

Testimonials – Groundswell

TOM WILLIS (2025)

I had wanted to attend Groundswell Agriculture for a while and it certainly didn't disappoint. From the moment of arrival, the atmosphere was amazing with so much positivity flowing around the event.

I saw a variety of presentations and discussions and particular highlights were Prince William's surprise unbilled speech and it was so encouraging to hear him recognise how much is demanded of farmers and how farmers can't be expected to do it alone. He is a wholehearted supporter of regenerative practices and the audience really appreciated hearing about his support.

This was in warm up for Gabe Brown, who as one of the founders of the regenerative movement, did not disappoint with his speech, about his journey beginning back in 1994 on his own ranch and those farms that he had encountered over the years, full of useful information, anecdotes and insights. Of particular interest to me was how quickly he was able to make an incredible change to his soils, in some cases within just a year with some stark images to support this.

The amount of kit, trials and demonstrations you could see was huge. Composting manure is something I have become interested in and Groundswell was absolutely the place to look into this further with a windrow turning demonstration, windrow turner for sale and a company specialising in the Japanese bokashi process for retaining more nutrients when fermenting manure.

I came away with a range of contacts, a lot more understanding and a very cool Make Agriculture Great Again hat!

When I applied for the bursary, I mentioned we were struggling with our strip till drill of late with grass weeds and it was great to meet others who had encountered similar issues and to discuss possible solutions, both with experts on their stands and fellow attendees. One of the unique aspects of the festival was that the number of conversations with all kinds of people that you had which was so rewarding.

There was so much more to the festival than just the stands, the big top tents and marquees. There was also a great range of food and drink options, many of them run by people using produce from their own farms with a large seating area of tables and benches where you could sit and enjoy your meal with fellow attendees. The Earthworm Bar and a couple of local cider vans provided the drinks. To close off the first night, Wildfarmed co-founder and regenerative farmer Andy Cato of Groove Armada fame provided the entertainment with an entertaining DJ set, which went down very well with the crowd.

It's certainly an event I will be attending again and I'd recommend it to anyone with an interest in any regenerative practices. It very much caters for all whatever level of interest or adoption you may have.



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ANGELA KIRKWOOD (2025)



I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Future Farmers of Yorkshire for financially supporting my attendance at the Groundswell Regenerative Agriculture Event. This experience has been both invaluable and insightful, certainly a refreshing and thought-provoking few days away from everyday farm life in East Yorkshire.

It was a pleasure to meet the other Yorkshire bursary recipients, each of whom was just as enthusiastic and engaged with the event. They are a real credit to the Yorkshire Agricultural Society, which continues to do an excellent job in identifying and supporting outstanding ambassadors for the sector and region.

On the first day, I'll admit to feeling overwhelmed and out of my depth. As a commercial livestock farmer, I was initially concerned that my conventional farming methods might not be well received. However, I approached the event with an open mind and a willingness to learn, which proved to be the right mindset. By the second day, I felt much more settled, relaxed, and able to fully absorb the wealth of knowledge on offer.

The show itself has a vibrant, festival-like atmosphere, with circus and safari-style tents scattered across the site. These host a wide array of speakers throughout the day, allowing attendees to dip in and out of sessions as they wish. The range and quality of

presentations were impressive – and having Prince William stroll past me at one point was a reminder that I was in very good company!

One of the more unexpected highlights was the emphasis on food production and conscious consumption. Retailers shared engaging stories about their produce, from pasture-fed beef to rye whiskey grown by trusted farmers who were paid a fair price. Whilst I remain cautious of potential for greenwashing and over-embellishment, the storytelling itself offered valuable lessons.

An enlightening evening dinner discussion explored the concept of 'gut health' in soil, particularly in relation to prebiotics – a topic I discussed in detail with the producer of Clarkson's Farm. While gut health is something I regularly consider in relation to livestock, I had not previously drawn parallels with the soil microbiome. It's a concept I expect will gain further traction as research progresses.

