



## Case Study: Overbury Enterprises, Gloucestershire, UK



On the border of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, Overbury Enterprises surrounds the Cotswold villages of Overbury and Conderton. A mainly arable farm with a flock of 1200 ewes, and a farm contracting business, the Farm is part of the wider portfolio of Overbury Enterprises. The 1590 hectares of land is on the slope of Bredon Hill, which at over 300 metres offers a range of gradients, and a diversity of soil types from heavy clays to Cotswold brash. Overbury Enterprises is LEAF Marque certified and since 2012 has been a LEAF Demonstration Farm; reflecting the ethos of the business in blending traditional values, such as the appearance of walls and hedges, and modern technologies, including the latest developments in agri-tech.

### Commitment to environmental sustainability

Jake Freestone, the Farm Manager, is a familiar face to many in the agricultural industry, having spoken at Farming Conferences, and as an enthusiastic social media user, he explained:

***“LEAF Membership came first in 2004 and LEAF Marque certification in 2007, we did LEAF Marque because we were direct selling lamb at that point and we thought that for a forward-thinking business, not just for the marketing side of things, that it gives us a positive commitment, to the work that we are trying to do in terms of environmental sustainability, the work we do with the community, using the latest technologies and LEAF Marque cemented all of that together.”***

With a mixed farming operation, combining “winter wheat for milling and biscuits, OSR for ADM and that goes as LEAF Marque, winter and spring malting barley and that all goes to Burton upon Trent, we grow human consumption peas, a bit of linseed.” The search for greater sustainability has started to integrate the various enterprises in new ways.

## Sustainable soil management

The starting point for the changes is a concern to improve the soil, based on work that Jake did as a Nuffield Scholar in 2013, looking at the plateauing of crop productivity:

*“The conclusion was that we have been mistreating our soils through over-cultivation and as a result of that we experimented with some zero-till, and now the bulk of the farm is in zero-till. The other thing I discovered was a wider rotation and the use of cover crops, to try and keep the soil covered at all times with something that is living, and then get the livestock to integrate into the arable unit but having them graze those cover crops.”*

This opportunity of integrating the livestock has led to a reconsideration of their management:

*“We what are trying to do is grow enough cover crops so that we can keep the sheep out for more of the year, rather than housing them and plying them with expensive bought in feed or home grown feeds, haymaking is not a cheap operation in a tricky English climate. It is early days to put quantitative values against it, but the theory is sound.”*

This process has been driven by an intersection of schemes and research, but Jake is aware that “in turn that ticks lots of LEAF Marque boxes in terms of precision farming, input minimization, pollution control it all comes back into that.”

## Managing resistance in livestock

LEAF Marque has encouraged a greater focus on management of resistance in the livestock:

*“In terms of sheep husbandry, it has focused our minds on resistance to worms and how we can manage that, hence getting involved with the faecal egg count, so we can monitor the health stages of the sheep ourselves and has led to about a 30% reduction in the worming products we use, as a result of not blanket treating.”*



Regarding animal welfare, LEAF Marque has not made changes to the farm's practices, but, "it does make us monitor what we are actually using, it is a good annual reference, partly for LEAF Marque and partly for focus on sustainability".

## Sustainable soil management

The work on the soil is beginning to make a difference, after an extended period of monitoring:

*"We have been monitoring organic matter in certain fields for about ten years, we are counting worm populations as a key indicator of soil health, and hopefully in February we are going to start doing some experiments to measure water infiltration."*

The differences are becoming noticeable as the land is being worked:

*"The soils are restructuring themselves; they are becoming more friable and workable; the team are noticing – they are saying that they are up a kilometre or half a kilometre an hour when drilling."*

This monitoring is now being coupled with scrutiny of earthworms, "we are getting down to counting the number of earthworms, weighing them and seeing what is actually going on".

## Community engagement



Although Overbury Enterprise host 'quiet' Open Farm Sunday, the main educational event is on a lambing day earlier in the year, where the focus is on the link between food production and conservation:

*“We tend to put most of our effort into our lambing day which can have anywhere between 600 – 1000 people, so it is all hands-on decks, the staff get involved, and the village tenants all come in to do teas and cake.”*

The link is made explicit by the food served:

*“We [used to] serve hot food, lamb burgers, lamb casserole so we can make that conscious link, they can see the fluffy side, but the only reason the fluffy side is there is because we are meat producers.”*

The outreach is backed up by extensive contacts with a school in central Birmingham, as well as local colleges and universities, to share the lessons learnt on the farm as widely as possible. The LEAF Marque in turn “feeds into our philosophy of improving the whole environment.”