



Initial Stakeholder Meeting Report Woodland Poultry in the UK

Work-package group 5: Agroforestry in livestock systems

Specific group: Poultry in the UK – Sainsbury’s Woodland Chicken Development Group

Date of meeting: 6th May 2014

Date of report: 16th May 2014

Location of meeting: Hollyfield Farm, Rakenford, Tiverton, Devon, England

Facilitator of meeting: Jo Smith, Anja Vieweger and Kostas Zaralis, Organic Research Centre; Hamish Thomson, Woodland Trust

Contact e-mail: jo.s@organicresearchcentre.com



Contents

1. Context	2
2. Description of system	2
3. Participants.....	2
4. Workshop structure	3
5. Issues and challenges raised	4
6. Current examples of interest or best practice	5
7. Potential innovations looking forward.....	5
8. Identifying those producers willing to participate in the research	5
9. References.....	5
10. Acknowledgements	5



AGFORWARD (Grant Agreement N° 613520) is co-funded by the European Commission, Directorate General for Research & Innovation, within the 7th Framework Programme of RTD. The views and opinions expressed in this report are purely those of the writers and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

1. Context

The AGFORWARD research project (January 2014-December 2017), funded by the European Commission, is promoting agroforestry practices in Europe that will advance sustainable rural development. The project has four objectives:

- 1) to understand the context and extent of agroforestry in Europe,
- 2) to identify, develop and field-test innovations (through participatory research) to improve the benefits and viability of agroforestry systems in Europe,
- 3) to evaluate innovative agroforestry designs and practices at a field-, farm- and landscape scale, and
- 4) to promote the wider adoption of appropriate agroforestry systems in Europe through policy development and dissemination.

This report describes one of about 40 initial stakeholder workshops to address objective 2. Further details of the project can be found on the AGFORWARD website: www.agforward.eu

2. Description of system

Sainsbury's is a major retailer in the UK. Sainsbury's first developed its Woodland brand for its free range and "SO organic" eggs in 2004, with 1 pence per dozen eggs sold donated to the Woodland Trust. This followed farmer John Widdowson's observations on how his hens preferred the shade and protection of trees (British Hen Welfare Trust, 2012). Sainsbury's expanded the scheme to include meat birds in 2009, with 2 pence from every chicken sold donated to the Woodland Trust. All the free-range "woodland" and "organic" farms must be:

- planted with trees which cover at least 20% of the range area where the birds are free to roam outdoors,
- planted with a mixture of fast growing and slower native trees which are indigenous to the local area,
- have trees planted close to the house to encourage the hens outside to range, and
- RSPCA Freedom Food standard approved.

3. Participants

The initial meeting was attended by 28 stakeholders, three staff from the Organic Research Centre (ORC) and one from the Woodland Trust. Two participants were from the 2 Sisters Food Group – the food company supplying the poultry to Sainsbury's. Other participants were the Agriculture Manager for Sainsbury's, a representative from Germinal Seeds. The remaining participants were meat bird producers from the south west of England.



Fig 1 The network meeting was attended by 27 people from the Sainsbury's Woodland Poultry Working group.

4. Workshop structure

1.30-2 pm	Arrival
2 pm	Introduction (including aims of workshop) and icebreaker. In pairs, discuss number one benefit and challenge that they identified in the questionnaire. Ask a few to report back to the group.
2.20	Research evidence on benefits of trees and chickens. Introduction of AGFORWARD project and participatory research network (Jo Smith)
2.45	Farm walk: a practical session telling the story behind the new and existing planting at the farm; design, species, establishment, maintenance programme, lessons learnt but including details on planting tips, the right way to put on a guard & the right time to take it off, weeding, thinning etc.
3.45	Refreshments followed by Group workshop (facilitated by Jo Smith and Hamish Thomson): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each person identifies the top five challenges of managing their woodland chicken system and writes on post-it notes 2. They allocate these five to four categories (production; management; environment; socio-economics) 3. As a group we look through these challenges (we may be able to group them if the same challenge comes up several times) and identify if: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. There is a known solution b. Anyone is trying something new to address the challenge c. Anyone has other ideas that could work and could be trialed 4. As a final exercise, each person will rank in order of importance the list of new ideas to trial (3c). this will form the basis for the next stage of the Agforward network which is to trial these new ideas on farms (2015-2016)
4.50	Summary of workshop and next steps. Feedback form to complete that includes expression of interest from those willing to be involved with on-farm research.
5.00	Workshop close

Participants were sent Questionnaire 1 to complete before the workshop and bring along with them. Only a small number of participants completed this beforehand, so the initial icebreaker task focused on getting everyone to fill out the questionnaire. A few people were asked to feed back to the group the main benefits and challenges of integrating trees and chickens, although there was some reluctance to share this.

