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# Generation Regeneration

*Written by:*

Dan Smith NSch

**September 2025**

A NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT

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# A NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT (UK)



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Date of report: September 2025

*"Leading positive change in agriculture.  
Inspiring passion and potential in people."*

Title	Generation Regeneration
Scholar	Dan Smith
Sponsor	McDonald's UK & Ireland
Objectives of Study Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore barriers to entry into industry for environmentally concern young people</li> <li>• Explore projects supporting the next generation into our sector</li> <li>• Find solutions to encourage the next generation into environmentally sound agriculture</li> <li>• Explore global regenerative farming innovation</li> </ul>
Countries Visited	UK, Switzerland, Brazil, Canada, New Zealand
Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture must confront racism, sexism, and ageism to unlock innovation and broaden participation.</li> <li>• The regenerative movement's grassroots integrity is at risk of dilution by corporate interests, yet this tension also brings visibility and funding.</li> <li>• Youth disengagement stems from lack of structure and role models, but alternative learning and peer networks can reignite interest.</li> <li>• Financial stability often resists change, but ESG tools and green finance can drive reform when applied with integrity.</li> <li>• Agriculture is often seen as part of the climate problem; strategic storytelling can reposition it as a climate solution and purpose-led career.</li> <li>• Ecological values must be matched with business and leadership skills, mentorship and replicable models are key to bridging this gap.</li> </ul>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study reflects a personal transition into regenerative agriculture, shaped by experience, the voices of young people and environmental considerations. Managing a therapeutic farm run on regenerative principles for underprivileged teenagers, I witnessed systemic exclusion firsthand, an experience that deepened my conviction that agriculture can be a powerful driver of social and environmental transformation.

## Key Themes and Findings

### 1. **Cultural Dimensions of Agriculture**

Agriculture is more than a profession; it's a cultural inheritance. Yet racism, sexism, and ageism persist, stifling innovation and discouraging diverse participation. Challenging these behaviours is essential to unlocking agriculture's full potential.

### 2. **Evolution of Regenerative Agriculture**

A grassroots movement rooted in ecological integrity and systems change; regenerative agriculture is gaining traction but also facing co-option by corporate interests. This offers visibility and funding, but risks diluting core values. Navigating this tension is vital.

### 3. **Educational and Vocational Pathways**

Many young people lose interest in farming due to a lack of structured curricula, relatable role models, and clear career pathways. However, peer networks, internships, and alternative learning models can reignite curiosity and offer meaningful entry points.

### 4. **Economic Incentive Structures**

Stable, high-return sectors often resist environmental innovation. Yet green finance, ESG frameworks, and data-driven tools can catalyse reform when applied with integrity and purpose.

### 5. **Environmental Engagement and Youth Perception**

Young people are deeply aware of climate challenges but often view agriculture as part of the problem. Strategic use of social media and authentic storytelling can shift this perception, positioning agriculture as a solution and a space for purpose-led participation.

### 6. **Ideological Commitment vs. Operational Capacity**

New entrants often bring strong ecological ideology but lack business and leadership skills. Mentorship and replicable business models are essential to translate convictions into long-term impact.

My study focus was on cultivating progression through solutions and explored where this was happening successfully across the sector. The greatest gains both environmentally and socially where these elements were considered.

- **Collective Responsibility**
- **Diversity and Inclusion**
- **Strategic Communication**
- **Integrity and Trust**
- **Purpose-Driven Outcomes**

### **Implementation: Roots In Model**

In 2024, I established a farm and consultancy business, Roots In to bring these principles and learnings to life. A 200-acre mixed lowland farm where every decision is guided by core values, to build a profitable, ecologically sound agricultural business that is scalable. We support diverse regentrepreneurs through opportunity, mentorship and shared governance. We engage corporate partners and the public through workshops, media, events, and collaboration.

Our consultancy offers regenerative farming and social support, landscape recovery expertise, and a bespoke support to guide strategic decisions and healthy futures for farms and estates with similar visions.

A project far greater than the sum of its parts.

### **Conclusion**

Agriculture covers 70% of UK land but faces cultural and structural barriers. By embracing shared responsibility, elevating diverse voices, implementing environmental change, and engaging with purpose, we can shift from defensive retrenchment to proactive leadership, redefining agriculture's role in public perception and policy.

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author alone from over 20 years of personal and professional development within regenerative agriculture and not necessarily those of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust, of the author's sponsor, or of any other sponsoring body.

All photos are the author's own unless specified.

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# INTRODUCTION

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*Tipuna*<sup>1</sup>- What does it take to be a great ancestor?

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I run a farm and consultancy business in partnership with my wife Ellie in Monmouthshire, South Wales. We run a mixed beef, sheep and arable enterprise with additional value bought in by others and a regenerative system. We run our business with a holistic framework and like to be guided by our values and beliefs.

It has been a long a twisting road to arrive at our own farm. My childhood was spent rurally where my dad managed various farms around the UK, but as a 'lost' teenager, my path was one I had to write myself. After a disengaged relationship with formal education, I left before tackling any opportunities that could have been available to me. Whilst I would not suggest I regret this, it is not the path I would encourage for others but do empathise with those who find themselves on a similar trajectory.

When I reach 21, I had lived in 26 different places and needed to make changes. I spent an incredibly happy 15 years in the Cotswolds supported by a wonderful community and this lay the foundations for my next steps. I moved to Monmouthshire to manage a farm for a national charity supporting

underprivileged teenagers. This allowed me to develop my passion for helping others and grow my practice of agroecologically-based farming.

My consultancy work grew organically from this, with a heavy focus on soil and management improvements based on practice rather than theory. It has grown significantly and is supported by many people to whom I will be forever grateful. In line with this I could see that I need to replace much of what I missed in my earlier years, so set out to develop myself personally and professionally in any way I could through courses and networks which eventually led me to Nuffield.



**Figure 1: The author, Dan Smith and his dog Duffy**

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<sup>1</sup> Māori word for ancestor



I know I am happiest when with my family, on an environmentally sound and productive farm, surrounded by good people with a shared sense of purpose. An easy recipe?



**Figure 2: The author and family at the launch of their new farm and consultancy, Roots In.**



## CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO MY STUDY

The beginning of my Nuffield study has two parts, one personal, and one the story of others.

Growing up on traditional British farms, and despite a deep-rooted romance for the industry and its culture, I had moved away by my late teens to explore other options. When offered the chance to return, I chose to align myself with a few individuals who would go on to become great inspirations in the years ahead. What connected them, even 15 years ago, was their shared commitment to regenerative agriculture. It opened my eyes to a new way of thinking and doing and laid strong foundations for the farming path I have followed ever since. I have spent years experimenting with regenerative techniques, pushing boundaries for soil health, and developing skills that reach beyond the farm gate.

The stories of the others are not mine to tell; they are often tragic, sometimes hard to comprehend, but many are full of hope, adaptability, and progression. I came to these stories through managing a farm for a charity, where underprivileged teenagers, often failing in education, unaccompanied asylum seekers and those from marginalised backgrounds came for therapeutic intervention. It was a weekly reminder of how lacking in diversity our industry was. Yet working day-to-day with these young people, I saw the power of innovative ideas, different ways of thinking, and how culture deeply influences the decisions we make. Their diversity in thought, background, and experience became an asset to our farming methods. Their inputs and challenges were vital in keeping us on the right path. I saw how a healthy regenerative environment, decent food, and solid values could cultivate real change. Young people would often leave the farm with shifted mindsets, and we tracked the long-term impact of these interventions. The team and I empowered them to make that change, showing them different options and growing them as people—through the medium of agriculture.

