



Dartmoor  
Hill Farm Project

# Dartmoor Hill Farm Project Review 2003 - 2013

*"Farming is crucial to the maintenance of Dartmoor, and it is this nationally recognised landscape that draws visitors to the area, providing a vital contribution to the economy, both at a local and national level."*

*"... I feel that the continuation of the Dartmoor Hill Farm project possesses real benefits to farmers, local communities and the wider area."*

**MP Geoffrey Cox**

October 2013



Scotch Blackface sheep © Garner Mitchell Photography

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## Introduction

Since 2003 the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project (DHFP) has supported farmers on Dartmoor to establish and run a wide range of projects to add value to their businesses and to increase vocational skills.

The DHFP has its roots in the *State of Farming on Dartmoor 2002*, a report commissioned by the Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) which identified the need to maintain a viable hill farming economy on the moor. From the start it has been funded by DNPA and the Duchy of Cornwall, with the support of a farmer-led steering group. It is hosted by DNPA.

From 2009, DHFP has formed part of a programme supported under the Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE). This programme has covered the three South West uplands - Dartmoor, Exmoor and Bodmin Moor - all of which have their own local teams. An independent evaluation of this project carried out in June 2013 concluded that the work had been well received by upland farmers and should be continued. Comments made to the evaluators about the benefits of DHFP by farmers are included throughout this review.

From the early days of sitting round farmers' kitchen tables discussing what they needed to help keep them farming in the uplands, DHFP has developed all kinds of different projects. These range from study trips to Switzerland to training days on social media and business planning, supporting farmer co-operatives, studies on animal health and organising farmer-led training of people working for government agencies. Ideas come from the farmers and are developed with DHFP to achieve all kinds of benefits.

"I am proud to have been associated with the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project since its inception in 2003. The Project has a proven track record of success, built on three founding principles: listen, engage, deliver.

**Listen** - to the views and ideas of Dartmoor farmers

**Engage** - work with the farming community to find solutions, develop new projects and support co-operation

**Deliver** - practical projects that support farm businesses, local communities and help sustain the special qualities of the National Park.

This report highlights some of the achievements of the Hill Farm Project. Whilst we have some notable achievements the future for farming in the National Park is far from secure and I sincerely hope we can build on our successes in the next Rural Development Programme."

**Maurice Retallick**

Chairman of DHFP Steering Group



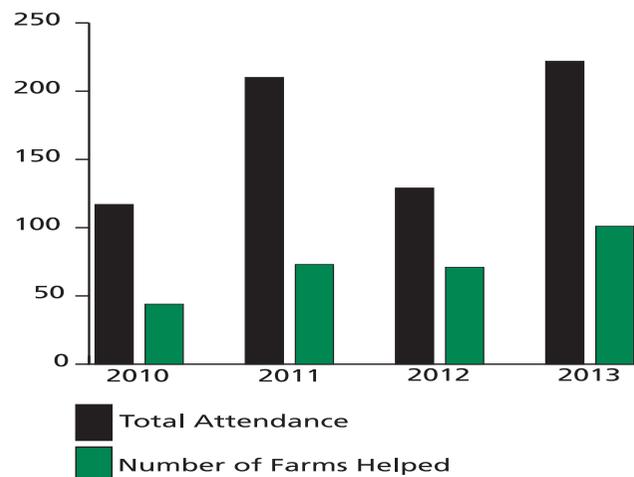
*Moorskills - innovative apprenticeships on hill farms for young people © DNPA*

## Achievements

Dartmoor Hill Farm Project has built up a database of 388 farms within the National Park boundary. Each of these farms receives quarterly newsletters and some choose to receive regular alerts about funding and training by email.

Courses are organised on Dartmoor to ensure that training is convenient and appropriate for different interests, skills and generations. Training topics are suggested by the farmers which ensures they are relevant. There have been a total of 1,522 attendances at these sessions. The training is aimed at different members of the family, recognising the different roles that people play in sustaining the family business.

### Training Events on Dartmoor



Staff give advice and support by phone, email and at events, shows and meetings. We have worked with or supported the majority of the farms on Dartmoor and of course we often support the same farmers in a number of different projects over the years. This builds trust and a strong relationship.

