

Farming and hedgerows: stretching the boundaries

November 2022





Foreword



Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, farmer, Devon

My farm is on the Devon Cornwall border, two counties particularly well known for narrow lanes and high hedgerows. While this may be unnerving for visiting drivers, we know that those hedgerows are nature's treasure trove. Hedgerows are one of the greatest pleasures of living in the countryside and need to be nurtured.

At whatever point you meet a hedgerow, whatever time of year, it has something completely different to offer – whether that's the abundance of plant life, insects, birds or other wildlife, big and small. All co-exist in total harmony and while, to the onlooker, a hedgerow may look like an impenetrable network of plant life and foliage, wildlife navigates it with ease. It provides a year-round habitat for nesting or hibernation and a ready supply of food, including plentiful amounts of blackberries – a particular favourite of mine – as well as much needed shade and shelter for livestock.

Of course, historically hedgerows were planted as a barrier or to mark a boundary between parcels of land or neighbouring properties, but they are so much more. Sensitively managed, they are multifunctional and, for me, add to the beauty of the countryside. We all need to find ways to protect nature and the environment as we face the effects of climate change, and if increasing the extent of UK hedgerows by 40% by 2050 can be part of that change, it certainly has my vote and support.

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Executive summary

Hedgerows have been a defining feature of the countryside for over 1,000 years. They bring landscapes to life with beauty and character and provide tangible signs of the changing seasons, while giving a strong sense of continuity. For farming, hedgerows have long provided a stock-proof barrier but also forage, shelter and shade for animals, habitat for pollinators and pest predators and firewood too. Hedgerows provide a wealth of other benefits: connecting habitats and providing pathways, shelter and sustenance for wildlife, while protecting the soil, cleaning the air and absorbing carbon emissions.

Across the country, however, many hedgerows are in a poor condition and require active management to thrive. Around 70% of UK land cover is agricultural, which means there is huge scope for farmers and land managers to plant and restore hedgerows. But we need a better understanding of their attitudes towards hedgerows and the benefits of, and barriers to, hedgerow planting and restoration on farms.

To that end, CPRE, the countryside charity, commissioned a survey of farmers to gather information on their views on hedgerows and how they manage hedgerows on their farms. With the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs) in development, it is a crucial time for hedgerows and their role in supporting food production, reversing the decline of nature and delivering net zero. We therefore need to ensure farmers and land managers are properly incentivised to enhance hedgerow networks through well-designed and accessible agri-environment payment schemes, and that hedgerows are recognised as an essential part of both the continuity and transformation of British farming.

Key findings

Importance of hedgerows

86% of farmers surveyed believe hedgerows are important to them and their business.

CPRE's hedgerow expansion target

82% of farmers surveyed support CPRE's campaign for a target to increase hedgerows by 40% by 2050, if the target is properly funded through ELMs or other government policies.

Benefits of hedgerows

86% of farmers surveyed see wildlife habitat/nature corridors as the top benefit of having hedgerows, with 64% seeing shelter for crops or livestock as the second top benefit.

Barriers to planting hedgerows

94% of respondents have experienced barriers to planting hedgerows, with the top two barriers being lack of resource (time/money) and the nature of government support.

Government schemes

70% of respondents would be encouraged to plant more hedgerows with government incentives and 54% would plant more with simple, accessible schemes.

New hedgerow planting

59% of respondents have planted hedgerows in the last ten years and are likely to plant more in the next five years.

Recommendations

Most respondents to the survey were farmers based in England, although valuable responses were also received from farmers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Apart from the first recommendation below, which relates to national climate change policy, recommendations made here reflect CPRE's charitable focus on England and policy which applies to England only. Agriculture is a devolved area of policy so different legislation, farm payment and agri-environment schemes apply across the other UK nations.



The government should:

- 1 Set a national target to increase the hedgerow network by 40% by 2050, as recommended by the UK Climate Change Committee. In England, this should be taken forward through government policy development, including in the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan (also known as the 25-Year Environment Plan) and subsequent reviews.
- 2 Design and resource ELMs to deliver a healthy expanded hedgerow network ensuring that it provides an accessible entry level hedgerow offer with widespread take-up, a clear pathway to more ambitious packages, and access to advice and training for hedgerow management.
- 3 Increase capital funding for hedgerow planting and restoration at farm and landscape scale.
- 4 Explore the potential for sources of private funding schemes to support a major hedgerow planting and restoration programme.
- 5 Pursue further research in partnership with CPRE on hedgerows to build on findings in this report and continue to develop evidence-based best practice.

Local authorities should:

- 6 Fully engage with farmers in their area as key stakeholders in the development of their Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- 7 Develop packages of blended public/private funding to channel new income options to farmers for hedgerow planting and restoration and complement funding available through agri-environment schemes.
- 8 Facilitate a programme of partnership-working between farmers and environmental/volunteer groups to help plant and restore hedgerow networks in their local community.

About the survey

In July 2022, Farmers Weekly conducted a survey of farmers and their hedgerows on behalf of CPRE. A total of 1,160 respondents answered questions on different aspects of hedgerow planting and management on farms.

Respondents were

- 76% farm owners
- 14% tenant farmers
- 4% both farm managers and workers
- 2% agricultural workers

Of these respondents

- 22% owned small farms (less than 20ha)
- 58% owned medium farms (20-199ha)
- 19% owned large farms (200ha and over)

Respondent enterprise types included

- 50% sheep
- 47% beef
- 47% cereals
- 15% oilseed rape
- 14% forestry
- 13% dairy
- 12% renewables
- 10% pulses and poultry

In all

22% of respondents were from the South West, 21% from northern regions (North West, North East, and Yorkshire and Humberside), 19% from eastern regions (East Anglia and South East) and 17% from the Midlands.
A total of 11% of respondents were from Wales, 6% from Scotland, and 4% from Northern Ireland.



Introduction

Hedgerows and the agri-environment

Hedgerows are an intrinsic part of our landscape. Steeped in history, they give a strong sense of continuity but also show signs of the changing seasons. Hedgerows provide a range of important public and private environmental services: habitat for wildlife¹ and ecological connectivity^{2,3}, shelter for livestock⁴, flood and pest control^{5,6}, enhanced pollination^{7,8}, and for us, a sense of place. They also play a vital role in tackling climate breakdown through carbon capture and storage.⁹ The hedgerow network, in its expanse, is our largest 'nature reserve'.¹⁰

‘Shade, shelter for livestock, food for pollinators and birds, food for us, making the landscape look so much better. I can’t think why you wouldn’t want proper hedges!’

20+ha, South West



Sadly, its value to farming, nature and society has not always been well understood. More than half our hedgerows were lost following the Second World War.¹¹ In fact, from the 1960s farmers were encouraged with grants to remove hedges to support food production.¹² These grants continued when the UK entered Europe and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The development of packages of financial support for farmers in the late 1980s - designed to protect and improve landscape, habitats, biodiversity and heritage and now known collectively as 'agri-environment schemes' - marked a decisive change in policy.

From 1987 the Environmentally Sensitive Areas scheme (ESAs) and from 1991 Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) supported restoration and planting of new hedgerows at an average rate of over 1,000km a year. This work continued under the subsequent Environmental Stewardship (ES) scheme from 2005 with hedgerows a popular option and the new Countryside Stewardship (CS) from 2014. New Hedgerows Regulations in 1997 have also prevented removal of historically or ecologically important hedges, with the CAP also providing a valuable regulatory baseline including for protection of grass margins under hedges.

