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# New model farming: resilience through diversity



FOOD & FARMING FORESIGHT – Paper 1

FOOD AND  
FARMING  
FORESIGHT



## CASE STUDY

## MIXED LARGE FARM; SOIL HEALTH; BIODIVERSITY; DIVERSIFICATION

## The Cholderton Estate, on the border of Hampshire and Wiltshire

The 1000 hectare Cholderton Estate, managed by Henry Edmunds, has significantly diversified over the past 100 years: the Cholderton and District Water Company, burials in Michael's Wood and hiring out disused farm buildings for light industry provide a range of sources of income. The estate demonstrates that farming and a healthy environment can co-exist. It is widely regarded as an excellent example of sustainable agriculture: having reasonable levels of production whilst balancing wider social and environmental benefits; hosting educational visits, providing jobs for local people and funded via the Countryside Stewardship scheme to restore chalk downland habitats that cover 20% of the site.

The estate is also highly diverse in habitats. It operates a mixed farming, closed system with around 800 beef and dairy cattle and 250 sheep. The estate is organic so purchases no nitrate or agrochemicals. Nutrients originate from animal manure and the amount required per hectare for each field is calculated to avoid unnecessary losses to the environment. Henry has also developed 'The Cholderton Mix' of different grasses and legumes for grazed pasture. It provides wider benefits such as improving animal health and soil nutrient levels and fostering a huge range of different invertebrate species. The seed mix is now sold to other farmers across England. There is a mix of woodland, arable land and areas of brassica crops for livestock and overwintering birds. Large numbers of trees have and are being planted on the estate to increase bio diversity and help make the farm nearly carbon neutral. The estate employs 22 people on husbandry, forestry, mechanics, building maintenance and general farm and conservation work.

The farm's diversity supports a wide range of fauna including: 450 species of the larger macro moths, 10% of which are considered to be rare; 34 species of butterfly; 70 species of bird including grey partridge, skylark, corn bunting



and breeding lapwings. There are excellent populations of harvest mice and brown hares, both species in national decline. The farm is also an important gene bank for the extremely rare Cleveland Bay horse and Hampshire Down sheep. A key driver of the high biodiversity levels is the restoration of the chalk grassland, one of the most threatened habitats in Britain. Working with the RSPB, sustainable management of the land has allowed the downland to thrive, attracting a range of equally rare and vulnerable insects such as the Adonis and chalkhill

blue butterflies (classified as near threatened); the Duke of Burgundy fritillary (threatened), the grizzled skipper butterfly (vulnerable) and rare hornet robberflies. The grassland is also home to a plethora of wildflower and grass species. Last year thyme broomrape was found growing in one of the areas of restored downland, a new species for Wiltshire. Fly honeysuckle, new to Hampshire, was discovered in a different area. Hampshire County Council has designated areas of the grassland as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance. As a result of much of this work Henry won the RSPB Telegraph Nature of Farming award in 2012.

Henry says he faced a range of difficulties in developing his successful, sustainable farm. One example is discovering the best ways to encourage the successful breeding of lapwings. This has involved endless patience, time, cost and perseverance.

The thin chalky soils are inherently lacking in fertility and are very vulnerable to erosion and infestations of eel worm, which can be a serious pest of arable crops. Fertility can only be preserved by a mixed farming system where a combination of grazing animals and leguminous crops are used to maintain soil structure. It is by retaining this system that bio-diverse integrity has been achieved. Henry has written (online) "All wildlife benefits from a mixed farming regime, yet this has been discouraged under present support mechanisms...What you will see at Cholderton can be achieved only if farming is profitable... support mechanisms must be geared towards those systems of farming that

are most conducive to the preservation of the tapestry of a diverse countryside, in all its many and varied aspects."

