

Testimonials – Groundswell

BLAIR WALLACE (2023)



I had the fantastic opportunity to attend Groundswell 2023 thanks to a Future Farmers of Yorkshire bursary. It was refreshing to be surrounded by like-minded people who shared my inquisitiveness for regenerative agriculture.

One of the highlights was the overwhelmingly positive atmosphere surrounding the event. Being in the company of such passionate and driven people was both inspiring and reassuring, and I'm excited to bring back a wealth of knowledge and inspiration to my clients.

It was especially encouraging to listen to farmers who are actively practicing regenerative farming methods on their holding rather than being lectured to by professionals or academics. These conversations not only broadened my horizons but opened my eyes to the latest advancements in agricultural technology. Staying informed about emerging technologies is crucial, as it enables me to provide the best possible advice to my clients.

Beyond the knowledge gained, it emphasized the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing within the farming community. The willingness of attendees to openly share their experiences and lessons learned was inspiring. I firmly believe that by fostering a spirit of collaboration, we can build a more sustainable and resilient agricultural sector, where farmers continually learn from one another and adapt to changing environmental conditions.

As I made the journey to Hertfordshire from my office in Boroughbridge, I questioned: why should a Yorkshire farmer switch to regenerative farming practices? There's no certification, no premiums on offer from supermarkets and (so far) little government support to encourage farmers to make the transition.

As a Land Agent, I get to see a lot of farming businesses and it became apparent that most of them are already practicing a level of regenerative farming without knowing it. I was therefore especially interested to attend a talk about whether now is the right time to certify regenerative agriculture to potentially attract a premium from the consumer.

It was stimulating to be reminded that regenerative farming is an evolving field, with new research and insights emerging constantly. It would be unwise to fossilise it too soon, limiting its potential and opening the door to criticism. It's crucial to avoid prematurely imposing rigid standards that may not accurately capture the essence of regen farming.

By remaining flexible and receptive to new insights and research, we can adapt our practices to optimize benefits for farmers, consumers, and the environment.

Whilst certification can provide credibility and assurance to consumers, it is essential to strike a balance between accountability and allowing room for innovation and growth. Taking the time to gather a comprehensive understanding of regenerative farming practices may, in the future, enable us to create meaningful and effective certifications that truly capture the essence of sustainability. Several key decision makers from large supermarkets

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attended the event and I'm interested to know where they believe regenerative farming has a place on the shelf. Attending Groundswell 2023 provided invaluable knowledge, inspiration, and a

network of industry experts that will empower me to guide my clients towards whether regenerative farming practices, on whatever scale, is right for their business.



BECKS & GAVIN LONSDALE (2023)



What an inspirational two days. The atmosphere was one of sharing theoretical and practical knowledge, including things that have been tried and not gone so well, which is what made it so useful and enjoyable.

There were around 6,500 people there and lectures simultaneously running in about seven different locations, making it incredibly hard to choose where to be, with chats at stalls and discussions over a beer. I was slightly worried the event would be too focused on arable but there was plenty to get stuck into regarding grazing and loads of soil biology-related lectures applicable to both.

One of the speakers, Anne Biklé, eloquently explained that the understandable and relentless focus on yield (to prevent famine) has come at the cost of nutrient density, leading to a whole host of problems for plant, animal and human health. The soil is effectively being “mined” for goodness by conventional farming without consideration of the 500-1,000 years it takes to replenish.

Plants have co-evolved with the microorganisms in the soil. In natural systems, the plants photosynthesize then push out exudates which feed trillions of microbes. The rhizosphere – a sort of “halo” around plant roots – is the most life-dense location on the planet, with vast numbers of microbes working in partnership with the plant in exchange for these exudates.

“Fetching-fungi” hyphae reach out huge distances (way, way further than the roots could ever reach) to find and retrieve nutrients, acting as a hardware store for the plant. It is a textbook symbiotic relationship. The microbes also produce compounds that stimulate hormones, secondary metabolites and the immune system of the plant... but only if we farm in ways that let this “biological bazaar” function, rather than render it redundant.

This is where regenerative principles come in – minimizing chemical and physical disturbance, keeping the soil always covered, integrating animals etc. Regenerative farming is a set of general principles, not an exact recipe, and looks different everywhere.

Discovering new techniques, methods and attitudes that might work in your environment is the exciting thing about Groundswell. For us, this incorporated Grazing Management, How to Monitor It, Bale Grazing and Functional Fertility in Grass-Fed Cattle.

