

Farming in Protected Landscape programme
Funding case study

Sandy Hill Farm

Installing mob-grazing infrastructure

Grant awarded: £4,874.79

Total project value: £7,094.07

Location: Sherborne, Cheltenham



**Cotswolds
National
Landscape**

Funding themes met:

Climate

Nature

Introduction

Matt and Laura Elliott are tenant farmers near Cheltenham on the National Trust's Sherborne Park Estate. They manage 60 pedigree Hereford cattle over 110 acres of permanent pasture, producing 'Pasture for Life' certified 100% grass-fed beef. They used a FiPL grant to improve soil health and biodiversity by making their grazing system more flexible and resilient.

Matt applied for a FiPL grant to install equipment to pump, store and run water from a natural source on the farm. They also installed a mains-powered 'hot-wire' which feeds a system of temporary electric fencing. These two infrastructure improvements make their very low-input and nature-friendly system more flexible and resilient.

Maintaining adequate supplies of forage while building soil health and biodiversity in their pastures is a priority. The farm achieves this by carefully managing frequent livestock movements in a highly adaptable and carefully planned system.

Matt said: "We used mains water originally for hydrating our livestock. But we had an old Victorian working well at the top of the farm that was a natural source of freely available water.

The National Trust had installed rainwater storage tanks and a solar pump to take water from the well to the tanks and from the roof outbuildings. However, we needed the water infrastructure from the tanks to the fields, as we mob-graze our cattle in small paddocks".



Matt Elliott

The application

The application was made by Matt in late 2021 to build the infrastructure through a water pipework across the farm and to use mains power to electrify flexible fencing to keep the herd of cattle grazing tightly together.

The grant request was approved because the infrastructure supports very low-input farming practices that aim to improve soil health and biodiversity. These are fundable outcomes under FiPL's nature and climate themes, aligned with Cotswolds National Landscape priorities for habitats and soils. Matt and Laura were able claim 80 per cent of costs with a grant of £4,874 and paid for the rest themselves. The funding was provided by Defra and administered locally by Cotswold National Landscape.

Installation of the systems

Matt was able to install the pipework and fencing system in the early part of 2022. He said:

"I put in all the water and electric fencing system in myself – it's a fairly straight-forward thing to do. I researched it and looked at a farm that already had the mains electric fencing system".

Matt continued: “We put in 1.5km of pipework that is gravity-fed from the highest point on the farm that we can plug into and get access to water for the cows in our grazing paddocks. Similarly, with the main electric fence or ‘hot-wire’, we control our cattle’s grazing with electric fencing and we move it daily. There is a mains energiser that sits centrally in the barn that carries high tensile steel out from the barn and across the farm, visiting every field.



Mains energiser in barn

Benefits on-farm

“We can hook on our portable electric fencing to the mainframe and we’ve got a remote control to switch it on or off, provided we are nearby. It’s just made life fantastically easier and more versatile for the mob-grazing. It all works well throughout the year”.



Cattle graze enclosed by the hot-wire



New stock fencing carries the hot-wire across the paddocks



Drone-view of the cattle mob-grazing in paddocks, split by hot-wire.

Matt explains more: “This saves a lot of time over the course of the year, just walking up and down fields to switch off power supplies and also carrying batteries on vehicles across fields reduces churning mud across paddocks in the winter”.

Matt discusses that reliance on mains water has savings for the environment, he said:

“It’s not so much about saving time with the water - it’s about having a free, natural supply of water available across the farm, we think we use about 90 per cent of our water from natural sources for the cattle. We’re not giving our cattle water that has been processed and treated for human consumption (which is a valuable and expensive resource), they don’t need that”.

Matt also uses the water to supply their polytunnel, for drinking water for their laying hens. In time, Matt expects to save a significant amount on mains water costs and the farm is more resilient now.

Final word

Matt said: “It has made the essential things that we do easier to do, we are building the health of soils and improving species diversity in our fields. It has made our farming system more robust and sustainable. We would have thought twice about doing some of the works, being able to get 80 per cent grant on the water and electrical works made it a no-brainer. It’s all been very positive to be involved with Farming in Protected Landscapes”.

More information can be found about the farm business here: www.sandyhillmob.co.uk.

Please note: Figures are based on final approved claims and estimated total spend on the project.