

Four actions for more effective agroforestry education in the UK

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Agroforestry adoption can benefit the environment, food security and resilience to climate change. However, a lack of knowledge is a primary barrier to adoption.



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Headlines

We identified **four actions** for farm advisors and educators to promote agroforestry adoption:

One: Create **open-access tools for agroforestry** funding and tree species selection.

Two: **Increase trust in advice** with 'neutral' advisors, agroforestry accreditation, and long-term examples of agroforestry.

Three: Embed **farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities** into educational programmes.

Four: **Educate land managers in training.**

Background

Research has shown that a lack of knowledge about agroforestry amongst land managers is one of the primary barriers to agroforestry adoption (Source: [Tranchina et al. 2024](#), [Tosh et al. 2021](#)). We identified knowledge barriers and proposed opportunities to address them.

During 2023-24, we engaged 220 stakeholders across the UK including farmers, advisors, policy makers, NGOs, and researchers. We conducted in-person interviews and workshops to identify educational barriers to agroforestry adoption and co-produce targeted solutions to address these barriers.

Findings

The primary barriers to learning about agroforestry were a **perceived lack of time** and a **shortage of trustworthy information**.

The educational barriers were highest for the business-related aspects of agroforestry management, including **finding funding and the long-term financial, legal, and regulatory impacts** of agroforestry adoption. One-to-one advice may be particularly important for these topics.

Farmers were **more confident in learning about the ecological aspects of agroforestry management**, including tree species selection, planting arrangement, and understory management.

Group learning activities, such as workshops, can be effective for these topics.



Implications & Recommendations

One: Create open-access tools for agroforestry funding and tree species selection

- A search tool with location and management filters to help farmers identify government and third-party agroforestry funding opportunities, including information on stacking offers.
- An agroforestry dating site for farmers to find private investors or businesses to partner with to create shared farming or joint ventures.
- A farmer-made checklist to guide decisions before joining an agroforestry scheme.
- A Decision Support System to help farmers complete agroforestry funding applications.
- An interactive online species information sheet with a decision tree for species selection, e.g. by combining existing species guides with the ESC Tool.
- Pair these online tools with paper adaptations to ensure inclusiveness and accessibility.

Two: Increase trust in advice with “neutral” advisors, an agroforestry accreditation, and long-term examples

We identified a lack of trust in agroforestry advice, and participants emphasised the importance of advice coming from “neutral” or “non-member” parties. They suggested **developing an agroforestry accreditation for advisors that spans forestry and farming**, as advisors are currently perceived as mostly having expertise in one discipline or the other.

Participants also reported that a lot of agroforestry advice is based on short-term examples and evidence, and longer-term examples are needed. Evidence from demonstration farms coupled with on-farm visits could be particularly impactful.

Three: Embed farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities into educational programmes

Farmer-to-farmer learning is very effective for knowledge-exchange. **Embedding and funding farmer-to-farmer learning opportunities in educational programmes**, for example via mentoring, farm walks, video case studies or workshops, **can promote learning and behaviour change**.

Four: Educate land managers in training

One-third of land managers in the UK receive formal agricultural training. This is lower than many other countries, like Germany or the Netherlands where the rate is twice as high, despite evidence that training supports agri-environmental farming. **Better educational opportunities on agroforestry that span farming and forestry could significantly increase agroforestry adoption rates.**



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