

Norwich Institute
Sustainable Development

Improving the Sustainable Farming Incentive for Norfolk? Insights from Poland

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Sustainable Farming Incentive 2021 to 2025

- Farming covers ~69% of UK land and is central to food production, biodiversity and climate

- Post-Brexit/Basic Payment Scheme phaseout → Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS) support pro-environment actions
  - High ambition: goal of 70% of farmland under ELMs by 2028

- SFI evolution: pilot → limited rollout → full schemes (SFI23, SFI24)[1]
  - £848m on SFI23 to Oct 25[2]
- Focus on soil health, hedgerows, IPM, biodiversity

- As at March 2025, 31,900 businesses had SFI multi-year agreements[3] …

March 2025: A turning point for SFI

Eastern Daily Press

Norfolk farm faces £140,000 shortfall due to SFI closure

5TH APRIL 2025 BUSINESS

Hundreds of Norfolk farms set to miss SFI nature incentives

22ND MARCH 2025 BUSINESS

BBC Reporting:

12 March 2025 603 Comments

Farmers may turn their backs on environmental work for more intensive food production after the government suddenly closed a green funding scheme, the National Farmers' Union (NFU) has warned.

- Funding ‘pause’ created uncertainty across the sector…
- Reduced confidence in scheme stability
- Delayed or withdrawn participation decisions

Policy instability began to affect farmer confidence and uptake

But why does this matter?

The March 2025 funding ‘pause’ highlighted a gap between policy and practice…

- Uncertainty raised concerns about farmer confidence and uptake
- Existing challenges at farm level were not fully understood
- Limited evidence on how SFI is experienced in practice in Norfolk

A clearer understanding of on-the-ground barriers was needed to improve delivery **– *This was the trigger for my Norfolk-based research***

Barriers to SFI uptake in Norfolk



- Research: June – August 2025
- *Interviews, discussions, visits, policy and literature review*

- **Main barriers identified:**
  - Policy instability creates low trust
  - Payments don’t match arable returns
  - Uneven access to advice
  - Behavioural and structural constraints

- All interconnected

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International learning: Why Poland?





- Rapid growth – flagship project 20,000 ha commitment to regenerative practices
- Public-private partnerships -

  PepsiCo and Unilever partner with Polish farmers to support transition
- Reduced farmer risk through support
- Clear financial and market incentives
- Integrated into national policy
- Relevant to Norfolk farming futures

Images © Food Valley 2025

Poland case study

- Visit: November 2025
- SW Poland: prime agricultural land, strong agricultural innovation
- Studied Terra Nostra's regenerative agriculture certification

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Terra Nostra - System in practice



Image © Terra Nostra Fundacja 2024



- Whole-farm regenerative agriculture certification approach
- 162 question audit - mostly digital
- 70% compliance threshold for certification
- Annual audits and soil testing
- Training required and advisory support offered
- Sense of continuous improvement
- Independent verification: Bureau Veritas
- Bridges policy, markets and practice

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Why do farmers engage?





- Primary driver economic: ~€20/t premium
- Certification adds retail value
- Higher value within the supply chain
- Risk reduction (contracts, loans)
- Farmer voice & pricing power
- Data sharing builds trust and credibility
- Environmental benefits are secondary

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Learnings from Terra Nostra and Poland



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1. Works at scale when financially viable
2. Reduces risk
3. Supported by credible systems
4. Outcomes are measurable; builds trust
5. Addresses behavioural barriers noted in Norfolk

Reflections for Norfolk Farming Futures

SFI transition:

- June 2026 (smaller/new applicants); Sept 2026 (all)[4,5]
- Support from Norfolk FWAG (May drop-ins)



What can help ensure success:

- **Stability** → enables long-term planning
- **Markets** → create financial viability
- **Trust** → strengthen intermediaries & advisory support
- **Data** → build confidence and uptake

For long-term success, regenerative and sustainable farming practices must be *practical*, *supported,* and *profitable* for **all**.

