

# River Ouse, River Cuckmere and Waller's Haven

South East Water has teamed up with Catchment Sensitive Farming to work with farmers and land managers to improve water quality and increase on-farm efficiency. We offer free training, advice and other incentives to support the farming community. For more information contact your local Catchment Officer – contact details below.

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## Catchment officers update

We must start by acknowledging the difficulties this winter brought to a lot of farms, and the hard work put in to keep businesses going while caring for the environment.

In challenging times it's important to reach out for support, so please get in touch if you need to speak to someone or contact the Farming Community Network (FCN) (see article on page 5).

The rain highlighted where improvements could be made with regards to run-off, and risky areas such as muck heaps, soil erosion or poaching. This could be a great time to get in touch for a chat about how you can avoid issues in the future and increase your resilience to extreme weather events. We may also be able to help financially through our maize management scheme (see article on page 2).

We are very hopeful for 2020 with some exciting new perspectives and a fresh outlook. Local farmers are leading the search for sustainable farming methods. Two new local farm clusters have formed to support cooperation between farmers to achieve landscape scale environmental benefits. Local advice organisations are getting better at supporting farmers and land managers in enhancing the countryside for the benefit of the public. These are just some of the things happening this year, which we hope will lead to positive steps forward for individual farms, and for the river catchment.

Our advice package now includes water resources, air quality and natural flood management, as well as our usual advice around diffuse pollution which we will continue to focus on.

Whatever this year brings, we are here to help you navigate it, so please do give us a call. We look forward to seeing you soon.

All the best,



Anne Blokhuis



Shai Gilad

## Contact us for more information about free training and advice:

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**A clear solution  
for farmers**  
CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING





Panel discussion at the 'Futureproofing maize production' event

## Maize management

It was fantastic to see so many of you at our recent 'Futureproofing maize production' event at the South of England Centre at Ardingly discussing practices that will ensure maize production remains sustainable in the region.

We have been supporting sustainable maize production in these catchments for several years through our Maize Management Project. This year, we are offering financial support to growers who have trialled methods for maintaining green cover through the winter, and we have committed to continuing this support over the next growing season.

We are offering a Maize Charter ([Link](#)) visit from the Maize Growers Association to recommend field and maturity group suitability, along with nutrient and post-harvest management advice. The visit is FREE, and will provide advice and a brief report which will be useful for years to come.

The following offers are available to maize growers in these catchments; please contact Anne or Shai to register your interest by **20 March**:

- undersowing with grass at time of drilling – £160/ha
- undersowing with grass post maize drilling – £160/ha
- grass post early maize harvest – £110/ha
- strip till/direct drill – £20/ha (can be combined with any of the above)
- Maize Charter visit – FREE



Maize under-sown with grass



Weaving drill for maize under-sowing



## Companion cropping – Oilseed Rape

Over the past few years, Oilseed Rape (OSR) has become challenging to grow. The main issue is the cabbage stem flea beetle, which since the loss of neonicotinoid seed treatments has proved near impossible to control. For those who haven't completely given up on OSR, a new approach is needed.

The use of companion crops to deter flea beetle pressure on OSR have shown some effective results and there are other additional benefits including:

- improved soil health and structure (reducing future pest pressure)
- reduced risk of erosion and run-off
- reduction of inputs
- recycling of nutrients
- assisted development of OSR rooting system and quicker to establish

The idea behind the use of companions is to act as a decoy by helping dilute the colour and smell of OSR which the flea beetle is attracted to.

### Establishment and destruction of companion crop

Companion plants are either sown simultaneously with OSR in the same row, or separately in a second pass between the rows. Non-leguminous companion plants such as mustard can also be broadcast after drilling OSR. Due to the unreliability of frost for natural destruction there is an expected dependence upon herbicide to terminate the companion crop.

### Trials

NIAB are trialling the following companions, both on their own and in combination:

- white mustard
- brassica mix
- buckwheat
- fenugreek
- spring beans
- legume mix

The best results so far have come from white mustard. The brassica mix has also had some beneficial effect.

Andy Barr, a farmer from Kent, has experimented with his own companion cropping trials across his farm which varies in almost every soil type. He has trialled OSR with legumes such as vetches and a mix of berseem and crimson clover, which have added biodiversity and provided the additional benefit of nitrogen fixation. However, Andy has had most success planting beans alongside OSR as they enhanced the yield and the seed cost is low; at under £10 per ha. The companion crop is drilled at the same time in two rows, using a split hopper. Years of using legumes has meant



Source: Andy Barr - OSR and companion crop of beans

nitrogen input has been reduced from 30 kg down to 10kg per ha as well as a reduction of herbicides and no pre-emergence application.

