

## Case study: Chris Dowse, Hall Farm, Lincolnshire



Pollen and nectar mixtures were put in as a measure to create habitat for four species of bumblebees identified on the farm, and to boost insect food for birds.

The flowers in the mixture include red clover, sainfoin, vetches, bird's foot trefoil and black medick. The mixtures were sown in the autumn.

**When in flower, these areas are literally humming with insect life**, including bumblebees, hoverflies (whose larvae are predators of insects such as aphids) and butterflies. They are also a very good food source for nestling birds.

## Sources of further information

RSPB Arable Farmland Adviser:  
01767 680551  
[www.rspb.org.uk/farming](http://www.rspb.org.uk/farming)

Smiths Gore – Farm Management  
01962 857405  
[www.smithsgore.co.uk](http://www.smithsgore.co.uk)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group:  
024 7669 6699  
[www.fwag.org.uk](http://www.fwag.org.uk)

The Game and Wildlife Conservation  
Trust: 01425 652381  
[www.gct.org.uk](http://www.gct.org.uk)

Visit [www.farmwildlife.info](http://www.farmwildlife.info) to:

- Post your questions and ideas on the discussion forum
- Read case studies of how farmers are benefiting wildlife
- Find out about events and courses in farm wildlife conservation
- Use the comprehensive list of links to other websites concerned with farm wildlife conservation

RSPB regd charity in the UK no 207076  
In Scotland no SCO 37654



## Nectar flower mixtures



*How to integrate wildlife benefits  
into your farming business*

## Why create nectar flower mixtures?

The main function of nectar flower mixtures is to **provide pollen and nectar to sustain pollinating insects** throughout the spring and summer. These insects pollinate some key arable crops. Hoverflies also lay their eggs in adjacent crops, and their larvae prey on crop pests such as aphids. Bumblebees and butterflies are key groups of insects that could benefit from this option.

Nectar flower mixtures can be created as field margin strips or as blocks in field corners which are awkward to farm. They do best in locations that receive plenty of sunlight.

They are highly visual displays of environmentally-friendly farming, and many farmers have reported being congratulated by local villagers for improving their environment.

The cost-benefit analysis opposite shows that the Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) payment means **it is more profitable to grow a hectare of pollen and nectar mixture than it is to grow a hectare of wheat**, if you take into account the savings in fixed costs. Over the course of an agreement, the lower gross margins of other crops in the rotation puts the net profit of ELS nectar flower mixtures even more in the black.

## What you can do

Nectar flower mixtures are a mix of nectar-rich plants such as clovers, trefoils, knapweed and phacelia.

They are generally sown in the autumn and cut annually in September. Half of the area is cut in June to promote late flowering. Check that there are no leverets or nesting birds in the area to be cut.

These mixtures tend to survive 3-4 years before the flowering species decline and weeds start to take over. **Returning the area to cropping and re-establishing the mix elsewhere is an ideal way to clean up areas if they become weedy.**



## Economic analysis

(by Smiths Gore farm management)

The analysis compares a hectare of nectar flower mixture and a hectare of winter wheat, assuming the mixture lasts the full five years.

	Winter wheat	Nectar flower mixture
Income from crop	£1020	
Income from ELS		£450
Variable costs	-£420	-£93
Savings in fixed costs		£295
Net margin	£600	£652
Change in net margin		<b>£52</b>

### Assumptions:

Winter wheat yield: 8.5 t / ha

Winter wheat value: £120 / tonne

Variable costs of option spread over 5 years: £95 (seed), £99 (establishment), £225 (cutting half in June and whole in Sep-Oct annually @ £30/ha), £9 (1 hour knapsack spray injurious weeds)

**For further details and help in doing your own calculations, visit**

[www.smithsgore.co.uk/publications](http://www.smithsgore.co.uk/publications)