



## Farmers Weekly

# WOODLAND TRUST 9 reasons to plant trees on your land

Written by [James Williams](#)

Friday 19 February 2016

There is a good chance that planting trees is not at the top of your farm to-do list.

The cost of establishing saplings, understanding what to plant and where to plant them, knowing what machinery and expertise you need to manage them, and having a use for the wood once its grown can be enough to put off many land owners and managers.

But planting and managing trees doesn't have to be that daunting, and planting trees on your farm can actually bring a wealth of benefits, regardless of your farming system.

See also: [How tree planting provided big benefits for one dairy farmer](#)

Planting trees on farms doesn't mean taking land out of food production to create a forest, it is about creating shelter belts and using trees so that they work for your farm and your farming system. Here are nine compelling benefits of planting trees on farmland:

### 1. Manage soil and reduce erosion



© Tim Scrivener

It is estimated that 2.9m tonnes of topsoil is eroded in the UK every year thanks to wind and water. Soil erosion can reduce the long-term fertility of the soil by removing nutrient-rich topsoil and organic matter, and the risk of it occurring is higher where rainfall is more intense or strong winds are common.

Planting trees along contours or areas known to be particularly windy can create natural barriers that protect soil and crops from the full impact to strong winds or rain.

Deep-rooting trees also help improve soil stability, while an increase organic matter from leaf litter can improve the soil's structure and reduce surface water run-off.

**Killer fact:** Degradation of soils on farmland in England and Wales is estimated to cost the agricultural industry £200m/year, while the indirect costs to the wider community could be more than four times that amount.

## 2. Improve animal welfare



© Wayne Hutchinson/FLPA/Rex/Shutterstock

From providing shelter to reducing exposure in extreme weather, planting trees and hedges can contribute to animal health and welfare in a number of ways.

Exposure to cold is one of the biggest causes of lamb loss in outdoor lambing systems, but studies have shown that providing shelter for sheep can reduce neonatal lamb losses due to exposure and hypothermia.

Sheltered, well-drained fields offer the best conditions for lambing and good mothering. Shelter belts can encourage natural behaviours of ewes, which leads to better suckling and colostrum intake, reduced disease risk and greater resistance to the cold.

On poultry units, well-designed tree planting can encourage free-range birds to range more, as they offer cover, shelter and shade.

Research has shown that providing tree cover can reduce feather pecking as birds are more likely to express natural behaviour and be less stressed, which in turn leads to an improvement in egg quality.

**Killer fact:** Studies show lamb losses can be reduced by up to 30% in cold, wet and windy weather if good shelter is provided

## 3. Shelter for crops



© Tim Scrivener

Dry springs and summers can be disastrous for crops, causing poor germination, reduced growth rates and lower yields.

Planting field edge or in-field shelter belts can help protect plants against drought by modifying the microclimate around the crop, reducing wind speeds which can remove moisture from the air.

Trees can also help extend the growing season for grass, as the shelter they provide can raise soil temperatures in early spring and late autumn.

**Killer fact:** Studies show shelter belts can increase wheat yields by at least 3.5% as a result of efficient water usage.

#### 4. Water management



© John Eveson/FLPA/REX/Shutterstock

Even modest increases in tree and hedge cover can increase water infiltration, which means surface water run-off is reduced and the rate that rainwater reaches streams and rivers is slowed. This reduces peak flows in the water course and could potentially reduce the risk of flooding downstream.

#### 5. Cut pollution



© Tim Scrivener

Pollution is costly to farms and the environment. According to the Environment Agency, soil erosion costs about £21m/year in water treatment, with about 25% of phosphates and 50% of nitrates in rivers coming from agricultural sources.

About 90% of the ammonia emitted in the UK is from agriculture, mainly from the breakdown of excreted urea from livestock.

Ammonia can damage sensitive habitats and water courses, as well as impact on the health of farm workers and livestock.

Trees can help by creating a physical barrier to reduce spray drift, capture pollutants and ammonia from livestock units.

**Killer facts** Tree belts as narrow as 10m have been shown to reduce ammonia in emissions by about 53%. Trees in leaf also act as a physical barrier against pesticides, trapping up to 90% of spray drift.

## 6. More energy efficient



© Tim Scrivener

Wood fuel can be grown on land which is difficult to farm, or harvested from trees planted to provide shelter.

Woodchip can also be used to provide an alternative bedding, either to replace straw or to mix with it.

Trees around livestock units and other farm buildings can improve energy efficiency of an agricultural business by providing shade and acting as a wind break.

**Killer fact:** About 3ha of woodland can heat an average farmhouse, with larger woodland able to feed a boiler to heat other farm buildings.

## 7. Added revenue



© Mint Images/REX/Shutterstock

If you are looking for ways to diversify your business by running a shoot, then planting trees can increase the potential of game shooting on farmland.

Tree lines provide “edge” habitat which is ideal for game birds such as pheasant and partridge to use as shelter and a source of food. And trees are a great environment for

“tourist” activities such as cycling and running as well as a regular source of firewood, and if managed correctly, valuable timber.

Silvoarable systems, which take advantage of the effects mentioned above by planting trees alongside crops, and silvopastoral systems, where trees are planted where livestock roam, can also provide diversified incomes.

Not only can they provide alternative feed sources, they can also offer alternative crops such as fruits and nuts and honey.

## 8. Trees provide habitat for pollinators



© Dave Pressland/FLPA/REX/Shutterstock

There are a number of reasons for the decline in pollinators across Europe, but loss of habitat has been identified as one of the most significant.

Trees, hedges and plants which grow in shelter belts provide important over-winter refuges, nesting sites and pollen and nectar feeding sources for pollinators throughout the year.

Pollinators have been found to use shelter belts as “highways”, which they browse and settle along, so providing regularly-spaced trees and shelter belts can help overcome the ecological deserts which occur in the middle of large, arable monocultures.

**Killer fact:** Pollinators are worth more than £510m/year to the UK.

## 9. Trees help with wildlife conservation



©Malcolm Schuyf/FLPA/imageBROKER/REX Shutterstock

Planting trees helps increase the habitat available to wildlife, especially where they buffer and extend ancient woodland. Newly created woodland leads to a rapid increase in insects, which can in turn attract birds and small mammals.

Targeted woodland creation can also help other species to move around the landscape as climate change alters their ranges.

**Killer fact:** Up to nine species of bat have been found to use very early stage woodland.

[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees)