

Project:	Realising the links between quality food production and biodiversity protection
Project Investigator:	Henry Buller
Duration:	2005-07
Impact Summary:	The research had significant policy implications for food chain development and for natural grassland management. It found that linking biodiversity to food quality could add social, economic and environmental value to meat products and recommends that this be recognised in policy objectives and adapted policy instruments

Research Aims

- To investigate the benefits of grazing farm animals on natural grasslands to farm businesses, product quality, ecological management and human health

Contribution to knowledge & understanding

- Results show that on certain farms, the active conversion from formerly improved pastures to natural grassland is leading to a net increase in the area under permanent grass at the farm level with an associated growth in grassland diversity
- Extensive grazing systems help reverse biodiversity loss
- Differences in pasture biodiversity can positively affect meat quality, chiefly as a result of the impact of plant species upon the rumen process

Implications for policy & practice (e.g. recommendations)

- Research provided evidence that there are added product qualities to be created through linking the protection and maintenance of species rich grazing pastures with quality food products. For producers this is significant; by integrating natural value into production chains, this increases product value. The explicit linking of place-based environmental quality and food quality means producers are able to engage directly with consumers through alternative networks and outlets, contributing to the flow of revenue direct to rural areas and stimulating on-farm employment and further rural investment
- The research highlights a need for policy objectives and adapted policy instruments to recognise biodiversity as an input to food quality

Applications of research for public policy/services and business performance

- Researcher team addressed Dartmoor Farmers Association and the National Farmers' Retail & Markets Association (FARMA) about project findings and work is ongoing with Dartmoor Farmers Association concerning putting project findings into practice
- Researchers have provided evidence and given advice to a number of farmer groups interested in pursuing the development of high biodiversity grassland-based husbandry systems in South West and Scotland

Stakeholder engagement and contribution

- Project engaged with over 80 stakeholders including farmers and farm managers, food companies, representatives of land management agencies and from Natural England, Wildlife Trust and RSPB
- Project worked closely with food chain actors and stakeholders,
- Major stakeholder workshop event held in 2006 involving presentations from project and from stakeholders. Audience included regional stakeholders, producers, representatives of national policy institutions and land management bodies
- One-day public-policy makers meeting 'The Grassland Peninsular' held in 2008 with a number of local and regional stakeholders from the South West in attendance
- Presentations to stakeholders at Relu Food Chain Forum, Relu Food Chain workshop, Relu Food Chain Conference and FARMA conference
- Three post-project stakeholder presentations to meat supply chain actors, sustainable development policy community and Dartmoor Farmers Association

Stakeholder comments

"We found the 'eat biodiversity' project of interest in terms of qualifying grazing herbage on the salt marshes to the west of Bridgwater Bay that provide the texture and flavour of salt marsh lamb. The quality of the lamb from grazing the marshes is what makes this a specialty food which is prized by chefs in London." (Elaine Spencer-White, Project Officer, Somerset Food Links Ltd)

Soft networks (e.g. work shadowing, visiting fellowships)

- A research network was set up with European partners engaged in similar research
- Plans to set up a second network with Australian and New Zealand researchers on the theme of 'Eating Biodiversity'

Securing future impact (post-project/follow-on work)

- Post-project contact with advocates of grass-based husbandry systems as a means of addressing contemporary environmental agendas are being pursued to develop this research agenda
- 2 Post doc researchers, 1 researcher and a technician have all continued in academic/research posts