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THE
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PROJECT

Farmers, Forestry and Delivery

Farmers, Forestry and Delivery

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study provides a snapshot of the experiences of farmers in and around mid-Wales who have already established woodland on their land for a variety of purposes. These early adopters provide valuable insight into the practical motivations, opportunities, and barriers associated with integrating trees into farm businesses. Their experiences highlight both the potential role of farm woodlands in supporting rural resilience and the importance of clearer pathways linking woodland creation with timber supply chains and end uses.

The findings reflect the experiences of farmers operating primarily in upland Less Favoured Areas (LFAs), where woodland creation is currently more prevalent, and should be interpreted within this context. Approaches to woodland creation are likely to differ across other land types and farming systems.

The image below illustrates an upland farm context from one of the site visits highlighting the use of shelter belts:



Figure 1: Upland LFA farm landscape showing contrast between open hill grazing and sheltered, more productively managed areas.

Farmers involved in this study were generally positive about trees on farms where woodland contributed to farm resilience, diversification and long-term economic stability. Both farmers and advisers highlighted that woodland creation is more likely to gain support where schemes allow practical flexibility and farmer-led decision-making, enabling trees to fit within farm business models. Some farmers also highlighted opportunities to generate additional income

through undertaking forestry work themselves, particularly where farm machinery and labour can be adapted to support woodland establishment and management. However, both farmers and advisers also noted that complex approval processes and regulatory requirements can slow woodland creation and reduce farmer confidence in engaging with schemes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study also highlights opportunities to strengthen communication and engagement around productive forestry within the farming community. Several farmers noted that woodland creation is often presented primarily through environmental narratives, while the potential for trees to function as a productive crop within the farm business model is less visible within mainstream farming platforms. Increasing the visibility of productive forestry within trusted farming networks – including peer-to-peer learning, advisory services, agricultural shows and farming media – may help demonstrate the economic and practical role that farm woodlands can play in supporting resilient farm businesses and local timber supply chains in Wales.

A clear difference emerged between advisory and farmer perspectives on carbon markets. While advisers frequently referenced income from the Woodland Carbon Code (WCC) as a potential driver of woodland creation, most farmers tended to prioritise practical land management, farm resilience, and opportunities to retain economic value locally through timber production and on-farm use. As part of the universal requirements under the new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), all farms will be required to undertake a carbon baseline assessment. Woodland and trees that sequester carbon may therefore contribute positively to these calculations. Discussions with farmers at the time the work was carried out showed that they are waiting to clarify their position in relation to the SFS.

Key insights from the study include:

- Trusted advisers and face-to-face engagement play a critical role in farmer decisions about woodland creation.
- Farmers are most positive about trees where woodland contributes clear economic or practical value within the farm business.
- Woodland is often still perceived as separate from the core farm enterprise, particularly where the economic case is unclear.
- Cultural perceptions within agriculture continue to influence attitudes toward woodland expansion, particularly concerns about the loss of agricultural land.
- Regulatory complexity and prescriptive scheme requirements can reduce farmer confidence and engagement with woodland creation.
- Clearer information on timber markets and supply chains would help farmers understand how woodland can generate long-term income.
- Skills shortages and contractor availability remain constraints but also represent an opportunity for farmers to develop additional income through woodland management and small-scale contracting work.
- Early adopter farmers who have already established woodland may play an important role in influencing wider adoption through peer learning and farm-to-farm knowledge exchange.

The relationships between farmer motivations, barriers and opportunities for sector support are summarised in **Table 1**.

Farmer Motivations	Barriers	Opportunities
Diversifying farm income	Complex approval and regulatory processes	Clearer guidance and reduced bureaucracy
Timber as a productive crop	Limited understanding of timber markets and pathways	Better communication through farming platforms
Long-term resilience for family farms	Cultural resistance to tree planting	Farm-to-farm knowledge exchange
Flexible land use within farm businesses	Prescriptive planting requirements	Greater flexibility in woodland creation schemes
Local value from farm-grown timber	Limited links to timber supply chains	Stronger links between farm woodlands and timber supply chains

Summary Table: Farmer motivations, barriers and opportunities for farm woodland

These findings provide an initial evidence base illustrating how farm woodland creation is already being integrated into farm businesses by early adopters in Wales. Strengthening communication, practical support and connections to timber markets could help expand these approaches, enabling farm woodlands to contribute more fully to both resilient farm businesses and the ambitions of the Welsh Government’s Timber Industrial Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The farmers who participated in this study were not a random sample. All had already established woodland on their farms and therefore represent early adopters of woodland creation within the farming community. Their experiences provide practical insight into the motivations, challenges, and opportunities associated with integrating trees and woodlands into farm businesses and land management.

Understanding how these early adopters have approached woodland creation provides valuable insight into how woodlands may be integrated more widely into farm systems, particularly where they can contribute to farm resilience, diversification, and future timber supply. These farmer perspectives are complemented by insights from forestry agents and advisers working with farmers across Wales to support woodland creation.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study explored the experiences and motivations of farmers who have already established woodland on their land. These farmers represent early adopters of woodland creation within the farming community and provide valuable insight into the practical realities of integrating woodlands into farm businesses. Through on-farm visits and conversations, the study sought to understand why

these farmers chose to plant trees, how woodland fits within their farm systems, and what opportunities and barriers they see for wider adoption. The findings provide an initial evidence base to inform future work connecting farm woodland creation with timber supply chains, knowledge exchange, and the ambitions of the Welsh Government's Timber Industrial Strategy.



