

Regional news

A fantastic nine months awaits

A new nine-month magical mystery tour for younger farmers in the North East is to be launched this month. The Student & Young Farmer North East Programme will open for applications from 1 July and offer 12 fully-funded places for an exciting line-up of visits starting in October.

The aim, says regional director Adam Bedford, is to give younger farmers the opportunity to visit inspirational farm businesses, sophisticated supply chain operations and see behind the scenes at the NFU nationally and in Westminster.

"Talking to our younger members, it's clear they are hungry for inspiration and knowledge – both on-farm and beyond the farm gate," he said.

"Our national development programmes are always extremely popular, so we were keen to offer a similar opportunity with a strong regional flavour."

As a result the first-ever North East programme will take participants on an extensive tour of the integrated supply chain at Bradford-based retailer,

Morrisons, as well as behind the scenes at award-winning horticultural business, MH Poskitt near Goole.

Participants will also visit the NFU's headquarters in Warwickshire and its London office, just a stone's throw away from the Houses of Parliament.

Finally, the programme will include a couple of two-day visits – the first to NFU Conference in Birmingham in February and, as the programme finale, a visit to Beeswax Farming in Lincolnshire.

Other opportunities will be presented to participants along the way, including the chance for some media training.

"We hope this will provide an exciting nine months of activity for our 12 participants, encouraging them to carve out a successful career in our fantastic industry," added Mr Bedford.

"We have a wealth of talent in this region, so hope to see lots of excellent applications."

+ For more details and the online application form visit the North East pages on [NFUOnline.com](https://www.nfuonline.com)

NEXT GEN Takeover

To celebrate the launch of the new Student & Young Farmer North East Programme, British Farmer & Grower is showcasing some of the region's young talent with a 'Next Gen Takeover'.

From case studies to comment and news, our younger members can be found on every page of this month's regional section.

A leading role has been taken by members of the North East Next Generation Group, who are helping the regional team develop new ideas for encouraging and supporting younger farmers now and in the future.

OLIVIA TAKES ON NEW ROLE

Olivia Richardson, whose family farms on the North Yorkshire/County Durham border, has taken on a new role as the leader of the region's Next Generation Group for the next 12 months.

Involved with the NFU's national Next Generation Forum for the past three years, she accepted to challenge of helping to develop the role of the group, which was set up six months ago.

Commenting, she said she was delighted to help co-ordinate group activities and also feed-in regional views to the national forum.

"It is exciting to see a new focus on encouraging and supporting younger farmers across our region and I'm keen to help make this a success," she said.

"There are lots of ideas floating about for ways of bringing younger farmers together – both socially and with a more business focus – so hopefully we will see this coming together."

NEW DATE FOR BALTIC EVENT

A new date has been announced for the flagship next generation event that had been due to take place at the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in April.

Postponed initially as a result of the coronavirus restrictions, it had been hoped to re-stage the event in October. However ongoing uncertainty over social distancing requirements means the new date has now been set for Tuesday 20 April 2021.

The line-up of speakers remains the same, with the possibility of exciting new additions – stay tuned for more details.

"We are really excited to be hosting this event in the region," said regional board chairman, Rachel Hallos. "It promises to be something very different with a superb venue, which of course was a former flour mill on the banks of the Tyne.

"Minette Batters and well-known farming podcaster, Will Evans, are already booked, so it is definitely a date for your diary."



NEXT GEN FACTFILE

Eleven younger farmers have joined this year's North East Next Generation Group. Together they cover all sectors and offer a wealth of experience to help guide the region's offering for our up and coming members.



OLIVIA RICHARDSON

County: North Riding & Durham
Role: Team Leader
Sector: Arable, Beef, Pigs
Passion: Shooting, education
Experience: National Next Generation Forum for three years

JACK KELCHER

County: Northumberland
Sector: Beef and arable
Passion: Growing his business and driving efficiencies
Achievement: NE Rural Awards Young Farmer of the Year



EMMA SMITH

County: Northumberland
Sector: Livestock
Passion: Farming & countryside, farming in the school curriculum
Experience: Chartered Rural Surveyor & Agricultural valuer

ALEX WARRINER

County: York East
Sector: Beef, sheep & pigs
Passion: Animal health & welfare, grassland management
Experience: Farmer events & knowledge exchange



THOMAS WILLIAMS

County: York East
Sector: Arable, potatoes, pigs
Passion: Growing his business and high-quality crops
Experience: NFU Cereals Development Programme

EMILY FIELD

County: York East
Sector: Pigs, poultry & arable
Passion: Animal health & welfare
Achievement: Completed the Worshipful Company of Farmers Leadership Course



JOHN CRADDOCK

County: North Riding & Durham
Sector: Tenanted livestock, arable & potatoes
Passion: Next gen involvement
Experience: Former chairman of Yorkshire FYFC

