



Farm Facilitator Forum 2025 Report

Integrated Recommendations for
Strengthening Facilitated Farmer Groups,
and Farm-Led Landscape Recovery

With thanks to the Rothschild Foundation and the Farm Facilitator Forum Working Group: Lucy MacLennan, Fiona Gately, Stephen Briggs, Tom Scrope, Alex Donnelly, Megan Lock



Executive Summary

Facilitated farmer groups have emerged as one of the UK's most effective mechanisms for delivering landscape-scale nature recovery. By coordinating habitat creation, soil and water improvements, emissions reduction, and access to natural capital markets, they translate national environmental ambitions into practical, farm-led action. However, this report found that facilitators feel limited by underfunding, administrative fragmentation and insufficient recognition of their role (the workforce that enables all collaboration and delivery). Several key themes were consistently raised:

1. **The need for long-term funding.**
2. **The need for professional recognition of the role of facilitators.**
3. **The need for informed coordination and management of metrics and data.**
4. **The need for integrated policy and finance frameworks** that empower farmers to lead nature recovery.
5. **The life cycle maturity of different groups**, which have different needs.
6. The prospect for farmers and communities to **secure investment that aligns with social and cultural needs** for climate adaptation.

It is possible to unlock significant environmental and economic returns by government, industry and funders working together to strengthen the foundations of this system:

- **Provide long-term facilitation funding** (5–7 years) to secure continuity, build trust, and enable farmer groups to plan and deliver landscape-scale outcomes, and provide space to scope out economic beneficiaries that could contribute to them becoming self-sustaining.
- **Professionalise the facilitator workforce** through a national competency framework, accredited training, and clear career pathways that work at the appropriate level of localisation.
- **Create regional and national coordination structures** to share learning, reduce duplication, and support cooperative delivery.
- **Enable blended finance models** with seed funding for governance, data, and market readiness, unlocking private and community investment.
- **Simplify policy, legal, and governance frameworks** to reduce administrative burdens and improve confidence in public and private schemes.
- **Establish a central resource and data hub** to provide mapping, monitoring, templates and training.
- **Strengthen Monitoring, Evaluation, and Outcome Reporting** to standardise national metrics, support participatory reporting and communicate outcomes.
- **Promote Inclusive, Farmer-Centric Engagement** including consideration of tenant farmers, and engaging the local community to support rural economic renewal.
- **Provide a mechanism for facilitators to share information / knowledge** to build their own capacity – where more mature groups can share with newer groups/facilitators.

If government, industry and funders work together to invest strategically in facilitation, governance, data, and coordination, nature recovery can be accelerated, rural economies can be strengthened, and a resilient, farmer-led environmental delivery system across the UK can be created.

Introduction

Across the UK, farmer groups and facilitator networks have become one of the most promising vehicles for delivering nature recovery, strengthening rural economies, and enabling locally led stewardship of natural capital¹. These networks (ranging from 20–80 farms working together voluntarily) form the social and organisational infrastructure needed to coordinate food and water security, habitat creation, improve soil and water quality, reduce emissions, and unlock ecosystem service markets. They translate national ambitions into local action on climate change.

Yet despite their central role, facilitated farmer groups remain underfunded, administratively fragmented, and insufficiently professionalised and whose significance is not fully recognised by government for delivering social, economic and environmental resilience. Facilitators, who serve as the core delivery workforce, operate with limited job security, unstable short-term funding, and few opportunities for training or career development. Many farmer groups lack the administrative capacity to develop and become investment ready to capitalise upon emerging natural capital markets. Others are constrained by policy silos, inconsistent rules, and high transaction costs.

In order to explore the challenges further, Agricology worked with the Rothschild Foundation to host a Facilitators Forum event in November 2025 which brought together 40 farmer group facilitators from across the country, representing different funding sources, geographies, objectives and stages of development. The programme and delegate list can be found in Appendix A. The event consisted of three panel discussions: funding, policy and resources. A summary of each of these sessions can be found in Appendices B, C and D.



Public, private, and philanthropic funders have a critical opportunity to strengthen the foundations of the system. Investment in facilitation, governance, data, and cross-group coordination can dramatically increase the scale and reliability of environmental outcomes. This briefing synthesises the full suite of recommendations discussed across organisations, regions, and experts and presents them in eight actionable policy pillars tailored for funders seeking to accelerate landscape-scale recovery.

¹ Facilitated farmer groups may be thematically focussed e.g. delivering nature recovery, or sector specific e.g. dairy; poultry

1. Provide Long-Term, Consistent Funding for Farmer Group Facilitation

The single strongest consensus across stakeholders is the need for long-term, stable revenue funding for facilitation. Facilitators are the glue that binds farmer groups together - they recruit members, build trust, coordinate projects, monitor outcomes, guide farm planning, manage governance, and bring in finance. They also help deliver social benefit to farmers, reducing isolation and have an essential role for improving farmers mental health and wellbeing by creating a community. Without them, farmer groups weaken or dissolve. With them, farmer groups thrive.

