

Agroforestry at Shimpling Park Farm

- bringing the ancient woodland out into the fields



The system

Planted 3 fields totalling about 50 acres with 3,500 trees in December 2020. Native species suited to a heavy land farm that mimic the species in the adjacent SSSI woodland and are ideally suited for the farm soil type. Between the trees they are growing organic arable crops (cereals and pulses) and will graze their sheep. Trees are planted in lines in the fields at 36m intervals (it was calculated when they get to their full height they will start impacting on the yield of the crops in which they're planted, but at that point they will be harvested). Plenty of room to farm in-between the trees. Field headlands have been left without trees. 4m wide tree alleys following the hedge line - southwest to northeast - for solar radiation - creating a balance between protection from the wind and ensuring crops receive light.



Tree species and management

All except the common walnut are native. Timber trees - oak, small-leaved lime, hornbeam and common walnut. Round each of the timber trees they have planted some nurse trees - if the timber trees fail, they can be used for timber as well. 10m between each timber tree and at 2m intervals between them there are other trees - wild cherry, aspen, wild service, holly, black poplar, goat willow, field maple, hazel, rowan.



Aims and outputs

The aim is to keep the fields as productive as possible, still growing the crops they grow in the rotation. The trees won't interfere with the productivity of the field but will improve the overall productivity of what the field can do for nature. They have planted a wildflower mix into the lines of the trees to generally boost biodiversity and provide nectar sources for pollinators. "Everything that goes with having trees on your farm brings all that nature into the middle of the field." They will harvest the trees at some point in their lifetime. Hazel will be used in the woodchip boiler, cherry will be sold as timber, oak species harvested much later, and they will all be replanted - bringing changes in the dynamic of diversity within the tree rows as they go through their various lifecycles. The trees will add another attraction to visitors on the farm and hopefully encourage people to camp at the farm. They will add to the diversity of the farm's income over a period of time. The tree alleys will help sequester more carbon, which will be a huge benefit. The trees will also help mitigate soil erosion and help with water management. There will also be a benefit for grazing animals - with large field sizes, trees in the middle of fields will give sheep opportunity to find shade during the day.



Lessons learned

Too early to tell but foresee that dry springs and low levels of rain generally will be a challenge, as will ensuring the trees are managed well for timber products.



Tips

Stop thinking about it, do it as soon as possible!