Following the presentation, the group went out into the range and Hamish Thomson led a discussion on best practice for planting and managing trees and the sward underneath. Main points that came up in the discussion were: encouraging the birds out into the range – the need for stepping stones of vegetation (longer grass and/or shrubs) close to the house; the lack of vegetation under the trees as the canopy closes and lowers light levels; where trees have been pollarded, weeds have flourished in the undergrowth, rather than grasses; tree management has been an issue, in terms of deciding what to do and when and who to do it. One other issue has been rabbits eating the bark during winter months.

Some of the group have been using the wood from the trees for providing on farm energy; others have tried harvesting apples from trees in the range but found that the birds damage the fruit before it can be collected. As all the range is needed to meet regulations on range per bird, it is impossible to take areas out of production to allow re-seeding or recovery of the pasture.

5. Issues and challenges raised

Back inside, Jo and Hamish led a workshop with the participants working in two groups to identify the main benefits and challenges of the woodland chicken system and identify some ideas as to what innovations could be trialed to address these challenges.

The main benefits proposed were:

- Environmental credentials – good for marketing
- Benefits the Woodland Trust!
- Increased activity of chickens
- Higher animal welfare
- Cover from predators
- Looks nice
- Cover increases ranging

The main challenges proposed were:

- Reduced light and ventilation
- Management cost and increased labor for fruit trees or wood fuel for example
- Soil erosion
- Increased weeds
- Build-up of disease – Marek's disease, dust-borne, particularly but not exclusively under conifers
- Grass growth – bare patches close to house and under the tree canopy (re-seeding difficult in these shady spots)
- Getting birds in at night – not permitted to have a dog
- Sheep grazing the range – with electric fence around trees – fence fails and trees get damaged
- Drainage – tree roots damage drains and leaves block gutters

Suggested solutions to the challenges:

- Better range design (e.g. plant trees directly in front of the doors/houses to encourage the hens out more quickly)
- Future tree management programme
- Sainsbury's pay for correct tree management

- Developing grass mixes that can tolerate the shade and poultry foraging
- Grass repair – throw grass around like confetti and let it grow.

6. Current examples of interest or best practice

Les Heywood, the farmer who hosted the workshop, has recently planted a new woodland chicken system, with clumps of shrubs and bushes near to the houses to encourage ranging, and trees which in the future will contribute to the woodchip heating system he uses for heating the houses.

Many benefits of introducing trees in chicken ranges depend on the age of the trees and the system, and are only measurable to their full extent after 5-10 years, once the trees are (fully) established. One participant has planted the trees on one side of her henhouse 10 years ago and only just recently planted trees on the other side of the house too. She noticed that the chickens use the older and established system much quicker and prefer the old trees over the newly planted system.

7. Potential innovations looking forward

Two potential innovations that could be further investigated in on-farm trials are

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of shade-tolerant sward mixtures that can persist under the trees • The design and management surrounding the chicken houses to encourage birds to range further away from the houses. |
|---|

8. Identifying those producers willing to participate in the research

Very few participants were willing to complete questionnaire 2 or commit to being involved in further research. A better approach will be to email the group via the Agricultural Manager at Sainsbury's asking for those interested in being involved further to get in touch, or to approach certain individuals directly.

9. References

British Hen Welfare Trust (2012). Interview with John Widdowson. Accessed 10 October 2014
<http://www.bhwt.org.uk/cms/interview-with-john-widdowson/>

10. Acknowledgements

The AGFORWARD project (Grant Agreement N° 613520) is co-funded by the European Commission, Directorate General for Research & Innovation, within the 7th Framework Programme of RTD, Theme 2 - Biotechnologies, Agriculture & Food. The views and opinions expressed in this report are purely those of the writers and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.