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There appeared to be some concern at Groundswell that regenerative farming is being colonised by corporations and a prescriptive, conventional-style mindset; there were discussions about whether it should be officially certified to avoid the language just being used for “greenwashing.”

However, farmers and landowners are a particularly curious, practical and intelligent set of people with a huge incentive to get

their soil management right, so we should trust them more! Seeing and being part of the enthusiasm and interest there is for regenerative farming at Groundswell was a very uplifting experience.

We will be making a number of changes to how we farm as a result of our visit and would like to thank Future Farmers of Yorkshire for the opportunity to attend via their bursary scheme.



ROB HENLEY (2023)



Groundswell, an agricultural event like no other! For a couple of nights before the event I tried to plan my diary to maximise attending what I thought I would be most interested in, what would give me best value for my time in Hertfordshire. I think I had about a 50% success rate with that plan. The last-minute decisions on which seminars to attend and which to miss certainly weren't easy ones.

Joel Williams featured heavily in my agenda for the first day. In Spring this year, I signed up to his online course to learn about using Foliar Nitrogen and the efficiencies and saving it would bring, and it did!

So here at Groundswell, I wanted to hear more of what he had to offer, starting in the morning with a basic principles seminar, I felt it

was a nice steady one to ease myself into the feel of the event, just to remind myself that the basic principles I am adopting on my farm at home, and align with what others are trying to achieve as well.

In the afternoon he kicked it up a notch or two and Integrated Pest and Disease management was the topic. This looked at how growing crops is about balance. If your cash crop has a nutrient imbalance, then it leaves it vulnerable to pest and disease. If it is vulnerable to these pressures, then you have to spend money fixing it with fungicides.

Discussing companion cropping and the benefits to soil health against pest and disease also featured in this seminar and again at a panel discussion on the second day: a very interesting topic that I'm yet to delve deeper into yet. The new SFI scheme looks to offer financial reward in this area, and I can see it becoming more commonplace for both reasons.

[At the Future Farmers Spring Debate, regenerative farming was the hot topic.](#) The take home message for many was that regenerative

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farming isn't binary. There isn't a tipping point of yes or no. There is something for everyone at all stages.

At Groundswell there was something for everyone, okay... there wasn't a stand selling shiny new ploughs but apart from that there was something for everyone.

The way I've described the event to people since attending is that there are a lot of speakers there willing to share their experiences and theories, what worked for them and what didn't work. In some cases, what they're going to try next but at no point did anyone tell you that you were wrong or you're doing it wrong. The information was there for you to draw your own conclusions. No-one I spoke to was trying to give the hard sell. It was a fantastic, relaxed atmosphere to discuss, share and learn.

Back in Spring, following Joel's online course, I threw myself into this way of farming. The direct drill came two years previous, but only

this year I really dug in and started to see what could be done with all these expensive inputs... or what I could achieve without them! Attending Groundswell and listening to various speakers affirmed that I was doing the right thing and others are too.

Whilst I didn't get everything right this year, combining that one belting crop of wheat had me beaming from ear to ear knowing that I had halved my fertiliser input and only used one precautionary fungicide with no detrimental effect on yield. Groundswell has spurred on my drive to farm this way. If I can save money and help the environment at the same time, it's a win-win all round.

I would like to say thank you to the Future Farmers of Yorkshire for this wonderful opportunity and I urge anyone who is interested in applying for one of their bursaries to do so. They really do want to help get members to the events that matter to them.



SHAUN ROBERTSON (2023)



Thanks to the Future Farmers of Yorkshire, I had the chance to attend Groundswell, at Lannock Manor Farm in Hertfordshire.

I'm from a non-farming background and started my working life in scientific research. Looking for a change of path, I was fortunate to move into the world of agriculture.

I now work on an arable farm in North Yorkshire, doing everything from organising and planning in the office to sitting on the tractor seat.

I was excited to have the chance to attend Groundswell and see what all the fuss was about, and hopefully return with new ideas and approaches that could influence what we do. My arrival on site showed this was unlike any agricultural event I'd been to before; an incredibly friendly atmosphere, an interesting selection of stands and schedule of talks, and a great selection of food and drink.

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My first port of call was a talk on First Principles of Regenerative Agriculture. This featured a soil biologist, an agronomist and a farmer, giving a fascinating insight in to the main principles underlying regen agriculture, and why they are worth thinking about. I then had a walk around the site, getting a true idea of the scale of the event.

It was good to see such a wide variety of companies and to have the chance to talk to a diverse range of people about a huge array of topics – some closely related to what we do, others completely out of my comfort zone.

