Unlocking the community benefits of regenerative agriculture from field to fork

Nestlé PROFESSIONAL

FOOTPRINT INTELLIGENCE

Contents

Foreword

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I'm pleased to introduce our latest report in collaboration with Footprint, highlighting the impact regenerative agriculture can have on local communities. At Nestlé, we're dedicated to creating shared value and promoting sustainable practices, and today we're proud to be part of a movement that's changing the way we grow food, protect the environment, and support the communities we depend on.

The stories shared in this report demonstrate the real change that regenerative agriculture can bring. From farmers revitalising their land and increasing yields to communities discovering new opportunities for sustainable growth, the benefits are clear and inspiring. By focusing on regenerative agriculture, we're helping to secure a brighter future for the communities we work with, ensuring their long-term prosperity and well-being.

However, our journey towards a regenerative future is not without its challenges. It takes collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to learning and improving. At Nestlé, we're committed to leading positive change, by working closely with farmers, suppliers, and partners across the entire value chain. By working together, we can create a ripple effect that goes far beyond our immediate reach, improving lives and protecting the planet for generations to come.

While we're proud of the progress we've made, we know there's more to be done. This report is a reminder of the potential we have to make a real difference, and a call to action for all leaders, organisations, and individuals to join us on this journey towards a more sustainable and inclusive future.

I extend my thanks to Footprint and all those who shared their experiences and insights. Your stories inspire and motivate us, reminding us of the power we have to shape a better world. Together, we can champion regenerative agriculture and make a lasting impact on the communities we serve.

Introduction

For some practitioners, the regenerative philosophy is as much about being rooted in place as in the soil

Interest in regenerative agriculture shows no sign of dimming. June's Groundswell festival, which acts as a forum for sharing the theory and practical applications of regenerative farming systems, was the biggest yet with over 7,000 people – spanning farmers to food business executives – coming together for the eighth staging of the event at the Cherry family farm in Hertfordshire.

Last year, *Footprint* published a report in partnership with Nestlé Professional UK&I in which we explored this growing interest and posed the question, is regenerative the future of farming[1]?

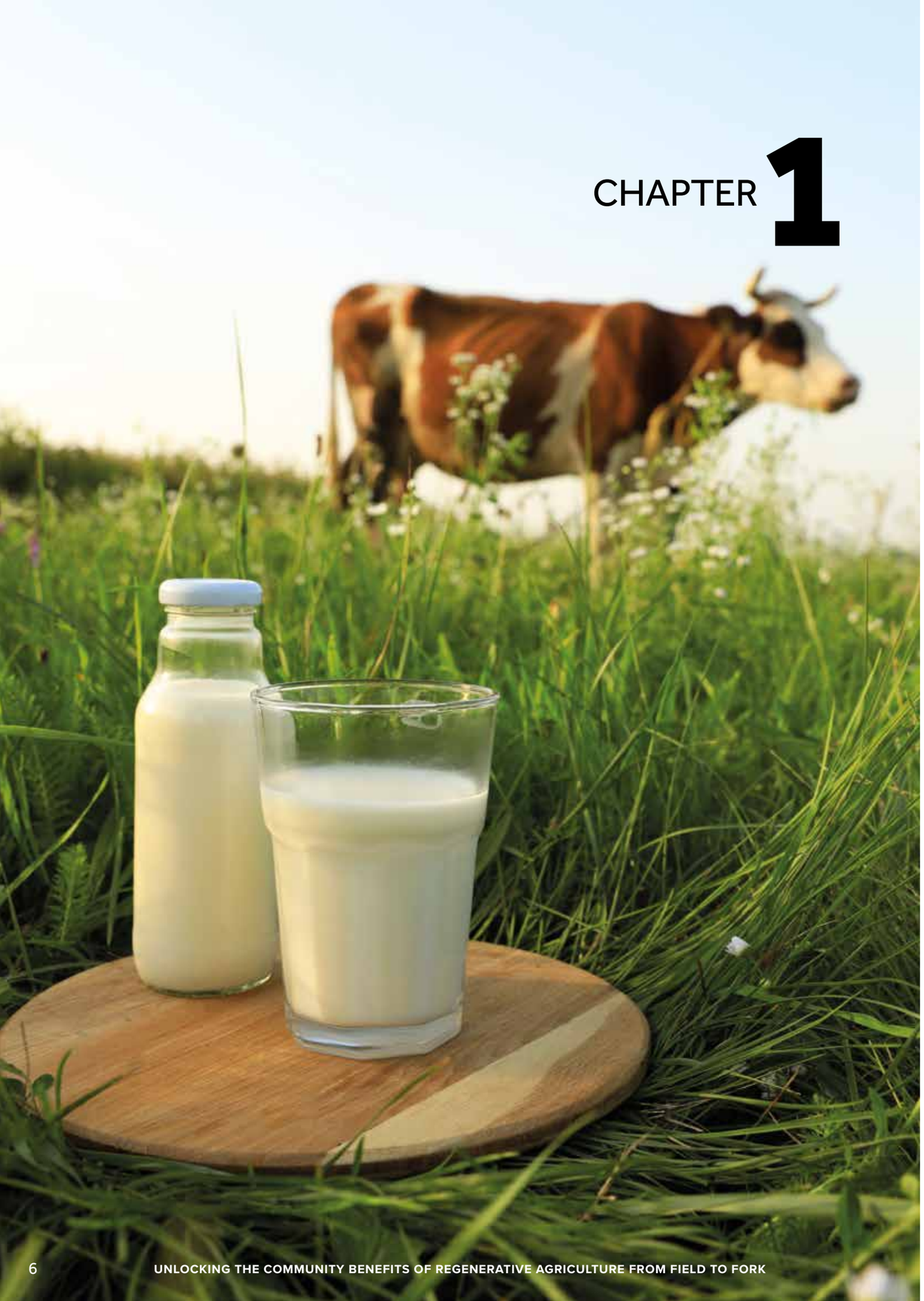
With evidence pointing to the broken nature of our current food system, we concluded that the journey towards regenerative agriculture is one that must be taken, but it must be done so carefully amid debate over definitions, concerns over greenwashing and fears that a farmer-led movement risks being co-opted to fit a corporate agenda. One year on, we re-examine the subject of regenerative agriculture but through a different lens – the role of regenerative agriculture in the community.

For some practitioners, the regenerative philosophy is as much about being rooted in place as in the soil, with farms forming part of a mutually beneficial ecosystem along with local people, institutions and businesses that delivers economic, social and environmental value to a community.

This theory has yet to be rigorously tested by scientific research and the notion that farms can be the glue that binds a community together is challenged by some as rose-tinted in an age of globalised food supply chains and commodity crop production.

This report does not seek to provide quantitative evidence of community benefit at scale. Instead, through conversations with farmers and local stakeholders, we explore the relationships that have developed between farms and their communities, the mutual benefits that can and have been unlocked when a farm adopts a regenerative mindset, and the challenges farmers and those that form part of their ecosystem face in unlocking these benefits.

We examine too the role that businesses further down the supply chain have to play in helping unlock the benefits of community-based regenerative agriculture through their relationships with farmers and their procurement practices. And we detail examples of where the commercial and community benefits of regenerative farming have successfully coalesced to create lasting social impact.



CHAPTER 1

Farming at the heart of the community

"There's great potential for regenerative farming to restore some of those place-based relationships and rebuild social and cultural meaning and value."

Charlie Taverner, Food, Farming & Countryside Commission

Since animals were first domesticated and crops first cultivated farms have sat at the heart of rural communities. Farming enterprises have traditionally powered local economies, both directly in the form of employment of local people and indirectly through the inputs they buy and the products they sell.

Yet the industrialisation of farming since the Second World War has spawned a new model of agriculture built on specialisation and mechanisation, which has reduced or removed the reliance of the farm on its local community and, in many cases, broken the connection of the local community with the farm.

In this modern age of globalised food supply chains and commodity crop production, the notion of farms serving as the beating heart of their local community risks feeling rather old-fashioned and rose-tinted. But does resurgent interest in regenerative agriculture among farmers and food businesses have the potential to reconnect farms with their communities and in so doing deliver lasting social, economic and environmental benefits?

Data evidencing the community benefits of regenerative agriculture remain relatively underdeveloped, however a pioneering study carried out in India, led by impact data and analytics provider GIST Impact and supported by the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, found tangible social impact from nature-friendly farming[2]. Published in 2023, the study used true cost accounting methods to compare the major economic, social and health impacts of natural farming (the term used in India to refer to what others call regenerative agriculture) with the three existing and still dominant farming systems in the Indian State of Andhra Pradesh – tribal farming, rain-fed dryland agriculture, and chemically-intensive farming in the delta region. As well as more favourable average yields, the study showed that a combination of lower input costs and higher incomes meant that natural farming also delivered improved farmer livelihoods with net incomes averaging 49% higher. Moreover, the study found clear evidence of enhanced social capital through measures like better health outcomes and higher female workforce participation.

We should be careful in applying lessons from agriculture in India to a very different UK context, however experts interviewed for this report – including numerous farmers – were unanimous in their belief that farms that adopt regenerative principles tend to have a wider network of stakeholders, support more local jobs and have closer community ties than conventional farms.

Untapped potential

Charlie Taverner leads the Food, Farming & Countryside Commission's (FFCC) 'farming futures' programme and believes the idea that farms can be a cornerstone of their local community "has enormous untapped potential". Taverner explains how the lengthening of food supply chains through transport and storage technology has made it possible for food produced on UK farms to be processed and sold on the other side of the world.

"What we have now in broad terms is quite an anonymous supply chain in which human and place-based relationships aren't so prominent," he says. "The main thing I think that has been broken is the connection of food to place and so there's great potential for regenerative farming to restore some of those place-based relationships and rebuild social and cultural meaning and value."

Dan Crossley, executive director of the Food Ethics Council is another "firm believer that farms can be that hub at the heart of the local community". He believes there are places where "that absolutely is the case" but these aren't necessarily representative of the wider farming sector, which has evolved to meet the demands of powerful buyers. "If you take the example of dairy farms, it would be doing a disservice to farmers to paint a picture that all dairy farms are a part of this rural idyll, sitting at the heart of their community, thriving financially with local people visiting and supporting their local farm [because] that's not the reality for most farmers."

Still, Crossley believes the principles behind regenerative agriculture (as explored in *Footprint's* 2023 'Is Regenerative the Future of Farming' report) can be consistent with efforts to re-centre farms within their local communities. "My sense is that a large part of the regenerative philosophy is about being rooted in place, in the soil, in the local, which by implication takes us into regenerative farms being more dependent on the ecosystem around them. And people and communities are a key part of that ecosystem," he says.

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Farm ecosystem

So who and what is part of the ecosystem that surrounds a regenerative farm?

Most obviously there's the farmer, and for tenant farmers that also means a land owner. Then there are the people employed on the farm both permanently and on a seasonal basis. They may be working the land or, where farming businesses have pursued a degree of vertical integration, employed in further processing or in sales and marketing roles. Where farming enterprises have diversified into areas such as events and education people may also be employed in non-food and farming related work, while the farm may also provide premises from which other local businesses can operate.

Beyond direct employees, there are the businesses that form part of the farm's local economy – suppliers of inputs like animal feed for example (including neighbouring farmers), as well as vets and consultants and buyers of farm produce. Buyers might range from local bakeries, butchers, pubs and restaurants through to national businesses who want to support regenerative agriculture through their procurement, often working in collaboration with wholesalers and other supply chain intermediaries.

Local people are another key part of this ecosystem often through their involvement with institutions such as schools, hospitals and churches. Many farmers speak of how adopting regenerative practices has brought them closer to their local community by opening up the farm to visits from local school children and community groups or simply by welcoming interested neighbours into their fields.

