

# Transition to agroecological approaches

## Pitt Hall Farm, Kingsclere Estates Ltd., Hampshire

Tim May is the fourth generation farmer in his family. He took the arable business over from his father in 2010. After a Nuffield Scholarship in the United States on farm economics, Tim started to look for new ways to keep the business financially viable and introduced a livestock enterprise in the arable business.



### Tim May

1012 hectares, mixed farm,  
family owned

Pasture-fed, Rotational grazing,  
Diverse leys, Organic

Min till and Direct drilling in  
arable

Seeing the crop yields flat-lining, whilst expenditure on inputs and technology kept increasing, Tim realised that something had to change in the arable business. He started to explore a range of options to make the business both profitable and resilient in the long term. A financial review showed that the savings on inputs for arable could finance the purchasing of livestock for a new enterprise, providing return from the newly planted leys.

Tim believes in investing in soil health. In 2012, 360 ha of less productive land were converted to grassland. Half the farm is now under grass-clover leys that maintain green cover all year round. The objective was to increase organic matter, help aerate the soil and make available many more nutrients that are locked up in the soil profile.

Another objective was to convert more solar energy into human usable energy and to diversify the enterprises of the farm. In 2014, Tim did a course in holistic management. His next move was to introduce a pasture-based sheep enterprise and implement mob grazing. He worked with the neighbour which also enabled him to learn more about sheep farming. In a second transition, Tim has been moving away from sheep towards a mobile organic dairy unit. The farm has now converted to organic to benefit from the premium market for meat and milk. Introducing livestock has made the original all arable enterprise more profitable.

Though the farm provides uncropped habitats to help support wildlife, agri-environment schemes have been less useful as the options and mechanisms are not a good fit for the holistic approach Tim has sought to implement.

Ongoing projects include further improvements to marketing and developing direct sales. Tim also intends to generate new business opportunities for new entrants through share farming agreements.

Overall the process was less daunting than anticipated. According to Tim, 'the biggest step is getting started'.

"I really enjoyed walking through fields, seeing blackgrass and knowing that I don't need to do anything about it, and coming back 8 months later and there is no blackgrass." "Holistic management has totally changed the way I think."