



## Pasture for pollinators

Wild bees and other pollinators play an essential part in agriculture, but as in many places, farming practices have contributed to their declining numbers. Six Welsh dairy farmers have set up an Operational Group aiming to boost pollinator populations. It will look at innovative management options in grass-based livestock farming, which is heavily dominant in Wales.

Wild bees and other pollinators are essential for UK agriculture as they pollinate fruit and vegetables as well as crops for livestock. The UK food industry could be seriously impacted by the threat that these insects are currently facing. A large part of this threat is down to habitat loss. Increased intensive farming and monocultural grass leys means that pollinators in the UK have fewer and fewer places to thrive.



Six dairy farmers from the Calon Wen Milk Co-operative decided to set up an EIP-AGRI Operational Group to boost pollinator numbers. They felt that most current studies and information on how to protect pollinator species were mainly focussed on arable or horticultural systems. In Wales, the majority of farmland is for grass-based livestock farming, and there was little research and advice available on this. They decided to run a project looking into different farm management options for grass-based livestock farmers which benefit pollinator populations.

The farmers will test and analyse range of different grassland management techniques on their farms which are spread across Wales. The farmers are also working closely with a seed company, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). Their aim is to demonstrate that simple changes to grassland management without sacrificing farm productivity and profitability can go hand in hand with bee conservation.

The techniques are:

- **Specialised seed mixtures** including bird's-foot trefoil, clovers (red, white, sweet and alsike), yarrow, and other species which enhance pollinator populations.
- **Uncut field strips.** Farmers will sow 2 seed mixes, one of which will include the 'new' mix formulated at the project's inception in partnership with the seed company. Trial plots will be surveyed prior to first cut in late May, then again in June and July.
- **Late grazed flower rich/semi improved pastures.** Potential sites will be identified in year one and baseline data collected. The impact of delaying grazing and/or deferring grazing until the following year will be assessed in terms of pollinator populations.

The Operational Group is co-ordinated by an innovation broker Tony Little from **ADAS**. ADAS is an independent provider of agricultural and environmental consultancy, rural development services, research and development, and policy advice. Tony Little said "This project is a really exciting opportunity to show how relatively simple changes in management can deliver big benefits for pollinators specifically but also for biodiversity more widely. If we can show on one hand that these benefits can be achieved with little or no cost to the producer, and on the other they can help to market products from truly sustainable production systems, this will represent a big step forward."

**Content:** <https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/pasture-pollinators>