Despite decades of interventions many hedgerows are in a degraded state because of a lack of management. Planting rates under agri-environment schemes are currently far too low and slow to

restore hedgerow losses of the last century.¹³ This is a critical time for the future of our hedgerows. The new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes in England, based primarily on the principle of public money for public goods, will be vital for meeting targets to deliver net zero, reversing nature decline and supporting sustainable food production.

In order to achieve this ambition, ELM must have sufficient financial backing. Wildlife & Countryside Link (of which CPRE is a member) has called for the budget for farming to be maintained at £2.4bn as a minimum until the end of 2024, as promised in the 2019 Conservative manifesto. Beyond 2024 the government should obtain an independent and accurate picture of the scale of environmental and public access need that ELM has to meet. This is currently estimated to be around £1.7bn a year in England, based on existing pre-Brexit environmental objectives. Once the new environmental targets are accounted for, we expect an ELM budget of between £2.4-£3bn a year will be the minimum requirement.

Healthy, restored hedgerows have a central role to play. They are widespread across arable and pastoral farmland so ideal for engaging most farmers with ELM. They deliver multiple outcomes for nature and the farmed environment. They are a fundamental part of working with nature to contribute to, but not replace, what farmers do: growing food. For all these reasons replanting and restoring hedgerows should be at the heart of ELM.

CPRE and our work on hedgerows

We began our campaign for hedgerow protection in the 1970s and played an important role in securing the introduction of the Hedgerows Regulations in 1997. These new regulations afforded the first statutory protection for hedgerows. In June 2021 CPRE launched a campaign calling for 40% more hedgerows by 2050, in line with a recommendation from the Climate Change Committee. In September 2021 we backed up this call with our 'Hedge fund' report which demonstrated what 40% more hedgerows could deliver for climate, biodiversity and the economy¹⁴. As most of the nation's existing hedgerows are on farmland, the farming sector is key to realising this ambition.

In calling for 40% more hedgerows, CPRE wants to make sure we are campaigning with farmers, recognising the challenges they already face, and identifying what support they need to manage, plant and restore more hedgerows. With the government developing ELMs in place of direct payments to farmers, it is vital that it listens to the evidence and considers our recommendations on how support schemes can improve the future for hedgerows and farmers.

The farmers' hedgerow survey

In July 2022 CPRE, in partnership with Farmers Weekly, commissioned a survey to better understand farmers' attitudes towards hedgerows and the benefits of, and barriers to, hedgerow planting and restoration. A questionnaire with 26 questions was developed and 1,160 farmers responded to the survey. The resulting data was tested for significant differences (that is, that observed differences did not happen by chance) and that there were no external variables that affected the findings. Results highlighted common themes as well as significant differences in attitudes to hedgerows and approaches to hedgerow management. Respondents were asked to state, where possible, the type of farm enterprise and whether they were solely arable or livestock farms.

In this report, we explore key findings and put forward policy recommendations to ensure farmers are properly incentivised and supported to enhance hedgerows on farmland. Where highlighted in the data, we discuss regional differences in attitudes to planting hedgerows, different approaches to management and barriers or limitations farmers experience in accessing support for hedgerow planting. Our findings represent a broad cross-section of farmers from different regions, size and types of farm business, all engaged in managing their hedgerows. This has enabled us to make a set of policy recommendations informed by the wide range of issues and challenges that farmers face.



Case study

Angela and Adrian Hibberd, Dorset

Restoring neglected hedgerows

Angela and Adrian run a 110ha mixed family tenanted farm between the New Forest National Park and Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. When the family took over the farm 50 years ago, the hedgerows were in a neglected state. After work to restore and manage the hedgerows, all of their fields now have hedge boundaries. There are over 16km of hedges on the farm.

While restoring hedgerows, Adrian chose to leave some sapling trees in the hedges which have grown into mature trees. The farm was part of an earlier agri-environment scheme in 2000 which worked well, allowing the farm to change from corn to predominantly grass production. The scheme included hedge-laying and replanting to gap up the hedge lines. This previous work has left little space to plant more hedgerows but sympathetic management of these hedges remains a financial burden to the farm.

'We've always taken pride in our hedges and are trying to farm sustainably, make a living and enhance wildlife,' they say.

'There are lots of wild birds: sparrows, swallows, yellowhammers, red kites, goshawks, peregrine falcon and kestrels nesting. It's such an ancient landscape and we can trace some of the hedges back to the 1700s. The hedgerows are vital to the wildlife on the farm, connecting small coppices and spinneys and providing corridors for different bits for wildlife.'

Angela and Adrian's farm benefits from having hedgerows as they're good for cattle by providing wind breaks, shelter and shade. **'Having the hedges as stock-proof as possible is important to the way we farm,'** they explain. They maintain the stock-proof nature of their hedges by flail trimming the top, side and bottom of the hedges every year, creating thick hedgerows — some of the hedgerows on the farm are over three metres wide. Cutting the hedgerows begins in late September, giving the wildlife time to eat the berries but it's also practical management for the time and labour available.



Findings

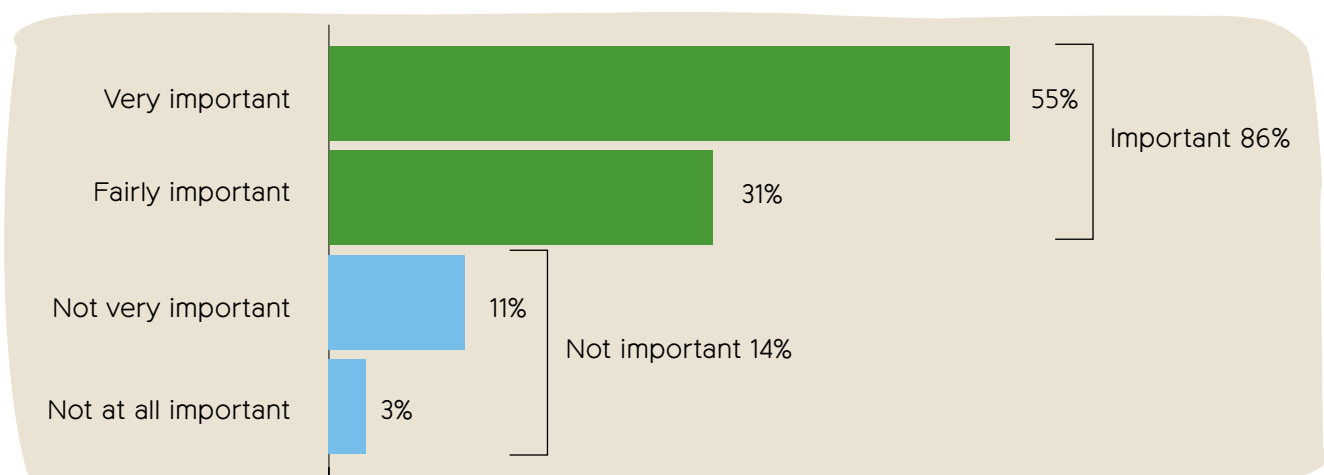
1. Farmer attitudes to hedgerows

The importance of hedgerows to farmers

Farmers believe hedgerows are important to them and their business, particularly those with small farms. If they have already planted hedgerows, they are likely to plant more in the future, illustrating ongoing support for the expansion of hedgerow networks. Not only are they supportive of more planting, they are actively planting hedgerows and strongly support the CPRE target to increase the hedgerow network by 40% by 2050.

