

A note of a visit to Cholderton Estate by farmers from Dartmoor LA.

HNV-LINK funding enabled a group of farmers to visit the Cholderton Estate in Wiltshire, UK. Six farmers from Dartmoor together with one farmer from Dorset visited the estate on the 26th September 2018 and were treated to information and examples by Henry Edmunds, the estate owner and manager.

Following the very dry summer when much of the grassland on Dartmoor dried out and was not productive the focus of the visit was to see and learn about a forage system that is more draught resistant than the usual grass dominated forage. Whilst there are significant differences between Dartmoor and Cholderton including soil type, altitude and rain fall all the farmers thought there were many ideas to consider and export to Dartmoor; they were impressed by the high yields obtained during a difficult year. The farmers also witnessed the rich abundance of flora and fauna on the state including rare invertebrates and birds.

The estate is a thriving fully organic farming enterprise. The operation is largely self-sufficient with most work being carried out in house including feed preparation, fertility building and weed control without recourse to industrial chemicals. The arable rotation is dominated by legumes such as Red and White Clover, Lucerne and Sainfoin. These are highly productive and form areas for intensive grazing and forage conservation. These fields are very important for many insects, birds and particularly bumble bees which swarm amongst the flowering legumes. All the forage areas consists of legume/grass leys that carry livestock at a higher density and provide the great bulk of hay and silage. These leys are normally established by under-sowing spring barley.

It is a mixed farming enterprise with the animals fed almost entirely on food that is grown on the Estate. The livestock include some 350 dairy cows in two units, plus 50 dairy replacement heifers, and 50 beef cattle and followers. Sheep are also important, with 200 purebred Hampshire Downs and 200 Finn crossbred; there are 60 ewe lambs. A smaller but nonetheless significant element is the presence of the Cleveland Bay horses for which the estate is particularly well known.



A flock of Hampshire Downs sheep on the estate.



Dartmoor farmers listening to Henry Edmunds

During the visit we were able to see the variety of forage and the livestock within the 1,000 hectare estate. Henry Edmunds, the estate's owner and manager, explained his attempts to make the estate sustainable.

Further information on the Cholderton estate can be found at: <http://www.cholderton-estate.co.uk/>

And details of the forage rotation and other environmentally important features can be found at: https://www.sitesplus.co.uk/user_docs/832/File/Farming-Practice-Crops-and-field-margins.pdf

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