After nearly a decade of helping others achieve more, I found myself putting a gate on a new stretch of 400-meter hedge with five teenage boys from Leeds. They had joined us for support after incidents in their school where girls had been sexually assaulted, and the boys were heavily influenced by social media figures promoting misogyny. Yet here, on the farm, they were the very best versions of themselves, engaged in meaningful tasks, with a sense of purpose. The enriching farm environment gave us space to talk about their concerns for the future, their interest in the environment, why we choose to farm regeneratively, and how they could be involved. They felt part of something bigger, change-making, contributory and better.

I felt like a hypocrite.



I knew there was more to learn. I knew there was more impact to have. I had encouraged hundreds of teenagers to go on to better things. I felt the weight of their future and my own children's future but had done little to change the industry that shaped it or gathered enough experience to be the lighthouse needed. Lighthouse people are more than just role models; they actively take their learning and experiences to guide and assist others into brighter futures.

I wanted to bring together the skills I had learned: communication, cultural understanding, championing young people, and regenerative farming techniques to cultivate change within agriculture.

This report is far from a technical guide. It is a story of a personal journey, intertwined with curiosity and a desire to be guided by the voices and thoughts of others, particularly those who will be most affected by the issues I am working to address through regenerative farming.



**Figure 3: A sign from a farm honesty shop supporting the farmers of Nova Scotia in safety and mental health.**

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*“Children are precious gifts that the Great Spirit lends to us. It is our duty to prepare them to be our future leaders. We ‘grow’ our children. Everyone in the community offers care and teachings for children’s spirit, their minds, their emotions, and their bodies. Our children have their own wisdom, and we take care to not harm their spirits.” Nehiyaw Elder*

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## CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT

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*'Anything we don't know about, we make assumptions about.'*

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This journey began with a simple questionnaire to collect information on why many of the teenagers I engaged with were not considering agriculture as a viable career path and how their perceptions related to climate change?

To explore this, I conducted a survey of 500 school-aged children across the UK. The responses revealed several recurring themes. While some of these themes extended beyond the scope of my original focus, omitting them would have overlooked a critical insight.

I have chosen to include them in this report, not as a distraction, but as an unintended and, at times, uncomfortable reflection of how the agricultural sector is viewed by future generations outside it. These perceptions are not unique to the UK; I have encountered similar sentiments in conversations and experiences around the world.

What I discovered went far beyond the idea that agriculture is not culturally attractive to young people. Many of them are well informed and genuinely concerned about climate change. But here is the disconnect - they do not see agriculture as part of the solution. Their inspiration comes from environmental figures and projects that often sit outside, or even in opposition to, food production.

That changed my journey. I began asking different questions: who are the young people who have taken steps toward sustainability through their education or early careers? Could they be the role models we need? Have they found their own lighthouse educators, those who guided them toward meaningful change? And who are those people?



**Figure 4: An infographic what 500 school-aged believe of UK farmers. Created by MS Copilot.**



When engaging with these people and some of those who I felt had relevant opinions, themes began to develop that both confirmed and challenged much of my biases.

## 2.1 Agriculture

The cultural weight of agriculture has never escaped me though I have come to see it as both a strength and a stumbling block. It was brought into sharp focus on a Herefordshire farm, when a farmer asked me, “Why do you think a thousand people stand and watch one person shear a sheep?”

The answer reaches back thousands of years. It speaks to our deep-rooted relationship with livestock, land, crops, and the environment. How we work within it shapes our behaviours, our values, and our sense of belonging.

This culture is not universal, but it is often what draws people in. Whether it’s mustering in the high country of New Zealand, riding with gauchos in Brazil, welding in a vast Canadian workshop, or walking the fields with a shepherd’s crook in the UK, there are threads; emotional, practical, ancestral, that pull us back, and pull others toward us.



**Figure 5: Calgary Stampede 2024, "The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth"**

### 2.1.1 Challenges

Many young people I have met on my travels and those considering their place or impact in the industry are curious about this culture. They want to understand it, broaden it, reshape it. But too often, it becomes a barrier.

Despite the efforts of many, racism, sexism, and ageism remain endemic in parts of our sector. I have heard it. I have felt it. From both those on the receiving end and those perpetuating it.

It is not just offensive it is unwelcoming. And worse, it stifles progress. It blocks innovation and the mindset shifts we desperately need. Calling out these behaviours is often seen as an attack. Too many are unwilling to listen to those who do not fit their idea of what ‘agriculture culture’ should look like.

Unconscious bias runs deep.

### 2.1.2 Opportunities

And yet there is strength here. Passion runs through our choices. When young people are given space to prove themselves, they are championed and nurtured. There is an opportunity for those brave enough to embrace it.



Our culture attracts storytellers. It spans communities and generations. And good stories travel far beyond internal circles.

Across succession plans, training routes, and grassroots movements, there are people existing and emerging doing incredible, inspirational, and vital work. They are a credit to themselves and to the sector.

## 2.2 Bastardisation Regeneration

In the two years since I began this study, regenerative agriculture has shifted. What started as a bottom-up movement reflecting what many were already doing on farms has been redefined.



**Figure 6: Guard donkey at Strawberry Hill Farm, New Brunswick. He has killed coyotes to protect chickens.**

Now it is a term found in marketing campaigns, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) reports, and bank-led accounting frameworks. It has been adopted by corporates, often without the integrity the founders and pioneers would have hoped for.

The reason is simple: it is descriptive, it is accessible, and it lacks formal accreditation. People understand it at least on the surface even if they do not fully grasp it. A publication from New Climate Institute stated: “Navigating regenerative agriculture in corporate climate strategies,” highlighted much of the issues that were often in discussion.

I do believe it has sparked conversations that stretch beyond the bounds of the sector. But I also

see the shadows creeping in.

On my travels, I’ve found large corporates surprisingly easy to engage with compared to some smaller-scale producers and organisations despite the fact that my values often align more closely with the latter.

There have been difficult conversations around sponsorship. Yet I have been welcomed into global boardrooms, given a seat at the table, and listened to even when I have challenged the status quo.

### 2.2.1 Challenges

There is growing discomfort around the term “regenerative.” Farmers who once identified with it are stepping away. Others reject it outright, feeling it implies they are degrading by default.



Its meaning shifts depending on geography, but increasingly it is seen as a tool for marketers used to add value to products, polish corporate credentials, and manipulate environmental targets. Rarely does it reward the farmer.

In systems where margins are already strong, and change is not necessary, the term is often treated as a punchline.

### 2.2.3 Opportunities

Still, there are doors opening. Funding streams exist for those willing to engage. Product premiums are available. Some of the same corporates diluting the term are also investing in knowledge transfer and on-farm interventions that did not exist before.

Banks are offering favourable rates to regenerative farmers, creating pathways to finance for those who might otherwise struggle.

The network is growing. The public is more aware. Mainstream media is using the term.

And while that brings its own risks, it also makes environmental farming more visible, and more accessible for those looking to do better.

## 2.3 Education and Entry into Agriculture

Originally, the focus of my study was to explore how we might capture and inspire teenagers to join our industry to spark mindset shifts and drive innovation.