- 86% of farmers in this survey believe hedgerows are important to them and their farm business (figure 1).
- 62% of farmers who felt hedgerows were very important had planted hedgerows on their farms in the last three years, with two thirds of those stating they are likely to plant more.
- 68% of respondents who had smaller farms (less than 20ha in size) believe hedgerows are very important, compared to 42% of larger farms (200+ha in size) who were less likely to find hedgerows very important.
- Farmers who had fruit (76%), poultry (73%) and sheep (61%) on their farms felt hedgerows were very important to their business.
- Hedgerows are very important to respondents who are solely livestock farmers (62%). This contrasts with arable farmers, who were less likely to view hedgerows as very important. This difference may be due to the reported benefits hedgerows provide as natural shelter and containment for livestock, with additional cost-savings on fencing, and despite evidence that hedgerows can enhance crop growth and water infiltration and reduce soil erosion in arable systems.¹⁵

Figure 1
How important hedgerows are to farmers and their business



How do farmers view new hedgerow planting?

There is significant support among the farming community for expanding the UK's hedgerow network, with an overwhelming majority of farmers highly supportive of CPRE's campaign for a target of 40% more hedgerows by 2050. Small farms and solely livestock farmers are particularly supportive of the target, though arable farmers are also demonstrably supportive. Farmers who support the expansion target also show continued enthusiasm for expanding their hedgerows if they have already planted: 89% of respondents who planted hedgerows in the last five years are likely to plant them again. However, farmers in the South West were less likely to plant more hedgerows, with many reporting that they are already at maximum capacity for hedgerow planting on their farms.

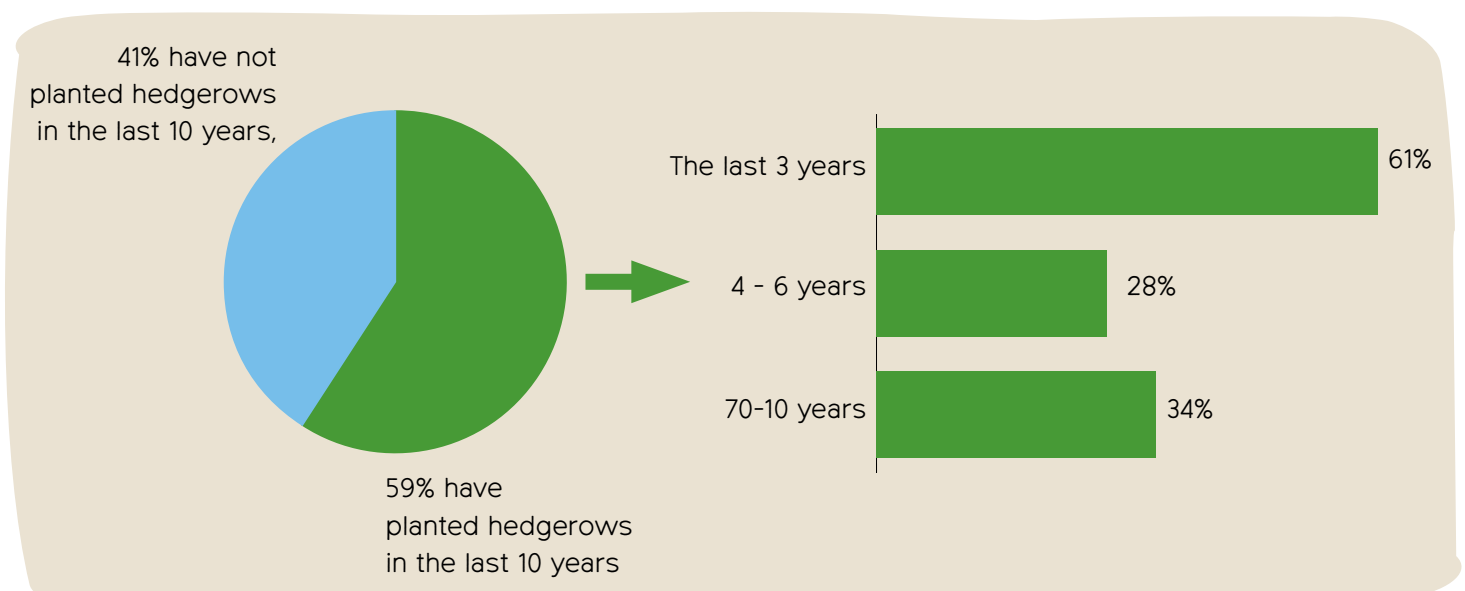
- 82% of respondents supported the CPRE campaign calling for 40% more hedgerows by 2050.
- Out of those who support the target, 88% have planted hedgerows in the last three years and 89% are likely to plant more over the next five years.
- Respondents who have solely livestock are highly supportive of the target for hedgerow expansion (87%) though arable farmers also support more planting.
- 90% of small farms (that is, those who are on a farm less than 20ha in size) support CPRE's hedgerow expansion target. In contrast larger farms (200+ha) are significantly less likely to support it.

- In the South East 53% of respondents are very likely to plant more hedgerows in the next five years. In contrast 30% in the South West are significantly less likely to plant more. And although farmers in the South West believe hedgerows are very important, they have planted, on average, the least number of hedgerows (in length) in the last 10 years. This may be explained by some farmers in the region reporting that they are already 'fully hedged' or only need to trim their hedgerows to enhance growth, rather than new planting.

'I would like to plant more. I believe it is better for the environment, wildlife and carbon capture on my farm.'

200ha+, East Anglia

Figure 2
Farmers who have planted hedgerows in the last ten years



Case study Giles Henry, Scottish Borders

Planting hedgerows for livestock and wildlife

Giles is a first-generation farmer and his 110ha farm in the Scottish Borders has been organic for the past 20 years. His son took over the lease last year and all of their business is now livestock, with improved grassland and paddock grazing.

For the last few years there has been little hedgerow maintenance on the farm. With help from the Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme in Scotland, Giles planted hedgerows with fencing. Since then he has started laying hedges of varying ages. Over the past 20 years he has planted about eight kilometres of hedges but without grants.

Giles planted hedgerows as shelter and shade for livestock and to create connected habitats for wildlife. **'I've always liked my wildlife,'** he says. **'The hedgerows have done great things for nature with more wildlife making use of the hedgerows.'** Recently, they've spotted snipe coming down to the fields - a bird usually only spotted up on the hills. They have curlews and lapwings in the spring and many more birds throughout the year, including greenfinches in the hedgerows. Now all of the woodlands on the farm are connected by hedgerows.

Hedgerow management is, however, not without its challenges. When Giles first arrived at the farm, there were about 200 metres of roadside hedgerows, with roads running through the farm. They now have 22 fields and 17 are on roadsides. He says he has a huge amount of roadside hedge which has to be cut - **'the council can come and cut the hedges but they just butcher them'**. The tenant before didn't like hedgerows because it cost money to cut them and Giles feels there are still people who see it as just another cost. However, he manages the hedgerows so they will be stock-proof and has applied for grants to lay more, which would save on the cost of replacing fences.

In the future Giles would also love to plant fruit trees in hedgerows. But he is very aware of the other benefits of having hedgerows.

'I wish more farmers would take more interest in their hedges. Everyone goes on about carbon and the amount of carbon that will be sequestered through these hedges is a lot.'