Another key discussion came from Tim Lang of the National Preparedness Commission, who addressed the threat of food weaponisation and its implications for national security. His talk raised serious questions about the UK's ability to maintain food resilience during times of global unrest. It offered some valuable ideas to consider when engaging with MPs on the importance of safeguarding our domestic food supply, particularly as we grow more reliant on imports and just-in-time logistics.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and its encouragement of local food in schools was another subject close to my heart. I asked how school climate menus might be made more holistic – factoring in food waste, local sourcing, and seasonality. Disappointingly, it

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seems many other school food suppliers share similar frustrations around implementation.

Finally, a session with Steve Reed, Defra's Secretary of State, proved robust yet ultimately disappointing. Despite skilled moderation by Farmers Weekly editor Andrew Meredith, Reed failed to offer a clear definition of 'food security' or any strong commitment to supporting British food production.

The big top was bursting at the seams as prominent American Regenerative Farmer Gabe Brown took to the stage and discussed the interaction between farmers and retailers and importance of resilient supply chains, his no-nonsense approach was appreciated by all in the room.

This was a fascinating few days and offer my sincere thanks to the Future Farmers of Yorkshire for this invaluable experience.

ADAM HAYWARD (2025)

Having never attending the event before and having heard that it was a different agricultural show, I was unsure what to expect from my visit to Groundswell. But when I arrived it has such a different feel to other events.

It was well organised and easy to navigate. The line-up of speakers, seminars and live demos was extensive and difficult to pick one as there is quite a few going at the same time.

It's a great opportunity to catch up with friends that also work within the industry and the networking between likeminded individuals. It is hard to find anywhere else on this level especially on this topic.

Some of the seminars I attended were 'Does the agriculture input sector have a role in regen ag?' And 'Breaking free: can farming ever escape its glyphosate dependency'. It was interesting to hear the panels' thoughts on the topics but also the audiences', there is lots

of opportunity to ask questions and see everyone's take on the topics.

I will definitely be attending Groundswell again and after seeing the camping and glamping facilities I think that would add to the experience.



Thank you very much to the Yorkshire Agricultural Society for giving me the opportunity to attend Groundswell and although I am not quickly switching to a full regen operation, it has definitely got me thinking about the future and was such a good event to see a wider prospective of the view of regenerative agriculture. There is not a simple solution to this topic, and I feel it's lots of small changes and attention to detail that can make a difference. One big change would put too much strain on a business.

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ANTONIA RAMSDEN (2025)



I was lucky enough to obtain a bursary place funded by the Future Farmers of Yorkshire to attend Groundswell 2025. The festival is held over two days in the heart of Hertfordshire and is known as the “Farmer’s Glastonbury”.

After two uplifting, positive and inspiring days I could completely understand why it is known as that. The festival was not only attended by thousands of farmers, advisers and researchers alike, but there were many guest speakers that showed what an important date Groundswell now is in the farmer’s diary.

Their main guests this year was Gabe Brown, author of ‘Dirt to Soil’ and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. The festival quite fittingly began with these two most high-profile guests speaking in the ‘Big Top’ tent.

The Prince of Wales spoke about how “regenerative agriculture should be the foundation stone of British agriculture to help us rebuild the health of our nation” and then Gabe Brown took to the stage to give a background to his journey into regenerative agriculture and how, after 20 years of practicing it, his farm has transformed into not only a haven for biodiversity but also a productive farm for food.

The programme at Groundswell is absolutely jam-packed with talks, demonstrations and seminars from morning to night and so it is

impossible to see it all. You can tailor your experience to what best suits your objectives, farm practices or interests.

For me, I went down to Groundswell to try and further my understanding of practical implementation of regenerative agriculture on our farm north of York. I have followed the movement away from conventional farming to regenerative farming for many years now but putting into practice has been challenging. I was really keen therefore to make some contacts, both farmers and advisers.

I write below what I feel I came away from Groundswell having learnt. Key takeaways from the two-day festival:

1. It doesn’t matter what your neighbour is doing, regenerative agriculture needs to work with your business, your soil types and your rotations. For quite a few years now there have 5 principles of regenerative agriculture (diversity, livestock integration, protect soil surface, minimise soil disturbance and maintain living roots). Thankfully, this year, a new one was added and that is context.

Context of the farm is hugely important to how you put regenerative agriculture into practice on your farm and I was so glad to see this 6th principle added. For years I have felt like I was getting it wrong, but the soil on our farm, being very sandy, means it is very difficult to build up organic matter.

