



Cow grazing clover

Two decades ago we let a larger piece of land to the visionary founders of a social enterprise. Growing Well is celebrating 20 years of supporting people's mental health through horticultural activity on their plot here on the farm. It's hard to believe volunteers have braved all weather to produce such wonderful organic vegetables all these years. In celebration, twenty of their supporters and volunteers are embarking on fundraising challenges to raise £20,000.

We have hosted the annual Friends of the Lake District Westmorland hedging competition for the last two years. The day brings an impressive display of skills and experience. During late winter and early spring, the four of us in the farm team spent many hours laying hedges according to a 12 to 15-year plan. We laid 1,200 metres of old hedge and planted 270 metres of new.

The Forty Farms Outdoor Exhibition Trail came to Low Sizergh in November 2023. British Life Photographer Amy Bateman, who farms with her husband Colin near Kendal, travelled around Cumbria for 12 months. She interviewed and photographed farmers before creating, with editor Dave Felton, the book *Forty Farms: Conversations about Change in the Landscapes of Cumbria*. A large exhibition at Rheged followed. The outdoor version here was made possible through the sponsorship of H & H Land and Estates.

While hedging along the route of the exhibition, it's been enjoyable to chat with the many visitors taking in the knowledge and insight that Amy has presented in 40 panels of images and text.



Cows grazing at Low Sizergh



Farm shops support Cumbrian Farmers. Leonie Fairburn, from Thornby Moor, delivers artisan cheese to Low Sizergh Barn

A section of my farming community gathered at Low Sizergh last summer for a Soil Association and Farmer Network discussion about herbal leys, which we established seven years ago. This mixed species planting develops the soil ecosystem, which impacts cow health and human nutrition. The introduction of herbs and legumes among grass seed has resulted in the dominance of forbs, also known as less desirable plants or weeds.

Docks are a case in point. Following training in holistic management in 2016, I try to consider what the land is telling me when one species thrives. What bacterial or mineral imbalance in the soil is encouraging the dominance? How has soil compaction contributed? Is there a nice thick mat of protective growth between plants or has bare soil made the seed vulnerable? Docks took over a reseeded field last year and it was this that I invited my farming peers to view. A recent visit from Patrick Holden, chief

executive of the Sustainable Food Trust was less challenging. We met Patrick in the 1990s when we converted to organic standards and were certified by the Soil Association, which he used to lead.

Patrick's Sustainable Food Trust podcast is widely listened to and he is relentlessly positive about speeding up the changes that need to happen if food and farming systems are to nourish the health of both people and the planet.

For the past eight years, the Sustainable Food Trust and 150 other groups have been developing a global farm metric - data that examines social, economic and environmental sustainability. Our landlord, the National Trust, has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030 so all tenant farmers will now measure their farm's contribution to this goal. We discussed with Patrick how the global farm metric better fits our more holistic view. We will join the trial and test the framework on the farm.