However, most facilitators rely on temporary grants of 12–24 months. This limits strategic planning, deters skilled applicants, and undermines continuity. Funders can have transformative impact by underwriting facilitation as core infrastructure.

Key needs include:

- **Guaranteed start-up funding for new farmer groups**, especially for their first 24 months, covering recruitment, governance, baseline mapping, and initial coordination.
- **Multi-year funding cycles (5–7 years)** to ensure continuity, maintain relationships, and allow farmer groups to build long-term environmental plans. Note this will fall across more than one funding cycle for most funders.
- **Support for ongoing habitat management**, rewarding maintenance, stewardship, and monitoring, as well as capital works.

Funding facilitation is not merely covering overhead: it is the most cost-effective intervention for leveraging farmer action, enabling blended finance, and generating measurable environmental benefits at landscape scale.

2. Professionalise the Facilitator Workforce

Facilitators play a complex role that blends environmental expertise, social leadership, conflict mediation, data management, and project coordination. Yet there is no unified competency framework, minimal training provision, and no recognised career path. Professionalising this workforce is essential to improving the quality, consistency, and credibility of farm-led landscape recovery.

Key needs include:

- **A national skills and competency framework**, covering the full spectrum of facilitation skills, from technical knowledge such as ecology, soil science, farm business literacy, theory of change, GIS, data collation, monitoring, and reporting through to 'soft skills' including building trust, leadership and negotiation.
- **Investment in training and development**, including structured onboarding, mentoring, and career development opportunities. This should extend to develop the roles of trainee, assistant, and apprentice facilitators to expand future capacity.

Supporting professionalisation increases workforce reliability, attracts high-quality candidates, and strengthens trust between farmer groups and external partners.

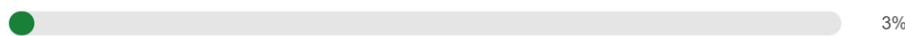


The poll below shows the level of facilitator recognition felt by those who attended the Facilitator Forum:

To what extent do you feel the work of facilitation is recognised and valued as a skilled role?

Multiple Choice Poll 30 votes 30 participants

1 = Not recognised at all - 1 vote



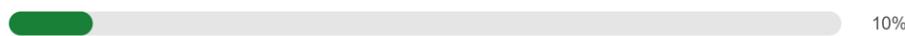
2 = Recognised slightly - 21 votes



3 = Recognised Moderately - 5 votes



4 = Recognised a lot - 3 votes



5 = Fully recognised and supported - 0 votes



3. Create Regional and National Coordination Structures

Farmer groups operate locally, but their challenges (and opportunities) are shared nationally. The absence of formal coordination means duplication of effort, inconsistent approaches, and missed opportunities for collaboration. There is a particular need for sharing of information between more mature groups / long standing facilitators and new groups and facilitators. Funders can help build the structures that enable collective intelligence and shared delivery capacity across regions.

Key needs include:

- **Regional facilitator hubs** providing peer learning, rotational training, shared mapping, administrative support, and opportunities for cooperative bidding.
- **A national coordination platform** that collates best practice, facilitates two-way dialogue with policy bodies, and represents facilitators at national level.
- **Support for thematic networks** such as soil health groups, pollinator corridors, lowland wetland networks, upland peat groups, or water quality coalitions, that can scale innovation and accelerate environmental impact.
- **Learning from global models**, such as Australia's Landcare or Denmark's farmer-led water quality cooperatives, which demonstrate the power of structured coordination.

These structures reduce isolation, increase efficiency, reduce administrative load on individual farmer groups, and deliver better value for every pound invested.