Then there is the natural ecosystem that is intertwined with a farm – the diversity of plant and wildlife species that help provide ecosystem services such as pollination, natural pest control and soil fertility. And one of the key potential benefits of regenerative farming to the local community is through improvements to the local environment. Reduced reliance on

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>
> **Emma Keller, Nestlé UK & Ireland**

chemical inputs, for example, can result in improved air and water quality, while healthy soils capable of absorbing large volumes of water and landscapes full of hedges, buffer strips and trees, can act as natural flood prevention measures.

Recent research published by the government agency Natural England found evidence that wildlife has benefited from farms being involved in the government's environmental schemes with numbers of birds, butterflies and moths all increasing[3].

This chimes with anecdotal evidence from businesses who are supporting the adoption of regenerative principles within their supply chains. Although she says generating robust farm-level data remains a work in progress, Emma Keller, head of sustainability at Nestlé UK & Ireland, says "we are pretty confident that lots of the work we've been doing around hedgerow and woodland restoration has helped improve water quality and increase flood resilience on the farm and in surrounding areas".

Social benefits

The Sustainable Food Trust (SFT) has been supporting the development of the Global Farm Metric, a common framework for measuring the impacts of sustainable food and farming systems across a range of environmental and social metrics around which it has built a broad coalition of organisations. Patrick Holden, chief executive of the SFT, is keen to highlight the importance for regenerative farms to deliver not only environmental benefits but positive social outcomes too, one of which is employment.

"Employment should be a positive externality, not something you try to get rid of," he says. "If you hire a person that obviously hits the bottom line but it also delivers a range of social benefits. You are effectively 'irrigating' the local economy."

Experts interviewed for this report agreed that regenerative farms tend to have a larger labour requirement than those farmed conventionally due to the lower intensity farming methods employed and the opportunity to add value through further processing and direct selling. "With conventional farming you're normally looking at one person per 1,000 acres with the aim of increasing efficiencies," says Alice Midmer, assistant manager at the GWCT Allerton Project, which researches the effects of different farming methods on wildlife and the environment at a 790-acre demonstration farm based in Leicestershire. "Regenerative farming can be more complex and unpredictable. It can also include stacking land uses (such as livestock, agri-environment schemes) which generally means there is more going on, so in this way to work well it can be more labour intensive."

Education is another area of high potential social impact. "When farms host visits from schools or members of the public and tell the story behind where their food comes from, that's a massive social benefit because unless we get the public to buy into this [regenerative agriculture], it won't happen at scale," says Holden.

Patrick Barker farms 1,360 acres of arable land in Suffolk along with his cousin, Brian. The farm has been practicing regenerative approaches since 2006 and Barker says they have always tried to foster a culture of openness with the local community. "When my daughter started school I sat down with the staff and drew up a program with the aim of getting every class to visit the farm every year, and then create continuity through the different age groups so that year-on-year the children are visiting and doing things that complement the school's own programme."

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Enterprise stacking

Many regenerative farms also engage in enterprise stacking with the aim of adding value to raw commodities and diversifying sources of income. Holden's farm produces milk, some of which is further processed into raw milk cheese. He also grows carrots, which as of this year are being supplied to local schools via wholesaler Castell Howell.

Taverner from the FFCC grew up on the family dairy farm in Devon which he describes as "some way along the regenerative journey". Over the years, the family has stacked various enterprises on top of its milk production including a farm shop, butchery, restaurant and, for the past decade, an ice cream parlour that employs dozens of local people during the peak summer season. Taverner explains that reductions in the farming workforce over recent decades through the shift towards specialisation and mechanisation have meant farms can become quite lonely places and not the social hubs they used to be. Finding ways to bring the public back onto farms is helping rebuild those connections. "There's a big social aspect of the regenerative movement," he says. "As much as anything else it feels a more humane and friendly way of farming."

Farms that have eschewed the conventional model of farming may also find greater opportunities to source inputs locally rather than through centralised, consolidated supply chains. Mark Chapple is a livestock farmer who works alongside his daughter, Amy, on the family farm near Tiverton, Devon. The farm supplies slow-grown, soya-free chicken to customers including The Ethical Butcher. Chicks arrive as day-olds and before they head out to pasture at 2-4 weeks are fed a soya-free wheat-based feed mix with

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> **Patrick Holden, Sustainable Food Trust**

protein derived from beans, rapeseed meal, peas and maize mostly grown within a 10-mile radius of the farm.

Many farmers interviewed for this report spoke about the mindset shift they underwent when they began farming regeneratively: from one of producing commodities to producing food. "For a lot of people, that leads them towards alternative, often local markets for that produce," explains Taverner. "If you're rearing cows or sheep that might mean doing meat boxes. At a more complex level, people are exploring whether they can establish farm shops or engage with local food hubs or cooperatives that will do a lot of the processing and packaging for them."

Dynamic procurement

Public sector institutions like schools and hospitals can play a key role in supporting regenerative farmers through their procurement. The NHS in England requires 10% of the weighting of every supplier contract to be based on social value, which could for example include a commitment to purchase a certain amount of produce from within 20 miles of the hospital.

Tim Radcliffe, net-zero food programme manager for NHS England, explains how the organisation has been reworking procurement frameworks to allow small and medium-sized (SME) suppliers to access NHS food contracts. Previously, framework agreements to supply fresh vegetables, for example, would run for three years and stipulate a minimum volume that needed to be supplied, effectively locking out SMEs. Frameworks are now moving towards dynamic procurement systems, which allow SMEs to join the framework at any time and tender to supply specific parts of it.

"It's still in its infancy, but we have examples of where a hospital in Somerset wanted organic milk from a specific regenerative dairy farm," says Radcliffe. "When they put the tender out in the first place it was impossible for the dairy to supply the number of hospitals in that contract so we rewrote the tender so that milk was split into different lots and for this particular hospital we said we wanted the milk to come from within a specific postcode. By doing that, it allowed the dairy farm to bid for and win the contract."

Where regenerative farms are able to access procurement contracts, public or otherwise, the benefits can extend beyond the commercial. SFT's Holden believes that improved public health can be a major social benefit derived from a shift to regenerative farming at scale. The Global Farm Metric is looking to develop a metric for the nutrient density of food produced under different farming systems with many farmers expecting that research will show food produced in nutrient dense soils within low chemical-input systems will create more nutrient-dense food than in conventional systems. "Probably the biggest negative impact of the current food systems we've got is on public health," Holden explains. "If we could make a coherent argument that you could save NHS treatment costs by investing in regenerative agriculture, that's a powerful economic argument to change."