Figure 2: Woodknowledge Wales' independent advisor Chris Jones out on a site visit to discuss farm woodland.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Context

This study explored how farmers and advisers in Wales perceive woodland creation within farm systems. It combines perspectives from advisers working across the sector with in-depth discussions with farmers who have already established woodland on their land.

The original intention for this task was to bring a wider group of farmers together in a workshop setting to discuss woodlands on farms and to explore the potential for a community of practice among farmers considered early adopters of productive woodland. Initial conversations with advisers suggested that a group approach would be less effective at this stage, largely due to negative reactions within the farming community following early discussions around the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), including suggestions of a 10% woodland requirement on farms, alongside wider uncertainty about how the scheme would operate.

Based on these discussions, advisers recommended prioritising trust-building and relationship development through one-to-one conversations and on-farm visits rather than group workshops. The approach was therefore adapted to focus on face-to-face visits and discussions with farmers on their own farms. This proved highly valuable, allowing open conversations about motivations, practical woodland management, perceived barriers and future opportunities, while also helping to build relationships between farmers and Woodknowledge Wales.

Data Collection

The majority of adviser contact details were obtained from Welsh Government's registered woodland planners directory, with additional contacts sourced from the Farming Connect approved advisers directory and a local Wildlife Trust organisation working with farmers on woodland creation and diversification. Questionnaires were sent to those identified and sixteen responses were received from forestry agents and advisers working across Wales.

All questionnaire responses and interviews were treated anonymously. Direct quotations are used throughout the report to illustrate key themes without identifying individual participants in order to protect confidentiality and promote openness.

Several advisers also recommended farmers who might be interested in participating in the study. Two farmers were already known to Woodknowledge Wales through their use of farm-grown timber for construction, one of whom incorporated small-scale sawmilling as part of the farm business model. One farmer had previously hosted a Royal Forestry Society visit to discuss woodland creation and farm diversification for future resilience. Another farmer planted woodland after observing the financial success of a neighbouring farm that had established productive forestry. One farmer was recommended by the Wildlife Trust due to their use of woodland creation and management as part of a nature-friendly farming approach.

Farmer Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six farmers who had already established woodland on their farms. Five interviews took place on-site and face-to-face, with one conducted by telephone. Farm visits typically lasted between one and two hours and allowed conversations to move beyond the structured questions, enabling farmers to explain their motivations, experiences and perspectives in their own terms. This qualitative approach provided deeper insight into how woodland creation had been integrated into farm businesses and day-to-day land management decisions.

As the farmers interviewed represent early adopters of woodland creation, the findings should be viewed as indicative rather than representative of all farm woodland perspectives across Wales. However, both farmers and advisers indicated that further opportunities for engagement and additional case studies could emerge through continued work in this area.

The farms included in this study are located primarily in upland Less Favoured Areas (LFAs), where woodland creation is currently more prevalent. This reflects the focus of the study on farmers who have successfully established and integrated woodland within their farm businesses. As such, the findings provide insight into decision-making within this context and are not intended to represent the full diversity of farming systems across Wales. Approaches to woodland creation are likely to differ in more productive lowland settings, where land use priorities and economic drivers vary.

KEY THEMES ACROSS QUESTIONNAIRES AND INTERVIEWS

Data from both the farmer interviews and the adviser questionnaires were analysed using a set of cross-cutting themes derived directly from the structure of the two questionnaires. This ensured that insights from both groups could be compared systematically while maintaining the different perspectives of farmers and advisers.

The themes used were:

- Farm context and baseline woodland presence
- Engagement and communication around trees on farms
- Attitudes and perceptions of trees and woodlands
- Business motivations and perceived value
- Practical and economic barriers
- Policy, grants and regulatory processes
- Skills, infrastructure and sector capacity
- Markets and end uses for farm-grown timber
- Trust, institutions and advisory relationships
- Future opportunities and sector support needs.

These themes reflect the progression of questions in both the farmer interview schedule and the adviser questionnaire.

In addition to the themes derived from the questionnaire and interview structure, the topic of carbon markets and the Woodland Carbon Code (WCC) emerged organically during interviews and responses. These are discussed where relevant in the findings and discussion.



Figure 3: Taken at farm 1 in mid Wales showing mature plantings from the Bracken Land Challenge Fund in 1997 on the right, new plantings of mixed native broadleaf on the left of the track, and some more mature Douglas fir at the bottom of the track.

PARTICIPATING FARM PROFILES

Six farmers across mid-Wales participated in this study. The farms varied in scale, enterprise type, and approach to establishing and managing on-farm woodlands. The following profiles illustrate the diversity of farm contexts and motivations among early adopters of woodland creation.

Farmer 1

“The main purpose of planting trees was to pay the mortgage.”

Farm type:

Formerly sheep and cattle (small flock of sheep and horses on remaining land)

Farm size:

100 ha (250 acres)

Land type:

Less Favoured Area / Upland

Woodland cover:

75% (mixed woodland including broadleaf and softwood blocks)

Approach:

Woodland creation was adopted as a financial diversification alongside horses and a holiday let. Tree planting was primarily motivated by the desire to create financial stability and strengthen farm business resilience, particularly when compared with volatile livestock returns.