**Figure 7: Feeding sheep with talented young people at a farm the author managed.**

I explored this thoroughly. While many are championing the conversation, progress feels slow. I have had countless conversations with organisations and individuals tackling this issue head-on. I have been involved in petitions, sat in policy-level meetings, and worked directly with schools trying to make space for agriculture. But too often, it is a battle. There is little room within the UK education system to embed land-based studies into the national curriculum or even into extracurricular activities.

Children in their early years often show a natural curiosity about farming. They ask how food is produced, how animals live, how the land works. But by the time they reach their teens, that spark is usually



gone. Those still excited by agriculture tend to be in it by default through family, community, or proximity.

Careers advice is scarce. Agriculture is barely mentioned compared to other sectors.

I have been questioned by recruiters in engineering, construction, and healthcare asking why agriculture does not do more to offer routes in for tertiary students studying related subjects. So, I broadened my scope, looking at colleges, universities, apprenticeships, and internships, trying to understand where those already inspired might find a way in.

### **2.3.1 Challenges**

Few universities are pushing boundaries in this space and those that do often sit so far outside the mainstream that they become marginalised themselves.

There are individuals doing good work, and research is growing to support new thinking but overall, there's a reluctance to change. Language is outdated. Opinions are fixed.

Funding is tight, and anything beyond traditional teaching is seen as contentious. Students studying relevant subjects receive little encouragement to consider agriculture as a viable path.

### **2.3.2 Opportunities**

Still, there are bright spots. Several well-established network groups based in universities, colleges, and independent organisations offer dedicated support for those exploring regenerative futures.

Formal learning plays a role, but it is often the in-field experiences and internships that make the difference. Young people are seeking alternative ways to learn and when they find them, they find each other, too, building peer networks that offer energy, support, and shared vision.

## **2.4 Economics**

Observations from my travels have made one pattern increasingly evident: the industries that are most attractive are those offering strong capital returns, established markets, and clear pathways for career progression. However, these same industries frequently carry the greatest environmental burden and arguably the most urgent need for transformation.



**Figure 8: The author and Sally Bernard at McCains Farm of the Future, Canada.**

The challenge lies in the lack of incentive for change. Where financial performance is strong, recruitment is straightforward, and strategic planning appears stable, there is limited motivation to pursue innovation or reassess environmental impact. In such contexts, mindset shift becomes the primary driver of change, yet this alone is rarely sufficient.

### **2.4.1 Challenges**

The compounding effect of stability without external pressure can significantly inhibit progress. In the absence of regulatory or market-driven forces, organisations and individuals are often slow to adapt. This inertia restricts innovation and fosters complacency, as stakeholders become accustomed to the predictability of their specialism. Such rigidity can leave industries exposed when market conditions shift particularly where investment in research and development has been minimal.

### **2.4.2 Opportunities**

Nonetheless, high-grossing industries possess distinct advantages. They typically maintain robust data sets and demonstrate a greater capacity to analyse external factors, providing a strong foundation for evidence-based innovation.

When environmental considerations are integrated meaningfully, the potential for large-scale impact is considerable. Moreover, these industries often have access to greater financial and human resources and are subject to increased scrutiny from downstream stakeholders. This pressure can create opportunities for reform, enabling more thoughtful engagement with sustainability and long-term resilience.



## 2.5 Environmental Concerns

Much of my work with young people and the time spent on farms with teenagers has been filled with questioning. Not just about farming techniques or career paths, but about the sector itself. They ask: Why do we do things this way? What is the impact? Who benefits? They are right to ask and should be encouraged to ask further questions.



**Figure 9: Burning wilding pines, New Zealand.**

As a sector, we need to be more aware, not only of the beliefs and challenges of our future customers, but of the environmental realities unfolding around us. It is clear that many agricultural practices are having substantial effects on the land, water, and climate.<sup>2</sup>

Often, we understand the nuances and we know the trade-offs, but we are slow to accept, slower to act and defensive, potentially ignorant of our position and impact.

The evidence is undeniable: we need to change. We need to innovate, not just for ourselves, but for our future ancestors.

What is striking is that younger generations grasp this more intuitively. Their buying habits, their values, their conversations, are shifting. They are asking better questions. They are challenging what has been normalised, and they have every right to.

### 2.5.1 Challenges

From their perspective, much of what we do is affecting their futures. There is growing distrust of agriculture and a disconnect from food. Misinformation spreads easily, and the sector becomes less attractive and less relevant when we do not engage.

### 2.5.2 Opportunities

Future generations are not just critical, they are curious. They are looking for answers and for opportunities. They want agriculture that is more nature-positive, less extractive.

They are advocating for regenerative, sustainable, climate-smart practice and that opens the door for recruitment, education, and cultural change. If we resource it properly, if we listen and respond, they will help reshape the sector from the inside out.

---

<sup>2</sup> Skinner et al 1997/ Morison, J.I.L. and Matthews, R.B., 2016 / Moffett, A. and Hill, C., 2022



## 2.6 Social media

Social media, while undeniably powerful as a tool for connection and information sharing, is also shaping how young people perceive agriculture, often in ways that discourage them from seeing it as a viable or inspiring career path. We need to acknowledge that this is the primary space where teenagers form their views, absorb stories, and decide what feels relevant to their lives. If agriculture is misrepresented or misunderstood in these spaces, the consequences ripple far beyond perception, they affect recruitment, innovation, and cultural continuity.



**Figure 10: The author and Tatum Claypool supporting indigenous farmers at Ag in Motion, Saskatchewan.**

### 2.6.1 Challenges

Social media platforms frequently amplify sensationalised or misleading portrayals of agriculture, ranging from exaggerated claims about animal welfare and environmental degradation to oversimplified narratives about food production.<sup>3</sup> For young people who lack firsthand experience or deeper context, these stories can quickly become the dominant lens through which they view the sector, fostering distrust and disinterest.

Many of the teenagers I have interviewed described farming influencers not as sources of inspiration, but as deterrents. Several named specific accounts that discouraged them from getting involved, often referring to “white men shouting at cameras” as more damaging than external critics. This kind of content is defensive, exclusionary, and disconnected from the realities young people are navigating and can alienate those who are genuinely curious but unsure where they fit in.

Compounding this is the persistence of negative stereotypes. Farming is still widely associated with long hours, hard physical labour, low pay, and a lack of innovation or prestige. These tropes are rarely challenged in mainstream content, and even well-intentioned “advocates” often romanticise the lifestyle without showcasing the complexity, diversity, and technological advancement that define

<sup>3</sup> Weber M, Rehn T 2020/ Proaño MM, Troncoso T 2018/ Moriarty CJ, Sutherland L. 2022



modern agriculture. As a result, farming is frequently perceived as a “last resort” career, something inherited rather than chosen, and far removed from the dynamic, future-facing industry it truly is.

As society becomes more urbanised and digitally saturated<sup>4</sup>, teenagers are growing up with limited personal connection to the origins of their food. Social media, with its curated and filtered content, can exacerbate this disconnect, reinforcing the idea that success and innovation are found in cities, tech hubs, and creative industries—not in rural landscapes or agricultural professions. Many young people assume that becoming a farmer requires inheritance or generational access, and this perception further narrows the pathways they see as available.