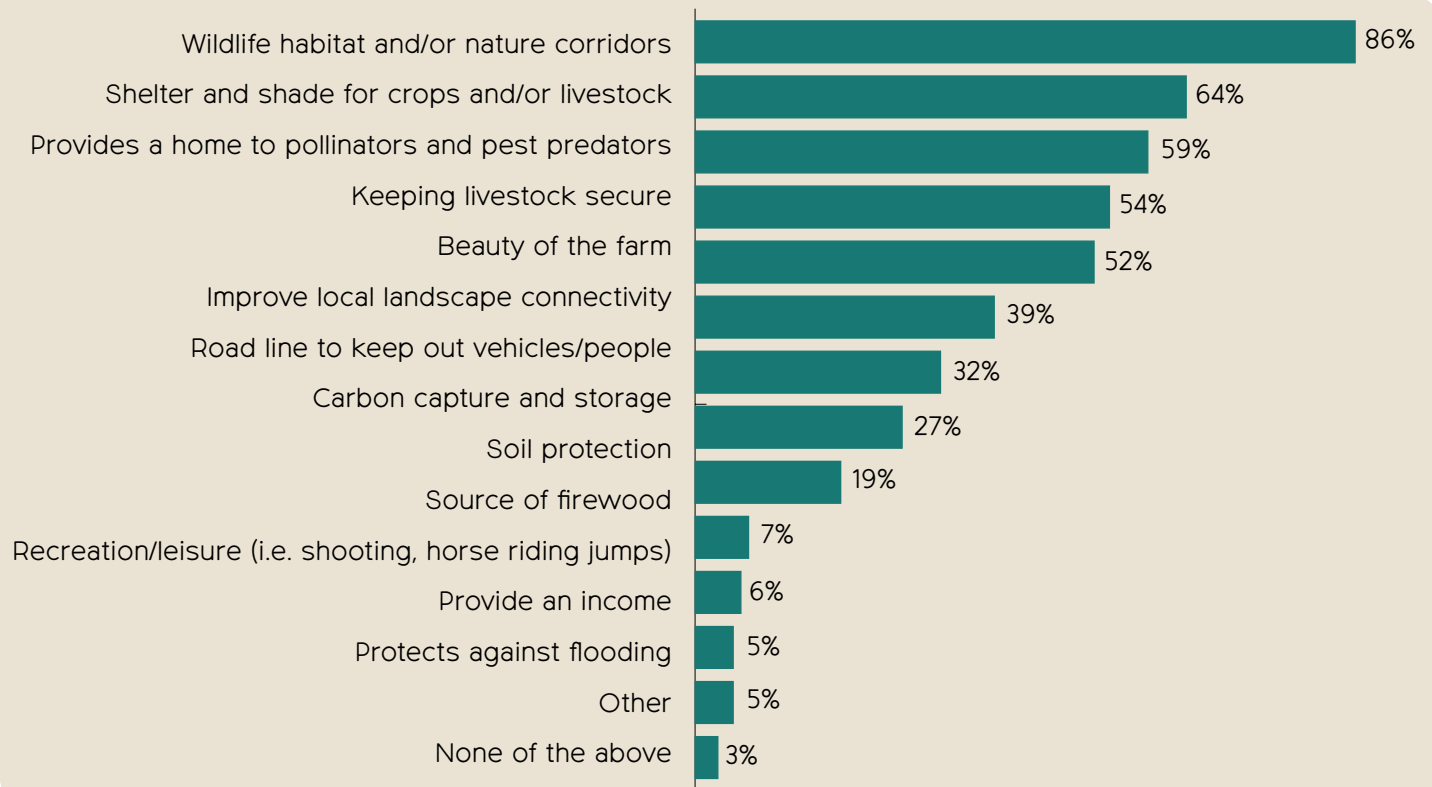
Key benefits of hedgerows on farms

The vast majority of farmers see wildlife and ecological corridors as the main benefit of having hedgerows - regardless of region and type of farm. Those who recognise wildlife as a top benefit also have continued enthusiasm for hedgerow planting. The very strong support for nature shown throughout this survey suggests farmers generally appreciate their hedgerows for nature and many value them for their beauty, providing a sense of place and importance in joining up local landscapes. The public benefits to nature and landscape which farmers see echo the private benefits to farms and food production. Providing hedgerow habitat for pollinators and pest predators benefits both farmers and nature and illustrates the multiple advantages for farmers of having hedgerows to support wildlife.

- 86% of farmers surveyed believe wildlife habitat and/or nature corridors are the top benefits of having hedgerows, followed by shelter for crops and/or livestock (64%, figure 3).
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents recognised the private benefits of hedgerows, in terms of providing habitat for pollinators and pest predators.
- Over half of all respondents felt a key benefit of hedgerows was that they added beauty to the farm.
- 90% of those who saw wildlife as the top benefit were significantly more likely to have planted hedgerows in the last three years.
- There was little difference between regions, with over 80% in every region describing wildlife and nature corridors as the top benefit to having hedgerows.
- As expected, over 81% of respondents who responded as solely livestock farmers were significantly more likely to see shade for crops and/or livestock as a top benefit. Similarly, also as expected, 73% of arable farmers felt a top benefit was providing a home for pollinators and pest predators.

Figure 3

The key benefits farmers describe of having hedgerows on their farms



Case study

Geraint Davies, Bala, North Wales

Producing food and caring for the environment



Geraint's farm is an organic 1,200 acre mix of upland and hill ground with 35 acres of ancient oak woodland, in Snowdonia National Park. It is a typical hill farm, tenanted on 1,000 acres with 200 acres owned, and mostly within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (85%). He has a mix of sheep and cattle and has focused on hedgerows over the last 15 years - mainly around 200 acres of grassland. Geraint farms as close to nature as possible, believing that producing food and a thriving natural environment go hand-in-hand, while ensuring the business is financially viable.



The farm has a mixture of old and new hedgerows, with some turning into lines of trees, so these have been coppiced or laid where possible. There's a lot of new planting: 14km of hedgerows have been newly planted or restored over the last 15 years. But they needed a functioning farm, so putting in hedgerows with grant aid to help was a win-win for a livestock farmer who both needs to produce food and cares about the environment. Livestock are usually housed over the winter but where there are more established hedgerows on the farm providing shelter from the weather, stock can be kept outside for longer and turned out earlier in the spring. Geraint calculated last winter's daily cost at about £150 a day for silage and shelter for animals kept inside, so hedgerows are a big money saver for his hill farm as well an important part of its biodiversity.

‘The farm has transformed,’ he says. ‘Birds and nature are using the hedgerows and I want to pass it on to the next generation. I now have two daughters who are keen little farmers so when we go on walks we'll have a list of things we want to see as we walk around the farm, everything from four-leaf clover to lapwings; they see what should be seen as they walk across the farm.’

The hedgerows are managed by laying and some coppicing. It takes time but they will grow to be a solid boundary and wildlife habitats. Geraint opts for more delicate management in places - protecting ground nesting birds, for example, by reducing perch points for predators. He plans to make some fields smaller again by splitting them up with new hedgerows, with the aim of making rotational grazing easier to manage.

‘If farmers want to benefit from future farming policies, it's not about reinventing the wheel but learning about what people want to achieve and having policies about restoring what was once there,’ he says. ‘At the end of the day, the focus is on producing food and caring for the environment in equal measure.’

Barriers to hedgerow planting and restoration

Almost all farmers in this survey have experienced challenges when it comes to planting hedgerows. Most farmers see the cost of planting as the key barrier they experience, including the cost of management or fencing to protect hedgerows. Others describe not having time to manage the hedgerows, inflexibility of government schemes and poor or unknown future funding and farming options. Many respondents simply describe how they already have many excellent hedgerows with no space to plant anymore. This is particularly notable in the South West where field sizes are smaller and solid networks of hedgerows remain. Surprisingly, the majority of farmers surveyed did not see hedgerows as a barrier to food production or production potential, underlining the fact that increasing hedgerow coverage does not necessarily mean compromising food production.

