LEAF Farm Boards

Our farm information boards are a great way to communicate positive messages about food, farming and the countryside.

For more information please visit:
leafuk.org/farming/resources/leaf-farm-boards
Fields of Energy

This farm produces energy crops to heat and power homes and businesses.

We choose energy crops that will grow fast and big.

When we harvest, we deliver them to an anaerobic digester.

Inside the digester a special mix of organisms digests the crop and produces gas which can be sold to the national gas network or used to generate electricity.

Hello sunshine

Sunlight is vital for producing crops for food. But here we also use sunlight to produce energy.

These panels catch the sun’s rays and convert them to electricity which is sent off to be useful to homes and businesses.

In between the panels we manage the grassland as a home and feeding ground for wildlife and livestock.

Home is where the bird is

Birds need a good home on the farm to rear their young.

Our nest boxes provide a safe place for birds to build their nests. They can gather twigs, leaves or moss nearby.

Some birds use saliva or spiders’ web to glue the material together.

The nest box gives chicks safety in their first weeks of life.

Special soils

We respect our soil. It must be healthy for our crops’ roots to grow well and find the food and water each plant needs.

Earthworms are good soil workers. Worms help recycle nutrients and the tunnels they make as they work let air into the soil.

We look after our soil to help the earthworms to thrive and multiply.

To do a soil ‘health check’ we count worms.

We like to see sixteen worms in every spadeful of our soil!
Stop and listen

Stop. Wait. Listen. What can you hear?
Leaves rustling? Birds tweeting? Wind blowing?
Bees buzzing?

Hear how the countryside is alive and active all the time.
Farmers are producing crops and caring for animals.
Rivers are flowing. Weather is changing.
Wild creatures and plants are feeding, growing and thriving.

What a beautiful place to be.

Water reserves

Our reservoir is an excellent home for lots of wildlife.
This reservoir is where we store water.
In winter, when there is a lot of rain, we keep it to use in drier times.
We use the water to irrigate our crops when they need it.

Fish live and breed in the water.
Many water birds visit to feed or rest.
Creatures live in the plants around the edges.

Waterways

Rivers and streams are home to many important wild creatures on the farm.

Insects such as mayflies and dragon flies need clean and clear water to feed in and reproduce.

Just as our farm hedges are wildlife corridors or motorways around the fields, the streams and rivers are aquatic or watery links around this landscape.

What a view!

What can you see?
All of this is farmland. It is carefully looked after by farmers like us all around the country.
For many generations, farmers have managed and shaped the land into what it is today.
We hope you enjoy it.
Animal Welfare

We take pride in our livestock.

A well-fed, cared-for animal is more likely to stay healthy but illnesses and injuries do sometimes occur.

Our animals are checked regularly and as well as making sure they have food and water we look closely for telltale signs that an animal is not feeling well. If there’s a problem we notice it early.

We have the skills to be able to treat most problems ourselves. If we need specialist help then we call in our local vet.

Currants And Berries

Red or black currants, raspberries and strawberries - growing the soft fruit of Britain has become a highly specialised type of farming.

We face stiff competition from fruit from other countries so we grow the new varieties that have been developed to be productive, good to eat and resistant to common diseases.

Even old favourites like strawberries are being grown in new ways – on raised beds or under plastic – to produce top quality, disease-free fruit.

Fruit used in juices, jams and other foods can be harvested by machine but for the whole fruit that reaches your table only hand-picking will do.

Apples and Pears

Apples are the most popular tree fruit but cherries and plums are making a comeback.

We can grow fruits on short or dwarf rootstocks to get a compact and fruit-covered bush rather than a tree. They still need careful pruning or trimming to produce at their best.

Birds and insects love the taste of ripe and juicy fruit and they can do a lot of damage, so growing in plastic tunnels or behind screens stops that problem.

These days you can buy most fruits all year but nothing compares with the flavour and texture of fresh British fruit in season.

Cows in fields and your safety

Cows are usually docile animals who are content when grazing on grass in open fields. However, like most farm animals, they can be unpredictable and should be treated with respect. They can be particularly nervous of people when they are with their young calves. Occasionally, this can make them protective or even aggressive.

If you want to walk on a permitted footpath in fields where there are cows and calves, then care should be taken. Give them a wide berth and don’t take dogs into the field, even if on a lead.

Thank you
Beetling About

On this farm we use natural, biological ways to fight the insects that attack our crops.

We have planted raised, tufted grass strips – known as beetle banks – across some fields to provide the perfect place for ground beetles.