*"Communication and meeting other farmers. Knowing there is someone there you can talk to."*



*Meat Dartmoor - a collaborative selling group © DNPA*

## Projects

### Moorskills

This innovative pilot apprenticeship scheme in partnership with Duchy College has had five intakes of apprentices since 2005. In the first year, there were 4 apprentices and 6 farmers involved. Since then, 29 young people have started the training, with 24 completing either a level 2 or 3 NVQ in livestock production or conservation. Of these 19 are still working on Dartmoor hill farms. The project won the South West Apprenticeship Small Employer Award and was named in the top 100 employers of apprentices nationally. The last intake was in 2011-12. However during 2013-14 the Moorskills directors are delivering a small grant scheme to farmers under 26 years old, in order to undertake important training which is not covered by other funding.

### Dartmoor Farmers' Association

The Dartmoor Hill Farm Project assisted with facilitating and establishing the Dartmoor Farmers' Association in 2007, a collaboration of over 50 farmers, whose aim is to work together to add value through buying and marketing opportunities. An offshoot of this has been the setting up of Dartmoor Farmers Ltd, a company limited by shares which the farmers have formed to sell their beef and lamb.

### The Forest of Dartmoor Fire Plan

The control of wild fires was a priority for the original Environmental Stewardship Agreement (ESA) on this 11,000 ha common and continues to be a formal part of the HLS agreement. DHFP has worked with a group of partners including MOD, Natural England, Duchy of Cornwall, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) and Dartmoor National Park Authority, to establish the Forest of Dartmoor Fire Management Plan. This plan has enabled 29 commoners to be trained and equipped to respond quickly in controlling and managing wild fires on the Forest, alongside DSFRS and DNPA rangers.

### Dartmoor and District Mule Ewe Lamb Group

Initially the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project helped secure assistance through the Dartmoor Sustainable Development Fund for promotion of this new specialised sheep sale in August 2004. Mules are lambs from either Swaledale or Scotch Blackface ewes, covered by a Bluefaced Leicester ram, combining the resilience of hill breeds with the faster growth of lowland breeds. The support from DHFP through study tours helped the group to gain a much deeper knowledge of the market place and the quality of animals they must produce. By 2009 membership had grown to over 30 and the group expanded to become the South West Mule Group. There are two main sales held in Tavistock each autumn with over a thousand head of lamb each time.

*"Forming the Dartmoor Farmers' Association was a real benefit for us, and it made a big difference."*



*Dartmoor Farmers' Association - adding value to farming practices © Chris Chapman*



Study trip to Northern Ireland 2013 © DNPA

### Dartmoor Healthy Livestock Initiative

This programme monitors animal health conditions particularly relevant to Dartmoor. It includes investigating mineral deficiencies in livestock, especially those on the commons, by carrying out blood tests on cattle and sheep. The work highlighted that, of our test farms, 67% had iodine deficiencies and 24% had copper deficiencies. This encourages farmers to test their own stock and to focus their spending on mineral supplements more effectively. We have also been increasing parasite awareness by running events on ticks and internal parasites. We have subsidised the purchase of faecal egg count equipment and provided free training to enable monitoring on farm to assess whether livestock have become resistant to drenches.

### Study Tours

Several trips with farmers to various parts of the country have been undertaken to widen their knowledge and aid development. This has included visits to farms and commons in Northumberland, Scotland and North Yorkshire, as well as livestock markets, farm shops, abattoirs, conferences and workshops across the country. There have also been exchange visits and shared trips with Exmoor Hill Farmers. The DHFP are involved in facilitating a second visit to Switzerland in October 2013, with the aim of inspiring and building partnership working between farmers and tourism businesses and investigating ways of working to add value. The first visit in 2005 led to the formation of Dartmoor Farmers' Association (DFA) and a strong voice for farmers on the newly formed Dartmoor Partnership - a tourism partnership for Dartmoor. DHFP and Exmoor Hill Farm Project took a group of farmers to Northern Ireland in September 2013 to look at maximising upland production.

*“The trip to Switzerland was a good insight, and we now run a farmers' market and have formed the Dartmoor Meat Group. It showed us how things could be run, and filled us with inspiration and confidence.”*



*Unravelling the tale of Moor Wool © Garner Mitchell Photography*

### **Grants Advice**

There is an ever-changing range of grants available to farmers for all kinds of things, including animal health, investing in renewables, business planning, farm diversification, training and investing in more advanced technology. It can be confusing to decide what is suitable for your own farm and hard to apply within the deadlines. DHFP staff let farmers know when suitable funds are coming up and have helped farmers with applying for grants, such as Farming and Forestry Investment Scheme I and II, Rural Economy Grant, Greater Dartmoor LEAF, Sustainable Development Fund, Prince's Countryside Fund, Catchment Sensitive Farming and many more.

### **Farmer Agency Training**

DHFP are running a pilot project, led by the Foundation for Common Land in Cumbria, in which farmers train public or charitable sector staff to improve their understanding of upland farming. This project is funded on Dartmoor by the Prince's Countryside Fund. 34 staff from Natural England, Defra, Rural Payments Agency, Environment Agency, RSPB, National Trust, Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authorities have each undertaken a series of three days' training and knowledge exchange, with 6 farmers hosting and supporting each other. The three days cover basic hill farming, commoning, common land management and hill farm economics.

### **Moor Wool**

A pilot project looked at the opportunities and difficulties involved in adding value to the wool from the sheep that graze the commons of Dartmoor. The cost of shearing is often more than the farmer can earn from the fleeces of these sheep. DHFP had wool processed and made up into a wonderful array of products, hanks of knitting wool, spinning yarns, material, felt, wadding, throws and twine. The costs of processing these goods make them quite a luxury item. An event run over a weekend in September 2012 attracted over 1,000 people and got very good feedback. DHFP are currently contracting further work to investigate the marketing opportunities and potential development of wool products.

### Dartmoor Women in Farming

This social network for women involved in farming provides monthly meetings during the autumn and winter months for relevant talks and visits. Topics covered have included succession planning, vet talks, websites and social media, diversifying into tourism and improving catering skills. DHFP have supported Dartmoor Women in Farming to apply for funding for running events and open days on farms through Dartmoor Sustainable Development Fund.

### Next Generation

Open to anyone under 26 years of age who is involved with farming on Dartmoor. This group meets bi-monthly to learn from each other as well as professionals about all aspects of hill farming in a relaxed environment.

### Farm Walks

A pilot programme of walks supporting farmers who would like to diversify into running public farm walks. The DHFP has helped four farmers in 2013 with planning and promoting the walks and handling bookings. The pilot is helping to set up a model for organising and marketing the walks to make them financially viable. The walks have been very well attended and feedback from visitors has been excellent.

*“We enjoyed hearing all about the farm directly from the farmer - so interesting... finding out what the hill farmer is up against”.*



Dartmoor - a grazed landscape © DNPA



Farmer-led walk and working dog demonstration © DNPA

## Evaluation

Dartmoor, Exmoor and Bodmin Hill Farm Projects have all been running since 2009 under an umbrella project called the South West Uplands Initiative. This was evaluated over the last 18 months by the Countryside and Community Research Institute. The evaluation involved phone and face to face interviews with farmers and a study of the activities and expenditure of all three projects. It identified the key strengths as being:

- the close relationship between the projects and the upland farmers;
- the fact that the teams are locally based and easily accessible for the farmers;
- good communication with the farmers;
- good understanding of local upland farming issues has instilled confidence;
- the ability to influence RDPE programmes; and
- adaptable and responsive to opportunities.

The areas identified for improvement included more joint working across the South West uplands, more monitoring of benefits on farm and more project development work.

Telephone interviews with Dartmoor farmers revealed that:

- one third said that the DHFP is making them think more about the profitability of their farm business;
- nearly two thirds said it had given them confidence to try new things;
- 73% of respondents felt that the DHFP had made some difference to the way they farm;
- 58% of respondents agreed that the DHFP had provided information that they would not otherwise have received; and
- most agreed (85%) that the DHFP had increased their awareness of RDPE schemes.



Fire plan training © DNPA



Swaling © DNPA



## Case Study 1: Mark and Tracey Northmore, Great Eddish Farm

Mark and Tracey Northmore have a 500 acre traditional cattle and sheep farm, with commoner's grazing rights across a number of commons. They have over 100 suckler cows and just over 700 ewes. They also have around 20 hill ponies and Dartmoor heritage ponies.