### 2.6.2 Opportunities

Despite these challenges, social media also offers a profound opportunity to reshape the narrative and reconnect young people with agriculture in ways that are visual, immediate, and emotionally resonant. Because teenagers are already immersed in these platforms, they are uniquely positioned to engage with regenerative farming practices that speak to ecological integrity, innovation, and cultural relevance.

Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube can bring farming to life, showing healthy soil, diverse cropping systems, rotational grazing, and other nature-positive practices in action. These images and stories can be far more engaging than traditional educational materials, offering a window into a sector that is evolving and full of possibility.

Young people can follow farmers who reflect their values, speak their language, and share real-world experiences. They can access real-time updates on new techniques, policy shifts, and success stories directly from practitioners. They can attend webinars, join virtual farm tours, participate in online conferences, and discover local workshops, all through the platforms they already use.

Importantly, social media allows for interaction. Teenagers can ask questions, join discussions, and build relationships with mentors and peers who are shaping the future of agriculture. When the content is inclusive, honest, and well-crafted, it does not just inform, it invites. It creates space for curiosity, for challenge, and for cultural change.



**Figure 11: Underprivileged young people relaxing in the lambing shed at a farm the author managed.**

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<sup>4</sup> Innovate UK, 2024/ DataReportal, 2025/ Office for National Statistics, 2020



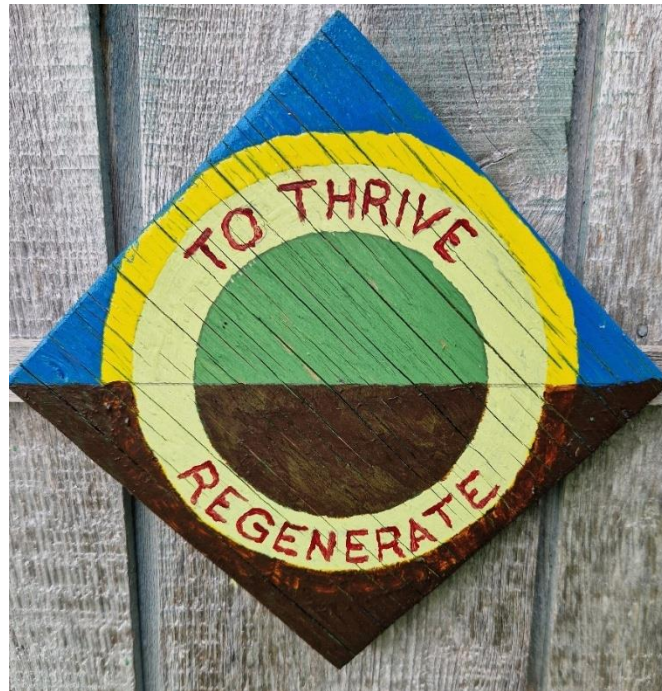
If we are serious about engaging the next generation, we need to meet them where they are not just to correct misconceptions, but to co-create new narratives that reflect the full complexity and potential of farming today.

## 2.7 Ideology

Throughout my tour, I have repeatedly encountered young people who are deeply passionate about regenerative agriculture and many of them have built their dreams on strong ideological foundations, driven by values of ecological integrity, community resilience, and cultural renewal. However, what has become increasingly clear is that while the vision is strong, the practical skills required to sustain these ambitions, particularly in areas like finance, supply chains, and business planning, are often lacking.

Initially, I assumed that the farming industry itself, and the cultural barriers within it, were the primary reasons why so many innovators and change-makers were struggling to gain traction. But what I have come to

understand is that many of these individuals already possess the mindset and motivation to drive change; what they lack is the operational knowledge and strategic capacity to make it viable in the long term. In the few cases where projects have appeared successful, they are often underpinned by significant private financial support, support that, while helpful, raises questions about scalability and accessibility for others.



**Figure 12: A poignant hand painted message at a community garden in Nova Scotia.**

### 2.7.1 Negative

The absence of foundational knowledge in business, leadership, and economic management is one of the most common reasons why promising regenerative start-ups fail to progress. While the passion is evident, the execution falters when basic structures are not in place. In many conversations, I have heard land access cited as the primary barrier, but often this masks deeper concerns, such as time constraints, financial insecurity, and the lifestyle shifts required to commit fully to farming.

There is also a tendency for ideology to remain in the realm of spoken word, aspirational, inspiring, but not always translated into action. Where projects are heavily subsidised by individuals or organisations with the financial freedom to



offer liberal support, it can create environments that feel unattainable to others. This dynamic not only distorts the market but also shifts opportunities toward those with privilege, making the space feel less inclusive and more difficult to enter for those without similar backing.

### 2.7.2 Positive



**Figure 13: Moving sheep with Hamish Orbell of Clayton Station.**

Despite these challenges, there is a significant opportunity to design educational pathways and support systems that bridge the gap between ideology and implementation. Many young people are actively seeking knowledge, they want to build successful, resilient businesses, and they are open to learning the skills required to do so. Ideology remains a vital part of this process, offering identity, confidence, and a sense of belonging to those exploring their futures within regenerative agriculture.

Rather than dismissing ideology as impractical, it can be used constructively to guide direction, shape outcomes, and build networks that support both vision and viability. With the right resources, mentorship, and training, these

young innovators can move from aspiration to action, creating models that are not only inspiring but also replicable and sustainable.



## CHAPTER 3: MY STUDY TOUR

### 3.1 Rebalancing the Lens: From Practice to People

At the outset of my Nuffield journey, I held a dual focus: to deepen my understanding of regenerative farming practices and to explore how the next generation might shape—and be shaped by—the future of agriculture. Both threads felt equally weighted, and I approached them with curiosity and commitment. My tours offered rich insight into both domains, and my own professional grounding in regenerative systems gave me confidence in navigating the technical and ecological aspects of the work.

However, as the journey unfolded, a subtle but significant shift emerged. I found myself less challenged by the regenerative farming space, not due to lack of innovation, but because the principles and practices were already deeply embedded in my advisory role and personal ethos. The traction around regenerative agriculture within the sector was undeniable, and I felt affirmed in my capacity to contribute meaningfully there.

Yet it was the generational element, the stories, aspirations, and tensions of younger and emerging voices that began to demand more of me. This space felt less defined, more urgent, and ultimately more fertile for impact. I realised that my value lay not just in sharing knowledge, but in listening, convening, and co-creating frameworks that could empower others to lead.

This is reflected throughout my report: in the visit choices I made, the conversations I prioritised, and the questions I carried with me across borders. In the UK especially, I found myself drawn to dialogues around youth agency, governance, and the cultural renewal of farming.