SOPHIE THORNTON

County: York East
Career: Research analyst with Promar International
Passion: Public engagement
Experience: NFU Student & Young Farmer Ambassador

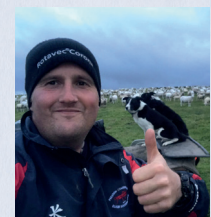


MATT DONALD

County: North Riding & Durham
Sector: Pigs & poultry
Achievements: Young Pig farmer of the Year 2017
Experience: PIP & national poultry board member

JIM BEARY

County: West Riding
Sector: Tenanted livestock
Passion: Positive thinking and progressive farming
Experience: A member of the NFU national sheep group



LOUISE HEWITT

County: West Riding
Sector: Arable
Passion: Everything about farming!
Achievement: Ag. resource management degree

+ For more information on the region's Next Generation Group, and up-coming activity being organised with younger farmers in mind, please visit the North East homepage on NFUonline.com. Anyone interested in getting involved with the group in the future should email: rachael.gillbanks@nfu.org.uk.

Fresh thinking on Net Zero

With weather extremes impacting most farms this year, a selection of younger members talk about their response to climate change and farming's net zero aspirations

Combinable crops

Mike Temple

Driffild, East Yorkshire

A desire to improve soil health and resilience in the face of increasing weather extremes has led one East Yorkshire farming family to change its ways and swap the plough and power harrow for a direct drill.

It's early days, but four years on and the signs are good, with the land standing up well to two very wet years and biodiversity beginning to increase.

Mike Temple says that as a mixed farm on reasonably light wold land, the family had a real opportunity to focus

THERE IS A REAL OPPORTUNITY TO ADD VALUE FOR CUSTOMERS WHO WANT TO BE AS GREEN AS POSSIBLE

on their soils while at the same time reducing machinery and other costs and achieving more flexibility to move the business in different directions if needs-be.

"While there are some innate challenges with the approach – particularly with pest and weed control – in all honesty we have never looked back," he said.

Building more grass into the rotation has helped the process – aiding soil health and weed management while also feeding the farm's suckler herd.

"I take the view that every time you release carbon into the atmosphere, it is costing you money to do so," Mike added. "Look at our main competitors, in the US and elsewhere. Their carbon footprint would be a fraction of ours – but their costs are also a fraction."

"To me, reducing your environmental



impact is a win-win. There are some real potential benefits associated with adding value in a world where our customers are increasingly looking to be as green as possible, but at the same time you are increasing your bottom line.

"So I see it as less of an inconvenience and more of an opportunity – one that will become ever more important as time goes on."

Dairy

Will Kitching

Northallerton, North Yorkshire

For Will Kitching, the challenge of adapting the family's dairy business in response to climate change is something that he thinks will be tough, but necessary.

Farming alongside his father Neville, Will says the day-to-day driver on the farm is business efficiency – reducing cost and saving time – but all too often this approach results in a smaller carbon footprint too.

"Making small changes in the way you do routine tasks can make a big difference," he said.

Talking about slurry management, he says they have opted to use a dribble bar for spreading, as injecting did too much damage to the grass root system.

"On the face of it, this is not as



environmentally friendly, but plan your operations very carefully and you can still minimise the impact. Plus we have not had to buy any bagged fertiliser for more than two years, which is another significant bonus."

Changes to your bedding and/or housing can mean time savings in the tractor and that too can have positive knock on effects.

Will also wants to be proactive on perennial problems like what to do with

plastic waste – as there are no local recycling facilities.

"I think we have to be creative too," he said. "I have been exploring the option of melting our waste to re-use it as plastic sleepers (for the driveway) or fence posts.

"We could even have a facility for farmers in the area to use collectively."

Getting fully up to speed on carbon footprint analysis is something Will finds somewhat daunting. "There is a lot to consider and all the calculators are different," he said. "But this is something we are all going to have to get to grips with in the future and although the future is somewhat uncertain, I'm sure we will rise to the challenge."

THE DAY-TO-DAY DRIVER IS BUSINESS EFFICIENCY – REDUCING COST & SAVING TIME – BUT THIS OFTEN RESULTS IN A SMALLER CARBON FOOTPRINT TOO

Livestock

Ross & Rebecca Wilson

Ingram Valley, Northumberland

Farming in the Northumberland National Park, and custodians of one of the finest prehistoric landscapes in the country – taking in 1,300 acres of scheduled ancient monument and one of the cleanest rivers in the world – it is not surprising that Ross and Rebecca Wilson are passionate about their environment.

The 2,000-acre organic farm is home to cattle, hill sheep and native Red Deer, all grazing the farm's extensive carbon store in the form of peat, heather and permanent pasture which is carefully managed to encourage native wildlife, particularly breeding populations of threatened wading birds.

