

Blazing a trail in Wales

Richard and Lyn Anthony are founder members of the GWCT Wales Farming Community network and their pioneering approach is at the cutting edge of regenerative agriculture. Joe Dimpleby reports



Project Profile

Location: Sealands Farm, St Brides Major, Bridgend, Glamorgan, South Wales

Acreage: 3,000 including 650 at Sealands

Farm type: Arable, sheep (800 ewes)

Type of ground: Lowland loamy soil with subsurface rock

Conservation measures: Minimum and strip tillage, cover crops, companion planting, hedgerow management, wildflower strips, grass margins, wild bird crops, winter feeding and predation management

Soil structure and fertility have been improved through minimum tillage, direct drilling, cover crops and companion planting of vetch, spring beans and clover, to fix nitrogen and buckwheat to help phosphate availability.



In just 16 years, Richard and Lyn Anthony went from managing a small flock of sheep on 110 acres of rented land, to a mix of contract farming and long-term farm business tenancies running 3,000 acres of arable and grass with a flock of 800 ewes. In 2013, Richard was elected a fellow of the Royal Agricultural Society of Wales in recognition of his work on soil management, which increased his yields by 20% and the earthworm population 10-fold. They continue to develop regenerative systems, favouring natural solutions over chemical inputs, resulting in a farm rich in wildlife including rare yellow wagtails and turtle doves. Lyn who is a partner in the business along with their son David, said: "It is amazing to see how the numbers and variety of different bird species, hares and other wildlife have increased over the past few years."

Soil structure and fertility have been improved through minimum tillage, direct drilling, cover crops and companion planting of vetch, spring beans and clover, to fix nitrogen and buck wheat to help phosphate availability. Apart from one application to tackle turnip sawfly, insecticides haven't been needed for six years. Richard said: "We've

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reduced insecticides to virtually nothing but it's important to be able to use them as a last resort. If you look at the way we were growing oilseed rape 10 years ago, it's

mind blowing. We now grow it with companion crops like buckwheat, vetches and spring

beans, which seems to have reduced the flea beetle problem, and grass margins with strips of wildflower mixes have restored beneficial insect predators. We've allowed our hedgerows to grow wider and taller, which is making a huge difference in combination with the field margins."

The farm's pheasant shoot also benefits songbirds by funding winter feeding, predation management and



Joe Dimbleby our head of communications reports on Sealands Farm where regenerative systems are seeing increased yields with reduced inputs.



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Richard and Lyn Anthony run the business along with their son David. Richard was elected a fellow of the Royal Agricultural Society of Wales in recognition of his work on soil management, which increased his yields by 20% and the earthworm population 10-fold.

game crop mixes including sunflowers, spring beans, keeper kale, buckwheat, millet and phacelia. All the other environmental measures are paid for by the business because Richard found the old Glastir agri-environment options too restrictive. In his view, it is vital that agri-environment schemes are flexible and fit in with the farming operations. He believes the latest policy in Wales will make the journey to carbon neutral farming harder. He says: "The project officers assigned to us through the old Glastir scheme rejected half of what we wanted to

put in. We were going to be disadvantaged and worse off financially, so we decided to do what we felt was the right thing. We don't think much of the latest schemes. We've done a huge amount to improve our carbon budget including reduced tillage, increased organic levels in our soils so we use less nitrogen fertilizer, and cover crops planted between harvests. As a result we are already sequestering around 50 tonnes of carbon per hectare. The new scheme's requirement for 10% of the farm to be put into trees will be less effective than our

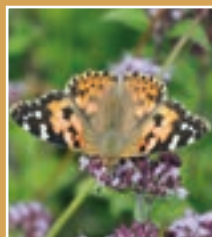
Wildlife Highlights



Brown hares



Songbirds



Butterflies



Bumblebees



Beneficial insects



Turtle doves



Farming Community

Lee Oliver
Interim Director GWCT Wales



The GWCT Wales Farming Community was set up to provide a free platform for farmers across the country who are keen to integrate biodiversity restoration and climate change mitigation with profitable farming enterprises. These Working Conservationists are evidence that the farming community wants to increase biodiversity in the farmed environment and understands how to achieve it. Our Farming Community offers a network for farmers to share knowledge and experience and a united voice to send a powerful message to the Welsh Government. We want to ensure that the people on the ground are at the heart of a new approach to agri-environment policy, which is adequately funded and fit to deliver urgently needed public goods. GWCT Wales has always championed a grass-roots, farmer-led approach rather than top-down 'desk-top conservation'. It recognises that the skills, commitment and knowledge of farmers, which when combined with adequate financial support and good advice grounded in science, is the essential recipe for success. Join the GWCT Wales Farming Community at gwct.wales. ■

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current soil management and lead to more high-carbon food imports. We need to get across this key point that Welsh farming is not the problem but potentially a big part of the solution to climate change."

In 2023 Sealands was chosen as the site of the Royal Welsh Agriculture Society's annual Regen event designed to show how regenerative farming systems can futureproof Welsh agriculture. Richard and Lyn regularly host politicians and policymakers and run numerous trials. Richard said: "This year alone there are 2,500 wheat trial plots and oilseed rape tests on the farm, all with a focus on developing sustainable farming practices."

Looking ahead, they would like to collaborate with other farmers, linking up woodland and other habitat, but the lack of clarity on landscape scale agri-environment funding and problems with the current schemes mean neighbouring farms are reluctant to take that step. Richard said: "I think a lot of our neighbours are interested in the concept and it's the road we want to go down, but we need to see what's on offer from the Welsh Government first." ■

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