Farmer 2

“Before we planted trees, I couldn't see the bottom line in the business... I was trying to future-proof the farm.”

Farm type:

Sheep (formerly mixed livestock)

Farm size:

200 ha (500 acres)

Land type:

Less Favoured Area / Upland

Woodland cover:

20% (predominantly softwood - approx. 65%)

Approach:

Woodland creation was adopted as a strategic response to uncertainty in agricultural markets and declining confidence in livestock profitability. Tree planting was viewed as a long-term business decision to future-proof the farm and replace livestock production on poorer land.

Farmer 3

“My father always planted trees for shelter... you start to see the value over time.”

Farm type:

Mixed livestock with cropping

Farm size:

222 ha (550 acres)

Land type:

Less Favoured Area / Upland

Woodland cover:

23% (predominantly softwood - approx. 65%)

Approach:

Woodland on the farm developed gradually from shelter belts planted by previous generations into a productive forestry resource influenced by a neighbouring farm and supplying timber markets alongside on-farm use.

PARTICIPATING FARM PROFILES

Farmer 4

“It’s part of the landscape here and part of how we manage the land.”

Farm type:
Mixed livestock
smallholding

Farm size:
19 ha
(40 acres)

Land type:
Less Favoured
Area / Upland

Woodland cover:
25% (mature broadleaf
woodland inc. riparian
areas, coppice and
orchard trees)

Approach:

Woodlands and tree planting on this site are managed primarily for household resilience and ecological value. Woodland areas include orchard systems and integrated woodland providing firewood, fencing material, and small construction timber.

Farmer 5

“We’ve always cut our own timber to use if we can.”

Farm type:
Sheep and beef with
cropping

Farm size:
100ha
(250 acres)

Land type:
Less Favoured
Area / Upland

Woodland cover:
10% (mixed woodland
including oak and
small softwood blocks)

Approach:

Woodland on the farm has historically been used for practical purposes including construction timber and fencing materials. The farmer’s father previously operated a small sawmill on the farm, supplying and processing timber locally. The farmer is now looking to re-establish small-scale milling to support on-farm processing and potentially supply local markets.

Farmer 6

“Sawmilling grew from a hobby.”

Farm type:
Sheep and beef with
cropping and sawmill

Farm size:
120ha
(300 acres)

Land type:
Less Favoured
Area

Woodland cover:
5-7% (softwood
prioritised for timber
production)

Approach:

The farm integrates a commercial small-scale sawmill business. Woodland planting is primarily focused on future timber production and optimising land use on less productive areas of the farm.

FINDINGS

The following sections present farmer and adviser perspectives separately. Using the thematic framework outlined earlier in the report allows similarities and differences between these perspectives to be identified while maintaining the context in which each group operates.

FARMER PERSPECTIVES

1. Farm contexts

- Farm sizes ranged from smallholdings of less than 20 hectares to farms exceeding 200 hectares.
- Farm enterprises included sheep and beef, mixed livestock systems, and mixed farms with some cropping for feed or rotation.
- Most holdings were located in Less Favoured Areas/ upland environments, often characterised by marginal or less productive land.
- Woodland cover across the farms varied considerably, ranging from approximately 5% to over 75% of the farm holding.
- Woodland types varied between farms and included shelter belts, scattered woodland blocks, larger areas of productive forestry and in one case agroforestry-style plantings.
- Tree species also varied depending on the farmer's objectives and planting scheme requirements, including softwood species such as Douglas fir and spruce alongside mixed broadleaf species including oak and other native woodland mixes.

This diversity reflects the different ways in which woodlands are integrated into farm businesses and layouts, ranging from small functional woodlands to larger productive forestry systems.

2. How woodlands fit into farm businesses

Woodlands were integrated into farm businesses in a variety of ways across the farms. In most cases woodland formed part of a broader mixed farming system rather than replacing farming entirely.

Key roles of woodlands within farm businesses included:

- Shelter for livestock and protection of fields and infrastructure.
- Provision of timber and wood products for on-farm use including for biomass, bedding, fencing materials, construction timber and firewood.
- Long-term timber production, particularly where productive softwood species had been planted.
- Diversification opportunities, including sawmilling and the use of farm-grown timber in buildings or other farm enterprises.
- Utilisation of less productive land, with woodland often planted on steep, marginal or otherwise difficult areas of the farm.

Several farmers described trees as a productive component of the farm system, particularly where timber could be harvested or processed locally.

For one farm, timber processing had become a significant diversification activity alongside livestock farming.

"You can switch the mill off and go back to the farm." - **Farmer 6**

In other cases, woodland was viewed as a long-term crop capable of supporting wider farm diversification, including tourism. One farmer described how woodland surrounding on-farm accommodation provided space for visitors to walk dogs, ride horses and enjoy the forest environment, adding recreational value alongside practical benefits such as shelter and wildlife habitat.

Overall, farmers tended to view woodlands multifunctionally rather than as a single enterprise and most positively where they provided clear functional or economic value within the farm business.