The couple has gone much further than this though, using recyclable packaging through a Local Heroes North East online shop where their meat is delivered via zero emission vehicles.

They also use all-electric vehicles

themselves, charged using solar power, and have pledged to plant a tree or hedgerow for every 50 lambs sold.

As a business, they closely monitor their carbon footprint, collaborating with The Planet Mark certification programme to continuously improve their environmental performance. The farm is the first globally to achieve Planet Mark accreditation.

"We are passionate about helping to reverse climate change and that's why we analyse everything we do with a view to further improve our sustainability," said Rebecca.

"It's an approach that makes good business sense as despite the investment needed in green technology, the result is lower costs long-term.

"We have always felt that the UK can lead the way with low-carbon farming, but being able to contribute to the regenerative economy seems even more important now as we head into one of the deepest ever recessions on the back of Covid-19."



BEING ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE REGENERATIVE ECONOMY NOW SEEMS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT AS WE HEAD INTO ONE OF THE DEEPEST EVER RECESSIONS

Poultry

David Throup

Nun Monkton, North Yorkshire

With water pumped from on-farm boreholes, electricity generated through solar, biomass and hydro installations and the farm producing almost 100% of the feed required for 104,000 free range laying hens, chicks and pullets, the Throup family have been working to improve their business self-sufficiency for many years.

The poultry litter is used to fertilise crops and in recent years the family has also been running their own mill and mix operation, only needing to buy in protein and oil. This has significantly reduced the amount of road transport involved in sending grain away and then buying it back as feed.

They have also embraced renewable energy, with 94kw of solar panels, a biomass boiler providing heat for chicks and pullets and, uniquely, two

Archimedes' Screw installations on the banks of the River Ouse providing 450kw of hydro power.

"Controlling our costs is the one thing we can focus on," said David Throup.

"Our location has allowed us to explore some unusual solutions, such as hydro, but really this is all about making the most of the resources available to us."

With the family's customer (Morrisons) increasingly interested in environmental performance, the latest improvement to the range, on top of extensive tree planting, is the addition of a hectare of bee friendly mix, which David says has



been alive with bees during the recent hot weather.

This year has also seen the family trial a move to direct drilling into cover crops, and exploring the possibility of using the farm's 50 acre woodland to run the biomass boiler.

"Achieving Net Zero will be very tough for the poultry sector," concluded David, "but there is scope for further improvements. I can certainly see a carbon footprinting requirement coming at some point."

OUR LOCATION HAS ALLOWED US TO EXPLORE SOME UNUSUAL SOLUTIONS, LIKE HYDRO, BUT THIS IS REALLY ALL ABOUT MAKING THE MOST OF THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO US

Championing the environment

Young hill farmer, Tom Vickers, hopes the new ELM scheme will be both viable for the family and deliver a long-term future for their thriving farmland bird populations

A single hill farm at Westgate in Weardale is home to no less than 1.5% of the country's black grouse population – a 'red listed' farmland bird that has grown steadily in numbers on the farm from 14 to more than 50 males counted in 2014.

The bird is thriving thanks largely to the efforts of the Vickers family and their commitment to environmental management over the past 40 years.

Today the business, centred on two farms – the Weardale hill farm and a linked upland holding at Tow Law near Bishop Auckland – is managed by 25-year-old Tom Vickers in partnership with his mother, Amanda. Together, along with a part-time herdsman and full-time shepherd, they manage a 1,000-strong Swaledale flock, 70 suckler cows and smaller flocks of Mules and pedigree Bluefaced Leicesters.

Tom, whose father died when he was just two years old, took a lead role in the business after he returned from finishing his agriculture and environmental management degree in 2016.

Having done his university dissertation on how hill farming practices can influence farmland bird numbers, he is clearly proud of the farm's achievements.

"We first got involved with agri-environment schemes in 1986 with the aim of making the most of the hill farm," he said. "Rising to 2,000 feet, and offering poor ground, allotment pasture and moorland, the farm had real potential to provide ideal habitat for key bird species including black grouse."

The resulting countryside stewardship, and now linked ELS/HLS agreements, have seen the family embark on a zero cultivation approach, with no pasture improvement permitted and a rush management plan that aims to maintain the optimal grazing mosaic.

Reflecting on the impact this has had on the farm's productivity, Tom says the Swaledale flock is not much reduced, but cattle numbers have more or less halved.

"At one time we would have run up to 140 sucklers, with 100 grazing our hill pastures during the summer," he said. "Now the number that can be accommodated is nearer 50, and this has an obvious knock-on effect."

He sometimes wishes he could enjoy the benefits of improved grassland – given that the upland farm must successfully feed all stock over winter – but at the same time enjoys seeing the farm's increasing bird numbers, which include grey partridge and lapwing as well as black grouse.