In these banks, beetles breed and overwinter in huge numbers. In springtime they spread out into the field to feed on the pest insects, such as greenfly, that attack our crop.

As well as being good for beneficial insects these banks make excellent nesting sites and hiding places for grey partridge and harvest mice.

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Farm Hedges

Hedges are home to lots of birds, mammals and insects.

Since ancient times, hedges have marked the boundaries between fields and farms. A thick hedge keeps farm animals in (or out!) and gives shelter from wind and rain.

Keeping hedges in good condition and full of food for farmland birds takes time and thought. Older hedges are cut at ground level and strong branches bent – or laid – to prompt new growth. Each year, but not in the nesting season, we trim some of our hedges. This also encourages young shoots that keep the hedge thick.

Planting a new hedge is very satisfying.

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Fresh Vegetables from the Field

Some of your recommended ‘five-a-day’ vegetables could come from a farm like this.

We eat many parts of plants: the roots (carrots) and tubers (potatoes), the stems (celery), the leaves (lettuce, cabbage), the flowers (cauliflower, broccoli) and the seeds (peas, beans).

As farmers, we have to grow our vegetables perfectly and judge just the right time to harvest them.

Potatoes, onions and beetroot can be stored in cool, dry barns for up to three months. In cold store they will last even longer. For the rest it’s a race to get them to our buyers and to you while they are field-fresh.

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Farm Trees – Old and New

Farm trees can be cut for firewood, fence posts or even to make fine furniture.

Woods are especially useful to wildlife if they link up with hedges. Dead and fallen trees support as much life as living ones.

To get a lot of timber from a small area a Hazel, Chestnut or Ash trees are coppiced (cut to the ground) every twelve years. Lots of new shoots grow from the stumps.

We protect the saplings – young trees – by covering the young growth to stop hares or deer chewing the bark. We keep them free from weeds around the base so they don’t have to compete for light and space.
Feeding Ground for Growth

Our crops only grow well if there is enough plant food in the soil.

We only put plant food or fertiliser onto the fields to make up for shortages in the soil. We take care to put on the right amount and at the right time for the crop as it grows.

Once we have decided what the field will grow we:

- analyse the soil to check whether there is enough goodness in the soil.
- choose the right fertiliser to suit what we want to grow.
- check that the fertiliser spreader is set up to apply it evenly and where it's needed.

Fields of Food

This farm is part of the working countryside. We work with nature to produce food to eat or raw materials for industry such as wool or crops for energy.

It's a challenging business. Every day we have to make careful decisions on what to do that is best for the land, right for the crop or livestock and good for the wildlife with which we share this landscape.

Quality is very important, we are proud of the food we produce and how we care for the countryside.

Feeding Farmland Birds

As farmers we like to do what we can to help farmland birds.

Some weeds are excellent feed for birds so we let them grow at the field edges. The nectar of wild flowers supports a lot of insects, which in turn are eaten by birds.

To provide food through the winter we can leave leftovers from harvest - or stubble - in the field.

Or to create the equivalent of a huge bird table set with tasty treats we can sow an area with plants such as sunflower, kale and millet.

Going with the Grain

Cereal crops are an important part of our British diet.

Breakfast cereals, bread and beer are made with grain from fields like ours. Cereals are not just grown for people. They are also an important ingredient in feed for farm animals.

We have to make the right decisions at the right time – and have the weather on our side! – to make a profit. The harvested grain has to be dry and free of disease and weed seeds otherwise no-one will buy it.

Young wheat, barley and oats look similar, but when ready for harvest they are easier to tell apart.
Giving Birds Breeding Space

A summer’s day with skylarks singing their hearts out high overhead – what could be better?

The way we farm today means that crops such as wheat grow too dense for skylarks to nest and raise their families. They set up home in the tramlines – or tractor wheel-marks – in the crops where they are easy picking for predators.

On this farm we leave some bare squares in the field where skylarks nest successfully. They can raise as many as four families in a season if suitable habitat is available.

Greatness of Grass

Grass is fantastic food for livestock.

It is nutritious and versatile. It may be eaten fresh in the field or we can cut it and preserve it – as dried hay or fermented silage – to be fed to the animals through the winter months while the grass in the field is not growing.

Grass needs food too. In spring we feed it with fertilizer or farmyard manure.

The grassland is easily damaged if there are too many animals in the field. We have to think carefully about how many animals we put out to graze, and when we do so.

Life on the Edge

The edges of the field are special:

• to wildlife – birds, insects and mammals can feed, hide or nest here.

• to the crop – useful insects and spiders over-winter in the grass then in spring move into the crop and eat pests.