4. Enable Blended and Innovative Finance Models

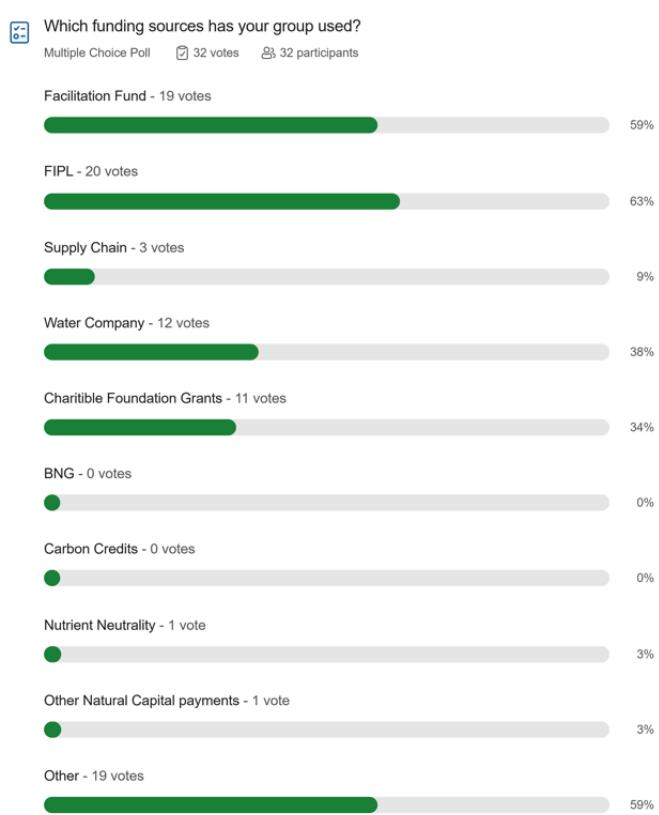
Farmer groups increasingly sit at the centre of natural capital investment, connecting public funding with private markets and community co-funding. Yet most farmer groups lack the financial knowledge, legal structures, or early-stage capital to participate effectively in complex market mechanisms.

Key needs include:

- **Blended finance models** that combine public, private, and philanthropic capital e.g. 40% public baseline funding, 40% private investment tied to measurable outcomes, and 20% philanthropic funding for development, innovation, or governance.
- **Seed funding for early-stage market readiness**, such as baseline data collection, feasibility assessments, branding and marketing/storytelling about farmer group achievements.
- **Incentives for local co-funding**, enabling communities, businesses, water companies, and catchment partnerships to financially support environmental improvements that benefit local economies.
- **Outcome-linked private investment frameworks**, paying for verified improvements in biodiversity, carbon, water quality, flood resilience, or social value.

Early philanthropic investment in governance, data, and facilitation significantly increases the probability that farmer groups can access long-term market revenue streams.

The poll below shows funding sources amongst the Facilitator Forum attendees:



5. Simplify Policy, Legal, and Governance Frameworks

Complex, inconsistent, or poorly understood policies often deter engagement and stall environmental delivery. Clear, streamlined frameworks enable farmer groups to act with confidence and reduce transaction costs.

Key needs include:

- **Supporting alignment across policy areas**, reducing the fragmentation between agri-environment schemes, LNRS implementation, catchment-sensitive farming, and species recovery.
- **Providing governance resources** for establishing CICs, cooperatives, and special purpose vehicles (SPVs).
- Reducing administrative burdens by simplifying administrative processes such as procurement pathways and bank account access.
- **Developing clear, accessible guidance** on biodiversity net gain (BNG), nutrient neutrality, stacking rules, and credit trading.
- **Provide a mechanism for collective feedback from farmer groups to policy developers** (Government & Defra/devolved administrations) and implementers (RPA /devolved administrations)

Clear rules and robust governance enables farmer groups to participate more confidently in both public schemes and private markets.

6. Build a Central Resource and Data Hub

At present, every farmer group must independently learn about mapping tools, monitoring systems, administrative requirements, and funding options. This leads to duplication and inconsistent quality. An independent data and resource hub would dramatically increase efficiency and ensure farmer groups have access to high-quality tools.

Key needs include:

- **A national farmer group map** showcasing coverage, themes, and outcomes.
- **Model governance templates** for legal structures, partnership agreements, and procurement.
- **A live funding database**, including public schemes, philanthropic grants, and market opportunities.
- **Farmer-controlled data systems** that allow farmer groups to retain ownership while contributing anonymised insights to national datasets.
- **Monitoring and mapping tools**, including standardised methodologies and geospatial layers.
- **Technical training modules** (ecology, GIS, facilitation, governance, monitoring).

Funding is needed to underwrite the development and maintenance of such a platform, ensuring it remains accessible, practical, and up to date.



7. Strengthen Monitoring, Evaluation, and Outcome Reporting

Robust monitoring is essential for funders, farmers, and policymakers alike. Yet monitoring systems across farmer groups vary widely, and many groups lack the training or tools required for high-quality data collection.

Whilst work has been done in this area it should include a methodology for ecosystem service evaluation linked to a standard for agroecology based on UKHab habitat and secondary management codes to evidence climate and nature positive investments.

Key needs include:

- **Standardised national metrics** for biodiversity, soil organic matter, water quality, carbon, cultural value, and socio-economic impact.
- **Support for participatory** monitoring, including farmer-led R&D, citizen science activities, and “baseline-plus” data systems.
- **Communicating outcomes**, using visually accessible dashboards, annual reports, and public showcases that highlight measurable improvements.