Although the agri-environment schemes have provided an important source of income, he adds that the family may have to do things differently if new farm policies miss the mark.

"I would be very disappointed if we had to change our approach, but the government's new policy has to be right and has to be financially viable," he said.

Turning back the clock and increasing cow numbers would be possible and would cover the income shortfall, but Tom adds it would have to return enough to cover the cost of extra staff.

"In my grandfather's time there would have been at least a dozen people working across the two farms but times have changed," he added. "Working with our herdsman, I can manage to calve 70 cattle but would not want to take on 120."

Looking ahead at what the new ELM scheme could deliver,



Tom says he is concerned that there is still a lot of uncertainty and worries about having enough time to adapt.

"As our current agreement is due to expire in 2022, before the new scheme is up and running, I will be looking to try and roll it over for five years," he said.

He is also looking to do more on two commons where the family also has grazing rights. "Currently neither common is managed as part of an environmental agreement, but there is potential to do something with the areas of exposed peat," he added. "I would be interested to look at a peat restoration project, but it would have to be viable for all graziers."

Ultimately Tom says any new scheme must adequately reward farmers for the work carried out and he is nervous about the suggestion that they should take more responsibility for deciding on the most appropriate measure to deliver any given outcome.

"Farming is primarily about producing food," he said. "And many aspects of our business, not least our cattle and sheep, are already outcome oriented. I wouldn't want to take on additional risk, especially when outcomes can be affected by things beyond my control."

NFU VIEW

The NFU believes that future environmental policy should include a mix of incentive schemes, recognising that farms must be profitable and competitive. In future, government must recognise that food production and positive environmental outcomes can go hand in hand.

The new ELM scheme must be:

- Accessible to all farm types and systems, catering for different skill levels.
- Good value for money, offering fair reward for risk.
- Transparent for all parties, with clear obligations and realistic expectations of farmers.
- Responsive to different farm practices, types and tenures plus different systems and changes over time.
- Responsive to different areas and landscapes with a national delivery framework.



For more information go to:

www.nfuonline.com/cross-sector/environment

Parting shot



An amazing year I will never forget



Sophie Thornton
NFU Student & Young
Farmer Ambassador

It is hard to know quite where to start when reflecting back on the last year as an NFU Student and Young Farmer Ambassador.

I remember driving to Coventry for our first meeting not really knowing what to expect. A year on and I have taken part in the Lord Mayor's Show in London, attended workshops on Net Zero, joined in on Speakers for Schools training, visited the NFU Brussels office and the European Parliament and attended the NFU Conference in Birmingham – meeting so many influential speakers along the way.

Not only that, but I got the chance to meet a group of great, like-minded, other Ambassadors from all over the country, working in different sectors but with the same passion for British farming.

For me the most memorable experience was the Lord Mayor's Show – which takes place every year in the City of London and centres on a three-mile long procession packed full of different floats including military bands, giant teapots, African drummers, an inflatable pig, 6,500 people and 120 horses.

The NFU joins forces with the Worshipful Company of Farmers, Red Tractor and Massey Ferguson to join the parade and to encourage people to

#BackBritishfarming – with an astonishing 500,000 people lining the route.

Last year we accompanied a Massey Ferguson MF 8740S tractor pulling an enormous market stall of British produce. Even better, for the first time ever, the procession was led by the new Lady Mayorness, Hilary Russell, not in a gleaming limousine, but in a tractor!

For me, this symbolised the diversity of farming and how great British food really is at the heart of the nation.

Walking beside such a spectacle was a brilliant way to showcase everything UK farmers do to produce food that safe, traceable and affordable and gives people a chance to ask questions and understand more about what is involved in producing their food. After the event, the food from the stall was donated to the City Harvest charity which supports 300 organisations across London.

The day was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and a fantastic experience – one that I will never forget – but the ambassador scheme is about more than attending conferences and events.

Personally, it has given me more confidence to shout about what we do as an industry over social media, whether you work on farm, for a processor, or a consultancy company. Together we produce products to among the best



standards globally, so why not shout out about it?

I have also been challenged to test myself, writing articles for the different NFU publications and presenting my dissertation findings on blockchain technology within the poultry industry to 50 delegates at an NFU 'poultry innovation' seminar. There have also been plenty of opportunities to network at different events.

It truly has been an incredible experience and a year to remember. so I would thoroughly recommend it to others in the region. It is exciting to see the new regional development programme being launched this month and I would encourage all NFU North East members to apply and get involved.

Lastly, I want to thank Orla, Huw, Heather, Gemma and the NFU for choosing me as the North East representative this year. Thanks again for organising all the events, seminars and training opportunities.

+ For more information on the North East development programme go to [NFUOnline.com](https://www.nfuonline.com)