3. Perceptions about trees and woodlands on farms

Farmers described their own perceptions of trees and woodlands, as well as how they believe trees are viewed more widely within the farming community.

Key perceptions from the farmers interviewed included:

- Woodlands as functional infrastructure, providing shelter, boundary management, habitat, leisure space and materials such as timber, fencing and firewood.
- Trees as a long-term productive crop, including where timber production or processing formed part of the farm business.
- Woodland as a productive use for marginal or unproductive land, rather than core agricultural land.

Farmers also reflected on wider attitudes within the farming community:

- Woodland creation is often perceived as being in tension with food production priorities.
- Trees are not widely understood as a crop within farming culture.

"Farmers don't think of trees as a crop... it's something you do on a rubbish bit of ground." - **Farmer 1**

FARMER PERSPECTIVES

Cultural resistance to woodland expansion was attributed to:

- Farming traditions
- Fear of irreversible land use change
- Identity tied to food production.

Concerns about loss of food production land remain influential in farmer attitudes toward tree planting.

"You plant it with trees, you're never going to produce food on that acre again." - Farmer 5

These findings suggest that while farmers directly engaged with woodland often recognise practical and economic benefits, wider cultural perceptions within agriculture may continue to influence attitudes toward tree planting.

4. Financial motivations and business resilience

Economic considerations were frequently cited as a key factor influencing woodland creation decisions. Across the interviews, trees were often viewed as part of a broader strategy to strengthen the long-term resilience of farm businesses.

Key financial motivations identified included:

- Diversification of farm income, particularly where livestock enterprises were under financial pressure.
- Woodland creation grants and maintenance payments, which provided predictable income during the establishment period.
- Long-term timber production, viewed as a future crop that could generate value later in the rotation.
- Use of farm-grown timber within the business, reducing costs for construction, fencing and fuel.
- Development of timber-related enterprises, including small-scale sawmilling.
- Carbon markets, which in one case provided additional income alongside woodland creation grants.

Woodland was also described as transforming underperforming land into a long-term asset proving security for the family farm.

Several farmers described woodland payments as an important element of farm financial stability.

"The animals don't pay. The grant covers everything and the maintenance payments help keep things steady." - Farmer 2

One farmer explained that woodland income contributed directly to household financial security.

"The woodland payments cover the mortgage." - Farmer 1

For farmers who had engaged with carbon markets, woodland creation was also viewed as an opportunity to generate additional value from tree planting. However, attitudes toward carbon varied across the interviews, with some farmers expressing uncertainty or scepticism about long-term carbon agreements.

Another farmer emphasised that timber enterprises must ultimately be financially viable beyond grant support.

"The grant can be there to get it started... but it's got to stand on its own two feet." - Farmer 6

Figure 4: On-farm woodland integrated into a less productive area and managed for timber production.

Image by courtesy of Farmer 2.



FARMER PERSPECTIVES

5. Practical challenges of woodland creation and management

Farmers identified a number of challenges associated with establishing and managing trees on farms.

Key challenges included:

- Establishing young trees, particularly managing weeds, drought conditions and replacing failed planting.
- Tree protection issues, including damage from hares, deer and grazing livestock.
- Long timeframes to maturity, with timber seen as a crop that may take decades to realise value.
- Availability of suitable contractors, particularly for smaller-scale woodland work.
- Access and terrain constraints, especially in upland or fragmented farm landscapes.

Several farmers noted that the establishment phase of woodland creation was the most demanding.

"Getting them established... that's the hardest thing." - Farmer 6

Some farmers preferred to outsource woodland planning and management to forestry agents, particularly where regulatory processes were seen as complex.

"They took everything out of my hands... it lets me concentrate on my kids." - Farmer 2

Others highlighted a shortage of small-scale forestry contractors, noting that most available operators are geared toward larger commercial forestry operations.

6. Policy frameworks and grant schemes

Farmers described mixed experiences with woodland policy frameworks and grant schemes. While financial support was widely recognised as important for enabling woodland creation, several farmers highlighted challenges related to scheme design, compliance requirements and policy messaging.

Key themes included:

- Woodland creation grants were seen as an important incentive for establishing trees, particularly where livestock enterprises were under financial pressure.
- Administrative processes and compliance requirements were often described as complex and time-consuming.
- Some farmers expressed frustration with species mix requirements within grant schemes, particularly where these limited the ability to maximise planting of productive timber species.



- The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) was frequently described as unclear or confusing.
- Policy discussions around tree cover targets were seen by some farmers as difficult to reconcile with food production priorities.

One farmer described the paperwork associated with woodland creation as overly complex.

"It's too complicated... if they want people to plant woodland, they should make it easier." - Farmer 6

He also highlighted frustration with species mix requirements within woodland creation schemes.

"We planted two acres ourselves... 100% Douglas." - Farmer 6

7. Skills, contractors and on-farm management capacity

Farmers described a range of approaches to managing woodland on their farms, reflecting differences in skills, available labour and business priorities.

Key findings included:

- Some farmers preferred to outsource woodland establishment and management to professional forestry agents.
- Others managed woodland directly on the farm, drawing on existing farm machinery and adapting equipment where possible.
- One farmer was actively involved in providing forestry related contracting and saw the opportunity for young farmers to do similar.
- Another farmer included timber processing and integrated this into his wider farm business model.
- Several farmers highlighted a shortage of small scale forestry contractors, particularly for planting, establishment phase, thinning and management.
- Interest was expressed by some in developing forestry and timber processing skills.