Monitoring strengthens confidence, enables adaptive management, and demonstrates the real-world value of landscape recovery.

8. Promote Inclusive, Farmer-Centric Engagement

Participation must be equitable and accessible. Without intentional design, environmental schemes can unintentionally favour larger estates, more experienced groups, or those with existing capital.

Key needs include:

- **Consideration of participation by tenant farmers**, smaller enterprises, young farmers, and new entrants.
- **Engagement approaches rooted in local culture**, such as peer learning, competitions, recognition events, practical demonstrations, and informal social gatherings.
- **Farmer groups acting as catalysts for rural economic renewal**, supporting cooperative ventures, local processing, community investment models, and circular economy initiatives. Link directly to rural communities through green neighbourhood planning (ACRE and Rural Community Councils).

Inclusive governance increases social legitimacy, strengthens participation, and ensures benefits are widely shared across rural communities.

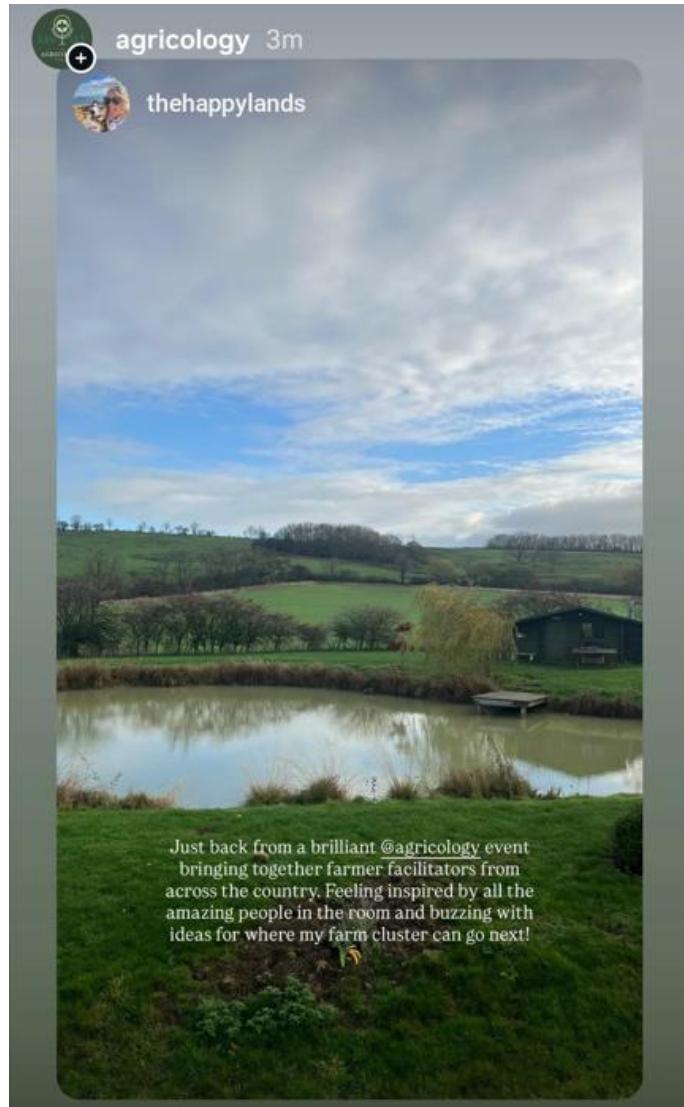


Conclusion

Facilitated farmer groups represent one of the most effective, trusted, and scalable models for delivering landscape-scale nature recovery. But their full potential will only be realised when facilitation is treated as essential infrastructure, governance is simplified, data systems are strengthened, and funders coordinate to support blended finance models and regional cooperation.

Investing in these foundations offers funders a high-leverage opportunity: every pound spent on facilitation, coordination, and data unlocks multiple pounds in farmer action, public scheme delivery, and private natural capital investment. It strengthens rural economies, accelerates ecological recovery, and builds long-lasting social and environmental resilience.

Public, private, and philanthropic funders are uniquely positioned to transform the landscape recovery system by focusing on these integrated pillars. With strategic investment now, the UK can build a future in which farmers lead nature recovery, rural communities thrive, and natural capital becomes a stable foundation for both environmental and economic prosperity.



Appendix A – Event programme and delegate list



Monday, 10th Nov 2025

Last year we held our first workshop for farmer group facilitators and based on the feedback received are delighted to welcome you to the 2025 Farmer Group Facilitator's Forum, at the Allerton Project.

