesuperseriousfarmer](#)

 [YouTube - @thesuperseriousfarmer](#)

AN UPDATE FROM THE FARMS



BEN WILLIAMS
DAIRY

[FIND OUT MORE
ABOUT BEN](#)

The recent sunshine has allowed cows to graze outside, the grass to grow, and the hay to be mowed and cut. Milk production is thriving, and overall, things are looking positive. Despite the current rain, which coincides with an upcoming event that the farm is hosting (Dairy UK Dairy Roadmap event). This event highlights the dairy sector's commitment to achieving net zero emissions and showcases the efforts and hard work of farmers towards this goal. It's a great opportunity to celebrate these achievements.

Ben also addressed Anna's concerns about oilseed rape, reassuring her that many others are facing similar issues with their oilseed rape crops. This is particularly concerning as OSR serves as a backup plan should there be issues with EU-derived novel soy entering the country. However, he noted that milk production is doing well, which is a positive aspect.

Becca has been dealing with issues of Flystrike recently, particularly on a memorable Monday morning that left her smelling like Flystrike for the rest of the day, which was far from enjoyable.

Despite this, she highlighted successes with their grazing plan. Initially, grass growth posed a significant challenge due to slow temperature increases. However, over the past month, improved conditions have led to substantial grass growth. Their grazing plan, along with rotations set around the fields, can now support their cattle effectively.

Additionally, they successfully utilized bale grazing, supported by sufficient silage availability, which has put them in a favourable position.

However, Becca noted that the volume of work has been a significant challenge, exacerbated by wet weather conditions delaying various tasks. As May and June progress, they face a long list of tasks that seem overwhelming.



BECCA HESKETH
GUEST FARMER

WHAT BEHAVIOUR CHANGE DO WE NEED TO SEE IN THE UK FOOD SYSTEM TO BRIDGE THIS DISCONNECT?

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1) Education on Food and Nutrition:

- School-age education and sharing the benefits of good food.
- Need to refocus the conversation on nutrition.
- Education - food taken for granted.
- Taking schools to farm visits, even virtually, so the children talk to the farmer.

2) Transparency and Visibility in Food Production:

- Improving visibility of what really happens in the food production process.
- Stories around food as well as the opportunities created by the industry.
- Raising awareness of stories with customers via technology (e.g., QR codes).

3) Respect and Fairness in the Food Industry:

- How do we define respect?
- Without fair prices there can't be respect. Retailers, Caterers and OOH can drive change here.
- Sustainability teams and procurement should be on the same boat.
- OOH caterers are very engaged in sustainability and responsible sourcing, and there is a huge opportunity to communicate with the public here.

4) Accessibility and Inclusivity in Food Choices:

- We need to be conscious of the needs of different demographics - not everyone has the luxury of being able to spend more.
- There is a luxury of time and mental capacity to make food decisions.
- Opportunity to educate about respect in different groups to build respect for food.

5) Community and Local Sourcing:

- Is there an opportunity for supermarkets to buy more regionally from cooperatives of farms?
- Stories! (focusing on the community and the local aspect of food production and consumption).

6) Breaking Down Barriers in Food Culture:

- 'Us' and 'Them' - breakdown the dichotomy.
- Story around food and the opportunities created by the industry (emphasizing unity and shared experiences in the food sector).

WHAT CAN YOUR BUSINESS OR YOU IN YOUR ROLE AND SPHERE OF INFLUENCE TO SUPPORT THIS?

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1) Transparency and Traceability:

- QR codes / labelling information on packaging. Traceability and expand on the story.
- Brand stories communicating the responsible sourcing, environmental impact, and respect.

2) Animal Welfare and Ethical Practices:

- Drive improvements in animal welfare.
- The case for 'better' meat (focusing on ethical and sustainable meat production).

3) Regenerative Agriculture and Sustainability:

- Shared values - reduce GHG emissions to mitigate climate change and take a regenerative approach.
- Continue key focus on sourcing ingredients from farmers adopting regenerative agricultural practices. And paying a sustainability bonus for this.

4) Education and Connection to Farmers:

- Training and education should always include a reality check and connection with farmers' struggles to give actions a purpose.
- Influence dietary choices and understanding in areas close to you, schools, and people.

5) Aligned Communication to Avoid Greenwashing:

- Brand stories communicating the responsible sourcing, environmental impact, and respect - in alignment with sustainability and regulatory teams to avoid greenwashing.

The urgency of overcoming these hurdles (only 6 years until 2030) lies in paving the path towards a fair, collaborative, and valued food system. Stakeholders must swiftly collaborate to achieve ambitious sustainability targets.

The third Farmer Advisory Board meeting highlighted the importance of having farmers' voices present in the same room as integral parts of the broader supply chain. The current disconnection hinders collaboration and genuine forward progress.

The thinking and inputs of this session will form the basis of how the Future Food Movement community can create change at pace.