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Case study: High Suffolk Farm Cluster

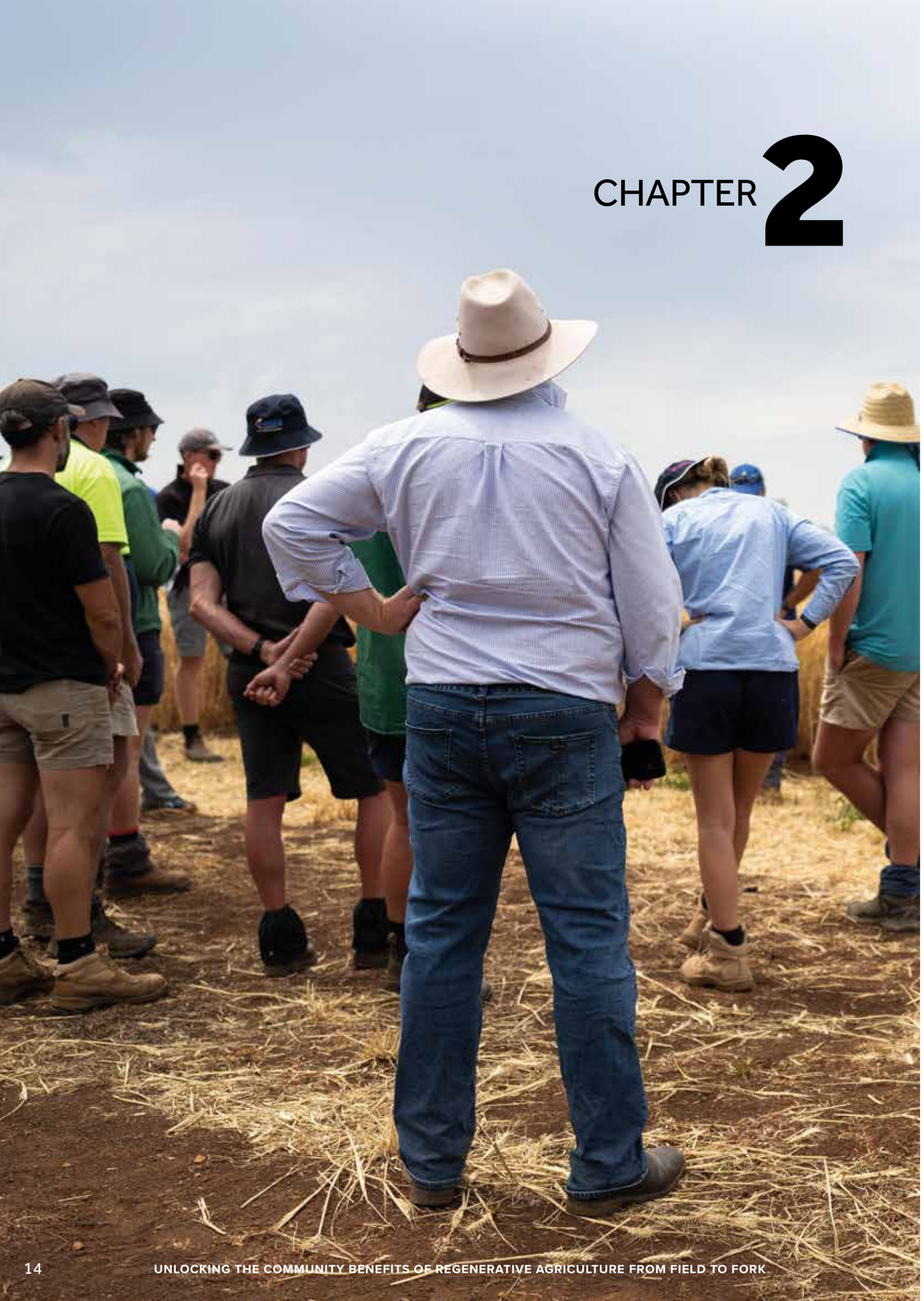
The emergence of farm clusters, which involve local farmers joining together to explore regenerative approaches at a landscape scale, has been a key trend in recent years with around 150 clusters now thought to have been established within the UK. The idea is that by getting farmers to work together to protect local habitats or river catchments you can deliver far greater impact than through one farmer working alone.

The High Suffolk Farm Cluster was established in 2023 and spans 12 farms covering a 13,600-acre area. Its origins lie within the 1,360-acre family farm run by Patrick Barker alongside his cousin, Brian, and its role as a strategic farm for the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB). This means the arable farm hosts numerous farm visits each year and, according to Patrick Barker, gives it a natural opportunity to be a hub for funded research projects and farmer-led knowledge exchange.

Barker successfully applied for funding to set up a farm cluster from the Landscape Enterprise Networks (LENs) programme, supported by Nestlé Purina. He then approached other farms in the area with the aim of carrying out a baselining project to capture the natural capital of each farm. Insect surveys have since been carried out and every single hedgerow has been mapped across the cluster; future plans involve laying or coppicing of hedgerows and restoration of ponds.

Barker describes the cluster as "like an informal social club to try and encourage better business practice and try and make farms more resilient and more sustainable. For us, that has been really unusual because historically everything we did on the farm has always been quite insulated. Although we knew all of our neighbours beforehand it's been a whole new level of people being able to work together and talk about things and collaborate in the truest sense of the word."

The links the cluster has made through working with LENs has enabled the farmers to gain much greater visibility over their supply chains. "We now know that a lot of the cereals that we all grow that we sell to (trader) Frontier Agriculture goes to Nestlé Purina and the spring barley that gets sold to Frontier will then go to (supplier) Muntons which then goes into Nestlé Shreddies," explains Barker. "For me that's been a massive source of knowledge because now when I'm hosting visits for farmers or schoolchildren or the general public I can tell the story with much greater confidence of where the produce is going."



