



‘Optimistic, spirited farmers sharing knowledge and vision in farming.’

Summary Findings from the FiPL Mentorship, Pasture and Profit programme in Protected Landscapes in the North of England.

By the end of the programme, around 70% of mentees made changes to farming practices because of their participation, with another 20% who were either just starting or planning to make changes soon.

Changes were primarily around grazing practices, farming with nature such as reduced inputs, higher diversity; changes to stocking, or increased testing and measuring of soils and biodiversity on their farms. As well as a range of practical benefits, key benefits were:

- Reassured or inspired about trying new things
- Being part of a group of like-minded farmers
- Learning from others about new ways of managing grassland and livestock
- Encouraged to follow a direction that they had considered appropriate and
- more profitable for their farms, but had limited confidence and support to take had they not been part of the programme

At the start of the programme, **the majority of farmers (26)** said they felt **somewhat confident** to make changes, and **20-25%** of farmers felt **less confident** about their knowledge or ability to make change at all.

‘I’ve learned a lot, gained confidence to make changes that I was afraid to make on my own, and made friends. The mentors that I’ve met are farmers who set a great example for the industry with their positivity and proactive, can-do attitude.’

‘I think the land has improved quite a chunk already...the cows are on the hill and the sheep are down the hill, whereas in the past the sheep were on the hill and the cows were down’.

‘I feel like we’re building soil and we’re getting there because we’ve noticed on some land how it used to go to seed really early, the grass was really short when it headed, we had loads of thistles. This was from conventional management of sheep and now we’re getting long grass essentially...what my father would call mowing

grass in the past. We've essentially had that up on the hill and the thistles have kind of disappeared.'

Table 3. Farmers' knowledge of specific topics, scale (1= no understanding (zero farmers chose this option), 2 = understand a little, 3 = I understand enough to have a conversation about it, 4 = I understand enough to explain it to others).

Topic	No of farmers (score 2)	No of farmers (score 3)	No of farmers (score 4)
Effect of grazing management on soil health	3	21	16
Effect of grazing management on water quality	5	17	18
Effect of grazing management on pasture performance	4	18	18
Using grazing to promote biodiversity and habitat conservation	3	18	19
Equipment and infrastructure needed for rotational grazing	7	18	15

The mentoring programme resulted in a statistically significant shift in wellbeing amongst the farmers who were involved.

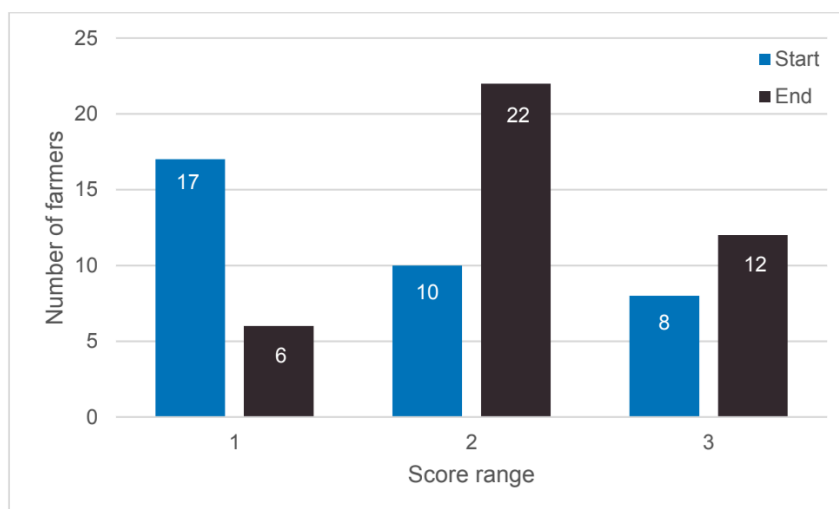
This is an excellent validation of a such a short-term programme:

- Increased confidence and sense of community and support
- Impacted practical changes to the way participants farm
- Improved visions for the future
- Shifted overall wellbeing and how felt about farming
- Providing farmers with a community of like-minded farmers to share knowledge and experiences with
- Farmers really valued support to farm in ways which fit with environmental sustainability

'The programme has opened my eyes to new ideas and future avenues for exploration and let me realise that I am not alone in believing there is a better, more holistic way to farm than has been traditional in the past 50 years or so.'

'Farming is quite an isolated profession. There's been sort of a stigma around it, that they [farmers] don't feel they can talk or ask...trying to get that over to some of the older generation has been quite difficult...this has been an opening up.'

Comparative flourishing scores for farmers at the start and end of the mentorship programme



Almost all mentees, regardless of gender or background, felt either somewhat more supported or more supported within the farming community because of the programme, with many farmers increasing their networking within farmer groups.

Key benefits reported:

- Knowledge, support, inspiration and encouragement
- Gained skills, confidence and reassurance
- Enabled to make changes to their farming practices

One of the mentees is currently at university studying agriculture, when asked whether he felt that it was possible to learn about grass only approaches at university, he commented that the teaching was: ***'Rather poor as to actually looking at more regenerative or just grass-based systems. They're just teaching sort of what the parents want someone to come home and do.'***

'A lot of our sort of friends and colleagues don't fall into the (National Landscape Area) so they would love to be part of something like this, but it would just need pushing wider scale for them to be able to be part of it.'

'You can't just try and farm your way out of this. You've got to think about it. But it's hard because people's identity has been tied to how they farmed and the type of

stock that they farm and what they sell normally and what their parents did and grandparents. I think they're so embroiled in what they do and work so hard, that they're just like a duck basically trying to keep above the water.