Andy observed when using beans as a companion crop, there was a reduction of flea beetle larvae on the OSR stem, whereas adults still attacked. Overall he is happy with the results of companion cropping beans with OSR and will continue to use this approach within the rotation due to input reduction, yield enhancement and reduced pest pressure.

If you are considering companion cropping why not create your own mini trial? There is always a degree of variability due to soil type and weather, so taking research into your own hands can often be the best way forward in finding a measure that works for you.

**If you would like support in trialling companion cropping, please get in touch with Anne or Shai.**



Source: Andy Barr – companion cropping with vetch

## AHDB updates

### AHDB recommended lists

AHDB has published a new interactive variety selection tool which makes it easier for farmers and agronomists to select varieties. The tool classifies varieties by yield and on agronomic merit (combined disease and lodging resistance scores). It also draws attention to yield response to fungicide application and how it makes both environmental and economic sense to tailor fungicide input depending on the variety chosen.

Currently, versions of the tool are available for winter wheat and spring barley but equivalent versions will be released for winter barley, winter oilseed rape and winter oats in the first half of 2020. The tools and user guide can be accessed at: <https://ahdb.org.uk/vst>

### AHDB Farmbench

AHDB has launched a new and free benchmarking business tool called Farmbench. This package allows producers to input either whole farm or enterprise specific data to suit their needs. Costs can be split across beef, lamb, dairy, combinable crop, potato and sugar beet enterprises.

Farmbench will help you to understand and compare your full costs of production, in an effort to manage resilience to risks and to cope with volatility.

The additional value of benchmarking with this tool comes from sharing details and making comparisons. AHDB is uniquely placed to facilitate on-farm group discussions, providing a safe, secure environment in which farmers can share data, compare costs, identify best practice and ultimately learn and grow.

Our industry is likely to experience significantly greater exposure to fluctuating prices, currency swings and adverse climatic events, impacting the resilience of many farm businesses.

This intuitive, user-friendly tool allows you to shine a spotlight on where you can fine-tune your business decisions and provide a comparison either within your own fields, or with anonymous data from local/regional peers.

### AHDB Monitor Farms

These **FREE** events bring together groups of like-minded farmers who wish to improve their businesses by sharing performance information and best practice, around a nationwide network of host farms. AHDB organises and facilitates Monitor Farm meetings for the farmers who own and operate the scheme. Monitor Farms are part of the AHDB Farm Excellence Programme.



Source: AHDB 2020

Each Monitor Farm project runs for three years. Learn more via the following links:

[www.farmbench.org.uk](http://www.farmbench.org.uk)

<https://ahdb.org.uk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NjGybddFmU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSWrw43vOaw>

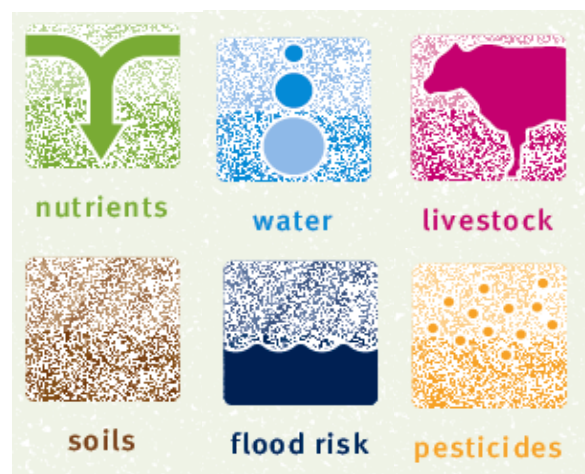
### Key actions for farmers

Update published by AHDB

<https://pork.ahdb.org.uk/environment-buildings/environmental-protection/>

The Environment Agency's 'Key actions for farmers' provides clear and consistent information to farmers to manage environmental impacts and:

- improve and protect soil health
- improve and protect water quality
- secure water resources
- reduce and manage flood risk
- protect air quality
- adapt to a changing climate



Source: Environment Agency 2020



## Natural flood management in the Ouse catchment

The Sussex Flow Initiative (SFI) is a natural flood management (NFM) project in the River Ouse catchment, supported by the Sussex Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and the Environment Agency.

NFM is a way of managing the landscape to make it more resilient to flooding and drought. It includes measures like woodland and hedgerow planting, creating floodplain and run-off attenuation ponds or scrapes, restoring natural wood in streams and reconnecting rivers to their floodplains.

We've been working with landowners throughout the Ouse catchment over the past seven years and providing free advice and delivery of NFM. These activities provide multiple on-site benefits, including reduced soil erosion; habitat provision for wildlife, including predators of agricultural pests, as well as benefitting downstream communities by slowing and storing water on the land.