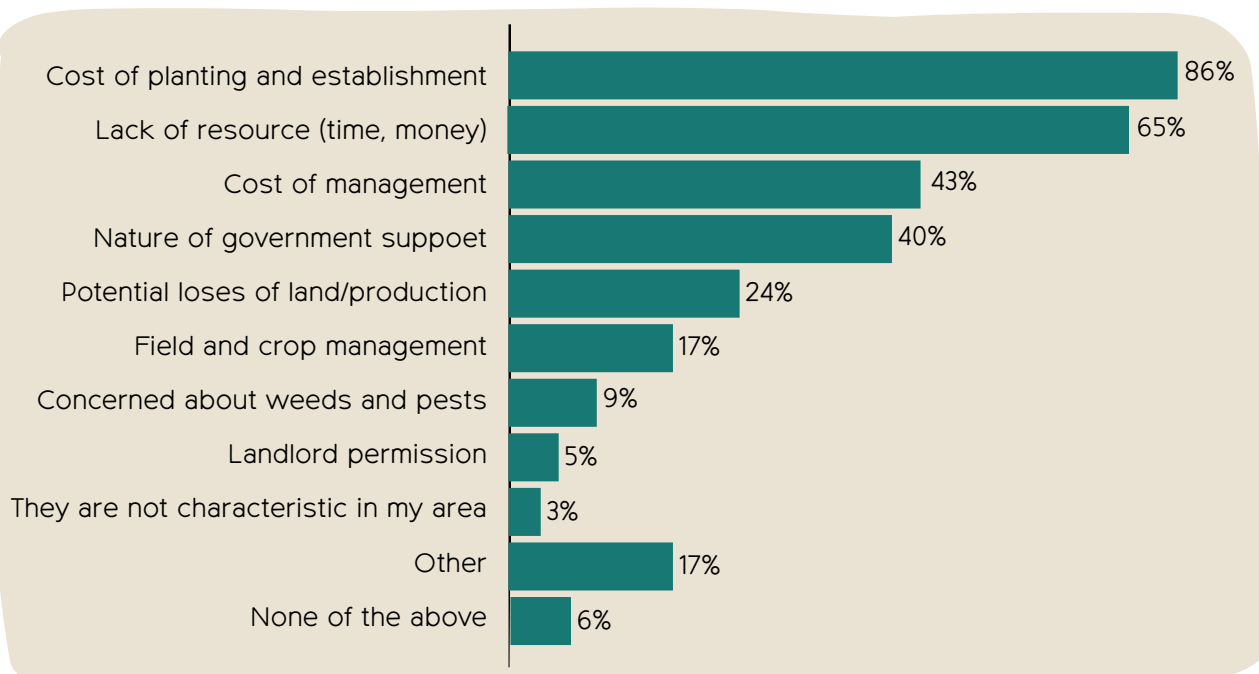
- 94% of respondents said they face barriers to planting more hedgerows.
- A high number of farmers surveyed (70%) cite cost as the primary barrier to planting hedgerows, along with lack of time and resources (65%) and the nature of government support (40%). Other barriers mentioned included scheme rules, mixed policy and government regulations.
- Government incentives and simple, accessible schemes are likely to encourage farmers to plant more hedgerows.
- Just 24% of those surveyed felt hedgerows took up space on their farm.

‘There is huge potential for new hedgerows and trees on many farms. But farmers need incentives and easy to understand schemes.’

< 20ha, Yorkshire and Humberside

Figure 4

Barriers farmers experience to planting more hedgerows



Case study

Carole Dickinson, Lake District

Future funding

Carole and her family have a small 50ha hill farm in the Lake District, which is quite high up with rough land and meadows, with some livestock. They've diversified with a campsite on the farm. The farm is quite traditional; they try not to use too much fertiliser or overstock it as they like the meadows to regenerate without reseeding and try to keep pastures traditional too.

The farm's ancient hedgerows were quite dilapidated until 10 to 12 years ago when work began to plant and restore them. Carole says there have clearly been periods of neglect but with a lot of money and 10 years of hard work, the hedgerows have quite quickly come back to life, which she has found very satisfying.

‘In addition to the hedgerow planting and restoration, we feel and see the fruits of our labour by seeing the many wild flowers and herbage growing in the hedges,’ she says. ‘I wanted to put the hedgerows back because it's such a beautiful place. It looks so nice now and the hedgerows deserve to be there.’

Carole lets the hedgerows grow up to six feet high for shelter but in the autumn they are trimmed a bit on top and laid annually in rotation once they are five or six years old. But the main challenge she faces is cost. ‘If you have it you need to look after it.’

‘All the fencing put in seven or eight years ago had to be redone. Before that, when we had to re-fence, it lasted about 30 years but it's now a big problem because the posts don't last. We're hoping if we keep laying the hedgerows we can eventually do away with fencing. It takes time and you need to be patient.’

Carole wants the government to look at how funds are spent. She feels that any project giving money to enhance the countryside and nature should police the spend to ensure it is used most effectively. But she says that people need to be re-educated - starting in childhood with education about nature and the outdoors.



2. Future government schemes and financial support

The majority of farmers plant hedgerows with some form of support. Most utilise government schemes (current examples include Countryside Stewardship in England), highlighting the critical importance of this funding for farmers. Nearly half of all respondents funded their own hedgerow planting, illustrating a strong commitment to maintaining hedgerow networks on farms. Over a quarter of farmers use private funding (that is, their own money or other external funds) to plant hedgerows. This suggests there may be schemes contributing to hedgerow planting which aren't being monitored. Future farming incentive schemes could therefore be potentially complemented by private finance such as carbon credits or other public funds such as flood reduction schemes promoted by the Environment Agency or local authorities. Volunteers could also provide additional capacity and be a valuable resource for hedgerow management or maintenance on farms.

Given that most farmers surveyed rely on government schemes to plant hedgerows, the majority want government incentives and simple, accessible schemes to plant more hedgerows and help with proper long-term management. Farmers ask for flexibility and freedom to make their own decisions within new schemes as well as funding for smaller projects. Some respondents feel disillusioned with current schemes while others describe the intense pressure to produce more per hectare than ever before. Farmers also said they would like greater advice, more guidance and skills development/training for hedgerow management. These findings highlight the complexities of hedgerow management, as opposed to initial planting.

- 56% had received some form of support. Of these, over 70% received support mainly in the form of government funding (for instance, Countryside Stewardship, figure 5).
- 44% of farmers surveyed planted hedgerows with no financial support, which represents a strong investment by farmers themselves in their hedgerows.
- 25% of respondents used private funding to plant hedgerows on their farms.
- 70% of respondents cited government incentives and simple, accessible schemes as most likely to encourage the planting of more hedgerows (figure 6).
- Over two-thirds of respondents would like regular payments and capital grant support for hedgerow management.

‘Hedges form part of our natural capital. Advice on managing and improving this asset would be appreciated.’

100ha+, Yorkshire and Humberside.

Figure 5

Financial and other support farmers received for planting hedgerows and source of support received.