Personal journey

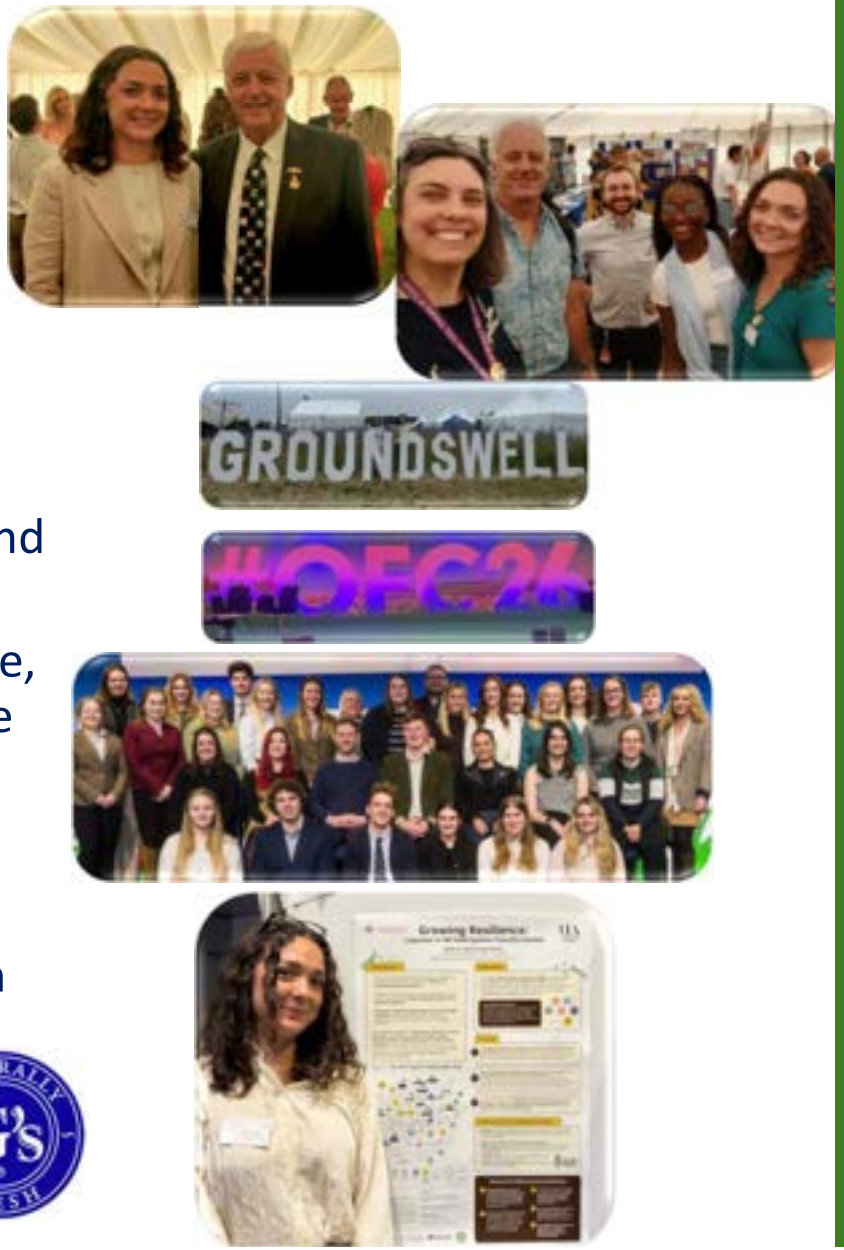
- Enabled international fieldwork
- Direct engagement with real farming systems
- Gathered practical lessons for UK policy

Wider sector engagement:

- Oxford Farming Conference Scholar, Jan 2026 - leadership and networking training, conference attendance
- Norfolk Farming Conference, Norfolk Landscapes Conference, Groundswell, Royal Norfolk Show NISD stand, Tyndall Centre Climate Conference poster showcase
- Outputs and comms: blogs, dissertation, presentation

Overall… built confidence, learned a lot, developed career path

April 2026: Started a Farms Technical Graduate post at G's Fresh



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Norfolk FWAG

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Image credits

Slide 1: Natasha Grist. Regenerative legume cover crop, Easton College (2025).

Slide 5: Norfolk County Boundaries map. https://www.gbmaps.com/free-county-maps/Norfolk.php

Slide 6: Food Valley. https://foodvalley.nl/en/foodvalley-supports-launch-of-landmark-regenerative-agriculture-landscape-in-poland-lower-silesia-360/

Slide 7: Georgia Oliver. Terra Nostra visit, Poland (2025).

Slides 8-10: Terra Nostra Fundacja. https://fundacjaterranostra.pl/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Program-PZPR_eng_web.pdf

Slide 12: Georgia Oliver and Natasha Grist. Various events (2025/26).

References

1. https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2025/03/11/an-update-on-the-sustainable-farming-incentive/
2. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sfi-spend-statistics-notice-january-2026/sfi-spend-statistics-notice-january-2026
3. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agri-environment-scheme-business-and-uptake-data-march-2025/agri-environment-scheme-business-and-uptake-data-march-2025
4. https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2026/02/24/sfi26-details-definitions-and-what-to-expect
5. https://norfolkfwag.co.uk/news/sfi-2026-summary-changes-additions-and-removals/

Slide 3 News articles links

https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25020222.hundreds-norfolk-farms-set-miss-sfi-nature-incentives/
https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25057567.norfolk-farm-faces-140-000-shortfall-due-sfi-closure/
https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2gp9lyx5xo