

# PENDLE HILL FARMERS GROUP

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR TWO 2019-2020

The Pendle Hill Farmers Group was set up in March 2018, following a successful application to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. Currently there are 28 members covering around 2750 ha.

The group aims to:

- Increase understanding of local Countryside Stewardship priorities and knowledge of landscape scale conservation techniques, and to encourage the uptake of schemes
- Work together with as many group members as possible implementing these techniques on, and across, members' farms by:

i) Restoring, managing and expanding priority habitats: woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and moorlands

ii) Restoring traditional boundaries

iii) Implementing natural flood management techniques

In this second year of the group operating we met eight times, with three indoor evening meetings, one indoor daytime event and four outdoor events.

This year we have concentrated on **soils** and **novel forms of farming support**. **Soils** in terms of the impact of compaction on surface run off and NFM, water quality, soil invertebrate numbers and hence farmland birds, as well as soil nutrients and pH in terms of ensuring members are not over-spending on bagged fertilisers and hence over-applying with detrimental impacts on water quality, grassland and aquatic habitats. **Novel forms of farming support** in terms of looking at 'payments by results' pilots, post-brexit farming support and the development of ELMS. We also provided information on Countryside Stewardship and through the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership project were also able to offer mapping and photography support for members entering the Hedges & Boundaries scheme. Partnership working with the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership has brought multiple benefits to the Farmer network, and these are set out in a table within this report.

### Soils, worms, soil compaction and nutrient analysis

Following a successful change request, we were able to add a series of soils related training events to our calendar for 2019-20. This began with a trip to North Sheep in Q1, with members taking part on workshops on soil compaction, listening to debates on quotas and the end of BPS, as well as being able to visit the machinery options for reducing compaction.

We held an outdoor training event in Q3 where local agronomist James Bretherton from Agscope came out to one of the member's farms to demonstrate digging soil pits, looking for compaction, undertaking worm counts and discussing the environmental impacts of compaction as well as the impacts on grass growth. Local dealership Townson's tractors also attended, bringing one of their sward lifter models which was really good to see in action. James returned at the end of October



for an indoor training session on plant nutrients and the importance of soil nutrient analysis. This was our most well attended session since the group began. During the meeting all attending members received soil sample kit from NRM which will enable them to take bulked soil samples from six of their fields and send them away to be analysed. In Q4 James returned to talk through the results of the samples during a 'soil surgery' day. It was very interesting to note that of all the farms who received results (19), 14 attended the results meeting. Of these 14, the majority needed to lime their pasture and silage ground, but very few were short on plant nutrients.

### **Novel forms of farming support**

There are three Facilitation groups within the Yorkshire Dales National Park and together they put on a joint event to look at how the RBAPS 'payment by results' pilots were working. This was a very valuable event for the members who were able to attend (it fell on a very fine day at the end of a fine week and so many members were hay timing and silo-ing), as they were able to hear from the farmers who were part of the pilot, the project officers who were running the pilot, as well as the team leaders who had devised it and could put it into the context of future changes to support mechanisms.

In December we held our winter group meeting when our speaker for the evening was Adam Briggs, local NFU Countryside Officer. The members attending were appreciative of the information they received and of the chance to have a group discussion about the impacts of brexit on their businesses, as well as the newly developing ELM scheme and the concept of 'payment for public goods'.



### **Countryside Stewardship**

This year three farmer members applied for the mid-tier of Countryside Stewardship, with endorsements from myself as facilitator.

In March Michael Graham came and spoke to the group about the water capital grants available via Countryside Stewardship. Michael knows many of the farmers already and they were keen to hear how to apply for funding. As ever Michael gave very useful and practical advice, and as he knows many of the farms, was able to relate that information to examples of the attending member's farms. We hope that applications will follow for items which are able to reduce diffuse pollution from yards and tracks.

### **Participation and delivery in partnership**

One of the advantages of being a farmer member of the Pendle Hill Farmers Network is the links with the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership. This is a four year HF funded programme in and around Pendle Hill which includes several projects which have been of great interest to the farming community. The projects and activity linked to the group is shown in the table below:

| PHLP Project   | Activity related to PHFN in 2019-20   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Traditional Boundary project</b> – help, advice, funding and training for the upkeep and restoration of priority traditional boundaries within the area (over and above those funded via CS)</p>   | <p>Eight farmer members have had walling or walling completed during the winter of 2019-20, with 1490m of hedging and 180m of walling restored so far. This PHLP project is being offered to the Network members first, and has increased the number of enquiries we have to join the group to 9 at present.</p>  |
| <p><b>Pendle WINNS</b> – a woodland creation and management project in cloughs and gullies, also tackling areas of non-native species – Himalayan balsam in particular.</p>  | <p>Members are first to be offered woodland planting and management advice through this project, so far four farms have been involved.</p>  |
| <p><b>Wild about Pendle</b> – a series of nature based projects ranging from community wildlife spaces to field scale meadow restoration</p>   | <p>One meadow restoration project is now underway on a member's farm and a pond restoration project is being planned. Owl box erected at members farm.</p>  |
| <p><b>What is a Hill Worth</b> – this is a research project looking at mapping out the natural capital assets at a farm scale, the ecosystem services which flow from them, and then looking at the impact of investment in their management on the farm business.</p> | <p>The four farms chosen for this project are all members of the network. These farmers will receive really focused farm scale information on their natural assets and ecosystem service delivery. The group as a whole will receive a presentation in September 2020 on how the work was undertaken, and how it will help members see their potential within a 'payment for public goods' programme.</p>   |
| <p><b>Graduate traineeships</b> – each year there is one traineeship within the project team, running each year from September.</p>  | <p>There have been two graduate trainees this year. From April until September Jessie continued her work on the Traditional Boundary project (see above) as well as continuing to help with Hedge &amp; Boundary applications. Dom, our new PHLP graduate trainee has been active with the Pendle signage project putting up information signs around the hill. He has also helped farmer members with their hedge &amp; boundary scheme applications in early 2020, taking photos and producing the maps needed for their applications and claims.</p> |



Our second year has been very productive, the farmer members have been very interested and engaged with our continuing work on soils. They are also very appreciative of the opportunity to discuss the options and outlook for upland farming, as well as of the opportunities the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership affords to them as members. Some members remain more frequent attendees than others. The challenge for the coming year will be to innovate to operate under Covid-19 restrictions, to continue to provide a programme which is interesting to them and to continue to encourage them to enter Countryside Stewardship agreements. We have a good age range of members, and so are keen to ensure there are elements which appear across the group.

**Plans for 2020:** this coming year we hope to concentrate on:

- Soil health, soil invertebrate health and links to vetmed
- Wildlife monitoring
- Farm carbon accounting

Sarah Robinson

30 April 2020