Farmer Group Facilitator Forum



Agenda and Timings:

10:00	Arrival
10:30	Welcome , Lucy MacLennan, Agricology
10:40	Aims and Objectives , Fiona Gately, Consultant & Ellie Stout, Director of Grants, Rothschild Foundation
10:45	Exploring the aims and benefits of clusters , Anna Wright, Environmental Programmes Manager, Royal Countryside Fund
11:00	Session 1 – Funding Chair – Tom Scrope , Nuffield Scholar; Panelists: Anna Wright , Environmental Programmes Manager, Royal Countryside Fund; Tim Field , Co-Chair & Founder, NE Cotswold Farmer Cluster & Carbon Quester; Molly Biddell , Facilitator, Upper Adur Farmers Group and Surrey Farming Cluster
11:45	Introduction to ADOPT , Tom Slattery, Technical Marketing Manager
12.00	Lunch & Networking
13:15	Session 2 – policy (with a small pi!) Chair - Stephen Briggs ; Farmer & Head of Technical Development, RASE & IFA Panelists: Peter Craven , Head of Agriculture, Natural England; Digby Sowerby , Managing Director, Environmental Farmers Group
14:00	Tea break
14:15	Session 3 – Supporting Facilitators Chair - Alex Donnelly , Farmer Facilitator Networks Officer, Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust Panelists: Kate Dewally , PhD student, University of East Anglia; Lucy Bates , Sustainable Farm Network, Harper Adams University; Megan Lock , Farmland Biodiversity Advisor, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust; Tom Scrope , Nuffield Scholar
15.00	Wrap up and next steps , Lucy MacLennan, Agricology
15.15	Close & Allerton Project Farm Walk

Programme:

Session 1:

- **Post-Facilitation Fund uncertainty:** what comes next; what funding options are available
- **Collaborative funding:** how clusters can come together regionally or thematically to access larger, shared pots of money.
- **Legal structures:** groups who have formalised (e.g. companies or CICs) -what structures they've chosen, why, and how they approached it.

Session 2:

- Linking **farmer clusters and national policy** –how clusters can feed into SFI/ELMS development and future agri-environment frameworks.
- How **cluster and sector-level groups interact**, e.g. demo farms, thematic networks and regional coordination.
- How to **represent cluster voices** within policy forums (e.g. NFFN, Defra or other advisory groups).
- **Landscape-scale issues** such as deer management and wider environmental priorities.

Session 3:

- Accessing better **training, mentoring and peer exchange** for facilitators – practical skills, “what works” sessions, and shared tools.
- How to keep farmers **engaged**; translating meetings into **on-the-ground action**.
- Funders often undervalue facilitation expertise – how to **gather and to share evidence** of its impact.
- Building a **skills matrix and resource library** to help new facilitators learn from experienced ones.

We will be using Slido to gather on the day feedback, please ensure you have downloaded the app.



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Monday, 10th Nov 2025



Alex Donnelly	Farmer Facilitator Networks Officer	BBOWT
Alice Farmery	Content & Engagement Officer	Agricology
Alice Keenan	Farm Liaison Officer – Yorkshire Dales	National Trust
Amber Lole		GWCT, The Escarpment Cluster
Anita Rogers	Facilitator	Clee View Farmers Group, South Shropshire
Anna Wright	Environmental Programmes Manager	Royal Countryside Fund
Belinda Brown	Facilitator	Southern Streams Farmers Group - Wilts, Berks, Hampshire Candover Valley Farmers Group - Hampshire
Ben Williams		Rothschild Foundation
Beth Symington	Relationship Manager	Regenerate Outcomes
Carolyn Jones	Consultant – Land Use & Management Planning	National Trust
Carrie Starbuck	Facilitator	Wessex and Combes Cluster
Chloe Palmer	Facilitator	Hope Valley Farmers, Bradfield Farmers Hayfield Farmers, Peak District
Christian Kielinger	Project Manager	Fenland SOIL (Cambridge to Peterborough, The Fens)
Digby Sowerby	Managing Director	Environmental Farmers Group
Ed Cox		National Trust
Ellie Stout	Director of Grants	Rothschild Foundation
Elliott Fairs	Facilitator	Teign Valley, Devon
Elis Smits	Facilitator	Cheshire and Warrington Future Farmer Group
Felicity Roos	National Consultant – Soil & Carbon	National Trust
Fiona Gately	Consultant	Rothschild Foundation
Fiona Torrance	Facilitator	GWCT, PepsiCo FAB (Fife and Angus)
Helen Race	Facilitator	West Lakeland Farmer-Led Nature Recovery CIC
Helen Snodgrass	Facilitator	Border and Maryvale Farmers, Shropshire/Cheshire/North Wales
James Thompson	Facilitator	6 Cluster Groups, Leicestershire
Jenny Phelps	Facilitator	FWAG