### 3.2 Countries I visited on my study tour

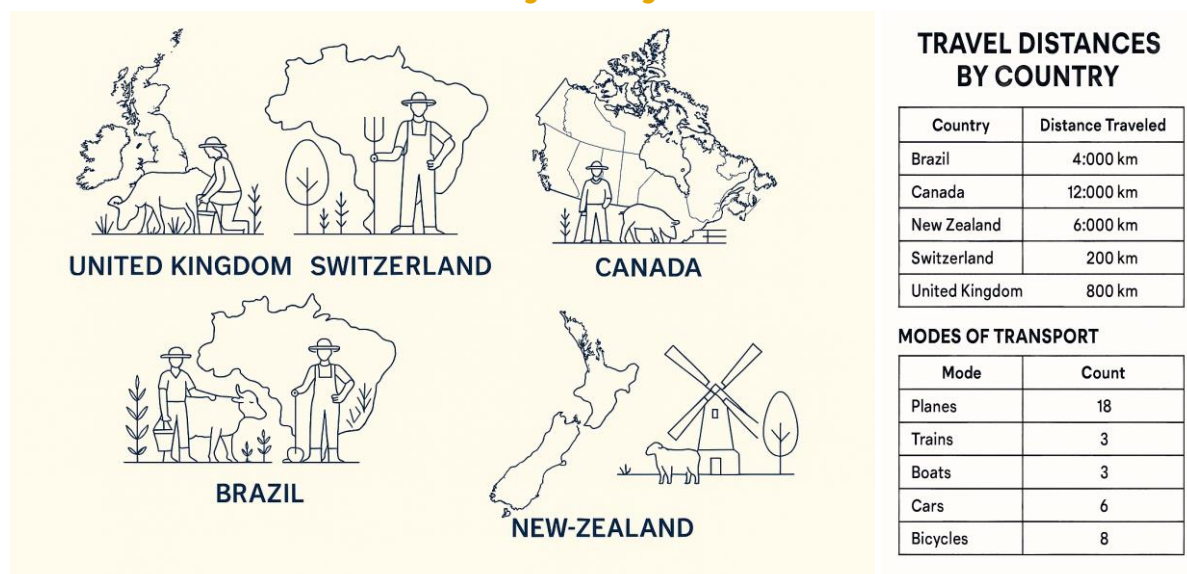


Figure 14: Maps of countries visited during Nuffield Scholarship. Created by MS Copilot.



## CHAPTER 4: DISSCUSION

### 4.1 Why do we need change?

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*'If you always do what you've done, you will always get what you've got.'*

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A growing divergence of opinion exists among future generations regarding what they believe to be good land management. Currently 16.8 million hectares, or 69% of land in the UK, are designated for agricultural use<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the scale of influence is undeniable. This is not just about land use. It is about identity, culture, and the kind of future we are shaping, whether consciously or by default. In the UK, 16% of principal farmers and holders in England are female, 17% of farmers under 35 were women (Defra 2024) and the number of Black and People of Colour varies between 0.8-1.2%<sup>6</sup>.

Agriculture has had a tough few years, the pressure is mounting, and the cracks are visible. But so is opportunity and change is already happening, whether we like it or not. The challenge now is to respond with intention, creativity, and integrity. If we act adaptively, we can build a future we are proud to be part of.

What is at stake is not just productivity, it is the soul of rural life:

- vibrant rural economies and communities
- the continuation of rural and land-management skills
- an innovative agricultural industry
- adaptation and mitigation of climate change
- embracing new management, innovative technology and data developments
- preserving farming traditions, culture, and local knowledge
- delivering improvements to biodiversity

This is a moment to reimagine, not just repair. To honour tradition while making space for innovation. To ensure that farming remains not only viable, but meaningful. The land is ready. Are we?

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<sup>5</sup> Defra 2024

<sup>6</sup> Partheeban, N. 2021



## 4.2 What is happening now?

### 4.2.1 Change Within the Industry

There is a growing urgency to respond to contextual stressors; environmental degradation, shifting community perceptions, and evolving policy landscapes. Across the board, we are seeing a move toward more environmentally conscious farming techniques, rapid innovation in technology, and a stronger alignment with ESG goals.

This momentum is creating real opportunity, not just for those already embedded in the sector, but for researchers, developers, and newcomers who are watching the pace of change and finding ways in. Much of this shift is being driven from the ground up by farmers at the coal face, adapting out of necessity and pushing innovation because they believe in what is possible.



**Figure 15: A young man from London reflecting on the hedge planting job ahead at a farm the author managed.**

### 4.2.2 Mindset Shifts

There is a noticeable shift in who gets to speak, and how. New voices are being invited into the conversation, young people, women, and those from demographics historically excluded from UK agriculture. Events and networks are emerging to support this, and it is changing the feel of the industry.

It is becoming more open, more curious, and more willing to listen. Alongside this, there is growing awareness around people management, mental health, and personal development. If nurtured properly, these shifts could make agriculture not just a viable career—but a fulfilling one.

### 4.2.3 Finance

Green finance is no longer fringe; it is becoming embedded. Banks are incentivising environmentally responsible practices<sup>7</sup>, and some farm business tenancies are beginning to reward ecological improvements<sup>8</sup>. Grant systems are increasingly designed around public goods, with environmental outcomes front and centre. This is not just about funding; it is about values being reflected in financial structures.

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<sup>7</sup> Oxbury Bank 2025

<sup>8</sup> Burges-Salmon 2025



#### 4.2.4 AI and Technology

Some of the most dramatic shifts are coming through AI, robotics, and precision tools. Agriculture is no exception<sup>9</sup>. These developments are opening doors for new skill sets. Data analysts, engineers, creatives, people who might never have considered farming as a space for their talents.

“AI won’t take your job, but someone using AI might” is a sentiment that is becoming real. The challenge is to stay curious, stay adaptive, and bring others with us.

#### 4.2.5 Communication

There is a growing overlap between agricultural and environmental conversations. Forums, press, policy, and social media are beginning to reflect this convergence. It is creating a more joined-up narrative, one that is easier to engage with and more attractive to those looking in from the outside.

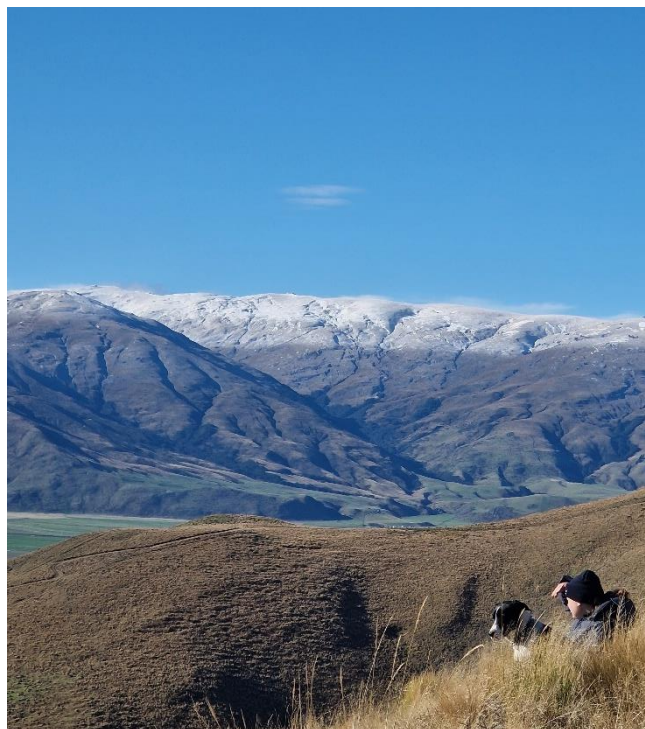
#### 4.2.6 People Creating Change

During my travels, I have witnessed countless projects led by farmers driven by a desire to do better, to engage future generations, and to leave a meaningful environmental and social legacy. These are not just stories of innovation. They are stories of courage, care, and commitment to change.

##### 4.2.6.1 Fairlight foundation. Queenstown, New Zealand

Provides world leading, on-farm internships which deliver practical, personal, and professional skills and knowledge-based training, building confidence, competence, and expertise, to underpin advanced careers in the agriculture sector. The uniqueness of this project being that it is designed specifically for women leaving university. It gives them a year-long placement within a challenging and commercial farming environment. They develop a support network of agriculture sector stakeholders to foster career opportunities for women in agriculture. This allows them to enter a male-dominated sector with confidence and allyship.