Next, I attended a session by Joel Williams on integrated pest and disease management. This shifted the focus of crop production from what chemicals to apply to combat a specific problem, to thinking about optimising the whole environment so we can grow healthy crops with less inputs.

The talk also made me consider diversity on the farm at different scales. We have a diverse set of habitats around our fields, we have temporal diversity of crops by using crop rotation, and we have spatial diversity across the farm by growing multiple crops. What we currently lack is diversity within a field. This can be achieved through companion crops or intercropping, or through genetic diversity of a single crop. We are going to try this on our farm this year.

Day two began with a coffee and a talk on compost. This was an interesting session with lots of ideas on ways to make compost, how to use and why it can be so good. We have a ready supply of muck on our farm which currently gets spread straight onto our fields, but composting could provide us with an opportunity to create a product which will improve our soil and provide a much more controlled release of nutrients to the crop. Any approach which allows us to save on applications of artificial fertiliser and improve our soils is worth considering, and this is something I hope to look in to more in the coming months.

There were a wide range of talks available and it was difficult to decide where to go, but some of the most interesting points came from talks that weren't necessarily in my immediate area of interest. It certainly paid to branch out across the whole site.

One of the main themes running through the event was the way in which speakers were willing to talk about things that didn't work as well as those that did. This certainly made a refreshing change and gave me encouragement to come back and give some new things a try. I would encourage others to attend Groundswell if they have the chance, it's already top of my list of events to go back to next year.

I've come back with new ideas and enthusiasm for what we do, and it's given me new motivation to continue to learn and improve in the coming years.



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TOM COAST-BROWN (2022)



Firstly, thank you to Future Farmers for this opportunity. I'm not sure on the definition of regenerative agriculture, even after attending Groundswell, and attending has probably created even more questions in my head than answered!

I'm not sure labelling it is even the correct way to describe it, as everyone seems to have a slightly different interpretation. Is it even something new? Looking after soil is something we should all strive to do regardless of how we choose to farm. Maybe we are already being trendy having stock grazing grass for extended periods, trying to increase organic matters with compost, diverse swards, low machinery costs and investing in animals.

Interestingly, the diverse swards store more carbon a hectare which could be a hidden incentive for the latest Sustainable Farming Incentive schemes. We are using them more and more because of the lack of rain we get in the summer which was also apparent at the Groundswell site!

The Yeo Valley regenerative project was probably the best break-out talk for me. It highlighted that you need to know where you're starting from. Many people start changing things but because they didn't measure at the start, it's very hard to quantify. For several

other speakers, a big focus was worm populations and soil structures.

Greg Judy, a pretty extreme grazing farmer from Missouri, highlighted a few things: use the animal that suits your system, it's already on your farm performing in your circumstances. Probably the best quote of the two days was, "better to do nothing and make nothing, than do something and make nothing". Greg was very successful at what he did and wasn't a fan of USDA beef, not believing in growth hormones being used. He created a high nutritional value product (100% grass fed beef) but he had to market it. There's no point in just sending it to market. You need to realise its value.

Other talks included trying to market regenerative produce, all of course for a fee. Jill Clapperton showed an interesting rainfall infiltration demo, which made me realise I should be grateful for my grass over winter and how it holds nutrients over winter rather than exposed soils, which wash down the stream when it rains.

One of the last talks, and another topic through a few other presentations, was about whether it made financial sense. It seemed to return less profit per ha, but should we be accepting a yield loss? After all, we are meant to be improving our soils, which in theory should be more productive! I think it's very difficult to quantify and going to the maximum isn't always best. Running a business that is profitable 10/10 years, to me, is better than one only managing to do it 7/10. It was also interesting to see many banks and consultancy firms in attendance at Groundswell.



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JAMES JOHNSON (2021)



Since I came back from Harper Adams University, my father and I have been farming in a way that is probably seen as intensive agriculture, following the typical route of heavy cultivations, artificial fertilisers and high chemical inputs,

something that we had both been taught to do.

However, even after following what we have been taught to produce our food, we have slowly been left with wheat yields that are stagnant if not decreasing compared to 20 years ago, grass land needing huge amounts of fertiliser to feed our cattle and the climate changing in a way that's making working windows smaller and smaller.

Our soils are getting less and less resilient to change in our climate and over the last few years I've really started to question why are we doing this and is this the only way we can produce food? Is this the only way we can farm?

