

COLLABORATION FOR SUCCESSFUL AGROFORESTRY SYSTEMS

The alternative multi-partner working model used at Dartington for their agroforestry tenants



THE WHAT AND WHY

Using alternative business models for successful agroforestry systems

Most existing agroforestry systems on UK farms have been established by the farmer who is also the landowner or tenant. However, many farmers lack both (a) the time and the specialist knowledge to plant and care for trees and (b) the capital to invest in trees, especially when setting up a new farming enterprise. In addition, trees are a long-term investment and the uncertainty of tenure and differences of opinion between farmers and landlords are both known disincentives to establishing new agroforestry systems on

tenanted land. Dartington Estate in south west England is delivering agroforestry in an innovative way not seen in the UK before, through a multi-tiered arrangement of land owner, farm tenant and tree license holders. What makes this unusual, and exciting, is that by enabling several different businesses to work together farming the field the landowner, Dartington Estate, has created an approach to agroforestry that overcomes some of the barriers which have prevented a wider uptake of agroforestry in the UK.



The 20 hectare agroforestry field at Dartington Estate, Devon, UK. Harriet Bell, 2018



Elderflower in the new agroforestry field at Dartington Harriet Bell, 2018

HOW IS THE CHALLENGE ADDRESSED

A multi-tiered arrangement

Old Parsonage Farm is a livestock farm on Dartington Estate. Part of the farm tenancy includes a 20 hectare agroforestry field. In this innovative model of agroforestry the farmers manage the alleys between trees rows as part of their 7-year silage/arable rotation and are financially compensated for the area lost to the tree rows by the separate tree licensees. The investment in the trees is made by three different businesses Luscombe Drinks (1600 elderflower trees); the Apricot Centre (600 apple trees) and; Salthouse & Peppermongers (150 Sichuan pepper trees). These businesses specialise in tree crops and have a market incentive to make

the tree crops work to meet the demands for their products. A licence was granted to the three businesses for the tree strips, with the farmers remaining in management control of the land upon which the trees are planted and able to claim basic farm payment on the area. However, the tree licensees needed the security of being able to use the piece of land on which the trees are planted for a sufficient period to see a return on their investment. The solution was that the land owner, Dartington Estate, provided a separate undertaking to ensure the continuation of the licence on the same terms regardless of the tenant.



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A key benefit of multiple partners is that combining different people's skills and expertise results in a system that is more socially and economically resilient – everyone brings their own markets for their own crop and by working together can access different markets; everyone has the potential to grow their market reach.
- Cooperation between all stakeholders and open communication right from the start and throughout the planning process are also key to making this model work.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Lessons learnt along the way

For the land owner, Dartington Estate, agroforestry made sense in terms of maintaining and rebuilding soils, enhancing biodiversity across the estate and endeavouring to positively contribute to reducing the risk of localised flooding. However, the requirement by the Estate that the tenant farmer plant an area with agroforestry discouraged some potential farm tenants from applying. Trees are expensive, they can take years to return the initial investment of planting and many potential tenants saw it as a waste of a good arable field. A collaborative approach has provided a solution to this problem by combining different people's skills and expertise in a system that is more socially, environmentally and economically resilient.

However, a large degree of cooperation is needed with this type of arrangement and one lesson learnt was the importance of getting all the multiple actors together throughout the project, particularly for the design process so that everyone is aware of everyone else's skills, interests and preferences from the start.

One of the big challenges of developing the tree licenses was ensuring that they were equitable for all parties, this tends to be very subjective. Ensuring the fairness of the financial arrangements was particularly difficult, taking into account: any loss of yield for the main farm tenant; increases in labour and administration; Basic Payment

Scheme and; potential increase in contractor costs for working a more challenging field – and balancing that against what's affordable for the licensees, including their upfront investment and long term payback.

The compensation element of the licence was also a sensitive subject; trees increase in value over time whereas normal investment items (farm buildings, machinery etc.) decrease in value so the usual depreciation method for calculating compensation rates was only partly applicable. Dartington Estate have developed their own compensation formula which required the Estate, as landowner, to back up the tenant's agreement. It is still too early to know if all elements of the tree licence are right. There's no comparable project and a review with data relating to yields and costs will be conducted a bit further into the project to see how it's all stacking up. However it is hoped that this could provide a useful model for similar future agreements.



Newly planted agroforestry field at Dartington Hall Estate
Harriet Bell

FURTHER INFORMATION

Description of agroforestry activities on the Dartington Estate:
<https://www.dartington.org/about/our-land/agroforestry/>

Harriet Bell's blogs detailing the agroforestry journey at Dartington:
<https://www.dartington.org/category/blogs/food-farming-conservation/agroforestry/>

Video of Harriet and the tenant farmer explaining the business model that has been used to set up the agroforestry system at Dartington: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRjG1xTAY6g>

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