Farmer Group Facilitator Forum

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Monday, 10th Nov 2025



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Jonathan Brunyee	Facilitator & Steering Group Member	Regenerative Agriculture Accelerator Programme & North East Cotswolds Farmer Cluster (Cotswolds)
Karen Davies	Facilitator	Wessex Downlands (North Wessex Downlands NL) & South Chilterns (Chilterns NL), Thames Valley
Kate Dewally	PHD Student (Cluster Research)	University of East Anglia
Kate Mayne	Facilitator	North Shropshire Farmers Group & Clee View Farmers Group - West Midlands
Lisa Lane	Facilitator	Upper Thames Farmer Cluster
Lisa Rundle	Facilitator	Fal Rivers to Reef farm cluster
Lucy Bates	Project Manager	Sustainable Farm Network, Harper Adams University
Lucy MacLennan	Director	Agricology
Marina Behnke	Facilitator	Aqualate Mere Catchment Group, West Midlands
Martin Edwards	Head of Deer & Woodland Management	British Association for Shooting and Conservation
Matthew Norris-Hill	Facilitator	Selborne Landscape Partnership, Winchester Down Cluster & Winchester to River Test Cluster, Hampshire
Mel Bradley	Facilitator	Kenn Valley Farmers Group (Devon)
Megan Lock	Senior Farm Environment Advisor & Facilitator	GWCT & Allenford & Martin Down Farmer Clusters
Molly Biddell	Facilitator	Upper Adur Farmers Group and Surrey Farming Cluster
Nick Marriner	Facilitator	Central Chilterns, oversees North Chilterns, South Chilterns Christmas Common & Chess Valley clusters
Peter Craven	Head of Agriculture	Natural England
Richard Wheeldon	Senior National Farming Consultant – Farming Systems	National Trust
Samantha MacLennan	Administrator	Agricology
Sally Eadon	Senior Agricultural Advisor	Warwickshire Wildlife Trust
Sally McNaught	Executive Director	Highlands & Islands Environment Foundation (West Loch Ness, Moray, Glen Urquhart & Lunan Burn Wildlife; Farm Clusters), Scotland

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Sarah Juggins	Facilitator	North Norfolk Coastal Group & CLC Group (Norfolk & Suffolk)
Sarah Williams	Director of Programmes	<i>Sustain</i>
Stephen Briggs	Farmer & Head of Technical Development	<i>RASE & IFA</i>
Suzie Robson	Facilitator	<i>Manhood Farmers' Cluster Group & South Downs farmers' Group, West Sussex/East Hants</i>
Tim Field	Co-Chair & Founder	<i>NE Cotswold Farmer Cluster & Carbon Quester</i>
Tom Scrope	Nuffield Scholar	<i>Soil Benchmark</i>
Tom Slattery	Technical Marketing Manager	<i>ADOPT Fund</i>
Wallace Currie	Knowledge Exchange Manager	<i>ADOPT Fund</i>

Farmer Group Facilitator Forum

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Appendix B:

Summary of Facilitator Forum Funding Panel

(produced from transcript using AI)

This report summarises the panel discussion on sustaining farmer-led landscape recovery and innovation in England. The session addressed three linked themes: funding diversification, governance structures, and strengthening farmer group operations and member engagement.

Funding Diversification and Financial Sustainability

With the future of the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSFF) uncertain, participants emphasised the need for farmer groups to develop blended and resilient income streams. Established groups now draw from multiple sources including public grants (FIPL, CSFF, NEIRF, WEF), private utilities such as water and energy companies, philanthropic donors, and member subscriptions.

Membership fees were viewed as an essential commitment mechanism rather than a full funding solution. Typical contributions are modest—per hectare or per farm—but help cover coordination costs and strengthen engagement. Crucially, members expect visible returns through improved margins, access to projects, or input savings. Farmer groups increasingly act as “economic cooperatives,” helping members access shared services, equipment, or environmental markets.

Several case studies demonstrated how philanthropic “seed funding” and blended finance underpin long-term resilience. One large Cotswold farmer group combined private, public, and utility partnerships to deliver landscape recovery, biodiversity, and flood resilience projects. Smaller groups in Sussex and Surrey used FIPL and council funds to restart activity and are exploring membership-based and philanthropic models.

Ecosystem-service markets were discussed as an emerging but complex opportunity. Successful engagement requires baselining, mapping, and collaboration across catchments to ensure scale and credibility. Farmer groups were advised to view these as future revenue streams rather than immediate replacements for public funds.