FARMER PERSPECTIVES

One farmer described how farm machinery had been adapted to support forestry work both on and off the farm.

"We adapt the farm kit to do the forestry work." - Farmer 1

Other farmers highlighted a gap in contractor availability, particularly for smaller-scale woodland management.

"Those people... are very far between now." - Farmer 6

Farm woodland management, in these cases, sits on a spectrum from fully outsourced to fully integrated farm enterprises.

8. Markets and uses for timber from farm woodlands

Across the farms included in this study, timber from farm woodlands was used in a range of ways depending on woodland type, scale, and management approach. In many cases, timber remained within the farm system or local area, particularly where woodland areas were small or actively managed by the farmer.

Current woodland outputs included:

- Firewood
- Fencing materials
- Sawlogs and ungraded timber for construction
- Woodchip for biomass and bedding
- Larger-scale productive woodland thinnings and final harvest to supply regional processors and timber markets through established commercial supply chains.

Several farmers expressed interest in increasing the value derived from timber through small-scale processing. One farmer was already operating a small sawmill on the farm, while others discussed ambitions to process timber locally or develop markets in the surrounding area.



Several farmers also noted that timber, biomass, carbon income and woodland grants currently benefit from favourable tax treatment. In comparison, some farmers described livestock enterprises as financially challenging once the full costs of inputs such as feed, bedding, machinery use and labour were taken into account.

In one case, recent planting decisions were influenced by the requirements of carbon markets and additionality rules:

"Carbon credits are worth more... if it's all broadleaf, you meet additionality easily." - Farmer 1

9. Sector support, advice and future engagement

Farmers frequently highlighted the importance of trusted agents and advisers and practical guidance when making decisions about woodland creation, management and timber production.

Key themes included:

- Use of forestry agents and woodland planners to navigate grant applications, regulatory processes and woodland design.
- Importance of trusted intermediaries in helping farmers understand motivations around woodland creation, management and timber production.
- Interest in practical learning opportunities, including farm visits and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.
- A general preference for practical examples and farmer experience, rather than purely policy-led messaging.
- Interest in clearer guidance on silvicultural practices, particularly thinning, species management and timber quality, to help maximise the value of farm-grown timber.
- Interest in clearer information on how to access local timber markets, including routes into small-scale processing, construction supply chains and local timber use.

All the farmers expressed interest in continuing engagement with Woodknowledge Wales, including the possibility of hosting farm visits or contributing to future knowledge exchange activities.

Awareness of Woodknowledge Wales prior to the interviews was limited among several participants, although interest in learning more about the organisation's work increased through the conversations.

Farmers are interested in growing timber, but clearer pathways from woodland management to market opportunities are needed.

ADVISER PERSPECTIVES

1. Context: farms and landscapes advisers work with

Advisers reported working with a wide range of farms across Wales:

- Including dairy, cattle and sheep, mixed livestock, mixed farm, arable and cropping, smallholdings.
- Often operating in mixed upland-lowland as well as Less Favoured Areas, and sometimes just lowland.
- Most advisers noted that typical woodland cover on farms varied widely between holdings.
- Opinions varied from no minimum scale for woodland to be integrated as part of the farm business to 30 hectares for it to be viable.

2. Engagement with farmers on land-use change

Advisers consistently emphasised the importance of direct, face-to-face engagement.

Key observations included:

- 11 out of 16 advisers identified face-to-face, one-to-one, on-site visits as the most effective form of communication.
- Walking the land with farmers was frequently described as the best way to discuss land-use change.
- Personal relationships and trust were considered more influential than written guidance or policy messaging.

Interestingly, advisers did not identify water management, runoff mitigation or pollution control as factors commonly raised by farmers when discussing woodland creation.

3. Adviser perceptions of farmer attitudes towards woodlands on farms

Advisers described farmer attitudes towards woodlands as highly variable.

Key observations included:

- Some farmers recognise the practical benefits of trees, including shelter and biodiversity.
- Woodland is often viewed as separate from the core farm enterprise.
- Sentiment toward woodland creation is frequently ambivalent or cautious.
- Concerns about permanent loss of agricultural land remain influential in shaping attitudes.

Some advisers noted that farmers often see woodland as non-economic unless managed at scale, while others highlighted that perceptions may vary significantly between regions and farming systems.

"Trees are often considered an obligation." -
Adviser response

6 out of 16 advisers observed that neighbouring farmers though often initially resistant or scathing would become curious about woodland creation, particularly once they start to see the economic benefits.



Figure 5: A mid-Wales landscape, showing bracken land, pasture land, open hills, hedges and woodlands.

ADVISER PERSPECTIVES

4. Woodlands as business assets or policy obligations

Advisers reported that farmers interpret woodland in several different ways.

Key observations included:

- Some farmers view trees primarily as policy obligations, particularly in relation to environmental schemes.
- Many farmers view woodland as a burden or an obligation that is separate from the core farm business model and a waste of agricultural land.
- Productive forestry is often not considered part of the farm enterprise unless clear economic returns are demonstrated.

