



Workstream 3: Holistic Considerations

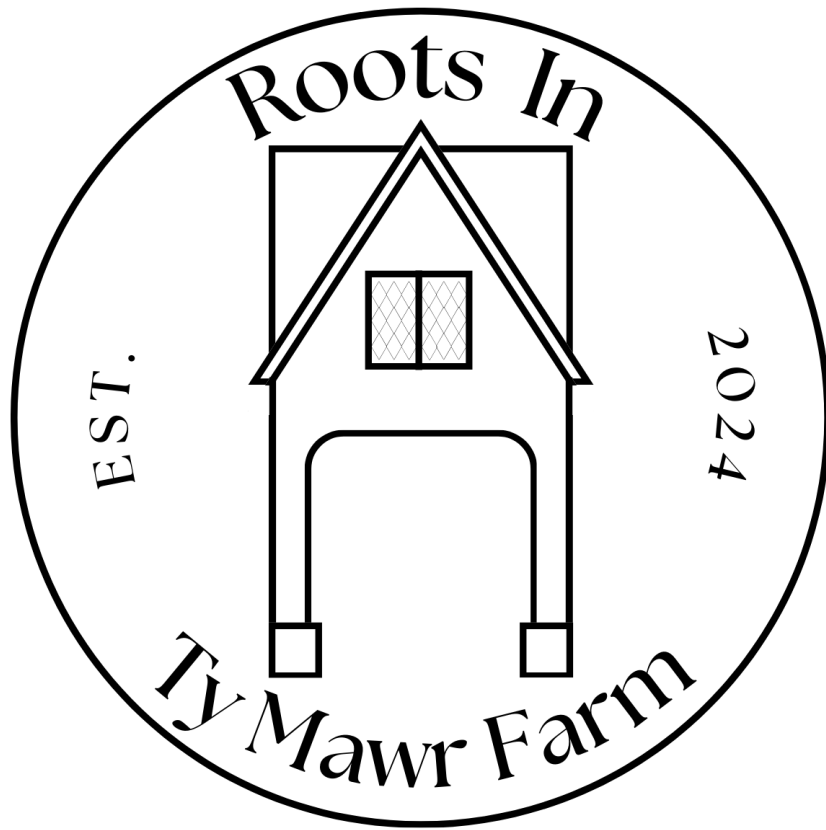
Supporting Regenerative and Conservation Grazing
on the Isles of Scilly



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Hill Top Farm, photo by Gail Caddy



Part 1

Introduction



photo by Angus D. Birditt

Introduction

Workstream 3 addresses the wider, holistic considerations required to make regenerative and conservation grazing viable and resilient across the Isles of Scilly. While Workstream 1 has focused on developing regenerative grazing plans for farms, and Workstream 2 on designing conservation grazing strategies for uninhabited islands and protected habitats, this workstream explores the enabling conditions that underpin both. It integrates analysis of livestock health, biosecurity, stakeholder engagement, cross-island grazing logistics, abattoir feasibility, and other social and cultural factors.

These considerations are not supplementary but essential. Without a coherent approach to animal health, safe handling, local slaughter infrastructure, and farmer and community engagement, the technical plans in Workstreams 1 and 2 cannot succeed. Scilly's geography, culture, and ecology create unique opportunities to build a resilient, closed-loop livestock system, but also present challenges that require joined-up solutions. This section draws together insights from consultation with farmers, conservation bodies, and local stakeholders, as well as technical

assessments of grazing capacity and disease risk. The following narrative presents a pathway for ensuring that regenerative and conservation grazing are not only ecologically effective, but also safe, culturally appropriate, and sustainable for future generations.

Romshed Farm



Part 2

Cross-Island Grazing & Abattoir Feasibility

Cross Island Grazing & Abattoir Feasibility

The long-term viability of grazing across the inhabited islands depends on aligning agricultural production with conservation objectives, while ensuring sufficient throughput to sustain a small-scale abattoir. Detailed modelling has been undertaken to map grazing pressure requirements and herd structures across St. Mary's, St. Martin's, Bryher, St. Agnes, and Tresco.

We are aware that the current model which lacks suitable grazing has led to SSSI's declining into unfavourable status. As such maintenance of the status quo would continue this trajectory.

Initially, a phased approach is required.

Phase 1, (2026-2028) will maintain the status quo in cattle numbers while intensive mechanical intervention is carried out on headlands to restore habitats.

