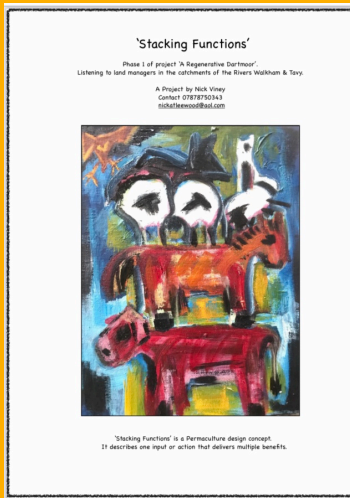


## Project - 'A Regenerative Dartmoor' phase 1 by Nick Viney January- May 2021



A feasibility study to understand about the barriers for adopting a more nature friendly approach to land management from 20 Land Managers in the Walkham and Tavy catchments on Dartmoor.

This involved making contact, scoping potential wildlife corridors and learn more about the mindsets of the land managers in this upland area of Devon in the southwest of the UK.

The questionnaire 'Stacking Functions' was my tool to engage with the land managers. To listen to and document their responses. There were over 40 questions. Figure 2 on the last page shows how the topics flow.

I have added a section after the responses titled "reasoning behind my question" to offer the reader some insight into why I asked that question.

Phase 1 turned out to be a slightly different project than first envisaged, because on day two after commencement we went into COVID-19 lockdown<sup>2</sup> so I had to adapt my methodology.

During the project I made several excellent contacts both within and beyond the two catchments. A very positive meeting with a group from the Environment Agency (EA) and with a West Country Rivers Trust (WCRT) representative. A large land owner in the neighbouring Plym catchment also expressed an interest in collaboration on future nature recovery projects.

As I have become familiar with the responses, some contradictions have emerged and I feel these require further study.

One such example from a Land Manager

**Q25** How nature friendly would you say your land management is?(1not at all - 5 very very)

Self Score- 4

**Q22** Do you routinely worm your livestock?

YES 3 or 4 times a year

**Q20** Do you think that dung beetles are an important creature on your land?

"not really"

**Q36** Could working with nature rather than against it could be more profitable?

" YES, You fight nature, it wins"

These genuine answers bear further investigation into this land manager's understanding of their impact on soil health and ecosystem processes.

## SOME OF MY OBSERVATIONS FROM THE RESPONSES

Q8 lots of land managers are still 'in the rut' of using round bale/ ring feeders. These can be very damaging to soil. There are excellent bits of kit available now such as the Greg Judy Bale Unroller which is compatible with the round bale, which can be towed by a quad bike, which doesn't mark the ground and allow for rolling out bales which although perceived by some as wasteful, have a positive effect on soil health. Here's a link to a video on this <https://youtu.be/lv9Ps6UvXCO>

Q10 Few have heard the term Silvopasture and even less consider it a viable proposition in terms of land use. Silvopasture is one of the most productive agricultural systems, would be excellent in our climate, topography and where there is a need for natural flood management. Financial assistance could be sought through the Environmental Land Management scheme as it would deliver on several public goods. Perhaps one issue could be that this is a long term strategy, not a quick fix?

Q13 Scrub - though the responses indicate many land managers consider that they have scrub, most land managers can see no value to it. On further questioning about the areas suggested, these would not be sufficient to deliver a 'Mosaic of habitats' so described by many in Q12. Peer pressure as scrub being "the sign of a poor farmer" was mentioned. Tidiness being the perceived mark of a 'good farmer'. Scrub seems to be perceived as a hazard and an obstacle to the smooth running of a sheep operation.

Q25 How nature friendly is your land management? This was self scoring. I would argue that it is not possible to score a 4 or 5 if your management demands use of synthetic chemicals. Pesticides through worming and fly strike prevention of livestock enter the natural world from the dung and cause significant damage to the mineral cycle and soil health. Use of antibiotics creates risk of resistance and the potential impact on human health.

When we compare responses to Q26 with Q36- we can see some contradictions. Most land managers stated that lack of productivity [LACK OF PROFIT] was perceived to be the main barrier to a more nature friendly approach, yet in Q36 , 18 land managers of the 20, stated that working WITH nature could be more profitable.

Why do we see this contradiction?

In my own learning & practice I have not found this to be the case.

Switching to a mob style grazing practice alone can result in a 3x carrying capacity in the first 2 years, creating greater profits and biodiversity uplift. But it requires more effort, a willingness to invest in kit and an innovative mindset.

Q29 WCRT are clearly doing some good work on the ground in these catchments and are trusted by several of the land managers.

Q30 Hedges seemed to be the area where most land managers found it acceptable to offer more to nature, so perhaps this route requires further investigation?

Q31 Butterflies received unanimous support in being actively encouraged on their land, yet in Q16 the majority of land managers would only provide the necessary habitat required for butterflies to thrive, if they were financially incentivised to do so.

Interestingly during Q31, many land managers prefixed their response with, " [species name], can it take a lamb?"

I wish that I had included Moles in the list as several CF expressed hatred for the Mole, one stating " Moles should be hunted to extinction".

Q33 showed good support for a local regenerative food hub both as producers and consumers. There is currently a vacuum for REGENERATIVELY produced meat and fibre and I believe Dartmoor land managers to have an incredible opportunity here. There was a misguided belief by one that this was already available.

Q34 The need for future collaboration seems largely accepted

Q35 Information on the Environmental Land Management scheme does not appear to be getting out there yet. Only 3xCF were able to list any of the proposed public goods. It is my feeling that it is not being taken seriously because as yet, there are no financial figures attached to the public goods.

Q37 There is a need for demonstration farms so land managers can see what is possible in an environment that they find relatable.

Prior to questioning each participant they were given some background, an indication of my point of view and aims for Dartmoor as a whole, you can read that [here](#). I did not share my POV whilst conducting the questionnaire.

The questions flowed something like FIGURE 2 but I maintain that all decisions and transactions, one way or another, eventually, lead back to the soil and this, as land managers, should be our daily focus.

In the words of Gabe Brown, " Every day I wake up and ask myself, how am I going to build soil today?"



THANKS

Again I would like to thank all the heroic land managing participants, who stuck with me for 40 questions and who, at this stage will remain anonymous.

Covid19 Lockdown made things complicated and your time was greatly appreciated.

Thank you to [the Devon Environment Foundation](#) for helping to support this project so far, without your funding I would have almost certainly thrown in the towel.

Thanks to [Ryan Eldon Rodgers](#) for keeping me at it.

[Nick Viney](#) Jan - May 2021