Mark has been involved in the Moorskills project for a number of years with over 20 students having worked on the farm. They now have one of these students working for them full-time and another part-time. For Mark this is one of the main benefits of his involvement in DHFP because the presence of the students *"meant you can take on that extra block of land or you can take on more stock. When you are lambing it was easier and you were not so spun out yourselves and therefore the livestock benefited"*. Mark also developed new skills through providing practical training to the students and from his involvement in the student interview process. He feels that Moorskills has had a broader benefit to Dartmoor by providing opportunities for local farming children to gain the experience in hill farming that is not available at college.

The Northmores are looking to diversify their income and DHFP has helped them in exploring diversification opportunities. Tracey is secretary of the Dartmoor Women in Farming group and has attended a number of events which have generated new ideas e.g. offering accommodation in camping pods *"Probably one night in a pod you would make the same profit as a bullock!"* Tracey feels involvement in the women's group has increased her social network across the generations and has broadened her outlook.

Due to her involvement in DHFP she has attended a couple of Rural Focus meetings which has led to her instigating an assessor coming to the farm to assess their energy consumption, an advisor coming to look at the potential for hydropower generation and someone coming to advise on marketing their meat from the farm gate.

The Northmores also feel that the DHFP is good at responding to farmers' concerns, for example by working with the National Park to set up dog training classes to reduce sheep worrying.

Northmore family © DNPA

## Case Study 2: William and Ann Willcocks, Meads Farm

William and Ann Willcocks farm just over 50 ha on the southern edge of Dartmoor, with the addition of grazing units on Harford and Ugborough Moor making for a viable enterprise. The family runs a herd of just over 100 pedigree Belted Galloway cattle, the majority of which graze on the commons. In addition to the cows, the family has many different breeds of sheep, the main flocks being the hill flock of Scotch, Swaledale and some Herdwick ewes all producing pure bred replacements or a Bluefaced Leicester cross for the mule flock. The other flocks include some pedigree flocks; Greyface Dartmoor, Jacob, Exmoor Horn and Suffolk. The lowland flocks produce some finished lambs as well as store lambs.

Ann is secretary to several Commons Associations who have entered into agri-environment schemes; necessary parts of ensuring commons are supported financially with the restricted grazing required under such schemes. Ann has been a member of the DHFP Steering Group for several years and is also a member of Dartmoor Women in Farming.

The main financial benefit of the DHFP to the farm has been their involvement in the South West Healthy Livestock Initiative, taking advantage of the BVD tests and the flock worm resistance testing that they heard about through DHFP. This then progressed to the purchase of a FecPak (faecal egg count kit), subsidized by DHFP. The tests showed William and Ann that the farm did have problems with resistant worms and investing in the FecPak has enabled them to make their worming strategy more efficient and saved them money. The amount of wormer they use has reduced since they discovered what products their sheep were resistant to and also that they did not require a worm drench prior to tupping (mating). Worming of any of the sheep on the farm is now carried out after a faecal egg count has been done, which allows them to decide which drench to use and when. No longer are the sheep treated because it is convenient to do so or with a product that will not work.



*Willcocks family © Willcocks*

## The future

The majority of funding for DHFP comes from the EU via Defra's RDPE budget. This programme comes to an end in December 2013. DNPA and the Duchy of Cornwall have secured funding for the current level of staffing until March 2014. After this DHFP may need to reduce to one part time post; however we hope that a funding bid will be developed for 2015-2020 which will allow the DHFP to focus on new opportunities. The recent evaluation of the last five year programme concluded that all three Hill Farm Projects could continue to improve the efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability of livestock farming across the South West uplands.

At the 2013 Farmers' Forum, the most frequent suggestions for future priorities were:

- continuing and broadening the healthy livestock initiative;
- give more advice on legislation, good practice, business planning;
- continue to act as a hub for information and contacts;
- continue to support Moorskills; and
- encourage the next generation of hill farmers.

DHFP would plan to draw out the most pressing priorities for Dartmoor hill farmers and look for the best way to fund these from the range of local, national and European funding available.



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas.

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Cattle grazing © DNPA