Several advisers also highlighted that farmers frequently struggle to see woodland as a business asset due to perceptions about permanent loss of agricultural land, long time horizons and episodic cashflow from thinnings and final harvest.

5. Barriers to woodland creation and management

Advisers identified a range of barriers influencing farmer decisions.

Key barriers included:

- Concerns about permanent land-use change.
- Cashflow and economic uncertainty.
- Limited knowledge of woodland management and timber markets.
- Cultural resistance linked to farming traditions and livestock-based identities.

Some advisers also highlighted that farmers may lack confidence in the long-term economic case for woodland creation, particularly where market information is unclear.

6. Policy, bureaucracy and regulatory processes

Regulatory processes were widely identified as a major constraint.

Key themes included:

- Woodland creation approvals were often described as complex and time-consuming.
- Habitat regulations and environmental constraints were frequently seen as restrictive or overly prescriptive.
- Mapping inconsistencies and lengthy approval processes were reported as barriers to scheme delivery.
- Regulatory uncertainty was considered a factor reducing farmer confidence in woodland schemes.



Advisers frequently described regulatory processes as complex and difficult to navigate.

"The process is burdensome and complex and is not apposite." - Adviser response

Several advisers also suggested that perceived regulatory resistance to commercial forestry may discourage farmers from pursuing woodland creation projects.

7. Contractor availability and operational capacity

9 out of 16 adviser responses stated there are not enough contractors to operate at farm-woodland scale.

Key observations included:

- Most advisers reported shortages of contractors, with one stating there is a training gap.
- Smaller-scale woodland work was considered harder to resource than large forestry operations.
- Skills related to woodland establishment and management were sometimes described as limited in rural areas.

One adviser suggested that contractor availability could improve if consistent planting programmes increased demand for forestry services.

ADVISER PERSPECTIVES

8. Timber markets and outputs from farm woodlands

Advisers reported that timber from farm woodlands currently enters a limited number of markets.

Typical outputs included:

- Firewood
- Biomass woodchip
- Fencing materials
- Small volumes of sawlogs
- Timber from small farm woodlands was often described as low-value or locally consumed, with market access sometimes constrained by scale and transport costs.

Advisers also highlighted limited awareness among farmers of how woodland management can generate ongoing income streams. While many farmers understand woodland creation grants, fewer are familiar with the potential for generating regular income through thinnings, timber harvesting or local processing.

"There is little understanding of producing a regular income from harvesting increment and adding value through own use and selling to local niche markets." -

Adviser response

9. Trust and credibility with the forestry sector and regulatory bodies

Advisers described a clear distinction between trust in individuals working within the forestry sector and distrust of regulatory processes and institutions.

Key observations included:

- Farmers often trust individual advisers, foresters and locally embedded organisations such as 'Stump up for Trees' with whom they have direct working relationships.
- Trusted relationships were frequently built through face-to-face engagement and long-term advisory roles.
- Trust in regulatory bodies and approval processes was often described as low.
- Several advisers highlighted frustration with bureaucratic processes, slow approvals and inconsistent regulatory decisions.
- Habitat regulations and the interpretation of priority habitat designations were commonly cited as barriers to woodland creation where farmers felt decisions lacked practical, pragmatic flexibility.
- Mixed messaging between policy objectives promoting tree planting and regulatory barriers to scheme approval was described as contributing to farmer scepticism towards woodland schemes.



"Farmers often trust foresters, but not the regulators." -
Adviser response

10. Opportunities for improved advisory support

Advisers suggested several ways to strengthen engagement with farmers.

Key suggestions included:

- Clearer economic modelling tools to demonstrate financial outcomes of woodland creation.
- Practical case studies and peer examples showing successful farm woodland integration.
- Improved guidance designed specifically for farm audiences rather than forestry professionals.
- Greater collaboration with farming unions, Farming Connect and advisory networks.
- Some agents and advisers also highlighted the need for better information on timber markets and supply chains, particularly where farmers are interested in diversification opportunities.

"Evidence of the economic and commercial benefits to farmers...would help communicate the value of woodland." - **Adviser response**

Advisers also highlighted the importance of recognising the role of farmers as active participants within woodland supply chains and management systems.

"This goes beyond 'provision' and needs to bring farmers in as relevant experts in the woodland sector." -
Adviser response

DISCUSSION

Key Insights from Farmers and Advisers

This study combined perspectives from farmers who have established woodland on their farms with insights from advisers working across agricultural landscapes in Wales. While the two groups approached woodland creation from different perspectives, several consistent themes emerged.

1. Trust and relationships are critical to engagement

Both farmers and advisers emphasised that face-to-face engagement and trusted relationships are essential when discussing woodland creation or land-use change. Most noted that on-farm conversations and site visits are far more effective than written guidance or policy messaging alone. Farmers similarly highlighted the importance of trusted intermediaries when navigating forestry decisions.

2. Trees are most positively viewed when they deliver practical or economic value

Farmers in this study were generally most positive about trees where they provided clear functional or financial benefits, such as shelter for livestock, timber for farm use, diversification opportunities, or long-term business resilience. Advisers similarly observed that farmers are more willing to consider woodland creation where a credible economic case can be demonstrated.