Phase 2, (from 2028 onwards) will introduce low-density cattle grazing at 0.15 LSU/ha on headlands, alongside farmed pasture, requiring approximately 163 livestock units (LSU) across the inhabited islands. This can be met with 80 breeding cows, assuming high calving and survival rates.

CURRENT			
Island	Farmed Area LSU	Headland LSU	Total LSU
St. Marys	55.9	9.5	65.4
St. Martins	8.1	11.55	19.65
Bryher	6.5	1.8	8.3
St. Agnes	20.5	4.95	25.45
Tresco	36.4	7.8	44.2
TOTALS	127.4	35.6	163

By **Phase 3, (around 2030)** improved pasture management and habitat recovery could allow stocking rates of up to 0.3 LSU/ha on headlands, raising total carrying capacity to around 236 LSU.

FUTURE			
Island	Farmed Area LSU	Headland LSU	Total LSU
St. Marys	72.7	19	91.7
St. Martins	22.6	23.1	45.7
Bryher	10.3	3.6	13.9
St. Agnes	22.8	9.9	32.7
Tresco	36.4	15.6	52
TOTALS	164.8	71.2	236



photo by Angus D. Birditt

Cross Island Grazing & Abattoir Feasibility (Continued)

The vision is for Scilly to produce enough of its own cattle to meet this requirement, keeping all calves born on-island through to finishing. This would mean shifting away from the current system of selling yearling stores to the mainland. Instead, Tresco, which has limited capacity to finish its own cattle, could supply store cattle to other islands, later reimporting finished cattle for sale under a “Tresco beef” brand. Such collaborative approaches could enable internal balancing of stock while reinforcing the narrative of a shared conservation and food system across the archipelago.

The herd modelling indicates that by 2030 Scilly could sustain a throughput of around 72 finished animals or cull cows annually, equivalent to six animals per month, sufficient to underpin

a small-scale abattoir. To succeed, the system will need clear financial incentives for native breeds and conservation grazing, coupled with a strong marketing strategy for Scilly-branded beef. The abattoir would not only close the loop on local production but also provide a base hub for veterinary testing, artificial insemination, and knowledge exchange.

Complementary to cattle, the grazing of hardy native breed goats on uninhabited islands such as Gugh, Samson, St. Helens, and Tearn is also recommended. These goats, managed as non-breeding animals with a 20% annual rotation, would provide both conservation benefits and a small but regular abattoir throughput of around ten animals per year.

In this way, the integration of cross-island grazing logistics with a small-scale abattoir provides a foundation for regenerative and conservation grazing to become a self-sustaining system.

Hill Top Farm, photo by Gail Caddy



Part 3

Biosecurity and Animal Health



photo by Ian Boyd

Biosecurity and Animal Health

Biosecurity is a critical consideration for the Isles of Scilly. Their geographic isolation offers the opportunity to achieve a high-health status herd, but this will only be realised if robust measures are adopted across all livestock enterprises.

At present, practices such as bull sharing and limited blood testing of incoming livestock undermine resilience. An island-wide agreement should be established, supported by Small is Beautiful, to create a closed herd system wherever possible. Artificial insemination should replace bull sharing, both to reduce disease risk and to increase genetic diversity. Import protocols should include mandatory blood testing for BVD, Johne's, IBR, Leptospirosis and Neospora, with vet-endorsed strategies for culling or managing any infected herds.

Particular emphasis should be placed on preventing the introduction of bovine tuberculosis (bTB). Scilly is currently a low-risk area with no local wildlife reservoir (badgers are absent), and no cases have been reported for many years. The greatest risk comes from purchasing infected cattle from high-risk mainland areas. Biosecurity protocols must therefore prioritise

sourcing only from low-risk herds, supported by isolation and post-movement testing. Although statutory surveillance continues through slaughter inspections and quadrennial herd testing, a locally agreed enhanced testing regime would significantly reduce risk.

A proactive role for a large animal vet based on-island is recommended, offering regular herd testing, TB biosecurity planning (with TBAS support), and farmer training. This vet could be subsidised as part of the Small is Beautiful programme, doubling as a knowledge exchange resource for wider herd health.

By adopting these measures, Scilly can build a closed-loop, resilient cattle population. This not only underpins conservation grazing goals but also strengthens market confidence in Scilly beef as a high-welfare, disease-resilient product.