CHAPTER 2

Managing change and building communities

> "I decided I was going to jump in with both feet, to cover cropping, direct drilling and improving soil health, do it properly and make it work – as it clearly does."
>
> **David White, arable farmer and Wildfarmed grower**

When farms sit at the centre of their community periods of change can be disruptive. Consolidation of the food supply chain, including farming enterprises, over recent decades has altered the fabric of rural communities. Barker explains how in the 1950s there were around 12 different farm holdings in his village in Suffolk, each of which would have employed between 10 and 20 people. "That's around 200 people within the local area employed on the land." Now, there are just two farms, including his own on which two people are employed.

Barker is keen to stress that rationalisation of farms has not broken the relationship between the farm and the community but rather changed the nature of it. "Now it's much more about education as opposed to employment. The best way to engage people is by showing them that we're doing things right."

Family matters

Change also presents opportunities, particularly for a farm transitioning from a conventional to regenerative approach, albeit unlocking these opportunities is not always straightforward. One of the key barriers to farms transitioning to a more regenerative system is the family dynamic. At this year's Groundswell festival during a session titled, 'Resistance to change on the family farm', panellists highlighted a series of barriers faced by farmers wanting to change their way of farming. These ranged from peer pressure and the fear of being the butt of jokes from neighbouring, conventional farmers, to resistance from often (although not always) older family members who have always farmed a certain way and in many cases control the finances of the business.

Midmer at The Allerton Project says family dynamics can present more of a challenge in farming than in other industry sectors because there are far more inter-generational businesses. "If you want to develop a business, and the only person you work with isn't keen, that can be difficult. There can be little incentive for the more senior generation to make changes or take on massive risks, and that can slow change down."

David White, a Cambridgeshire arable farmer who now grows wheat for Wildfarmed, which produces flour and bread products from regeneratively grown wheat and supplies brands such as ASK Italian and Franco Manca, says a turning point in his journey towards adopting regenerative principles was the passing on of the last of the previous generation. This caused him to review what he wanted from his farming business, and life. Although White says "regenerative techniques" would not have been in the vocabulary of previous generations, the practices now adopted on the farm would have been very familiar to them. The move has been away from the contract farming agreements he and his family had held for many years to produce commodity crops like sugar beet for large corporations. It is now more focused towards nature-based farming on a smaller scale producing healthy ingredients. "I decided I was going to jump in with both feet," he says, "to cover cropping, direct drilling and improving soil health, do it properly and make it work – as it clearly does".

> "Conventional farming is mostly quite regimented and well understood whereas with regenerative you're really trying to work within a system that is constantly changing."
>
> **Alice Midmer, GWCT Allerton Project**

Stick or twist?

Appetite for risk is something that comes up frequently in conversations with farmers who have successfully transitioned to regenerative farming. James Evans is a regenerative beef farmer from Shropshire. In 2020, he co-founded Grassroots Farming, which works with a collective of regenerative beef farmers to improve key environmental indicators like soil health and biodiversity while delivering social benefits to families and communities. Talking about his journey to regenerative farming, Evans says: "I was always quite lucky in that I was open to new challenges, I like change, I like doing things differently to what my neighbours do. But farming is steeped in tradition, so trying to get farmers to do things that they haven't always done is really difficult."

Taverner at the FFCC says a lack of financial certainty is a particular barrier to change. "Transitioning your entire business in a more regenerative direction takes a number of years and, initially at least, can incur costs through investment in new equipment and result in yield reductions, so if you're going to make that transition you need to be confident that you're going to be able to absorb those costs and that can be very challenging."

Approaches to funding also need to evolve. As a 2022 report from the Netherlands-based Sustainable Finance Platform noted, a major contributor to biodiversity loss is the agricultural sector and yet the loss of biodiversity remains "a blind spot" for the financial sector. "A regenerative, sustainable agri-food system calls for fair costs, fair risks and returns, and a system's transition," the report authors wrote in their report 'Financing regenerative agriculture'[4].

A lack of knowledge is another challenge that must be overcome since transitioning from conventional to regenerative farming requires learning an entirely new system that has no set guardrails. "The knowledge required is quite different as is the mindset," says Midmer. "Conventional farming is mostly quite regimented and well understood whereas with regenerative you're really trying to work within a system that is constantly changing. There are a lot of moving parts, so that's why knowledge and networks are so important."

It's good to talk

One common feature of a successful transition to regenerative farming is in the ability to access a wide community of like-minded practitioners. Evans notes that farming is "pretty lonely work" that has one of the highest rates of suicide of any occupation. "A lot of that is because farmers have to face these struggles all on their own and so getting farmers to talk with one another is vital."

The Grassroots Farming standard aims to tackle some of the mental health issues associated with farming by requiring farmers to be part of a discussion group. They are also expected to invite the public onto their farms and to increase the number of days' holiday they take each year to ensure they have a break from the farm (holidays are often anathema to farmers). "When transitioning to a new style of farming it can be quite a lonely place as you have to bear the brunt of failures while farming in uncharted territory," says Evans. "Being part of a community connected by WhatsApp allows our farmers to share successes and failures and not be judged."

The notion of community in regenerative farming extends well beyond locality. In discussion with Henry Dimbleby at Groundswell, Wildfarmed co-founder Andy Cato described the Wildfarmed producers' WhatsApp group as the "hive brain" of the business. White says the value in having access to this group of like-minded farmers is huge. "When I

Case Study: RegenFarmCo Biohub

Some food and hospitality sector businesses are looking to get closer to the farm to understand how adoption of regenerative practices can support their sustainability ambitions. This includes partnering with trial farms, which act as hubs for testing new regenerative approaches and sharing learnings from both successes and failures. Ings is an upland pasture farm in an area of outstanding natural beauty situated just west of Harrogate. It is August but the clouds are low-lying and it is drizzling with rain. "There is so much attention on regenerative agriculture at the moment but water seems to be the forgotten element," explains Vincent Walsh, the founder and MD at RegenFarmCo running the "circular and regenerative" Biohub here.