3. Woodland is often viewed as separate from the core farm business

Advisers frequently reported that farmers perceive woodland as separate from the farm enterprise rather than integrated into the farm business model. This perception appears to be reinforced by long timeframes associated with timber production and limited familiarity with woodland management.

4. Cultural perceptions remain a significant influence

Both farmers and advisers described persistent cultural perceptions within agriculture that shape attitudes toward trees. Woodland creation can be seen as conflicting with food production, and many farmers do not yet view trees as a productive crop in the same way as agricultural enterprises. Advisers also noted that policy messaging has historically emphasised native woodland creation and biodiversity objectives. While these aims are widely supported, this framing may also contribute to farmer perceptions of woodland primarily as an environmental measure rather than as a productive or multi-purpose component of farm businesses.

5. Policy design and regulatory complexity influence farmer confidence

Advisers consistently identified regulatory processes and policy complexity as factors that can discourage woodland creation. Mapping inconsistencies, habitat regulations, and lengthy approval processes were frequently cited as barriers to scheme delivery. Both farmers and advisers also noted that highly prescriptive planting requirements can reduce farmer engagement where they limit flexibility in species choice or woodland design.

6. Economic clarity and market pathways are needed

Both groups highlighted the need for clearer information on the economic potential of woodland on farms, including timber markets, management practices, and supply chains. Farmers expressed particular interest in understanding how timber grown on farms could connect to local processing and construction markets.

7. Skills and supply chain capacity remain important

Farmers and advisers both highlighted gaps in skills, contractor availability and woodland management knowledge, particularly at the scale of farm woodlands. There was also interest in opportunities to develop local timber markets and small-scale processing capacity.

8. Early adopters may influence wider change

The farmers interviewed in this study represent early adopters who have already established woodland within their farm businesses. All indicated willingness to share their experiences through site visits or future engagement. Both farmers and advisers noted that peer learning and farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange could play an important role in shaping attitudes toward trees on farms.

Taken together, these insights highlight the importance of aligning woodland creation policy, advisory support and supply chain development with the practical realities of farm businesses.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings from both farmers and advisers point to a set of consistent relationships between motivations for woodland creation, the conditions that enable successful integration, and the barriers that currently limit wider uptake. These relationships are summarised in Table 1.

The relationships outlined in Table 1 illustrate how farmer motivations, policy conditions and market opportunities interact to shape decisions about woodland creation within farm systems.

Table 1: Farmer motivations, barriers and opportunities for farm woodland

Farmer Motivation	Enabling Conditions	Barriers	Opportunities
Farm diversification and income stability	Woodland Creation Grants	Complex approval and regulatory processes	Clearer guidance and reduced bureaucracy
Productive timber as a farm crop	Peer examples and visible local success	Limited understanding of timber markets and pathways	Clearer messaging on farming platforms (Farming Connect, Farmers Weekly, agricultural shows)
Future economic resilience for family farms	Trusted advisers and practical case studies	Cultural concerns about woodland replacing agricultural land	Farm-to-farm knowledge exchange
Flexible land use within farm businesses	Farmer-led woodland creation	Prescriptive planting requirements	Greater flexibility within woodland creation schemes
Local value from farm-grown timber	Access to processing and markets	Limited links to timber supply chains	Stronger links between farm woodlands and timber supply chains

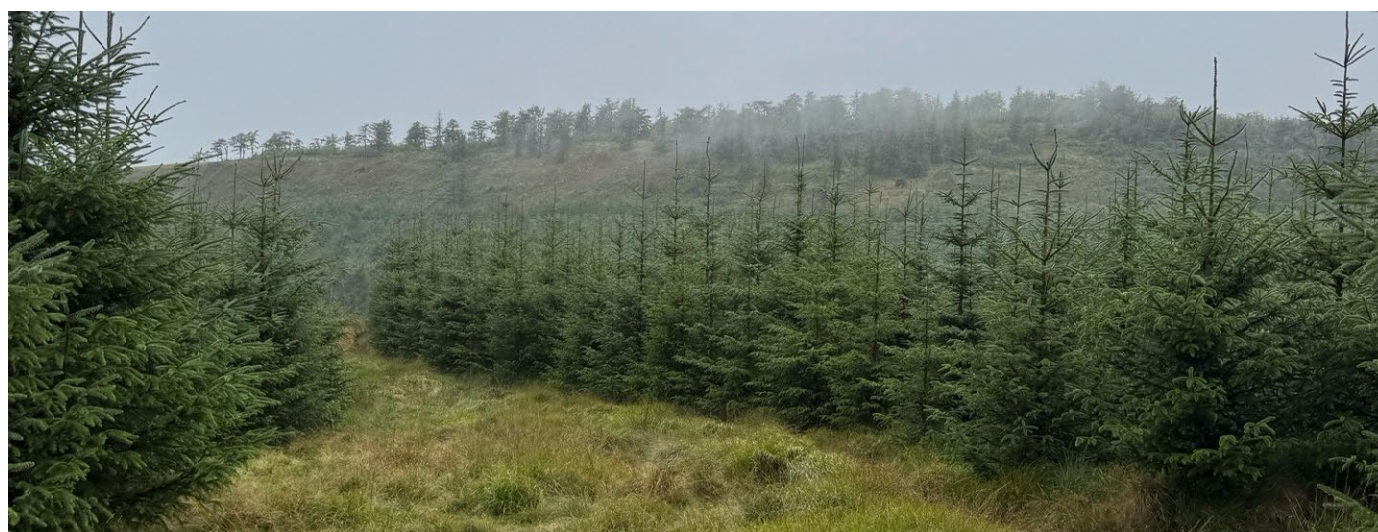


Figure 6: On-farm woodland integrated into a less productive area and managed for timber production. *Image by courtesy of Farmer 2.*