After listening to a really interesting talk in the Agricolology tent on experimenting with living mulches, I had a really informative discussion with the farmer who had undertaken the experiment. He farms a very similar rotation on very similar soils down in Norfolk and

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it was uplifting to hear that he encounters the same issues as we do on our farm.

2. There is lots of help out there. I have felt quite isolated when implementing regen agriculture on our farm but the hundreds of stands at Groundswell are all there to help you along the way. I was able to speak to organisations like the NFFN (Nature Friendly Farming Network) and BASE that run on-farm seminar days and webinars. I also entered the 'Understanding Ag' tent who were so informative and helpful.

They not only put me in touch with one of their members who is local to me, but also after a long discussion over my objectives on the farm sent me to the next door stand who are going to help me with soil carbon baselining and soil health in order to hopefully bring in an extra income stream to the farm through carbon credits.

The two days at Groundswell were invaluable to my continuing development in regenerative agriculture but also for me to gain contacts who, going forward, will be able to support and advise me.

The last two years has shown not only how varied the seasons and weather we get in the UK is and therefore how crucial regenerative agriculture is to successfully farming in challenging and extreme weather conditions.

Finally, I want to thank the Yorkshire Agricultural Society and the Future Farmers of Yorkshire for the opportunity to attend Groundswell. I thoroughly enjoyed it and feel I got a huge amount out of attending both in terms of educational content but also building my contacts and network.

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SILVIE RACKHAM (2024)



Groundswell was described to me as a ‘melting pot of regenerative agriculture’. What is regenerative agriculture? Regenerative means ‘to cause something to heal or become active again after it has been damaged or inactive’. Thus, regenerative agriculture acknowledges that the land has been damaged and needs healing.

We know this to be true: soils are degraded, biodiversity is at an all-time low, our waterways are polluted, and the nutritional content of our food is diminishing. We need to rethink how we farm and produce food.

In late June, I, a grower at Northern Roots – a new urban farm in Oldham – joined 8,000 people at Groundswell. Over two sunny days, we came seeking inspiration and practical ways to implement the principles of regenerative agriculture.

Soil health was a major focus at the festival because it is at the heart of regenerative agriculture. The aim is to restore degraded soils into healthy "living soils".

I stumbled upon the Soil Medic Tent, where Thomas from Old Tree Soil discussed the mycelium-inspired network they have created, allowing people to share ideas and knowledge to spark a composting revolution. It's a no-brainer: food waste is transformed into quality

compost to help rejuvenate the soil, with each composting hub directly feeding local land regeneration projects. At Northern Roots, the urban farm's soil has a rich, complex industrial past, and in the next few years, we hope to bring it back to life. We are making our own compost, growing green manures, and looking at other ways to further build organic matter in our soil. Old Tree Soil has a YouTube channel with lots more information on this that I'm going to delve into.

The Soil Medic Tent was a hive of activity, with people looking through microscopes, exploring bokashi and biochar, and discussing brewing tonics to feed microbes. I found it interesting how the language used for soil health overlaps with that of gut health, such as tonics, diverse diets/crops, and fermentation. It makes sense since both are complex biomes and got me thinking about food produced in healthy living soil and the impact of that on human gut health. In an earlier talk, "Regenerating the Human and the Interface between Food, Farming, and Medicine," Dr Jenny Newman discussed the connection between what's in the soil and our health and shed some light on how changing farming practices could help reverse our increasing incidence of chronic, degenerative diseases.

I went to Groundswell for inspiration and practical ways to implement the principles of regenerative agriculture, I came away with a head full of ideas and lots of energy for Northern Roots. I heard someone say, "The old system doesn't work, it doesn't need tweaking; we need a new system" Could Regenerative Agriculture be the new system? It's a step in the right direction for sure and I left the festival feeling hopeful.

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JEFF LILL (2024)



What is Groundswell? You could describe it as a two-day regenerative agriculture festival based at Lannock Manor Farm in Hertfordshire offering a huge range of talks, activities and demonstrations from hundreds of experts and exhibitors. However, I think it could be best described as a meeting of enthusiastic people who are interested in thinking about how they farm their land.

