

## INTEGRATED FARM MANAGEMENT

For many farmers Integrated Farm Management (IFM) is a logical development of their current farming system combining the best of traditional farming with appropriate modern technology. IFM balances responsible resource management, animal welfare, care of the countryside and economic viability for the benefit of all. LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) have been working to assist farmers to move towards more sustainable practices through the adoption of IFM.

The key principles of Integrated Farm Management are:

- A commitment to good husbandry and animal welfare
- Efficient soil management and appropriate cultivation techniques
- The use of crop rotations
- Minimum reliance on crop protection chemicals and fertilisers
- Careful choice of seed varieties
- Maintenance of the landscape and rural communities
- Enhancement of wildlife habitats
- A commitment to team spirit based on communication, training and involvement

IFM is not prescriptive but is a dynamic concept. In other words the whole farm approach system of IFM has the flexibility to be relevant on any farm across the world and is adaptable to new technology and changing market pressures and consumer demands and expectations. Planning a whole farm approach through IFM can achieve sustainable production generating a profitable farming system that cares for the environment.

### The IFM wheel



The IFM wheel demonstrates all the different areas of the farm business that farmers need to consider when adopting a whole farm approach. Community issues and landscape, wildlife and biodiversity are just as integral as management decisions concerning soil management or energy efficiency.

Everyone wants a countryside that thrives. A countryside that is alive with wildlife, supports viable farming businesses and produces wholesome affordable food. This can all be achieved through IFM.

## IFM practices Animal Welfare



Animal welfare is a source of growing public concern. IFM employs techniques of livestock management that maintain animals in good health, comfort and low stress, by feeding, handling, housing and transporting them under conditions that reflect proper care and concern for their welfare. Under an IFM system, consideration is given to the way decisions are made on the whole farm.

Not only does this include animal welfare, grassland, forage and crop management, but also the attention to detail demanded in order to ensure sound animal husbandry techniques, environmental responsibility and an economically viable farming business.

### CASE STUDY – David Johnson, Cheshire – 68ha dairy farm

*'Adopting IFM has given me the ideal framework within which to run my business. Livestock farming is complex at the best of times but now I have a more flexible business approach, through the adoption of the LEAF audit, which has resulted in vastly improved margins. Our cows now average over 8,000 litres on a low capital system, in which animal welfare is top priority.'*

## Looking after the countryside



Care for the environment is at the core of IFM, and the demonstration of this care is a living farm landscape that enhances people's experience and enjoyment of the countryside and where landscapes, food production and wildlife live side by side.

Conservation and landscape issues must be totally integrated.

### CASE STUDY – Chris Passmore, West Sussex – a mixed 344ha arable, beef and sheep

*'For many years now we have tried to protect and encourage the wildlife, but the most important action was to start by taking stock of the wildlife and habitat that we already had on the farm. The next step has been to understand what farming practices impact the wildlife, habitats and their food sources. Often, little changes in our farming practices have meant big benefits to the wildlife at little or no cost!'*

## Soil management



Soil is the basis of all agricultural production and the conservation and improvement of this valuable resource must be of the highest priority in the adoption of IFM. Good soil management helps increase yields and profit while reducing environmental problems caused through the risk of soil damage through run off and soil erosion. This allows produce to be grown on healthy and biologically active soil with a satisfactory level of organic matter, a good physical structure and sufficient fertility.

**CASE STUDY – Andy Drake, Blechemore Vale, South Wiltshire, a 200 acre dairy/arable farm**

*'The soil is one of my most important resources. It is regularly analysed for its soil nutrient status and pH, whilst low ground pressure tyres are used to avoid compaction and cultivations are carried out along the contours to reduce the risk of soil erosion. Crops are established using a mixture of ploughing and minimal tillage to strike a balance between the benefits of the former providing weed control and the latter in improving soil structure. Planning of our rotation is critical, we have introduced wheat to follow the maize, useful as a feed for the cows and helpful in improving my soil structure, an excellent integrated farming system.'*

## Crop protection



IFM uses and encourages continual improvement in pest control measures that have minimal impact on the environment and human health and which promote sustainability and profitability. A well-established and managed crop will be more competitive with weeds and more resilient to attack from pests and diseases. Crop variety and rotation play an important part in avoiding build up of pests and disease.

If pesticides need to be applied it is with the utmost care making sure only the exact amount is used. Monitoring crops is crucial to judging what treatment is needed. Often the levels of infestation are low enough for the crop to look after itself.

**CASE STUDY – Mark Tripney, Leverhulme Estates, The Wirral, 550ha arable and dairy**  
*'Attention to detail, highlighted through the LEAF Audit, is an important aspect of management of Leverhulme Farms. Crops are regularly inspected and inputs are carefully targeted and only applied where appropriate. Fertiliser requirements are calculated according to individual crop needs with allowance made for nutrients left by the previous crop. Overall the management strategy has been based around getting the detail of each enterprise right.'*

## LEAF – Linking Environment and Farming



LEAF is all about 'LINKING ENVIRONMENT AND FARMING' and for twelve years has been helping farmers improve their environmental and business performance through the promotion and development of IFM. LEAF creates a better public understanding of farming through a nation wide network of over 45 demonstration farms.

These demonstration farms communicate the key IFM messages to visiting public and other farmers. The demonstration farms inspire other farmers to be positive and prepared and seek out opportunities to bridge the gap between farming and the public. For the consumer, the opportunity to see a working farm and talk to a working farmer is valuable for understanding the role of farming in maintaining the countryside.

The feedback from people we have onto our farms each year is extremely positive. Over 85% say they had a greater understanding of how farmers are addressing rural environment concerns, 90% said the visit was worthwhile and informative, and 89% said the visit had gone a long way to address their concerns about food safety.

*'The more the public know about work that is being done by LEAF farmers to help wildlife and their genuine concern for the countryside the better for all concerned...they will talk to others about what they learnt on this farm and remember with pleasure, the real enthusiasm for linking environment and farming during their visit', The Ramblers, Lincolnshire.*

### Further reading and resources

1. **The LEAF handbook for Integrated Farm Management**, LEAF, 2000
2. **Time Well Spent – A Guide to the Uptake of IFM on Lowland Livestock Farms**, LEAF, 2002
3. **LEAFMarque Standards**, see [www.leafuk.org](http://www.leafuk.org)
4. **New LEAF Audit 2003**, contact LEAF office
5. **Towards Sustainable Agriculture – a pilot set of indicators**, MAFF, 2000
6. **Arable Cropping and the Environment – a guide**, DEFRA and HGCA, 2002
7. **Speak Out** – a tool kit for farmers to help them bridge the communication gap between farming and the public
8. **Virtual Farm Walk** – an interactive CD rom to view all the realities that happen on a farm without getting your feet muddy!

For more information about Integrated Farm Management, for copies of any of the resources above or to find out more about LEAF and visiting a demonstration farm, please contact us.

We look forward to meeting you.

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