

Helix network

expands to include the very first Agroecology Farm

This autumn will see the addition of Whitley Manor Farm in Newport, Shropshire to the Hutchinsons national Helix network.

However, this is a Helix farm with a difference - it is the first Helix farm that will focus solely on the principles and practices of Agroecology.

Agroecology or Regenerative Farming is a method or practice of farming that has come increasingly into the limelight as growers look for ways of working with nature on their farms – driven by the need to follow a more holistic, environmentally focussed path,

“As an industry, we are looking for answers as to how many of the practices associated with Agroecology such as reducing cultivations, using cover crops and reintroducing livestock can really make a sustainable and profitable difference to our farms,” explains Ed Bown, Hutchinsons head of Agroecology.

“Our Helix farms were set up to test new technologies and practices in

real farm scenario's and this is exactly what we are aiming to do with the Agroecology Helix Farm.

“Our objective is not to look at the minutest details and trials but to look to answer some of the bigger picture questions surrounding Agroecology practices.”

“For example we want some clarity on questions such as when moving over to an Agroecological approach, how are yields affected? Do they drop off and then pick up again? What are the direct benefits to soil health, biodiversity and soil nutrient availability? Are they measurable and definable?

To answer these questions, we will take baseline measurements and evaluate the impact of Agroecological technologies or agronomic practices on factors such as soil health, diversity and carbon.





Harry Heath, Whitley Manor Farm



> **For Harry Heath who took over the running of the family farm several years ago, being a Helix Farm provides a valuable opportunity to see how different Agroecological approaches and technologies can potentially not only improve yields but also reduce input costs.**

"Our journey into Agroecology has been driven very much by looking at how we can ensure that we are farming in a positive way for the bottom line and environmentally. We had a legacy of heavy cultivations on the farm which cost money and were not doing very much for soil health - so we needed to look at how we could manage this differently going forward - and this was the real spring board into looking at how Agroecological practices could help us to do this."

"This has taken a real mindset change, so we are taking each step at a time. It is not a rigid and defined approach but one that is about responding to the field or situation that we have in front of us - so we have learnt to be much more flexible."

When Ed Brown took on the agronomy for the farm, we discussed the various options we had that allowed us to address these issues. Since then we have moved to a no till approach, direct drilling, using cover crops where possible and also widening and having more flexibility in our rotations.

"However, every farm has its own set of challenges, and at the end of the day, its important to look at the big picture. For example, whilst we don't have the issue with black-grass that many growers in the east do, rye-grass is proving to be a really niggly invasive and difficult to control weed.

"One field in particular has high rye-grass populations, so after much debate on the various options available to us to get on top of it, the answer was clear, we decided to plough it. Whilst this is not what fits into an Agroecological agenda - it is what the field needed to re-set and now we can move forward and focus on building soil health."

Ed Brown, Head of Agroecology Services



As an industry we understand agroecological farming is more resilient, enhances natural resources and is future proof. It also has the support of government strategy which may create opportunities to access new markets and income streams.

In response to this, Hutchinsons has recently launched its Agroecology service.

Led by **Ed Brown**, this bespoke service is purely focussed on helping growers take these ecological principles and apply them to their own individual farming businesses.

"We recognise the desire for change, but many growers are looking for advice and support to make these changes - whilst remaining profitable," he says.

"We have already invested in training specialists across the business, and are committed to developing and trialling different agroecological approaches and technologies. The launch of the Helix Agroecology farm is just one facet of this, and we look forward to sharing our learnings from this in due course."

To find out more about our Agroecology service, please contact us: information@hlhlt.co.uk



Helix LIVE Seminar Returns this Autumn



The Hutchinsons Helix initiative is about improving farm decision making to increase profitability. The 'how' we do that is by testing, developing and validating technologies that produce data, which are then interpreted by the agronomist and grower to make better informed decisions.

Helix has five main focus areas - data and sustainability, improving soils, optimising nutrition, genetic benefits and integrated crop management.

This last year alone has seen the development and introduction of technologies such as the climate system, TerraMap carbon mapping, BYDV, blight and growth stage prediction models, a field diary / scout app and cost of production mapping. Ultimately these need a central system to work through and that is where the Omnia platform comes in.

This year we are continuing to investigate and develop improved crop imagery, novel crop protection, farm strategy and planning technology, Nitrogen and phosphate use efficiency alongside nutrition technologies, a carbon mapping and management tool, an integrated crop management tool, along with increasingly targeted agronomy and yield prediction.

Join the free online
'Helix Live' seminar

TIME: 8.30 - 9.45am

DATE: Wednesday 10th Nov. 2021

Helix Live will cover the latest developments from these focus areas across the national Helix farm network, and what is being testing going forward. Helix host farmers will share their experiences and explain the benefits of farm scale use of technology to their individual farm businesses.

Agenda

- Update on Helix, how it is expanding and highlighting existing work that will continue, as well as new projects for 2021 and beyond.

Stuart Hill,

Head of technology and Innovation for Hutchinsons.

- Carbon, measurement, improvement and opportunity, is an ever increasing and complex area.

Matt Ward, Services Leader will demonstrate what technology can bring to this and how that can be a benefit.

- Two growers will give us some insight and findings from their own farms and involvement in Helix which they see as a benefit.

Tom Jewers, Helix Suffolk, of G D Jewers near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk and **Nick Wilson,** Helix Yorkshire, of Nick and Liz Wilson, Marton cum Grafton, near York.

- **David Howard,** Head of Integrated Crop Management will review some of the ICM work carried out this year as well as introduce a new opportunity with farm strategy planning to aid decision making on productivity and integrated crop management.

• Questions & Answers

To join these live discussions and have an opportunity to ask questions, please register now for your chosen Helix Live session by visiting www.helixfarm.co.uk/events/helix-live-registration



Nick and Liz Wilson - Hosts of Helix Yorkshire

Helix farms:

Early farm scale development takes place at our Helix National Development Farm over in Northamptonshire, courtesy of **Andrew Pitts**. Further development and demonstrations are delivered at our emerging Helix regional farms, of which we are expanding to 7 farms this autumn - these are Helix National Farm, Helix Suffolk, Helix Yorkshire, Helix Northumberland, Helix Oxfordshire, Helix Fife and a Helix Agroecology farm.

The first stage on farm is understanding the farm's current strategic position. Therefore, key criteria such as productivity, nutrition status, environment, soils, to name but a few, are key measurements as a start point. Achievable targets can then be agreed and a strategy put in place to accomplish those targets.

Keep up to date with all the latest developments within the Helix project by viewing our dedicated website: www.helixfarm.co.uk