The farm was set up in 2023 thanks to sponsorship from QuornPro, Levy (part of Compass Group) and Yorkshire Water. The original farmer, Derek Greenwood, is also a key partner, having farmed sheep here since he was a boy. Like many farms in this area, the land has been used exclusively for grazing – the sheep trotting where they like, when they like. But not anymore.

The animals will be key but Walsh is keen to keep them at bay until the silvopastures are ready and he fully understands the landscape and the system that will work. Fences are being erected where walls have crumbled as he attempts, in his words, "to create the best conditions for life … whilst improving the functionality of the system".

Not having the sheep as the "dominant force" is tricky for local farmers to get their heads around. You certainly need thick skin for this kind of trial – you are battling the elements, decades of tradition and a totally new approach. Mistakes mean money, as Walsh found out with wild flowers that didn't come up. He is learning about the trees that work and the other plants that work with them. Various cover crops are being trialled too. "That's why food companies need these trials and farms like this," he explains, acknowledging that he is in a fortunate position; farmers don't have the spare cash to throw at such projects.

The 91 acres here is tenanted rent-free, with support from Levy (which is already using some of the produce at football stadiums), Quorn and Yorkshire Water (the country's second largest land-owner). The latter is hoping the site will help showcase "regenerative interventions" that can be adopted by others. Staff from Levy and Quorn have also been here to listen, learn and lift.

There is much still to do, says Walsh, who has already overseen planting of thousands of trees to produce fruit and many thousands more to help restore and protect land. Everyone in the area will benefit. "People have already said to me they're seeing more birds in the area," he adds.

CHAPTER TWO MANAGING CHANGE AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES

> "Being part of a community connected by WhatsApp allows our farmers to share successes and failures and not be judged."
>
> **James Evans, Grassroots Farming**

try something new it takes me a year to work out whether it works or not, but when you're part of a group of 100 farmers and everybody's trying something slightly different, asking questions of one another, posting pictures on the chat and sharing their examples of success and failure, that is hugely valuable."

Dairy cooperative First Milk has run a regenerative farming programme since 2021 through which members receive a bonus payment for committing to field-level regenerative farming actions. Building on this, in 2024 it began incentivising members to do more, rewarding those with a higher regenerative farming score with higher payments.

Sharing best practice is central to the success of the scheme. First Milk runs an ongoing programme of workshops for farmers – 94% of whom have now submitted a regenerative farming plan. It has also developed a network of regenerative pioneer farms to support farmers with specific on-farm advice, as well as sharing their progress, challenges, and learnings as they work to implement regenerative farming practices.

The knowledge that there are others going through the same experience also helps farmers stay resilient in the face of scrutiny from their neighbours, suggests White. "We're all doing something slightly different from the norm and you do feel a little bit out on a limb when the crops don't all look the same and you're getting critiqued by your friends and neighbours as they drive past. You've got to be quite a resilient character and have an amount of self-confidence to stand up to that peer pressure."

Community engagement

White also points to the importance of engaging the local community as farms adopt regenerative practices. These practices often involve planting multiple species in one field, which can make a farm appear 'messy' or unfarmed when in reality it is helping build ecological health through species diversity. "When I started doing what I'm doing it looked initially as though the farm had been abandoned and I had to field all kinds of difficult questions from local people who walked the footpaths because it didn't appear that I was farming the land at all," says White.

He took the opportunity to start writing regular articles in the local parish newsletter in which he could communicate to people what it was he was doing on the farm. That led White to organise a farm walk for local residents followed by coffee and cake, a successful initiative that has since been repeated. "There's certainly more of a connection now between the community and the farm which is a good thing," he observes.

Building a community from the ground up also involves developing deeper relationships with buyers. Evans talks about the transition from producing "a commodity to producing food" and the "transformational feel good factor" of knowing for the first time where his beef is going. As well as having customers, including butchers, restauranteurs and chefs, frequently visit their farms, Grassroots farmers along with their families often visit the restaurants of the businesses they are supplying with their beef. "That gives them an enormous sense of self-worth which is sadly lacking in our industry," Evans says. "Doing things this way brings the industry back together and makes us feel like we're all in the food business together. I feel really passionate about that."

CHAPTER 3

The role of hospitality in the community

> "The biggest reward we can give suppliers that are doing interesting things on sustainability is by promoting the work that they're doing."
>
> **Pete Statham, Sysco**

Just as farmers must find a way to access and develop their own networks as they begin their regenerative journey, businesses further down the supply chain have a key role to play in helping unlock the benefits of community-based regenerative agriculture. Alongside local pubs and restaurants purchasing local farm produce, large buyers can help provide the incentives to farm regeneratively through the relationships they develop with farmers.

"We have quite a big reach in terms of the farms that we source from and the farmers that we engage with so we feel like we have a responsibility in engaging farmers and bringing them on the [regenerative] journey," says Nestlé's Keller. Rather than a top down approach based on standards and specifications, Keller describes Nestlé as having more of a convening role that involves funding initiatives like farming clusters and knowledge exchange programmes which enable farmers to talk directly with one another and share best practice.

In January this year, Nestlé UK and Ireland announced a new partnership with The Allerton Project through which farmers and suppliers of Nestlé will receive practical, context-based land management advice to deliver positive environmental outcomes on their land.

Farm learnings

Businesses themselves can derive numerous benefits from building these kind of ties with regenerative farmers. Companies setting net-zero commitments that are reliant on sourcing a certain proportion of ingredients from regenerative agriculture will need buy-in from farmers (and measurable evidence of impact) if they are to meet those commitments. But more than that, there can be tangible benefits for businesses in terms of internal knowledge building and employee engagement from becoming part of a regenerative farm's hinterland.

Matt Ryan, regeneration lead at Nestlé UK & Ireland, explains that as well as delivering training, education and experiential learning for farmers, the partnership with The Allerton Project will engage

Case Study: Full Circle Farms

Based at the Chiddingly estate in West Sussex, Full Circle Farms is successfully pioneering a model that combines commercial regenerative farming with community support. The farm, which was established by farmer Tom Morphew, serves two purposes: one section is given over to growing fresh vegetables for corporate customers to use in their restaurants, while the other acts as a community garden where people facing mental health issues like depression or anxiety benefit from what Morphew describes as "horticultural therapy".