Governance, Legal Structures, and Equity

Accessing diverse funding requires clear governance and an appropriate legal identity. Most farmer groups operate or plan to form **Community Interest Companies (CICs)** or similar not-for-profit structures, which enable grant applications, contracting, and fair fund distribution. Some larger landscape recovery groups use **special purpose vehicles (SPVs)**, allocating one share per hectare to balance returns between landowners and tenants.

Equity and inclusion were recurring concerns. Many tenants struggle to benefit from environmental markets due to ownership restrictions. Transparent share or partnership models were recommended to prevent displacement and ensure fair reward for management as well as landholding.

Participants agreed that ongoing **revenue funding** for facilitation remains critical. Capital grants alone cannot sustain coordination or knowledge exchange, yet facilitation is the foundation of effective collective delivery.

Strengthening Farmer Group Operations and Member Engagement

To ensure long-term viability, farmer groups are focusing on operational resilience and strengthening member participation. Key strategies include:

1. **Capacity Building:** Investing in facilitator skills, including project management, financial planning, and stakeholder engagement, helps farmer groups deliver more efficiently and access diverse funding sources. Training in monitoring and reporting ensures accountability to funders and members alike.
2. **Member Engagement:** Farmer groups emphasised the importance of active participation by members to maintain momentum and legitimacy. Structured communication, regular meetings, and demonstration projects increase buy-in and encourage knowledge exchange. Members are more likely to support farmer group fees or co-invest when benefits are tangible.
3. **Partnership Development:** Building strong relationships with local councils, environmental NGOs, utilities, and research institutions enhances credibility and opens funding pathways. Multi-partner projects can share costs, leverage expertise, and demonstrate impact at a landscape scale.
4. **Monitoring, Reporting, and Visibility:** Effective tracking of environmental and economic outcomes strengthens farmer groups' case for continued funding and supports advocacy. Visibility through case studies, social media, and local events reinforces the value proposition to members, funders, and partners. UKHab mapping can track this and even publish to the LNRS using the PSGA.
5. **Replication and Scaling:** Successful approaches in one area can be adapted elsewhere, increasing the overall impact of farmer groups. Guidance, toolkits, and peer-to-peer networks help new or smaller groups accelerate development without duplicating effort.

By prioritising operational resilience and member engagement, farmer groups can secure ongoing funding, maintain active participation, and deliver measurable environmental and economic outcomes.

Conclusion

Farmer group organisations play a pivotal role in enhancing industry collaboration, knowledge sharing, and regional economic growth and resilience. Their effectiveness is closely linked to strong governance, clear operational structures, and active member engagement. Ensuring sustainable funding, fostering transparent communication, and implementing robust performance monitoring are critical for maintaining farmer group resilience and long-term impact. While innovation and pilot programmes can provide additional benefits, the core drivers of success lie in operational efficiency, cohesive networks, and the ability to respond adaptively to member needs and market conditions. By prioritising these foundational elements, farmer groups can continue to deliver measurable value to members, stakeholders, and the broader economy.

Appendix C:

Summary of Facilitator Forum Policy Panel

(produced from transcript using AI)

Session 2 explored the intersection of policy, funding, and farmer clusters, focusing on how policy frameworks influence farmer group operations and how farmer-led initiatives can inform and shape government strategies. The session examined practical approaches to environmental delivery, facilitation networks, and aligning local farming priorities with national policy objectives.

Environmental Farmers Group Model

EFG was established four to five years ago by six farmer groups in Hampshire in partnership with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust. It is a farmer-owned natural capital cooperative that operates as a profitable company, with profits redistributed among members. Its work focuses on three areas: building membership, developing environmental delivery plans with farm-level targets, and trading natural capital to attract private investment.

Funding and policy remain key challenges. Establishing farmer groups requires significant upfront investment, particularly in the first two years, before revenue from membership, trade equalisation payments, sponsorship, and grants becomes sustainable. Policy uncertainty—especially around biodiversity net gain, nutrient neutrality, and credit stacking—can complicate financial models and project delivery.

Funding and Policy Approaches

Participants shared practical approaches to overcoming funding barriers. In Cheshire and Warrington, linking farmer groups to regional economic development allowed the Future Farmer Group to secure local authority support, emphasizing farming as a growth sector with environmental and economic benefits. Similarly, Gloucestershire explored National Lottery and other funding streams to support farmer groups. These examples highlight the value of connecting farming initiatives to broader regional priorities to access sustainable funding.

Role of Farmer groups and Facilitators

Farmer groups and facilitators are essential intermediaries between farmers and policy objectives. They consolidate fragmented efforts, provide peer-to-peer learning, and translate high-level policy into actionable farm-level practices. Facilitators act as “boots on the ground,” engaging directly with farmers, understanding operational realities, and fostering local collaboration. They also support entrepreneurship, helping farmers improve marketing, branding, and access to local supply chains.