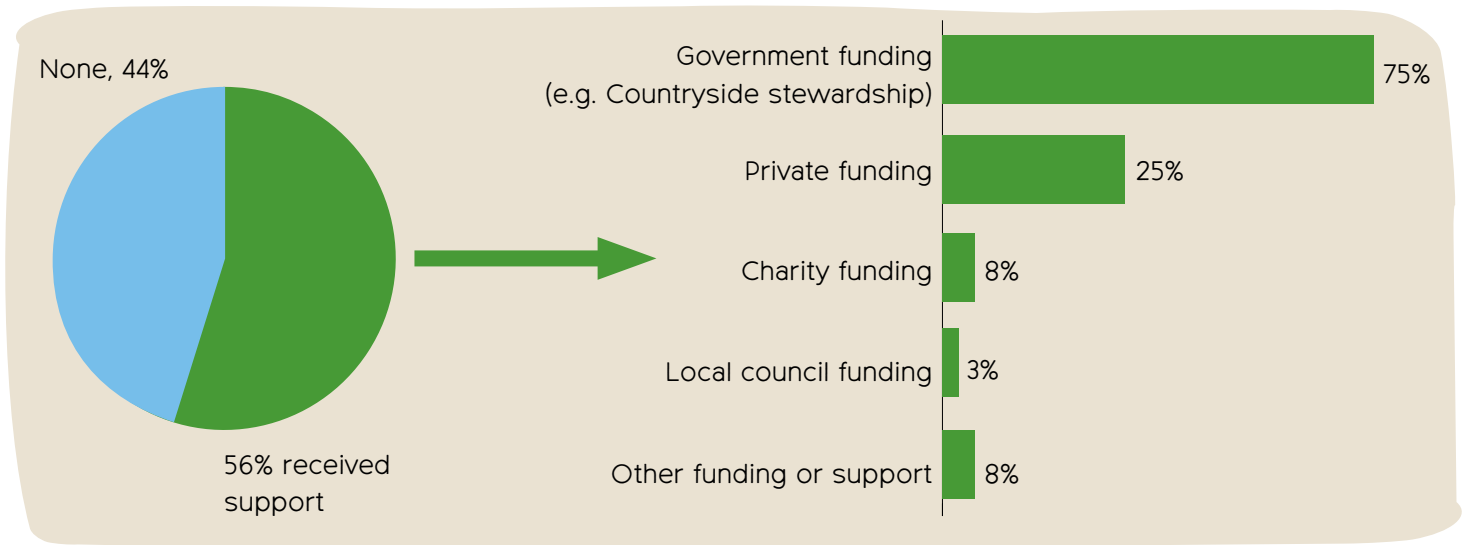
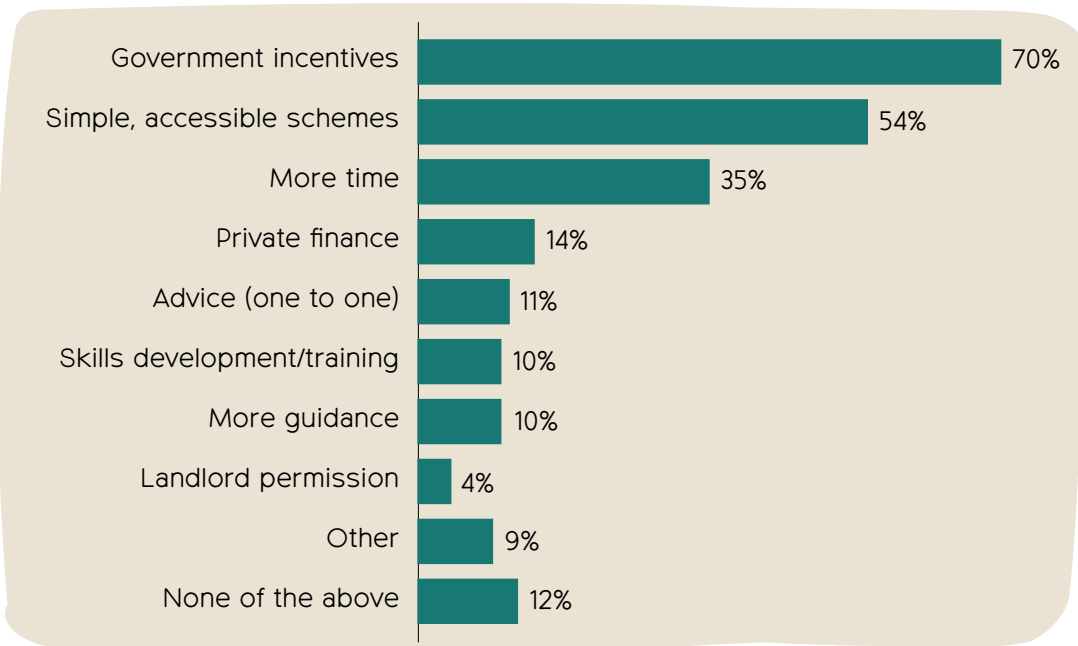


Figure 6

Factors which would encourage farmers to plant more hedgerows





Case study

Kevin Hawes, East Sussex

Schemes and generational change

Kevin has been a farmer since 2005 and sees farming as a way of life. His aim is to live self-sufficiently on his 100-acre farm, overlooking the Upper Medway Valley. Historically, the farm would have been typical of others in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, each with a patchwork of fields used for mixed farming, with remnants of ancient woodland and deep-cut lanes.

Before (2003)



After (2022)



After buying the farm in 2003, Kevin decided to turn the land from arable to grassland and now grazes cattle and sheep. Over the years he has planted over 30,000 hedgerow plants and 20,000 of those under an original agri-environment grant to help restore existing hedgerows and enhance the landscape. Some of the planting was done with the help of local students, and the rest was done by contractors. In recent years, hundreds of metres of hedgerows have been traditionally laid by hand.

Kevin sees his hedgerows as an excellent network for wildlife, and with the Ashdown Forest nearby and a network of woodland all around, he is completing a patchwork of habitats that would once have existed across the High Weald. He flail cuts the hedgerows annually at the right time of year to protect nesting birds, and the contractor cuts a little higher than the previous year so the hedges get slightly taller each time.

Two years ago, Kevin secured a local grant from the Sussex Lund Environmental Charity to part-fund some hedge-laying, but funding ended when the project completed. He would like to see 'levelling up' in action, with funding passed to local agencies to provide support for rural projects. Kevin isn't currently in any national environmental scheme, and finds the new approach to rural funding confusing, with few options for permanent grassland farms, but would like to be able to apply for capital grants for hedgerow planting and restoration. He feels that new government schemes need to do more to convince farmers like him that they can offer sufficient rewards to maintain the sustainable and environmentally sensitive farming which is essential in areas like the High Weald.

Over the next 10 years, Kevin is keen to look at how working in partnership with neighbouring landowners and the next generation of young farmers can encourage others to plant and restore more hedgerows.

'It would be great to have a new model for running an enterprise with young people with great ideas, and let them farm the land more creatively,' he says.

'We need to consider succession planning to help young farmers gain access to land to be able to establish themselves in agriculture. It would be great to be able to engage a new generation.'

3. How farmers manage their hedgerows

Farmers vary in their approach to managing their hedgerows, with a notable difference between those who are solely livestock or arable farmers. Livestock farmers prefer to gap up and lay hedgerows while farmers with arable businesses and on larger farms opt for rotational management. There is a clear generational difference to hedgerow management. Not all farmers want to change the way they manage their hedgerows and many say cost and time are major reasons why they manage their hedgerows the way they do. Those that would like to change feel restricted by requirements under Countryside Stewardship and find government regulations and schemes to be barriers to diversifying. There is a distinct need for more advice and access to more traditional skills and greater assistance from Defra. Farmers also love wildlife. This is their main reason for taking a positive approach to hedgerow management.