Members of The Garden Army, to give the not-for-profit social enterprise its official title, spend as much or as little time on the farm as they like where they can help grow and harvest the fresh produce, carry out maintenance tasks, or just "chill out" in Morphew's words. "They can stay for 10 minutes or they can stay all day. They can get involved and plant hundreds of plants or they can sit in the sun and watch chickens all day. It really doesn't matter."

The garden produces a variety of fresh produce in a regenerative system which, like the corporate plot, uses no artificial inputs. All the food produced in the community garden is supplied to local food banks which then help support the farm by identifying people who may benefit from its unique form of therapy.

"The concept of what we do on the farm is very simple," explains Morphew. "It's the same way we approach helping people; we just give them the space to grow. And so they come along, get a handful of tools, make a few mistakes and plant things in weird places. It's in getting those things wrong and then correcting them that builds their confidence and resilience to be able to deal with what life throws at them."

The other area of the farm is dedicated to growing vegetables for corporate customers. Currently, contract caterer Sodexo has three plots of land supplying its Sodexo Live, Good Eating Company and schools and universities segments. A huge variety of vegetables and herbs will be grown on the plots – planned in collaboration between Morphew and Sodexo chefs – which will then be used throughout the caterer's menus.

Businesses pay for the plot rather than the produce meaning the risk to Morphew from a poor harvest is significantly reduced. "What that means is as a farmer I can afford two members of staff to be in that plot every day with their hands in the soil, weeding and tending to the crop. On a normal farm you couldn't afford to do that," he says.

The revenue from the business relationship allows Morphew to provide the horticultural therapy for free, supported by the help of local volunteers many of whom are retired and often "bored or lonely" and value the opportunity to "come out and get stuck in".

The Garden Army also works with local GP surgeries and schools to identify people who may benefit from therapy, including children with learning disabilities. "One of the most rewarding things is seeing how people grow," says Morphew. "When they first come here, they often won't make eye contact and won't stand too close to you [....] but by the end of it they're giving you a cuddle goodbye and singing songs and saying goodbye to everyone individually."

Morphew has big plans to expand the enterprise beyond the 10 acres he currently farms at Chiddingly. He recently put in a tender for a 400-acre site on the South Downs, which would allow Morphew to offer more businesses the chance to hire a plot of land or sponsor the community garden, as local food company Higgidy currently does at the Chiddlingly site. He also wants to produce meat and dairy and create a circular system whereby food waste collected from local restaurants is composted at the farm and returned to the land.

CHAPTER THREE THE ROLE OF HOSPITALITY IN THE COMMUNITY

> "I think that you should try and always get your produce from around where you are based because you're supporting your own community."
>
> **Francesco Fiore, Milton Keynes University Hospital**

directly with Nestlé employees. "This year alone, I expect we'll get close to 500 Nestlé UK & Ireland employees to the farm to understand the opportunities of regenerative agriculture, but also the practical realities of what it takes to go on a transition like this and the reasons why we can't just push a big button and have everyone farming regeneratively."

Businesses looking to support regenerative agriculture should be prepared to get closer to farms and understand the needs and motivations of farmers. Wholesaler Brakes is now offering its customers a range of artisan breads made with a blend that includes Wildfarmed flour. Pete Statham, head of sustainability and government relations, GB, at Brakes-owner Sysco, explains how the Wildfarmed team recently came and gave a talk to a group of Sysco leaders about regenerative wheat farming, with some of those leaders also due to pay a visit to a Wildfarmed farm. He says building this knowledge within the business will help commercial teams sell the benefits of buying foods produced in regenerative systems to Brakes customers. "The biggest reward we can give suppliers that are doing interesting things on sustainability is by promoting the work that they're doing."

Partnership building

Every year provides new examples of hospitality sector organisations and their suppliers forging partnerships with regenerative farmers at a local level. Patrick Holden tells of a recent partnership he has struck with Castell Howell Foods, Wales' largest independent foodservice wholesaler, to supply his carrots to local schools as part of a pilot project to get vegetables produced by local growers onto school menus across the Welsh regions. "They are giving me a guaranteed price for all the carrots I grow, and it's a good price," says Holden, who stopped supplying carrots to supermarkets many years ago due to the low returns. "Why have I come back in? Because I'm being offered a secure market, guaranteed forward pricing and Castell Howell also help with the collection infrastructure, so they're actually on our farm collecting our carrots."

At Milton Keynes University Hospital, catering manager Francesco Fiore is working to ensure that as much food as possible is local, fresh and seasonal. Everything served at the staff and visitor restaurant is freshly cooked on site and as much as possible is sourced locally. "I think that you should try and always get your produce from around where you are based because you're supporting your own community," he says. "Our fruit and veg comes from a supplier in Bedford, which is about 20 miles away from the hospital, and they source seasonal produce from a farmer who farms about six miles away from them. We're also just about to take on a butcher based in Buckinghamshire and they also get their meat from local farms."

Public sector buyers still face significant challenges in scaling the volume of sustainable food they serve in institutions such as hospitals and schools. Fiore, for example, notes how in his hospital in Milton Keynes patient feeding is contracted to another supplier which provides chilled prepared meals because of a lack of on-site kitchen facilities. "My long term passion is to one day get a fresh-cook kitchen in this hospital," Fiore says.

Money matters

Financial considerations are another key and oft-cited barrier. Farmers want to know that buyers are prepared to make a long-term financial commitment to supporting their adoption of regenerative principles that in turn gives them confidence to invest in the transition. "Any change

Case Study: Airfield Estate

The Airfield Estate near Dublin, Ireland, is a 39-acre working, urban farm and gardens with a farm-to-fork sustainable food system. Its aim is to help visitors learn about sustainable food production both through educational activities and through the food served in the restaurant and farmers' market.

The estate follows a farm-to-fork ethos based on regenerative principles. Over 20 acres of land are dedicated to the farm which features a milking herd of Jersey cows as well as Jacob sheep, Oxford sandy and black pigs, Saanen goats, and Rhode Island red hens. Airfield also grows its own fresh produce in a kitchen garden, which is served to guests in the onsite restaurant.