Historically one of the places I worked at, they were getting £200k - £250k a year of BPS. It takes a lot of money, a lot replacing that. So, going into herbal leys could be a option. But so many people within, who were potentially advising them, who were basically saying: 'they're no good because they're 20% less yield and you can't use fertiliser on them and you can't put slurry on.' I said, you don't know it's 20% less because you don't measure your grass. You don't have a clue what you're producing anyway. So, you can't just reject the option. It's the system that people were in and invested in, in terms of machinery for silage making, clamps this that and the other.

It's hard to see beyond that and they're being advised by people within the conventional industry that are interested in selling them fertilizer, feed this that and the other. It's almost like they'd be betraying their community to do some of this.'

Impact of Pasture for Life learning philosophy and community

Farmers made very good use of the materials and events on offer through the programme, and had **directly influenced** what was in the programme according to their needs, resulting in the acquisition of new knowledge from like-minded farmers and product development.

The organisation and the co-ordination were core to the success of the programme. The regional co-ordinators in the North were highly praised for the way in which they ran the programme, and it is clear from the interviews that the passion, knowledge and personal qualities that they brought to the role have made a real long-term difference in these Protected Landscapes.

Key features and outcomes:

- Always facilitated introductions and sought to ensure that everyone felt welcome
- Support offered through the programme affected communication with other farmers
- Some farmers have joined social media platforms not used before
- Hosted farm trips or been invited to talk about their businesses to other farmers
- Coming together to learn in the programme has been a welcome process
- Relationships and the feeling of community were clearly fundamental to its success
- Sense of community in the programme resulting from the work of the regional coordinators and the openness of the mentors and farmers involved

'I think it is just the general community of being part of Pasture for Life and having that wealth of communication with different people.... it has just opened up that sort of support, especially for myself and my husband because we're quite young

compared to some of the other people in the program.'

'I'm probably that person nobody wants to talk to if you're not in Pasture for Life because I rave about it. Pasture for Life, the Yorkshire Dale's National Park, the Yorkdale's Millennium Trust, the support I get from those organizations. without it, it farming would be probably just not as good and bloody really hard.'

'Before joining Pasture for Life we did exactly what they [his father/family] always did and there wasn't much change from one year to the next, whereas this year I feel like we have made a lot of changes to what we would normally do in order to maximize our outcomes from this place which he wouldn't have done without somebody else saying it worked first.'

'Unbelievable. I've started Instagram through Pasture for Life. I didn't even know what it was before and now I've got all these people who talk to us and want to come and see us and it's literally exploded through Pasture for Life.'

'I would like to just have more of a formal qualification in a way that I could use in putting it towards an application for a tenancy or something like that.'

Change in farmers' knowledge of specific topics pre and post the programme

Table 1. Farmers' knowledge of specific topics, scale (1= no understanding (zero farmers chose this option), 2 = understand a little, 3 = I understand enough to have a conversation about it, 4 = I understand enough to explain it to others).

Topic	No of farmers (score 2)	No of farmers (score 3)	No of farmers (score 4)
Effect of grazing management on soil health	6	20	9
Effect of grazing management on water quality	9	20	6
Effect of grazing management on pasture performance	9	19	7
Using grazing to promote biodiversity and habitat conservation	8	20	7
Equipment and infrastructure needed for rotational grazing	11	15	9

Table 3. Farmers' knowledge of specific topics, scale (1= no understanding (zero farmers chose this option), 2 = understand a little, 3 = I understand enough to have a conversation about it, 4 = I understand enough to explain it to others).

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Final Reflections

The responsiveness of those involved in the evaluation itself is a mark of the success of the programme.

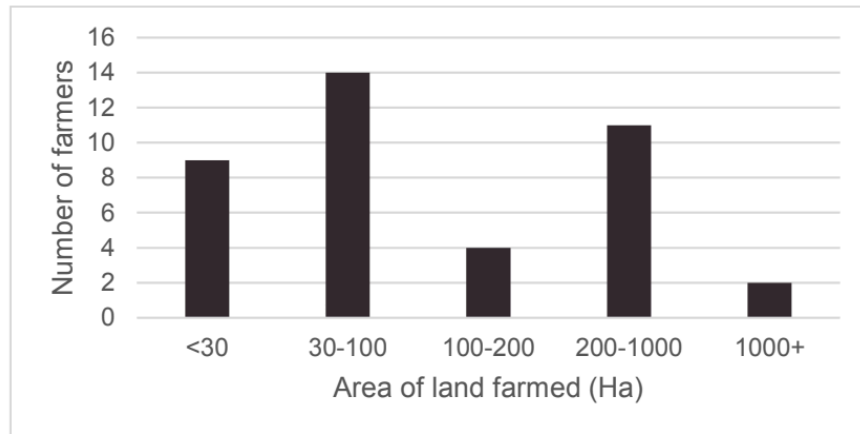
The findings from the research reflect other findings around regenerative, farming with nature approaches which challenge the dominant paradigm of agriculture (conventional approaches focused on volume of production) elsewhere in the world.

Work by Charles Massey (2018) with Australian farmers indicates that leading change organisations (like Pfl) ultimately comprise a 'community of practice' – where learning occurs through social participation and the practice of a knowledge Community.

Massey found that 'these different communities of practice played a double and vital role; first in providing new information counter to the unsettled person's previous world view and then second, **socially reinforcing that transformative learning via participation in a non-threatening environment, those undergoing change received help from others in recognising perspectives and trusting their own values and beliefs**'.

Research Survey Base

87% of farmers or 35 out of 44 filled in the online survey at the start of the mentorship programme, and 40 out of 44 completed the survey towards the end of the programme.



All data and quotes from **Summary of FiPL mentorship evaluation report from year 2 of the Pasture and Profit in Protected Landscapes programme in the North of England, Lisa Norton 2025**