We look after the edges. We can plant them with tufted grasses (which are excellent habitat for ground-nesting birds) or wild flowers (to feed butterflies, other insects and birds).

Growing Oil

There’s no mistaking an oilseed crop when it is in flower. The flower of linseed is vivid blue while oilseed rape – also known as canola – is bright yellow. But it is much later, when the tiny seeds are mature and dry, that the crop is harvested.

We sell oilseeds to food processors who extract the oil to make cooking oils or other food ingredients.

These oils are also used by industry as lubricants and to make products such as cling film.

The crop can also be processed into bio-diesel to power engines – truly green energy.
Healthy Crops
As soon as the crop starts growing we check it regularly to watch out for any problems.

Our job is to keep damage from insect pests and diseases to a minimum and make sure that weeds don’t take over.

Like people, very often the plants can recover from infections (caused by fungi, bacteria or viruses) or even insect attack. If they can’t then we have to give the crop some help.

We choose and use very carefully the treatments that control weeds, pests or disease.

More to a Meadow than Meets the Eye
It may look like just grass but close up you see it can be a mix of lots of different types of grasses as well as herbs and wild flowers. That is why in summer a meadow is often teeming with wildlife.

Farmers take special care of old meadows and even create new ones.

A meadow needs treating differently to modern grassland. It grows slowly. It doesn’t like a lot of fertiliser. Cut and dried in late summer, meadows make tasty and nutritious hay for farm animals to eat.

Wall to Wall Interest
Traditional stone walls were built to keep farm animals in (or out!) and to mark field or farm boundaries. Constructing them helped to clear the land of stones.

They tell a story. On farms around Britain, the stones used, the style and purpose all vary.

Walls are living history; many wild creatures and tiny plants live in the wall’s nooks and crannies.

Building walls is a real skill. So is repairing them.

Please Respect Nature
We have created lots of wildlife-only areas on this farm. We are happy for you to use the permitted pathways but please keep to them and do not disturb our conservation areas.

Woodlands, meadows and field edges are home to many wild plants and animals. If you are here with your dog we ask that you keep it under close control at all times. Wildlife thrives much better if undisturbed.

Thank you
Riches in Ditches

There's nothing dull about ditch water.

We can't grow crops on waterlogged soil. Surplus water seeps into under-field pipes which drain into the ditch.

A lot of farm ditches are home to many interesting creatures. Shy mammals such as otters and water voles can take up residence. Frogs, newts and toads use them as breeding grounds and ditch insect life provides food for birds and bats.

Just as hedges are the wildlife corridors or motorways around the fields, ditches provide aquatic or watery links around the landscape.

Something to Ponder

The farm pond is a really busy place above and below the surface.

Some ponds provide drinking water for livestock. Large ponds – or reservoirs – can be dug to catch the winter rainfall to water the crops in summer.

We leave scrubby vegetation around the pond edge to provide cover for hiding and hibernating frogs and toads, nesting places for ducks and good hunting grounds for dragonflies.

The Right Tool for the Job

This farm's machinery is kept in tip-top condition for reliability, accuracy and energy efficiency.

Tractors are the modern workhorse. They have tremendous power to pull, lift or drive other machinery.

From the tractor cab you can use hydraulic and electrical controls to make precise adjustments.

In some cabs, on-board satellite-linked computers guide the work.

We avoid soil compaction by using large tyres that help spread the weight of the tractor.

Using Water Wisely

Crops get thirsty.

Potatoes, carrots, parsnips and salad crops such as lettuce and spring onions, often need more water than falls as rain. Without enough water the crop wilts and stops growing.

We pay for a licence to take water from the river or deep underground to hold in the farm reservoir or spray straight onto the crop.

We use water wisely. We measure the rainfall and the moisture in the soil then adjust the irrigation equipment to put on the right amount to give the best yield.
LEAF Farm Boards

LEAF Farm Boards are a fantastic way of telling regular walkers and visitors to the countryside about how farmers are producing food with care for the environment.

The robust, weatherproof boards cover all areas of farming practice and how farmers are taking care of the countryside. You can choose the boards that most suit your farm and the wildlife which lives there. Some farmers position their boards individually or they can be grouped together beside a footpath, farm entrance or even on the wall of a visitor centre or farm shop. They are easy to fix, either to a fence or gatepost or you can make up a few boards together using a larger piece of ply board and fixing this to posts. The boards are 298mm x 210mm or A4 size.

To view the boards and place your order visit: www.leafuk.org/myleaf

If you are a LEAF member, you are entitled to a 30% discount of the total cost of your order!