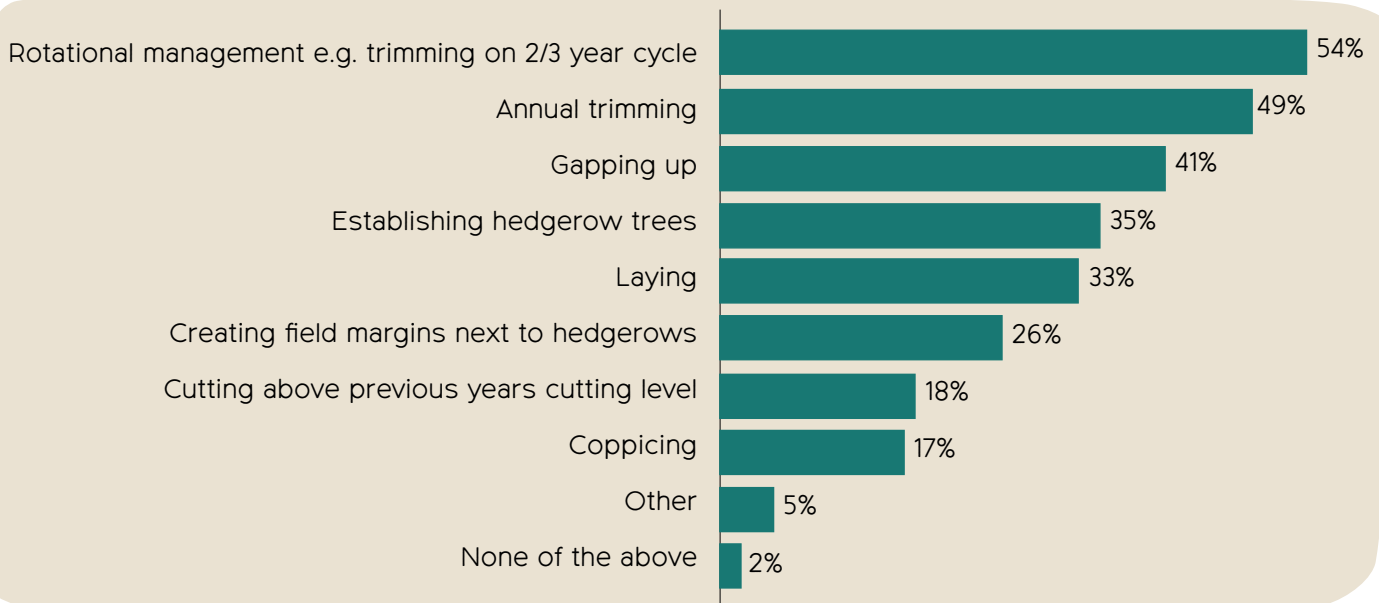
- Around half of all respondents are most likely to manage their hedgerows through rotational management and annual trimming (figure 7). Only a third would like to change how their hedgerows are managed.
- 80% of farmers surveyed who are 65 or over are significantly less likely to change how they manage their hedgerows.
- Livestock farmers are significantly less likely to manage their hedgerows through rotational management (48%) and significantly more likely to manage them through gapping up (40%), establishing hedgerow trees (40%) and laying (43%).
- Farmers with arable enterprises on their farm are significantly more likely to use rotational management, including those who have pulses (73%), oilseed rape (71%) or cereals (65%), with respondents who have renewables (73%) also significantly more likely to use rotational management.
- Respondents with larger farms (200+ha) are significantly more likely to use rotational management (67%).

‘We need support with funds and training. The slower we move with rural skills, the faster we’re going to lose skills like hedge-laying and we can’t afford to do this.’

Geraint, Bala

Figure 7

How farmers currently manage their hedgerows



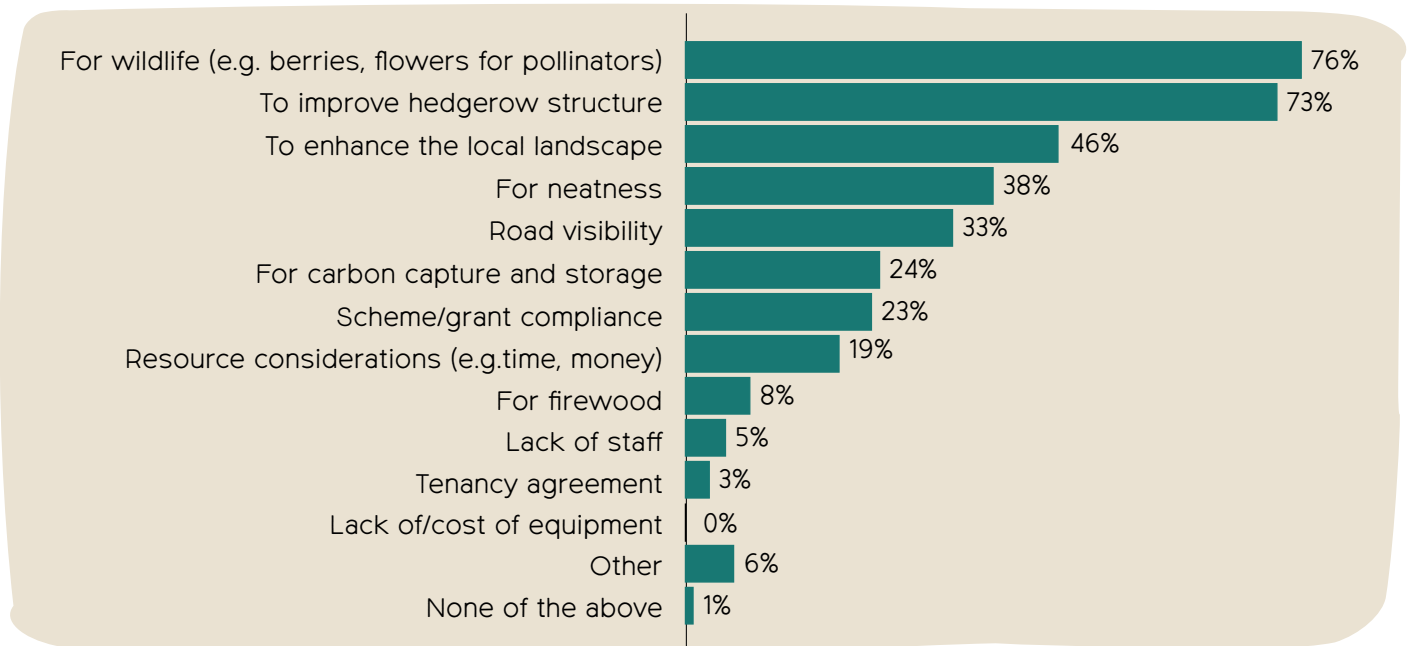
- 76% of farmers choose to manage their hedgerows for the benefit of wildlife.
- 73% of farmers surveyed manage their hedgerows to improve hedgerow structure (figure 8). These results signal positive approaches to good management for both wildlife and livestock.
- However, 38% of farmers manage their hedgerows for neatness, which could present a challenge to achieving less restrictive management and bushier, more rotund hedgerows in the future.
- Two-thirds of farmers surveyed do not want to change how their hedgerows are managed.
- Those who do want to diversify their management want to establish hedgerow trees and gap up. Some respondents described their preference for annual trimming to enhance the health and quality (or ‘thickness’) of the hedge and would prefer greater autonomy and less regulation.
- For over 50% of respondents, the main barrier to changing hedgerow management is lack of resource (time and money).
- Some farmers say they are happy with their current management, so feel no need to change. Many farmers commented on the lack of practical help with rural skills such as hedge-laying.

‘We wanted our hedgerows to be thicker at the base to provide greater benefits for nature. To achieve this, we only cut them on one side for four years in a row. We now have lovely thick hedgerows but it is disappointing that this management approach isn’t currently supported financially by government.’
500+ha, South East



Figure 8

Why farmers currently manage their hedgerows the way they do



Case study

Graham Jackson, North Yorkshire

Arable opportunities

Graham's farm in North Yorkshire is a 70ha arable farm, growing oilseed rape, winter barley and wheat, apart from 3ha of grass managed as wildflower meadow under current Countryside Stewardship scheme funding and cut for hay. The farm is in an evolutionary stage, expanding the type of crops grown and moving away from a conventional plough-based farming towards a more regenerative approach to improve the biology of the soil.

