Ian Waller – Hampden Bottom Farm, Great Missenden

Ian Waller is a first generation tenant farmer and has been on his 450 hectare farm in the Chilterns since 1990. The total cropped area of this land is 380ha, with the remaining 18% as non-productive land or in stewardship.

Protection and enhancement of the farm's wealth of environmental features, combined with a sustainable business are vital to the success of IPM at Hampden Bottom Farm. They were one of the first (and largest) farms in the South East to be accepted into the HLS stewardship scheme and are really proud of what they have achieved at the farm in terms of wildlife management. There are over 35 kilometres of hedges and 38 kilometres of 2 metre buffer strips which have been planted with floristically enhanced grass margins. The species rich chalk grassland is managed to encourage tawny and barn owls and the farm is well populated with skylarks and yellow hammers. Lapwings have returned to the farm following the creation of lapwing nesting areas. One small area of the farm has been left uncultivated for 25 years and is a haven for ant hills which attract large numbers of green woodpeckers. Other bird species include red kites, buzzards, song thrushes and grey partridges.

Ian has encouraged this diverse range of species by managing the farm in a way which provides habitat for insects and birds. All the fields have a grass or floristically enhanced margin around the edge. Hedges are cut on a rotational basis so that there is always a mix of young and old growth and berries are available through the winter. There are trees within the hedges to provide habitat and singing posts for song birds and a large amount of woodland – though this can be a problem with pigeons and deer causing some crop damage.

The farmed land is divided into six blocks and Ian always grows oilseed rape on one sixth, milling wheat on four sixths and spring beans on the remaining block in a six year rotation, which fits in well with staff:

First wheat → Second wheat → Rape → First wheat → Second wheat → Beans

It is this rotation that Ian says is crucial to his integrated farm management plan. Catch and cover crops have required 'outside of the box' thinking, as they compromise the rotation. However, Ian has been using rape as a cover crop between two blocks of last year's rape. This has been an essential IPM tool in managing cabbage stem flea beetle by acting as a trap crop.

Alongside the arable enterprise, Ian also has 80 Herdwick ewes that graze the species rich chalk grassland and has established chicory and white clover within their grass fields as a herbal ley. The chicory acts as an anthelmintic reducing gut parasites and reducing the need to use a routine wormer on his sheep.

By following a balanced crop rotation, using appropriate crop protection products and application equipment, Ian is able to discourage the build-up of weeds, pests and diseases. Integrated farm management is all about careful planning and attention to detail. All the crop management decisions are based on careful monitoring, regular rotational soil testing and crop walking. A nutrient and soil management plan is revised each season and crops are grown on a field by field basis to ensure the nutrients are optimised for crop performance.

Although Ian is a fully qualified member of the BASIS professional register, (and also has FACTS, Basis Soil and Water and BETA conservation management), the farm uses the expertise of an independent agronomist. Other than Ian however, there is only one other full time worker.

"I employ one man and 200 million worms" says Ian,

who stresses the importance of earthworms for the overall soil health of the farm. There are many beneficial insects present, including parasitic wasps that parasitise aphids and Ian believes this has been helped by not using insecticides for the last three years. However, this does mean that the beans grown do not always meet the specification for human consumption and have to go as animal feed as a consequence of bruchid beetle damage.

Ian believes that the blackgrass on his farm is resistant to most blackgrass herbicides. They hand rogue some blackgrass and soft meadow brome, but it can be difficult to get round everything with only two members of staff. They therefore try to manage blackgrass through cover crops and using a disc drill to direct drill, which is done over the whole farm. Cover crops contain radish, mustard, phacelia, crimson clover, berseem clover and buckwheat. The farm uses glyphosate to destroy cover crops. Ian says the potential loss of glyphosate is a 'massive worry' and believes that "we as farmers need to remember that whatever we do, we are making an environmental impact. We need to maximise the best practice of chemicals, not abuse them."

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The use of glyphosate allows all the benefits of cover crops – improving soil structure and quality, improving water retention, reducing erosion, surface run off and diffuse pollution, nutrient recycling, increasing organic matter, building up earthworm numbers etc. would be far more difficult without glyphosate.

Further details can be found in AHDB's on-farm research into cover crops.

The farm stopped ploughing in 1998 and now all crops are direct drilled. Ian's desire to embrace IPM more fully came after he had been ploughing: running the tractor 24 hours a day, working night shifts, changing plough points frequently and tyres every season. As he is a first generation farmer, he found it easier to make the shift as he didn't have someone telling him what he should or shouldn't do. However, he says,

> "I equally don't have someone who will bail me out if it goes wrong!"

POLICY ASKS

- Future ELMS should not be too prescriptive
- Government need to decide what outcomes they desire – farmers will deliver this if the right schemes are put in place
- Research needs to be more farm-focussed
- Knowledge exchange needs to be improved to encourage uptake
- Funding should support best practice on farm

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

https://www.agricology.co.uk/resources/managing-hedges-benefit-pollinators

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