East Anglian Fens Peat Pilot

Catherine Weightman
East Anglian Fens
Archaeologists at Must Farm have uncovered the charred wooden roof structure of a 3,000 year old round house
Holme Post
East Anglian Fens – the issues

- The CO2 loss from lowland farming on the peat soils is far greater than the uplands but the focus on lowland peat loss has been limited, the scale and urgency of the problem has to be accelerated.

- 33.9% of CO2 emissions from farming in the UK comes from East Anglian peat soil contributing massively to climate change gas emissions. 1-2cm of peat soils are lost every year in the fens.

- Although it covers less than 4% of England’s farmed area, the Fens produces more than 7% of England’s total agricultural production, worth £1.23 billion - less than 50 years of peat remain.

- Great Fen, Wicken Vision, Willow Tree Fen, Ouse Fen are transforming arable land to a more traditional fenland landscapes, but the challenge is that actual area of these projects is having very limited impact, if any on reducing CO2 emissions in the whole fenland area.

- Peatland emissions are not currently counted in the national emissions inventory but are expected to be from 2020 onwards. This will significantly affect places with lowland peat such as the Fens: this is likely to increase Cambridgeshire’s reported GHG emissions by 60% to 90%, highlighting the need for concerted and swift action (CUSPE report, Nov 2019).
Sphagnum farming in Germany
What will the pilot do - by end of March 2020

- Work with academics to ground truth data on remaining peat resource and identify evidence gaps.
- Produce 6 case studies of best practice farming on retaining/enhancing carbon rich soils in the fens.
- Produce 10 short visions from people who manage the fens, by asking – How do you see the vision of the fens in a Net Zero future.
- Working with Newcastle University and the other pilots on - Analysis of social barriers and opportunities to implementing the England Peat Strategy
- Host a conference for stakeholders, in 2020 – 5th March
  Tomorrow’s fenlands: carbon, soil and livelihoods
Tomorrow’s Fenland: carbon, soil and livelihoods.

Programme  5th  March 2020
10:00   Welcome by host - Michael Sly, Park Farm & NFU

Session 1: Fenland resources: peat soil, carbon and water sustainability
•  Chair: Clifton Bain, IUCN UK Peatland Programme
Peat soil reserves and losses in the East Anglian Fens
Professor Ian Holman Cranfield University
Greenhouse Gas emissions from East Anglian peatlands
Professor Chris Evans, Centre of Ecology & Hydrology

Safeguarding the sustainability of water in the East Anglian Fens
David Thomas, Middle Level Commissioners and Robin Price, Water Resources East
•    Q & A
12:00  Session 2: Sustainable management in action: sharing practices on peat soil which slow the loss of soil carbon and water management to encourage higher water levels within peat soils

Chair: David Hunter, Defra

South Lincs Fenland Partnership (SLFP), case study of work in Lincolnshire Tammy Smalley

Case Study of how farms are becoming more sustainable, reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions but still growing food economically.

Andrew Knaggs G’s Arable crop Manager

Q & A
14:00  Session 3: Opportunities and challenges to investing in sustainable fenlands.

Chair: Naomi Oakley Natural England

Overview of research & development in wet agriculture: future farming opportunities  Richard Lyndsey, University of East London

Implementing / making the change to wet agriculture, Typha farmer Aldert van Weeren

Reaching the Dream of sustainable farming systems through collaboration & UNESCO Fens Biosphere: Water Works - Kate Carver, Great Fen and Mark Nokkert Cambridgeshire ACRE

How to make the most of marketing for sustainable fenlands  Andrea Kelly and Terry Osbourne - Claritie CANAPE

Key opportunities and challenges to investing in sustainable economic East Anglia fenlands. Keith Leddington-Hill Managing Director Laurence Gould Partnership
Following on after peat pilot – April 2020

- Follow on with Lowland Agriculture Peat Task Force
- Continue to collate evidence on GHG emissions, fill information gaps with CEH/Cranfield, Greenhouse Gas Reductions NIAB
- Work with the Great Fen project/other trails to disseminate information on paludiculture
- Look at further innovation/research – Agri-tech E, ELMS trials, AHDB
- Input to the defining: what a sustainable buffer for the Fens, candidate UNESCO biosphere will look like.
- Help to create a routemap to deliver the England Peat Strategy
- Continue to work with Corkers crisps/Buffaload ceo
- Look at land ownership/tenancy – produce a map for peat soils in the fens
- Work with IDBs to produce a map of hydrological units and peat depth
Follow on continued - not prioritised

• Having clear proposals for how we build strong wildlife outcomes into a future peatland strategy for the Fens (rather than solely being around soil conservation, good though that is…)
• Identify IRZ for peat soils
• Work with Cambs County Council and NFU to plan for Carbon neutral
• Link into LNP/OX/CAM and local Natural Capital Investment Plan
• Continue to work with NFU, vegetable producers to look at developing individual farm plans for GHG.
• Start to work with land agents in the fens such as Savills, to make sure they understand about peat
• Find a way to meet other large landowners in the fens such as Agri-serve, Cambridge Univ colleges
• Look at wetting up soil, under solar farms
How farming has changed – what is next chapter in the fens?