We ensure that any work we recommend complements and enhances existing land management. In addition to any one-off grants and labour that SFI can provide, many NFM measures can be supported by grants and advice from Countryside Stewardship and Catchment Sensitive Farming.

If you would like to talk about the potential for NFM on your land and any funding opportunities, or you would like to know more about SFI, please contact Sam Buckland, at [sussexflowinitiative@gmail.com](mailto:sussexflowinitiative@gmail.com) or visit [www.sussexflowinitiative.org](http://www.sussexflowinitiative.org).

If you're in the **Cuckmere** or **Waller's Haven** catchment and interested in Natural Flood Management on your land, please contact Shai or Anne.



Water storage scrape intercepting a land drain and surface run-off

## Support through change



For some people, change is an exciting new opportunity; for others it can lead to anxiety and stress. Whatever your view of the next few years in farming, staying resilient, from both a business and a personal perspective, can make a big difference to the performance of the farm and the wellbeing of the people who work there.

This is the view of the charity and voluntary organisation 'Farming Community Network' (FCN) which has launched a free online information hub at [www.farmwell.org.uk](http://www.farmwell.org.uk). It contains a wealth of information to help people in farming manage the complexity of change.

FCN also provides a helpline that is open from 7am to 11pm every day, offering support for anyone in farming who is experiencing difficulties.



**Helpline: 03000 111 999**

## Connecting beekeepers and farmers

Farmers will often inform beekeepers of their intentions to apply an insecticide, but '**BeeConnected**' provides a new way for farmers and beekeepers to keep in contact.

This online notification service allows beekeepers to be kept informed of local crop protection activities and when insecticides are being applied to crops, which may present a risk to their bees.

Register your details and sign up to this valuable tool on 'BeeConnected'  
<https://beeconnected.org.uk>



## The impact of climate change

Farmers are having to explore the impact of more frequent and extreme weather events. In facing up to the impact of last summer's drought, the Beast from the East and this saturated autumn, the effects are being felt far more widely and intensely than ever before and predictions indicate that the trend is likely to continue.

Much of the work we do with farmers and landowners, clearly helps to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Clean water and air, healthy soils, abundance of wildlife, rewetting degraded peatlands, increasing tree cover and securing long-term diverse grasslands are all relevant and necessary in supporting agriculture deliver on its responsibilities to the climate.

We see a crucial opportunity to work with farmers to help them identify their greenhouse gases emissions and what they need to do to reduce these at source.

Farming produces three main types of gases which are dangerous to the climate:

- **Nitrous Oxide** – farming is the largest global source of this gas
- **Methane**
- **Carbon dioxide** – CO<sub>2</sub> is the most common greenhouse gas globally. It is the measure used to gauge other GHG's potency

Within agriculture, methane and nitrous oxide are produced in greater quantities than carbon dioxide. Methane and nitrous oxide are more harmful than carbon dioxide but spend less time in the atmosphere.

We are looking to help farmers understand the sources of agricultural GHG and, once these are identified, provide support to positively impact on GHG emissions.

In order to do this we will need to discuss livestock rearing, chemical fertilisers, energy use, transport, waste produced and soil-based emissions from disturbing soils.

There are a series of different tools to help with reducing carbon on farm. One example is the Farm Carbon Cutting Toolkit (FCCT) – a farm Carbon Calculator that gives a new opportunity to help understand and act on opportunities at a local level. FCCT is a non-profit farmer-led organisation. Find out more via the link: <https://www.farmcarbontoolkit.org.uk/>

## Dates for your diary

### 2 March

#### **Sussex Lund grants** – closes for applications

Sussex Lund grants are available for projects that improve habitat, scenic beauty or access, and which have some public benefit (e.g. enhancing the view from a footpath or road). Grants of between £500 and £10,000 are available. For more information see: <http://www.highweald.org/look-after/sussex-lund.html> and contact one of the advisors listed to give you the best chance of your application being successful.

#### **Countryside Stewardship – Mid-tier application deadlines**

**31 May** – paper/phone application pack request

**30 June** – online application pack request

**31 July** – application deadline

For information:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-get-paid-for-environmental-land-management#mid-tier>

South East Water takes looking after your data as seriously as we take looking after the environment. Your data is only used by us so we can email, call, write or text you about our Catchment Sensitive Farming work. This includes advice about grants, events and campaigns.

We hope you want to hear from us but you can change your preferences at any time by emailing us.

For more information: [www.southeastwater.co.uk/privacy](http://www.southeastwater.co.uk/privacy)