Farmer groups provide critical feedback on policy impacts, enabling adaptive management. By mapping farm-level priorities against Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) and catchment objectives, farmer groups help identify practical solutions, demonstrate successes, and highlight challenges for policymakers.

Challenges and Opportunities

Key challenges include regulatory complexity, fragmented engagement, and limited farmer awareness of cumulative environmental impacts. Strategic programs like Nature Recovery Networks often operate at



landscape scale with limited direct farmer involvement. Opportunities exist in locally led, bottom-up approaches that integrate mapping tools, spatial analysis, and landscape planning to balance environmental and production objectives.

Conclusion

The session highlighted the interdependent relationship between policy, funding, and farmer clusters. Successful natural capital initiatives require clear funding pathways, supportive policy frameworks, and collaborative networks that amplify farmer knowledge, enable peer learning, and provide feedback to government. Strengthening facilitation networks and collective coordination allows farmers to deliver measurable environmental outcomes while maintaining productive operations. By integrating local expertise with strategic policy objectives, farmer clusters can enhance landscape-scale conservation, improve farm sustainability, and contribute effectively to national environmental targets.

Appendix D:

Summary of Facilitator Forum Resources Panel

(produced from transcript using AI)

Farmer group facilitation plays a pivotal role in strengthening farmer networks, improving environmental outcomes, and promoting knowledge exchange. The discussion highlighted the value, challenges, and opportunities for formalizing the facilitation profession.

Diversity and Complexity of Facilitation Roles

Facilitators operate across multiple disciplines, combining advisory, managerial, project delivery, and data collection responsibilities. Key points include:

- **Skills required:** Relationship-building, negotiation, interpersonal communication, monitoring, evaluation, and policy reporting.
- **Challenges:** Facilitation is undervalued, with inconsistent recognition, funding, and career pathways.
- **Flexibility vs. consistency:** Professional roles must adapt to individual farmer group needs while maintaining structured support.

International examples offer guidance:

- **Australia:** Facilitators act as CEOs of networks, providing strategic oversight.
- **Argentina:** Formal training, structured meetings, and provincial coordination ensure consistent engagement.
- **Denmark:** Facilitation is integrated into existing professional roles, balancing multifunctional expertise with group support.

Soft and Hard Skills in Facilitation

Effective facilitation requires a balance of soft and hard skills:

- **Soft skills:** Trust-building, communication, and stakeholder engagement are essential for maintaining cohesion and participant confidence.
- **Hard skills:** Data collection, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting allow tangible demonstration of environmental outcomes, such as increased species diversity.
- **Role specialization:** Dedicated facilitation roles enable focus on outcomes, while multifunctional roles broaden expertise but require careful management of administrative demands.

Professionalization and Mentorship

Key strategies for professional recognition include:

- Standardized skills frameworks: Cover leadership, coaching, mentoring, change management, and theory of change methodologies.

- **Structured mentorship:** Trainee and assistant facilitator roles allow learning through observation and guided practice.
- **Centralized resources:** Curated hubs and platforms can support training, networking, and knowledge sharing. Funding and sustainability considerations are critical for long-term success.

Sustaining Engagement and Network Impact

Maintaining active participation requires a combination of strategies:

- **Flexible engagement:** Meetings and activities should accommodate farmers' schedules and priorities.
- **Relevant content:** Data-driven feedback, interactive exercises, and recognition of achievements reinforce value.
- **Peer-to-peer learning:** Honest exchange of successes and failures fosters accountability and practical learning.
- **Technology integration:** Mapping tools, GIS analyses, and social media enhance visibility and demonstrate measurable impact.
- **Structured networks:** Examples such as Australia's Growers Group Alliance show the value of national coordination, resource sharing, and shared identity among facilitators.

Recommendations

To strengthen farmer group facilitation in the UK:

- **Develop a national skills framework** to standardize competencies and career pathways.
- **Implement mentorship and trainee programs** to foster practical learning and professional integration.
- **Create centralized resource hubs** offering training, guidance, and networking tools.
- **Adopt data-driven approaches** to measure environmental and social outcomes effectively.
- **Enhance visibility and advocacy** through marketing, social media, and collective engagement with policymakers.
- **Explore flexible network structures** combining regional coordination with national support mechanisms.

Conclusion

Farmer group facilitation is a skilled, multifaceted profession essential for sustainable farming networks and environmental stewardship. Achieving professional recognition requires balancing soft and hard skills, structured mentorship, standardized training, and data-driven impact measurement. International models highlight pathways for national coordination and resource sharing. By adopting these approaches, the UK can strengthen facilitator recognition, improve farmer engagement, and ensure long-term resilience and sustainability in agricultural networks.