

Transition to agroecological approaches

The Lakes Free Range Egg Co Ltd, Cumbria, Lake District

David Brass took over the beef and sheep farm from his father in 1989. A year later, his wife Helen introduced layers. In a move to further refine the farming operation, they planted woodland and hedges, and the farm started to produce woodland eggs. An organic enterprise was added more recently to meet the growing demand for organic eggs.

In 1989, when David took over the farm, it consisted of about 30 hectares of beef and sheep. The first change was one of intensification to move to early lambing, and a year later 200 layers were introduced as David's wife Helen's enterprise. In 1997, David and Helen decided to plant trees for their hens and have since worked with various organisations on range enrichment for the layers through tree and hedge planting.

In the next few years, the laying flock's size increased considerably, producing free-range eggs, and egg production became the main business. Currently, there are 135,000 free-range hens on the farm. After building their own pack-house, the family was able to take on a contract with a supermarket, which gradually expanded in the next 10 years.

In 2001, a small proportion of the business was converted to organic, as David and Helen saw a growing demand for organic eggs and decided to get on board. However, they do not think organic certification offers a clear advantage in terms of profitability on their farm, compared with woodland free-range eggs. The farm now supplies several multiple retailers with woodland and organic eggs.

The family and the staff feel good about the direction the farm took, for the animal welfare and the benefits for the environment, and as they feel there is demand from consumers for this type of product.

“This is more about management, less about chemicals, which is always good. We enjoy working with the marketing chain. It fits our ethos.”



David and Helen Brass

118 hectares, mixed farm, family owned

Woodland eggs, Free-range and Organic

Grazing land cut for hay or rented to local farmers for sheep