Alongside the farm, the estate boasts a community garden which is a shared space for people to come together and learn about sustainable food production. It also offers volunteering opportunities, courses and workshops to help people learn more about urban gardening, horticulture and sustainable food production; and it runs a programme supporting young adults in disability services to develop their employability skills and reach their employment ambitions.

Gather & Gather, a brand of caterer CH&Co, operates the visitor restaurant at the Airfield Estate. The Gather & Gather culinary team at Airfield work closely with the estate owners and staff to develop menus that show off the variety of organic food and drink produced on the estate.

Airfield's farm-to-fork ethos is intrinsic to a menu which is fully seasonal and changes depending on what the farm is harvesting at a particular time of year. Head chef Isobel Farrelly places a particular emphasis on using seasonal vegetables; a current favourite dish is a courgette and radicchio salad with Jersey ricotta cheese.

"My menus are focused on what's coming off the estate each week and each month," she explains. "The gardeners harvest the vegetables on Tuesdays and Fridays and I design my menu around that."

Although a lot of businesses claim to follow a 'farm to fork' ethos, Farrelly says "here it really is because the customers that are coming here to eat are eating fruit and vegetables that have been grown literally right behind them".

She estimates that around 60% of the ingredients served in the restaurant are sourced from the estate with the remaining 40% consisting of foods that can't be grown locally such as citrus fruits, olive oil and dry foods like pasta and rice.

costs money," says Midmer at The Allerton Project. "Often farming regeneratively requires new kit and while there are lots of grants available now, that shift still requires a financial investment. If as a business you see that as your role to support those farmers, then hopefully you're on the right track."

Ask Patrick Barker from the High Suffolk Farm Cluster what he wants to hear from businesses who express a desire to support regenerative farming and his response is: "How do we share risk and how do we value what doesn't have financial value? Things like clean air, clean water and biodiversity: how do we add value to those sorts of things that the market doesn't currently value?"

Businesses are approaching that question in different ways. Some, like Wildfarmed, are paying a simple premium above the market price to their producers.

Keller explains that Nestlé's relationship with milk supplier First Milk used to involve "a simple contract for milk" but farmers are now paid an additional sustainability bonus for adopting regenerative practices. "We're now contracting with them in a much broader way to recognise not just the commodity that they're selling to us but the other environmental

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benefits they're providing," says Keller.

Honest mistake

Businesses, just like farmers, are also showing a willingness to experiment and learn from their mistakes. Honest Burgers has recently switched from a direct sourcing model, which involved purchasing the whole carcass from Grassroots beef farmers and finding markets for the cuts it didn't need, to a mass balance approach whereby it pays a levy on every kilo of beef it purchases which is then distributed by Grassroots among its collective of beef farmers.

The previous model, although well-intentioned, was in practice hugely complex to deliver, including difficulty finding viable end markets for hides, bones and less popular cuts, as well as problems providing the right specification of steaks for restaurants. "We've done the hard yards, we tried the direct supply [model]. It's not there yet," says Honest Burgers co-founder Tom Barton. "We'd love to revisit it one day [but] what we're trying to do now is see if we can just get more regenerative meat on the market."

Future challenges

The example of Honest Burgers shows the difficulties businesses face in rewiring long-established commodity supply chains that have been designed to maximise efficiencies and minimise costs. This potentially poses challenges for farmers looking to diversify their output as part of a shift to more regenerative systems. "When farms

have one or more enterprises that makes it much more complex for the buyers because they're going to have to think about what other crops or products the farm is selling and that's going to need more regional and decentralised infrastructure," says Holden.

Ryan at Nestlé believes procurement models are in the process of changing but it is still a "work in progress". He adds however that "we absolutely recognise the need for longer term agreements to make sure that there isn't an undue risk placed on the farmers to make this transition".

Crossley at the Food Ethics Council would like to see businesses further down the supply chain be "honest and consistent" about their support for regenerative agriculture. "I understand that corporates want to tell a positive story and share the good things they're doing, but I think it would be refreshing if we had some honesty from companies about some of the things they're doing that haven't worked so well, some of the issues that they're facing and some of the challenges, and opening themselves up more to scrutiny."

While there is obvious appetite among regenerative farmers to farm in a way that benefits both them and their local community, it would

be fanciful to suggest that the kind of self-sustaining local ecosystems that deliver jobs, financial security and other social and environmental benefits are representative of the wider food system.

What's clear is that if regenerative agriculture is to deliver the kind of community benefits detailed in this report at scale, it will need buyers to help unlock those benefits rather than act as an impediment to them. "I think corporates are still trying to establish exactly what their role is," says Ryan. "What I think we're realising more and more is not to own or hijack the entire agenda but to think more about facilitation. It's about providing farmers with de-risking opportunities and giving them the support that they need rather than driving the entire narrative ourselves."

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> **Matt Ryan, Nestlé UK & Ireland**

About Footprint Intelligence

The ever-shifting sustainability debate makes it vital for businesses to have accurate intelligence to make informed decisions. Footprint Intelligence is Footprint Media Group's research and analysis division, helping companies develop successful strategies in the context of responsible business practices. Footprint Intelligence aims to drive, promote and share best practice by helping industry resolve pressing sustainability issues. It asks tough questions and finds answers. It uses research and industry insight to bring businesses together to identify solutions, opportunities, trends and challenges.

About Nestlé Professional

At Nestlé Professional®, hospitality is more than just a business. It is our business. This means inspiring the next generation of culinary talent through Nestlé Professional® Toque d'Or®; striving in the field in Nutrition, Health and Wellness; and collaborating with the industry for a more sustainable future. From coffee to cocoa, and from food waste to water, Nestlé works with farmers, chefs and operators continually to help make sustainable strides forward.

Footprint Intelligence was commissioned by Nestlé Professional to write this report. The research comprised in-depth, semi-structured interviews with industry experts, desk-based research, involvement in industry events and forums, and comments and insights from opinion leaders linked to the industry.

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