

CASE STUDY UK-2

Hope Farm (UK)

BRIEF PROFILE OF THE CASE STUDY

Hope Farm is located in Cambridgeshire in England, a territory dominated by arable farms (cereals, oilseeds) on good quality soils characterised by heavy clay. Farms in this region are mostly specialist arable farms, operating in conventional systems, but 50 years ago most farms would have been mixed, with sheep and cattle. This change has resulted in a significant **biodiversity decline** and **water issues** in the area (a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone) with soil sediments, pesticides and nutrients leaching from farms. In a lot of ways, this situation is typical of middle and eastern England.

In 2000, the RSPB, a bird and wildlife NGO, bought a ‘boring’ farm to demonstrate that management to restore birds is viable and compatible with a commercial activity. Today, its objective is to move from one, isolated farm to a coherent landscape of potential influence and impact.

The main environmental and social benefit studied is biodiversity but secondary environmental and social benefits are also: soil functionality, soil protection and water quality.



KEY FACTORS IMPACTING THE PROVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

Hope Farm seeks to influence arable farming to enhance environmental and social benefits in the region. There is plenty of potential to build synergies with other interesting initiatives going on in the area, especially with other forward-looking farmers trying to improve performance, increase resilience, benchmark and innovate, develop or use existing markets for ‘green’ crops or respond to the public education needs/appetite. And many factors appear to push for this change to happen, for example **input prices, legislative or environmental pressure** (e.g. water quality, pesticide legislation, weed resistance), **policies and institutions in place to offer support** (although to a limited extent), **consumer/public demand for more environmentally beneficial agriculture**. On the other hand, **farmers’ mind-set and practice change slowly**. Some are spontaneously carrying out trials, others require a lot of persuasion to adopt new practices - and do not see RSPB’s Hope Farm as being convincing enough.

EMERGING FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

It is all about people, persuasion, knowledge, trial and trust. To initiate change to ensure environmental benefits’ provision, one needs first to understand the social background in an area – people, perceptions, culture and networks. However, having social benefits alone do not guarantee that changes will occur: **change agents/catalysts are important in a sector where legacies last a long time**. The time is right for innovation and new partnerships, working at a landscape scale but the case study shows that there is **a need to rethink about how to facilitate change in a context of limited public funding**. The lessons learnt from this typical intensive arable region are likely to be useful in other countries even though the specific solutions, reflecting the cultural/social background, would certainly vary.