Over the COVID-19 outbreak, and the loss of my social life, it gave me time to really start to research. I came across Gabe Brown a rancher in America who focused purely on soil health and diversity. After watching many YouTube videos and reading his book 'Dirt to Soil', the questions in my head were starting to be answered and

new ones forming. This was America however, does this happen in the UK?

Groundswell gave me the opportunity to experience the idea of regenerative agriculture first-hand, being able to go to lectures from forward-thinking farmers who have been toying with reduced inputs and building natural fertility for 20 years - farmers such as Tim Parton; the first lecture I went to, and it was mind blowing. It looked at plant leaf pH to determine if it's more susceptible to pest or disease attack before it's even occurred and being able to put that right before any damage had taken place.

Talks on carbon credits and how they may be used in the future was also intriguing, very much in the early stages, but could definitely be a welcome income stream in the days after BPS, that is if their calculations are correct.

There was a fantastic showing of machinery too, but I'm not going to lie, I spent my time looking at cover crop mixes, compost demonstrations, lectures and talking to other farmers; gaining as much knowledge as I could to bring home to the farm.

The only thing coming from a mixed farmer is that the show was very much arable focused. Apart from the mob grazing on herbal lays demonstration, which was very interesting, as this is something we had toyed with the idea at home but had never seen it. Safe to say we are putting some in next year! Hopefully in time they will develop a grasslands part to the show.

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What separates Groundswell from other shows is the ability to be able to network. During the day or at the bar in the evening, everyone is willing to chat about their journey, their mistakes, their success and any advice they may share. There's no blueprint of 200kg/acre N fertiliser or T1,T2 chemical sprays, everyone's farm is different, and that's what makes it so interesting.

Groundswell has definitely helped me on my journey of regenerative agriculture, fuelling my passion in soil health and diversity and which in turn will help my father and I drive our farming business forward and make it more resilient to future change.

Thanks again to Future Farmers of Yorkshire and YAS for giving me this fantastic opportunity!



BEATRICE GUTHRIE (2021)



I arrived at Groundswell at 9 o'clock on the Wednesday morning. It was a gorgeous sunny day and the grounds were buzzing with people. With a rumbling stomach, my first point of call was the food stands. There was a great selection to choose between, from curries to wagyu burgers to wood fired pizzas.

Out of the seven talks I listened to over the two-day event, my first was the panel which discussed whether fungicides have a place in regenerative agriculture. All the speakers agreed that the usual timings of applications that farmers have been using for years, (T0, T1, T2...) are likely going to change.

The key agronomic activities that farmers will have to adopt to reduce fungicide inputs include selecting varieties for high disease resistance and implementing longer crop rotation to reduce disease inoculum.

More farmers will be likely to adopt new technologies like weather stations with disease modelling to help plan fungicide timings and rates. Their research highlighted that the use of multiple species intercropping (e.g. beans with oats) can reduce disease pressure on various trial plots. They concluded that fungicides should be used as a last resort rather than a pre-planned routine.

This may be tricky as most farmers use fungicides at specific timings to prevent disease from travelling up the crop. Using fungicides as a last resort would mean that they will have to solely use eradicant fungicides which are less effective and are limited to a small number of products.

Another very interesting talk was discussing the future of agronomy. It's evident that agronomy is going to change due to the termination

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of the BPS and the introduction of the new ELM scheme. They said that the use of technology and AI will play a big part in an agronomist's job. Agronomists may also have to advise farmers to achieve higher profit margins instead of higher yield. This will mean that agronomists will need to access farms' financial accounts (such as labour and machinery costs) on top of their traditional agronomic methods.

This higher workload could mean that the farmer may need more than one agronomist which will specialise in each individual aspect of the role. Maybe the farmer will have to take on the agronomy themselves and employ a consultant for financial and environmental scheme advice. It was a very thought-provoking talk and it will be exciting to see what will happen.

My favourite talk was given by David Purdy and Philip Wright which was about how soil structure is affected and developed through

plants and biology working together. They went on to say that high intensity cultivation (e.g. ploughing) has been shown to reduce the biology and worm numbers in the soil over time.

Having a higher worm number has shown to increase infiltration rates and improve soil structure which will benefit the farmer. Machinery weight and tyre pressure has a huge impact on soil structure and they recommended farmers to try and adopt controlled traffic farming (CTF) and to reduce tyre pressures to help to alleviate soil compaction and improve drainage.

I thoroughly enjoyed Groundswell and would like to thank Future Farmers and YAS for the bursary opportunity; it's an amazing event providing an insight into what agriculture will look like in the future. Bring on Groundswell 2022!

