



A clear solution for farmers

CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING

Tackling soil erosion through CSF advice

Isle of Wight Catchment Partnership

River Yar, Isle of Wight Catchment

Partnership Officer: Lucy Temple

Farm description

Bachelors Farm is a 314 ha arable farm spread over a wide area of the south-east of the Isle of Wight. In four major blocks with a number of smaller outlying fields the major impacts of farming are on the catchment of the eastern river Yar, the Island's largest river and source of some of the potable water for the Island's population.

The majority of the holding is situated over ferruginous sands with a landscape dominated by large fields, degraded hedgerows and few small shelterbelts. These factors make the soils prone to wind erosion. Previously a dairy farm, the farm was switched to pigs before its current use as an arable farm producing cereals and vegetables.

A minimum till system is used in drier years and ploughing during wetter ones with 40% subsoiling carried out in any one year. Some of the land is rented out to other farmers for vegetable production and part of the farm has donkey and horse grazing established on it. The farm is adjacent to two SSSI's and six SINC's (wildlife sites).



Erosion in river valley

Pollution issues

The relatively intensive nature of the arable farming was leading to soil run-off and erosion of the sandy fields immediately adjacent to the eastern Yar. Perennial problems with silt and pesticide pollution has meant the closure of the eastern Yar as a source for drinking water in the recent past and the Isle of Wight Catchment Sensitive Farming Partnership was keen to target farms where these incidents could happen again.



Soil run-off on slope



In-field erosion and run-off



Margins alongside watercourse



Use of road planings on track

Pollution solutions

The solution was to improve farming operations on this site through a combination of advice and financial incentives. Targeting this catchment allowed us to take up the farmer's invitation to talk to him about all aspects of farm management. Soil run-off and erosion were highlighted in discussions and the farmer was receptive to the Partnership exploring options on how to reduce these particular problems.

The Project approached Natural England who allowed a Farm Environment Plan to be drawn up and an application to the Higher Level Stewardship scheme was prepared by the farmer and the Project officer, highlighting the natural resource protection options including HF1 (field corners), HJ5 (in-field grass), HF7 (beetle banks), HE3 (6m buffers) and HJ3 (low input arable reversion).

Six months later, after discussions with Natural England, some of these options have been adopted and the obvious scars and run-off sites have improved, with grassy, unploughed areas leading to soil stabilisation and reduced siltation.

Farmer engagement and motivation

The farmer invited the Project Officer to the farm and was open to suggestions regarding a reduction in the run-off and loss of soils experienced on the farm. The Project Officer's approach and style was seen as helpful presence rather than a regulatory one which allows for better communication and guarantees greater co-operation. Invitation by the farmer allows for greater openness in initial discussions and gives the Project Officer a greater degree of credibility in the later negotiations.

However, the financial incentives under Higher Level Stewardship were a critical factor, particularly the availability of arable reversion.

The farmer also accepted the need for grassland maintenance and to acquire grazing animals or enter into grazing agreements with his neighbours so it is not a case of sitting back and letting the grass grow!

Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer (CSFO)

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