



Nature Recovery  
Shropshire and  
Telford & Wrekin

# Helping nature to recover by...

## Changing Farming Systems, with farmer, Duncan Bennett



### The Farm

160 acres, upland livestock (beef & sheep) at Pennerley, near Minsterley. Duncan came out of ESA payment scheme as he was frustrated with follow-on agri-environment schemes.

He entered back into the mid-tier Countryside Stewardship Scheme, as a result of joining the Upper Onny Farmer Group. Duncan's farm is within the Shropshire Hills National Landscape.

He produces:

- finished cattle (Aberdeen Angus) sold straight to Pickstock Abattoir, Telford.
- sheep – sold as stores through local auction markets (Welshpool or Ludlow).

### Results so far...

**Spending less and increasing profit, “a win win”** and a more sustainable farming business.

**Restoring nature** – birds, insects and plant species are coming back onto the farm...

**“Goldfinches stripping creeping thistle seed heads and a barn owl has had 3 successful years rearing chicks. The sward diversity is good for insects including dung beetles, butterflies and bees. When rolling hay out for cattle I now see troop of wagtails, sparrows, chaffinches. I also hear skylark and curlew. ”**

### Inspiration to make changes:

- Spiralling input costs
- Wanting to build farm business without being so reliant on funding
- Poor soil health – compaction caused by continuous overgrazing and lack of sward diversity
- Building confidence through being a member of the Upper Onny Farmer Group
- Gaining new ideas from farm visits and other farmer events to hear from, and see, what other upland farmers are doing.
- Learning more about natural regeneration by talking to people and watching YouTube videos

**“My aim was to get land and livestock as healthy as possible.”**

### Duncan's thoughts on the changes he has made on the farm...

*“Making the changes was about building my farm business without being reliant on funding. We need to be able to survive without it – hence, lowering costs, changing breeds and system.”*

*“The biggest thing I've done that has benefitted everything is to rest the ground as long as possible between grazing.”*



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**“Am I doing the right thing? Making the changes was a big and scary decision but so far it keeps going right and I feel a whole lot happier. I’m always busy but have a better work life balance and a healthier farming system which I’m really enjoying.”**



### Changes made on the farm

- System change – following regenerative agriculture principles – soil, air and water
- Hedgerow creation and restoration, hedgelaying workshops with CPRE Shropshire
- Natural Flood Management – deculverted stream, pond creation, protected watercourses and created wider buffer strips
- Got rid of commercial sheep flock, from 300 to 130, and changed to Easycare sheep. Building up flock to around 200.
- Cattle numbers decreased and switched from continental crosses to Aberdeen Angus. Halved cattle numbers.
- Constantly evaluating/monitoring land and livestock to ensure livestock adapt to the farm and the land is in best condition.

### Duncan’s next steps are to keep lowering costs and to get land and livestock as healthy as possible.

By changing the farming system, Duncan has improved his farm business and created space for wildlife on the farm. This is helping to build nature recovery networks across the county. [Read more about Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Local Nature Recovery Strategy.](#)

### With advice from

- Inspirational advice from Greg Judy on grazing and cattle
- Shropshire Hills National Landscape Team (Farming in Protected Landscapes and Upper Onny Farmers Group facilitator)
- Severn Rivers Trust carried out Farm Water Audit and advised on follow-on work
- General advice from Natural England, Environment Agency, Shropshire Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Pasture for Life & local ecologist
- Hedgerows – from the Whole Farm Plan, James Robinson, CPRE Shropshire

### And funding / support from

- [Farming in Protected Landscapes \(FiPL\) programme](#), Shropshire Hills National Landscape.
- With FiPL funding [Severn Rivers Trust](#) carried out Duncan’s Farm Water Audit (FWA).
- Severn Rivers Trust’s ‘Temeing with Life’ Project funded FWA recommendations.
- Duncan’s Whole Farm Plan was funded through the [Whole Farm Plan Defra ELM Test & Trials](#). National Trust were the lead organisation, through the [Stepping Stones Project](#).
- [CPRE Shropshire Hedgerow Project](#) provided hedge plants and volunteers to plant. Also accessed support from the Tree Council’s Network Rail Community Tree Planting fund.