One success story of this project was a returning intern who now works



**Figure 16: I spent a day gathering hinds with Simon Wright and, pictured here, a university graduate and Fairlight Station intern (and her dog) watching a drone working.**

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<sup>9</sup> Mahajan, S. 2025



on the farm; a bright example of how skill, dedication and application can be a strong role model for others.



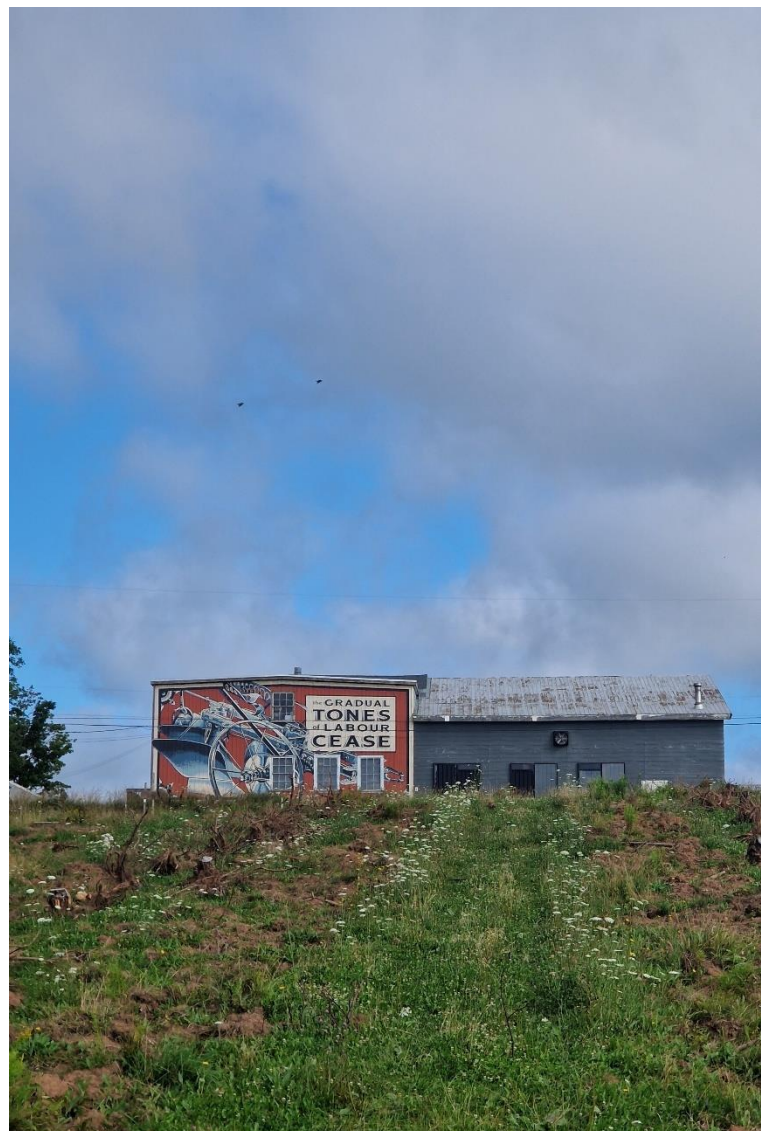
**Figure 17: Greg Hart and the author at Mangara Farm.**

#### 4.2.6.2 Mangara Farm, Hawkes Bay

Greg and Rachel Hart run an enriched and conscious farming enterprise with people at its heart. They have pushed boundaries with on-land interventions such as dam design, grazing choices, and agroforestry, bringing people with them on the journey. They actively seek to engage various stakeholders from large corporates to holiday makers whilst providing employment opportunities for future generations to learn their craft and open their minds.

#### 4.2.6.3 Young Agrarians, Canada

Young Agrarians (YA) is a farmer-to-farmer educational resource network for new and young ecological, organic, and regenerative farmers in Canada. They are committed to providing programmes that are inclusive and available to farmers and friends from diverse backgrounds. YA are volunteer-driven, with farmers across the country organising on-farm events and building community to create spaces for knowledge sharing and growth. The network is made up of a diverse array of food-lovers and growers including farmers, fishermen/women, holistic managers, market gardeners, ranchers, seed



**Figure 18: After chasing a lone sheep with Josh Oulton of Tap Root Farms, Port Williams, a barn painted with the words “Gradual Tones of Labour Cease”. A poignant reminder.**



savers, food activists, beekeepers, community gardeners, and food and farm organisations.

#### 4.2.6.4 Regeneration Canada

Regeneration Canada is a nonprofit organisation dedicated to promoting soil regeneration to mitigate climate change, restore biodiversity, improve water cycles, and support a healthy food system. They strive towards this goal by creating spaces for farmers, landowners, scientists, agronomists, businesses, community organisations, governments, and citizens to learn, connect and take action to regenerate soils.

#### 4.2.6.5 AgDiversity

An online awareness course about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), targeted at the UK agricultural and other land-based industries.

#### 4.2.6.6 Culture Roots Collective

Culture Roots Collective is a Black and People of Colour-led collective uniting those working in food, farming, and land stewardship. It exists to reclaim relationships of Black and People of Colour with land and agriculture, restore ancestral knowledge, and cultivate just food systems for our communities.

*Both these initiatives are thanks to the work of Navaratnam Partheeban NSch 2021.*

#### 4.2.6.7 Emergent Generation, UK



**Figure 19: Emergent Generation Summer Gathering 2024 at Conygree Farm.**



Emergent Generation is a diverse network of young people working together to build an agroecological food system and regenerative future. A brilliant, collaborative organisation started by Jonty Brunyee NSch 2015 and several forward-thinking and dedicated members. They meet several times a year for open discussion and knowledge exchange. Emergent Generation offers an excellent alternative to some other farming organisations aimed at young people; it has many refreshing qualities.



**Figure 20: Conan Moynihan, Force of Nature Consulting, Simon Osbourne, Quorum Sense, and Sam Lang, Regenerative Farmer visiting Simon Osbourne's farm, Canterbury.**

#### *4.2.6.8 United in Story*

What binds these change-makers together is not simply their actions or achievements, but the profound and often challenging stories they choose to share. Stories that carry the texture of lived experience, the nuance of struggle, and the quiet strength of persistence. Each narrative is distinct, shaped by its own context and challenges, yet all converge in their ability to inspire, to move, and to invite others into deeper consideration. Without story, we are left with facts and figures, useful, but limited in their capacity to shift perceptions or stir convictions. Data may inform, but it rarely transforms. It is through story that we access the emotional resonance and relational depth required to challenge assumptions, to soften resistance, and to cultivate empathy. If we are serious about creating lasting change, we must continue to go beyond the surface, beyond the binary, and into the layered complexity where real transformation takes root.



## CHAPTER 5: SOLUTION NOT PROBLEMS

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*“Hope is knowing what the future looks like, even if you can’t see it today” Jack Cocks*

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### 5.1 Reframing Agriculture: Responsibility, Inclusion, and Purpose for Future Generations

It is increasingly evident that many young people possess a deep understanding of climate change and its implications for their lives and communities. Their desire to contribute to meaningful change is clear, yet many lack a defined pathway to do so within the agricultural sector. As a result, we are witnessing a significant loss of talent, innovation, and potential to other industries perceived as more progressive, inclusive, and future-oriented.