Graham is a generational farmer. His grandfather was a dairy farmer and half of the farm used to be grass with hedgerows. An old 1907 field map shows that some of the smaller fields are still the same shape with the same boundary lines but some have been removed to make fields bigger. They don't have many hedges - mainly hawthorn and blackthorn and some with a greater mix of species.

'We are arable but like to see trees, particularly oak,' he says. 'With open barren land there's not much wildlife but hedgerows create such a nice habitat and enhance the beauty of the farm.'

Graham would like to find out more about how hedgerows are good for crops.

'I'm particularly interested in the wildlife that lives in the hedgerows. They must be of benefit because we rarely use insecticides and we have more boundaries so whether the hedgerows have something to do with it, it would be good to know.'

The main challenges to managing hedgerows for Graham are time and access to environmental schemes. The farm have their own flail hedge-cutter so the cost of cutting is reasonable but time is an issue: the profitable crops are the winter crops so there is a tight window from September, when cutting can begin, and getting seeds in the ground. Over the years they've let the hedgerows get a bit taller (every third year) but they would find management advice through a scheme a big help, such as on when to coppice or replant a hedge or let it regenerate.

Graham would like to plant more hedgerows if grants were available:

'We could have more hedges now and I'd like to see some boundary lines planted with hedgerows. With arable, it looks good and feels like you're doing the right thing.'

Recommendations and future opportunities

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, CPRE recommends the below, which are aimed at central government and local authorities. Apart from the first recommendation below, which relates to national climate change policy, recommendations made here reflect CPRE's charitable focus on England and policy which applies to England. Agriculture is a devolved area of policy so different legislation, farm payment and agri-environment schemes apply across the other UK nations.

Based on the survey findings, CPRE recommends that:

Government should:

- 1** Set a national target to increase the hedgerow network by 40% by 2050, as recommended by the UK Climate Change Committee, and put in place mechanisms and resources to deliver it. In England, this should be taken forward through government policy development, including in the 2023 Environmental Improvement Plan (also known as the 25-Year Environment Plan) and subsequent reviews.
- 2** Design and resource ELM to deliver a healthy expanded hedgerow network in England by placing it at the heart of the farming offer and ensuring that ELM provides:
 - A straightforward, accessible and flexible entry level offer to farmers that properly rewards and supports management to deliver healthy hedgerows with widespread take-up
 - A clear pathway to more ambitious packages of options to support farmers to:
 - manage their hedgerows as a whole-farm network to create a mosaic of hedgerow habitats at different stages of growth
 - do targeted specialised management of hedgerows particularly for endangered species
 - collaborate with other farmers on hedgerows to enhance the beauty, character and connectivity of their local landscapes, and to restore hedgerows to landscapes where they have been largely lost.
 - Advice, training and skills development in hedgerow management
- 3** Increase capital funding to enable planting and restoration of hedgerows at farm and landscape scale, ensuring that funds for rejuvenation are joined up with options for better hedgerow management.
- 4** Explore the potential for sources of private funding - such as hedgerow carbon credits or water companies seeking to improve water quality - to support a major hedgerow planting programme
- 5** Pursue further research in partnership with CPRE on hedgerows to build on the findings in this report and continue to develop evidence-based best practice.

Local authorities should:

- 6** Fully engage with farmers in their area as key stakeholders in the development of their Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- 7** Develop local packages of blended public/private funding to channel new income options to farmers and complement funding available through national agri-environment schemes.
- 8** Facilitate a programme of partnership-working between farmers and environmental/volunteer groups (for instance, local CPRE groups, TCV (The Conservation Volunteers), Groundwork and other community groups) to engage the support of volunteers to help plant and enhance hedgerow networks.

Future opportunities

The following key issues have been identified through this report, requiring further exploration by the government, Natural England and/or CPRE:

- Compare investment by farmers in hedge planting over the past 10 years, to evaluate the difference Countryside Stewardship (CS) has made to the extent of hedge planting, compared to those who received no CS funding.
- Establish how much planting is being done more widely, and with what other private or public financial support, and learn what that means for how the 40% target can be achieved by 2050. This could be with a blend of private schemes such as carbon credits or public finance such as flood reduction funding.
- Explore a landscape character approach to identifying where hedgerows could be planted and restored around the country to enhance local landscapes.
- Raise awareness of the environmental and economic benefits of hedgerows such as carbon capture or soil protection, given the survey showed these categories were perceived by farmers to have fewer benefits.



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- ¹⁰ See CPRE, England's hedgerows: Don't cut them out, August 2010, p12 ; [England's hedgerows: don't cut them out! - CPRE.](#)
- ¹¹ <https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Hedge-fund-report-executive-summary.pdf>
- ¹² Evolution of Agri-Environment Schemes in England (NE373) <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/3567470>
- ¹³ Research by Leeds University suggests it would take 455 years to achieve the Climate Change Committee target to increase our hedgerows by 40% by 2050 – see Resilient dairy landscapes: Sequestering carbon by planting hedgerows Dr Sofia Biffi, Prof Pippa Chapman, Dr Richard Grayson, Prof Guy Ziv 5 October 2021 [6e504692ff8770a2914c18a3999dcea3dc43e0.pdf \(resilientdairylandscapes.com\)](https://www.resilientdairylandscapes.com/6e504692ff8770a2914c18a3999dcea3dc43e0.pdf)
- ¹⁴ <https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Hedge-fund.pdf>
- ¹⁵ [Hedgerows and their management for carbon storage: \(nfonline.com\)](#)

Appendix

Survey questions

1. Which one of the following best describes your involvement in agriculture?
2. Have you planted any hedgerows in the last three years, four to six years, seven to ten years, we have not planted hedgerows in the last ten years.
3. What is the approximate total length of any hedgerows you have planted in the last ten years?
4. Did you receive any financial or other support when planting the hedgerows?
5. To what extent are you likely to plant more hedgerows on your farm in the next five years?
6. How important are your hedgerows to you or your farm business?
7. Which of the following are the top five benefits of having hedgerows on your farm?
8. What are the top five barriers to planting more hedgerows?
9. Which of the following would encourage you to plant more hedgerows?
10. In which of the following ways do you currently manage your hedgerows?
11. If you would like to do so, please add any further details about your hedgerow management practices
12. Why do you manage them in that way?
13. Would you like to manage your hedgerows differently?
14. How would you like to manage them differently?
15. If you wish to, please add any further details
16. What are the main barriers to changing your hedgerow management?
17. What kind of support would you like for hedgerow management?
18. In which month do you typically cut your hedgerows?
19. How easy or difficult is it to cut hedgerows in line with the hedge-cutting dates set out in cross-compliance?
20. Why do you say that?
21. Are you already in a government / environmental scheme?
22. Would you be willing to support the campaign for hedgerow expansion, if it is properly funded?
23. Which of the following enterprise types do you have on your farm?
24. What is the total land area of your farm?
25. How old are you?
26. In which region are you based?

About CPRE, the countryside charity

Founded in 1926, CPRE believes in countryside and green spaces that are accessible to all, rich in nature and playing a crucial role in responding to the climate emergency. With a local CPRE group in almost every county, we're advocating nationwide for the kind of countryside we all want: one with sustainable, healthy communities and available to more people than ever, including those who haven't benefited before. We've worked for almost a century to support and promote the countryside, and we'll be doing this for generations to come. That's why we call ourselves 'the countryside charity.'

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