

Hall Farm, Sutton Estates



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Hall Farm is situated in the heart of the picturesque Lincolnshire Wolds in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The farm is predominantly arable with a herd of Lincoln Red cattle and a 'flying' flock of North Country Mule sheep. Amenity woodland and a small commercial shoot are also part of the Estate. The Estate have long held the belief of the key principles of Integrated Farm Management with Hall Farm being involved with environmental schemes since 2000 when they first entered into a Countryside Stewardship agreement, followed by Entry Level and Higher Level schemes in 2008. Hall Farm is owned by Sir Richard Sutton Limited; the Sutton family have been landowners for a very long time and ownership of part of the Lincolnshire Estate dates from the 16th Century.



The Farm

The Lincolnshire Estate is approximately 3,600 hectares (8,900 acres) with just over 2,600 hectares under arable crops, 450 hectares of permanent pasture and 550 hectares of Environmental Stewardship. The total Estate spans across a 30 mile radius going as far north as the Humber bank. Soils range from free draining medium chalk loams high up on the Lincolnshire Wolds to low lying, heavy clay soils adjacent to the River Humber.

Crop Production

The Estate's arable enterprise grows a range of crops such as wheat, barley, oilseed rape, beans and sugar beet over 2,600 hectares (6,424 acres). Cereals, oilseeds and pulses are sold through grain merchants for use as human consumption and animal feed, with direct end user contracts to add a premium where possible. The sugar beet is grown on contract to British Sugar for use throughout their portfolio of products. All crops are grown following Integrated Farm Management principles, which mean that environmental consequences are considered in every decision we make. Fertilisers are applied at variable rates across all fields and plant protection products are only used when suitable cultural methods would not suffice.



Since 2011, the Estate has reviewed its cultivation policy, trialling the use of direct drilling, which was driven by the determination to increase its environmental profile through reduced energy requirements and the longer term objective of improving soil health. We openly admit that we have experienced mixed results to date but many lessons have been learnt.

Current cultivation practices now revolve around the use of direct drilling, combined strip tillage, minimal cultivations and rotational ploughing. The use of cover cropping, to avoid long periods of leaving land bare throughout the winter, prior to the spring planting of cereals, has also been recently incorporated. The overall objective is to reduce reliance upon chemistry through a more targeted use of cultural control and nutrition.

Livestock

A beef suckler herd of 120 Lincoln Red cattle was established in 2001. Recently, the herd has been crossed with an Aberdeen Angus bull obtaining a premium contract supplying Waitrose. The cattle are fed on the permanent pasture around the Estate in the summer months and housed throughout the winter; they are fed a diet of silage and cereal. Hall Farm also has a 'flying' flock of 1,400 North Country Mule sheep. The sheep are purchased at nine months of age as ewe lambs and kept for twelve months before being sold as breeding sheep the following autumn. The sheep remain out on the grassland all year round, clearing the pastures following grazing by cattle. Such an integrated system has enhanced the utilisation of the grassland on the Estate and provides a clean grazing system for both types of grazing animal. The welfare of our animals is always at the heart of what we do and the implementation of an integrated grassland management system has reduced our reliance upon medicines.

Community

Hall Farm has opened for LEAF Open Farm Sunday since 2007. The village church and the local W.I. get involved with the event to raise funds for their causes, along with local food producers. The Estate has also hosted the local church Hog Roast for a number of years. Through environmental stewardship several permissive footpaths have been put in place creating circular walks around several surrounding villages.

Conservation

The Estate has been part of Environmental Stewardship schemes since 2000. Since that time, 200 hectares of arable land have been returned to grassland, archaeological sites have been protected, a lost parkland has been re-created, 164 hectares of buffer strips have been created on arable land along with 25 hectares of pollen and nectar flower mixtures and 10 hectares of wild bird mixes. Barn owl nesting boxes, both indoor and outdoor, have been erected with the birds being monitored every year. 1,150 hectares of land have been dedicated to Grey Partridge recovery and the results are included in the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust's national database. Working alongside the Lincolnshire Chalk Streams, wild brown trout have been encouraged to breed in the Waithe Beck, which runs through Hall Farm; ponds have also been allowed to naturally re-generate to encourage wildlife. There are also 125 hectares of small woods dotted around the Estate which are managed for their amenity, landscape and wildlife value.

Visits

Hall Farm became a LEAF Demonstration Farm in 2002 and each year we host between four and ten visits to the Estate. We welcome visitors from schools and the wider community so that we can show them how we are producing safe, wholesome food in a way that both protects and enhances the environment.

About LEAF Demonstration Farms

LEAF Demonstration Farms are commercial farms, which show the beneficial practices of Integrated Farm Management (IFM) to a broad range of audiences, through organised visits. They communicate an understanding of IFM in order to encourage uptake by farmers, support from the industry and political awareness of sustainable food and farming. For more information, visit www.leafuk.org.