The perception of agriculture among younger generations remains poor. If we are to shift this narrative, the responsibility lies with us. While considerable effort is being made to address these challenges, the most effective solution may be to revise the narrative we present—starting from within.

### 5.2 Structural Barriers and Sectoral Responsibility

The agricultural sector continues to present barriers that discourage future generations from viewing it as a viable solution to environmental and societal challenges. Instead, agriculture is often perceived as part of the problem. Addressing this requires a clear and collective response.

A recurring question posed during interviews was: *Who holds the responsibility for encouraging future generations into farming?*

Responses varied, but a consistent theme emerged. Those within farming frequently attributed responsibility to educators, while educators, supply chain actors, and the public often pointed back to farmers. When this was reflected to farmers, some acknowledged the



**Figure 21: The author and worker at Embrapa, Campo Grande, Brazil.**



logic but expressed concern about the additional burden. Others rejected the notion outright. Only those already engaged in youth-focused networks recognised the impact they could have and demonstrated a willingness to act.

Responsibility must be shared across the sector. It is not a burden; it is a strategic imperative.

### 5.3 Advancing Diversity and Inclusion

At the outset of this study, a key objective was to explore how diversity could be encouraged within agriculture. This required looking beyond the sector. In no instance was diversity found to be a disadvantage.

Industries that have actively educated internal stakeholders and made deliberate efforts to include individuals from diverse backgrounds report positive trends in innovation, mindset evolution, and long-term viability. Agriculture must follow this lead. The options are clear: either initiate change from within, challenging inappropriate behaviours and outdated cultural norms or continue to fall behind sectors that are consistently more attractive, prosperous, and forward-thinking.

### 5.4 Strategic Communication and Narrative Building



Every farm, every decision, tells a story. In today's digital landscape, where social media occupies a significant portion of young people's attention, the agricultural sector must learn to communicate effectively and authentically.

Many young individuals lack the skills to critically assess the information they consume. As stewards of the sector, it is our responsibility to counteract misinformation and amplify credible, inspiring narratives. Sensationalist reporting, internal negativity, and a lack of public engagement are causing reputational harm and deterring potential entrants.

We must invest in strategic storytelling highlighting progress, innovation, and opportunity.

**Figure 22: Hands on learning at the Calgary Stampede, Canada.**



## 5.5 Integrity as a Cornerstone

Respect and credibility are earned through consistent, values-driven behaviour. Integrity must underpin all actions across the agricultural supply chain.

Few things are more damaging than the dilution of genuine progress through exaggerated claims or performative commitments. Within internal networks, this may cause friction. Externally, it undermines trust and limits our ability to participate meaningfully in environmental discourse.

Acting without integrity is a serious constraint, not only on sectoral credibility but on our ability to attract and retain talent. It erodes the trust we work hard to build and diminishes the authenticity that defines agricultural identity.

## 5.6 Purpose-Driven Engagement

To attract problem-solvers and environmentally conscious individuals, agriculture must offer a clear sense of purpose.

By demonstrating that the sector can be both a solution to global challenges and a space for cultural and economic vitality, we provide a compelling proposition. In a world where purpose is often elusive, agriculture has the ingredients; history, community, and ecological relevance, to position itself as a sector of choice.

We must actively signpost opportunities, whether through corporate partnerships, grassroots initiatives, or targeted outreach.



**Figure 23: The author and fellow regenerative farmers listening to Elizabeth Buchanan at Scholarship sponsors McDonald's UK and Ireland event at Somerset House, Savings in Soil.**



## 5.7 Visibility and Representation

Visibility is essential. Where innovation and success occurs particularly among young people, regentrepreneurs and marginalised groups, we must ensure these stories are seen, heard, and understood and celebrated.

Often, individuals operating on the fringes of mainstream agricultural culture contribute significantly but lack recognition. As sector leaders, it is our responsibility to engage with these individuals and facilitate broader access to their work.

For underrepresented groups, seeing someone relatable succeed in agriculture can be transformative. Representation is not merely symbolic; it is a catalyst for change.



**Figure 24: His Majesty the King and author meeting to discuss regenerative agriculture and soil at Somerset House, London.**



## CHAPTER 6: REWRITING THE STORY: BUILDING ROOTS IN AND A REGENERATIVE FUTURE

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*'No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.'*

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**Figure 25: Author and his wife, Ellie at their farm, Roots In, Monmouthshire.**

### 6.1 Working in Acres, Not in Hours

Visiting agricultural communities across the world has been both challenging and deeply inspiring. On a personal level, these experiences created space to reflect on my beliefs and reaffirm the motivations behind my work. They reinforced a core truth: I am most fulfilled and productive in environments that nurture both people and the planet.

Professionally, I sought to advance my career while remaining aligned with my passion for regenerative agriculture and sectoral transformation. This led to a weighty decision to step away from my role as a farm manager and dedicate more time to study, personal development, and consultancy. This transition enabled me to expand my contribution to the agricultural sector and pursue opportunities that reflected the insights I had gained and the values I hold.



## 6.2 Creating Something Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts



**Figure 26: AI created advertisement for the author's farm, Roots In. Created by MS Copilot.**

In 2024, an opportunity arose to put these principles into practice through the rental of a farm on the progressive Old Lands estate in Monmouthshire. Together with my wife Ellie, we established Roots In, based at Ty Mawr, a 200-acre lowland arable, beef, and sheep operation. The farm not only provides a foundation for raising our family in a healthy and forward-thinking environment, but also serves as a platform for innovation, education, and community engagement.

Roots In is designed to integrate the learnings from my studies into real-world practice. It is a space where new entrants and those seeking to innovate within agriculture are actively supported. We welcome alternative thinkers and challenge conventional norms in a safe, inclusive environment where individuals can thrive. Our events focus on practical business

development and scalability, offering a grounded perspective on what it takes to succeed in the sector.

We also engage with corporate partners, members of the public, and individuals outside the farming industry facilitating dialogue, knowledge exchange, and immersive experiences. A retail outlet is currently being developed to showcase produce from our farm and the wider local community, with the aim of deepening engagement and removing barriers to participation.



**Figure 27: Public engagement and farm tour at the authors farm, Roots In.**

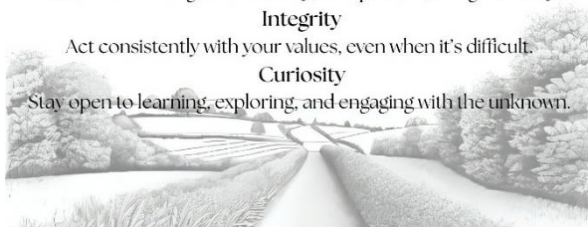


Our holistic approach to has allowed us to define the values we live and work by for both ourselves and the farm. This process has been important in defining what our futures look like, giving us a keen sense of purpose and identity, and allowing external stakeholders to understand our perspective. This has been a powerful empowerment and engagement tool. Both are displayed in our communal area for all to view.