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Productive Forestry within Farm Businesses

For many farmers interviewed in this study, woodland creation became more attractive when trees were viewed not only as environmental assets but also as productive components of the farm business — effectively as a long-term crop. This included timber production, on-farm use of wood products, and diversification opportunities such as small-scale processing. In these cases trees were often described in similar terms to other farm enterprises, capable of contributing to farm resilience and future

income. In this way, woodland was often viewed not as a replacement for farming, but as a complementary land use capable of supporting the long-term resilience of the farm business.

In some cases, farmers described a historical connection between farms and small-scale timber processing, including examples where previous generations had operated sawmills or used farm timber for construction and fencing.

Figure 3: Farm infrastructure using farm-produced timber.



However, several farmers and advisers noted that woodland creation schemes and advisory messaging are often framed primarily around environmental outcomes, particularly native woodland establishment. While these objectives are widely supported, some farmers expressed uncertainty about how productive forestry fits within current policy frameworks.

Carbon Markets and Farmer Perspectives

Advisers frequently referenced carbon markets and the Woodland Carbon Code as a potential driver of woodland creation. However, most farmers interviewed in this study were generally more cautious about carbon schemes, with many expressing uncertainty about long-term commitments and contractual implications.

Figure 4: Farm infrastructure constructed using on-farm timber. *Images by Anna Dauksta.*



This highlights a difference between advisory and practitioner perspectives. Most farmers viewed carbon schemes with caution and tended to place greater emphasis on practical land management, long-term farm resilience, and the potential for timber and wood products to support on-farm use and local supply chains where possible within Wales.

For many farmers, retaining value locally through timber production and farm diversification appeared more tangible than participation in carbon markets.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Trusted Intermediaries and Farmer Engagement

Both farmers and advisers emphasised the importance of trusted relationships when discussing woodland creation and land-use change. Farmers frequently highlighted the role of trusted intermediaries such as forestry agents and advisers who could guide them through woodland planning, grant applications and regulatory processes.

Face-to-face engagement, particularly through on-farm visits and practical discussions, was consistently described as more effective than written guidance or policy messaging. These findings suggest that trust-building and peer-to-peer learning will play an important role in increasing farmer confidence in woodland creation and management.

Communicating Productive Forestry within Farming Networks

Several farmers also noted that woodland creation is often presented primarily through environmental narratives, while the potential for trees to function as a productive crop within farm businesses is less visible within mainstream farming platforms.

Farmers and advisers suggested that improving how productive forestry is communicated through trusted farming networks – including Farming Connect, agricultural shows and farming media – could help demonstrate the economic and practical role that farm woodlands can play in supporting resilient farm businesses. One adviser suggested that mainstream farming publications could highlight the value of productive timber in ways similar to how crop and livestock prices are regularly reported, helping farmers better understand the potential economic value of timber grown on farms.

Improving visibility of forestry and on-farm timber use within agricultural contexts may therefore be an important step in helping farmers see trees as part of the farm system rather than separate from it.

Figure 5: Use of farm-grown timber for joinery work in an on-farm holiday let courtesy of a participating farmer. *Image by Anna Dauksta.*



NEXT STEPS

A key outcome of this study was the development of relationships between farmers actively engaged in woodland creation and organisations working across the farming and forestry sectors, including advisers, agents, farming networks and Woodknowledge Wales. All participating farmers expressed interest in continuing the conversation and indicated they would be willing to host future farm visits. This provides a strong foundation for farm-to-farm knowledge exchange and for strengthening connections between farming, forestry and timber markets.

Opportunities emerging from this work include:

- Farm-to-farm knowledge exchange
- On-farm demonstration visits
- Improved communication around productive forestry as a crop within farming networks
- Clearer pathways linking farm woodland creation with timber markets and supply chains
- Stronger collaboration between farming organisations, forestry advisers and timber sector stakeholders.

The experiences of these early adopters demonstrate that woodland can play multiple roles within farm businesses, supporting diversification, resilience and future timber supply. Building on these insights through continued engagement between farmers, agents and advisers, farming organisations and the forestry sector could help strengthen the role of farm woodlands within Wales' emerging timber economy.

Areas for further exploration

Future research could explore several additional areas that were not covered in this study. These include farmers' exposure to woodland-related education during agricultural college training, perceptions of the role of trees in water management and pollution reduction (as highlighted in the Pontbren research).

Additionally, it would be valuable to explore how woodland creation and tree integration opportunities vary across different land types and farming systems in Wales, including more productive lowland areas. This could support a more strategic approach to land use, identifying where woodland creation at scale is most appropriate, as well as where integration within farm systems can deliver multiple benefits including shelter, water management, nutrient buffering and supporting the overall management and resilience of the farmed landscape.

References

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