Certainly, some of those attending were further along their journey of regenerative farming than others, but everyone I spoke to was open minded, enthusiastic and willing to learn. My guess is that everyone attending had a busy schedule (on and off farm), however, they put two days aside to reflect on how they would farm in the future.

The number and range of speakers at Groundswell was vast, regardless of your area of interest in the agricultural industry, there was someone relevant to your specialism. However, I deliberately attended a few talks that involved different areas of the industry. For example, I found a presentation by representatives of the

abattoir industry fascinating. They detailed their challenges and how they hoped that changes would be made to the legislative burden that had been imposed upon them. I was left with an overwhelming impression that these were sensible people, talking common sense and that they needed to be listened to., I also attended a talk from representatives of British flower growers, Very different topics (from the abattoir session) were discussed but there was a common theme of enthusiasm for their chosen area and the desire to ensure that their businesses delivered high quality products for the public, whilst also operating a sustainable (both financially and environmentally) business model.

I was fortunate enough to meet up with my fellow bursary winners at Groundswell and it was interesting to compare our experiences and different interests. We all had a different perspective on the agricultural industry but that brought huge benefits as we discussed a number of issues. My own view is that the broader understanding that you have of the industry the better. You can never have too much knowledge or experience!

I would like to say thank you to the Future Farmers of Yorkshire for this opportunity and I urge anyone who is interested (and those that are a little sceptical about the 'regenerative farming' label) to apply for one of the bursaries to do so.

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ANNA PENNELL (2024)



Earlier in the summer, I was awarded a bursary place at Groundswell 2024. It was an incredible experience and thank you to the Yorkshire Agricultural Society and Future Farmers of Yorkshire for giving me the opportunity.

The Groundswell festival in Hertfordshire provides a forum for farmers, growers, or anyone interested in food production and the environment to learn about the theory and practical applications of regenerative farming systems. It has been on my radar for a few years, but it exceeded all my expectations.

The whole event has a real festival of farming feel about it, the fundamental attitude was so incredibly positive. As one of the many interesting speakers said, Groundswell is about the positive of farming and meeting any problems with solutions, it is not about moaning!

Coming from a 'wool' background, I tried to mix up my experience by both attending some of the more wool and fibre-based talks as well as just expanding my farming knowledge and experience.

I hit the ground running with an interesting talk on the 'Future of small abattoirs and local meat'. It was interesting to hear about a model being practised in the South West using a cooperative mobile abattoir system that toured various 'hubs' and how they intend to expand this over time. As someone who is a frequent user of my

brilliant local small abattoir for direct-to-consumer meat box sales, the risk of losing it to increasing red-tape and legislation is a real concern, so it was great to hear different approaches as well as some of the incentives from DEFRA to help smaller abattoirs.

Another real highlight of my first day was to listen to Canadian speaker Odette Menard on CROP concept and soil compaction. She was a super engaging and interesting speaker who really helped to focus the mind on the four components – cover, roots, oxygen, porosity – that work together to make a healthy soil. I was also fortunate to catch her speaking the next day on the very clever Rainfall simulator showing the benefit of various ground covers both in terms of rainfall run-off as well as nutrient leaching.

One of the key things that I found about Groundswell is the number of farmers there that were talking about their own experiences. They could tell us what had worked and what had not in their own farms and real situations, and I found this invaluable.

One of my favourite talks from the second day was held by LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) on 'How do we inspire the next generation of sustainable food producers?' It was so good to hear from both young people alongside farmers already effectively engaging with the next generation mostly working with LEAF. This is something I feel very enthusiastic about and I think one of the most valuable things to come out of the two days at Groundswell was a plan and the contacts to help me move forward with this on my farm.

I came away from a brilliant two days absolutely inspired, with a hundred more questions about my farming journey than I went with, but also a book full of the contacts of helpful people who want to see

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our farming industry succeed and are so enthusiastic about what they do. Thank you once again to Future Farmers for giving me the bursary to attend, I would really recommend it to anyone interested in the future of agriculture, whatever sector that might be in.

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

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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 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

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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.

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,

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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 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.



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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.

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

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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.



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.

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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.



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

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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.

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 whiling 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.

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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 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!