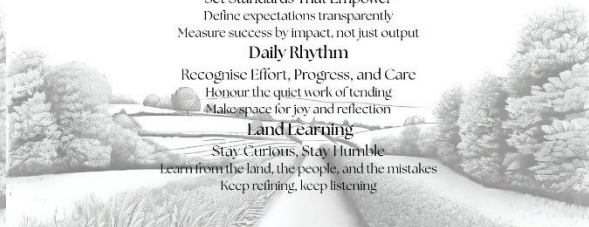
## Values Menu of life

- Treat Others as We Wish to Be Treated**  
A reminder that empathy and fairness are the foundation for all decisions.
- Challenge**  
Encourage healthy questioning, innovation, and the courage to push beyond comfort zones.
- Grace**  
Approach interactions with patience, understanding, and respect, even in disagreement.
- Nurture**  
Foster an environment where people, ideas, and potential can grow.
- Expectation**  
Set and uphold high but achievable standards inspiring others to rise to meet them.
- Open Hearted**  
Foster trust through authenticity, compassion, and generosity.
- Integrity**  
Act consistently with your values, even when it's difficult.
- Curiosity**  
Stay open to learning, exploring, and engaging with the unknown.



## Values Menu of Land

- Resilient Custodianship**  
Care for Land as a Living System  
Respect soil, water, and biodiversity as  
Prioritise long term vitality over short term gain
- Adaptive Thinking**  
Respond to change with curiosity  
Embrace uncertainty as part of the landscape  
Design systems that learn and evolve
- Place Based Wisdom**  
Listen to the Land and Its People  
Ground decisions in local knowledge  
Honor cultural and ecological histories
- Nurture Regeneration**  
Grow More Than Crops  
Cultivate resilience in ecosystems and communities  
Support cycles of renewal, not extraction
- Craft with Intention**  
Design for Function, Beauty, and Belonging  
Build infrastructure that serves and inspires  
Use materials and methods that respect the earth
- Equity in Practice**  
Share Access, Power, and Opportunity  
Invite diverse voices into land decisions  
Support new entrants and marginalised stakeholders
- Clarity & Accountability**  
Set Standards That Empower  
Define expectations transparently  
Measure success by impact, not just output
- Daily Rhythm**  
Recognise Effort, Progress, and Care  
Honour the quiet work of tending  
Make space for joy and reflection
- Land Learning**  
Stay Curious, Stay Humble  
Learn from the land, the people, and the mistakes  
Keep refining, keep listening



### 6.3 Collaborative Enterprise and Inclusive Governance

We have been fortunate to collaborate with a diverse range of individuals and organisations. All participating enterprises operate under rolling annual contracts, and we are in the process of establishing a formal board to facilitate open, constructive dialogue for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Roots In offers mentorship where needed and shares access to our networks. A communal meeting space is available for workshops and events, fostering collaboration and learning. All enterprises operate under the same agroecological and regenerative principles as our in-hand farming practices. Notably, all growers and craftspeople are under the age of 40, representing a wide range of cultures and backgrounds.



### **Current Enterprises Include:**

- Cut Flower Garden
- Wood Turner
- Market Garden
- Arable Share Farming
- Beekeeper
- Meeting Barn

### **Enterprises in Development:**

- Vegetable and Poultry Grower
- Knifemaker / Blacksmith
- Biological Composting
- Agroforestry
- Regenerative Equine Livery

## **6.4 Scaling the Approach: Roots In Consultancy**

To support broader adoption of this model, Roots In consultancy focuses on environmental improvement and helping landowners understand how sustainable practices can benefit their business, local communities, and long-term land stewardship.

A particularly exciting area of work involves supporting new landowners in optimising their farming systems for both environmental and productive outcomes. In some cases, we assist with recruitment and offer remote management solutions. Our involvement in several landscape recovery projects has enabled us to embed regenerative principles into strategic decision-making frameworks—ensuring that prosperity, health, and ecological integrity are central to future land use.

We have developed a journey planner that acts as a compass for the work we complete and relationships we cultivate. This process very much utilises our human and land-based skills and is proving highly effective for our clients and their projects.



# Roots in Consultancy Journey

<p>Current Context</p>	<p>We begin by understanding the landowner or farmer’s present situation—ecologically, economically, and socially. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Land assessment:</b> Soil health, biodiversity, water systems, and existing land use.</li> <li>• <b>Enterprise mapping:</b> What’s currently operating—livestock, crops, tourism, education, etc.</li> <li>• <b>Cultural and community context:</b> Who’s involved, what values drive the farm, and how decisions are made.</li> <li>• <b>Narrative framing:</b> How the farmer sees their land and legacy</li> </ul>
<p>Outcome Context</p>	<p>Here we co-design a vision for what success looks like, balancing ambition with realism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ecological goals:</b> Improved soil carbon, water retention, habitat restoration.</li> <li>• <b>Economic diversification:</b> Introducing new enterprises—e.g., agroforestry, on-farm processing, education hubs.</li> <li>• <b>Social impact:</b> Youth engagement, inclusive governance, community resilience.</li> <li>• <b>Narrative clarity:</b> A compelling story that aligns with funding, partnerships, and public engagement.</li> </ul>
<p>Support</p>	<p>This phase identifies the scaffolding required to move from vision to action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Technical expertise:</b> Soil consultants, enterprise designers, ecological monitors.</li> <li>• <b>Business planning:</b> Financial modelling, market access, cooperative structures.</li> <li>• <b>Mentorship and coaching:</b> Especially for younger or transitioning farmers.</li> <li>• <b>Policy navigation:</b> Grants, subsidies, and regulatory frameworks.</li> </ul>
<p>Empowerment</p>	<p>We focus on building capacity, not dependency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Narrative agency:</b> Helping farmers articulate their journey in ways that attract support and inspire others.</li> <li>• <b>Decision confidence:</b> Support to be confident and show conviction in decision making.</li> <li>• <b>Inspire action:</b> Background support for action progression.</li> <li>• <b>Tools for autonomy:</b> development of skills and mindset to achieve full autonomy</li> </ul>
<p>Resilience</p>	<p>Finally, we embed systems that can weather change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ecological resilience:</b> Diverse cropping systems, perennial species, and closed-loop nutrient cycles.</li> <li>• <b>Economic resilience:</b> Multiple income streams, cooperative models, and adaptive planning.</li> <li>• <b>Social resilience:</b> Strong networks, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and mental health support.</li> <li>• <b>Cultural resilience:</b> Celebrating identity, place, and values</li> </ul>



## CHAPTER 7: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THANKS

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*“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.”*

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This is the most important chapter for me, the kindness, support and encouragement I have received throughout my study has been incredible. The honour of being allowed into family homes and to learn from people that I now consider as friends all around the world has been inspirational. In turn, welcoming others to visit our farm has been equally as rewarding. This list of people is long and varied, I will forever be grateful to those who helped me, no matter how small, I have many memories that you formed that will shape both my career and life. This thanks, will never do it justice.

Thanks to the young people I have engaged with for their often brutally honest and challenging thoughts; I hope in some way I can cultivate a brighter future.

The support I have received from my sponsors McDonald's UK and Ireland and their international teams has allowed me access many opportunities and valuable learning opportunities that I will be forever grateful for.

My wonderful family and friends who have kept me motivated when times have been difficult. A new job, a new consultancy, a new farm and four months travel have, at times, been tricky to navigate.

Lastly thanks go to my wife, Ellie, and our beautiful children, who without their support, respect and trust, none of this would have been possible.



**Caption 28: New friends, adventures and life lessons.**



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