FAI Farms, photo by Ian Boyd



Part 4

Stakeholder Engagement and Governance



photo by Clem Sandison

Stakeholder Engagement and Governance

The success of regenerative and conservation grazing will depend on the support of a wide range of stakeholders. Key groups include tenant farmers, the Duchy of Cornwall, the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust, veterinary services, DEFRA, the local community, contractors, and visitors. Each has distinct interests, from productivity and financial stability, to habitat protection, to landscape preservation and visitor experience.

Tensions are inevitable. Farmers are concerned about restrictions on grazing productivity, while conservationists may seek seasonal exclusions to protect seabird nesting. The local community may worry about public access or safety, especially regarding cattle and dogs. Contractors need confidence in a steady flow of work. To mitigate these conflicts, co-designed grazing calendars, clear financial incentives, and transparent communication are essential. Virtual fencing offers a technological solution for balancing ecological and agricultural needs, and its benefits should be demonstrated through pilot schemes and community events.

Governance should take the form of a steering group with representatives from farmers, the Duchy, conservation bodies, and local residents. Engagement must be ongoing, with regular farmer workshops, community open days, and accessible information at tourist points of entry. Volunteers can be trained as livestock checkers, expanding the successful model already developed by the Wildlife Trust.

Crucially, stakeholder engagement must not be treated as ancillary. It is the mechanism by which cultural buy-in, conflict resolution, and long-term sustainability will be secured.

FAI Farms, photo by Angus D. Birditt

Part 5

Other Considerations



Gowbarrow Hall, photo by Angus D. Birditt

Other Considerations

Several additional considerations emerged from consultation and analysis.

First, there is strong demand for knowledge exchange and farmer support. Establishing a farmer support hub within the abattoir facility would create a focal point for veterinary services, faecal egg counts, blood testing, and artificial insemination, alongside training and peer-to-peer learning.

Second, issues of legacy and succession must be addressed. Many younger generations are interested in continuing cattle farming, but conversations often repeat existing generational narratives, with little reference to environmental or biodiversity concerns. Through targeted discussions and payments under Small is Beautiful, opportunities exist to reshape this inheritance, embedding conservation and tourism benefits into the next generation of farming.

Third, safety concerns must be prioritised. Shared handling equipment is common on the islands, but maintenance, suitability, and knowledge vary

widely. With projected increases in cattle numbers and age classes, safe and well-maintained facilities are non-negotiable. Investment in shared equipment, training, and safety protocols should be treated as high priority.

Finally, cultural nuance is central to project design. Farming on Scilly is deeply shaped by island identity, independence, and freedom of choice, visible for example in breed selection. Recommendations that impose uniformity risk undermining farmer engagement. Instead, proposals must respect cultural values while guiding farmers towards systems that meet both production and conservation goals.

photo by Tom Aspinall



Part 6

Integrated Recommendations



photo by The Ethical Dairy

Integrated Recommendations

Taken together, these holistic considerations provide the enabling framework for Workstreams 1 and 2. Cross-island grazing and abattoir development will create the infrastructure for a closed-loop system, but only if biosecurity measures are strengthened to protect herd health. Stakeholder engagement and cultural sensitivity will ensure that grazing plans are adopted in practice, while safety, succession, and knowledge exchange provide the social foundation for resilience.

Future support and project programmes should therefore prioritise:

- **Establishing an island-wide closed herd system with enhanced biosecurity protocols.**
- **Creating strong financial incentives for native breeds and conservation grazing.**
- **Developing the abattoir as both processing infrastructure and a knowledge exchange hub.**
- **Embedding stakeholder engagement through co-designed grazing calendars, volunteer networks, and open communication.**
- **Investing in safe, shared handling infrastructure and training.**
- **Supporting generational renewal of farming with explicit links to conservation and tourism benefits.**

photo by Clem Sandison



Part 7

Conclusion



photo by Andy Rumming

Conclusion

Holistic considerations are not an add-on to regenerative and conservation grazing but a precondition for their success. Scilly's geographic isolation and cultural distinctiveness offer an unparalleled opportunity to build a resilient, closed-loop, high-health cattle system that delivers for biodiversity, farming families, and the local economy. By integrating biosecurity, stakeholder engagement, abattoir feasibility, and cultural sensitivity, Workstream 3 ensures that the technical recommendations of Workstreams 1 and 2 can be realised in practice.

The Small is Beautiful programme now has the opportunity to set a precedent for how regenerative agriculture and conservation grazing can be mutually reinforcing within a small island community, ensuring both ecological recovery and the long-term sustainability of farming on the Isles of Scilly.

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Part 8

Case Study: From Bulbs to Biology

Annex

Annex 1 Livestock Unit Allocations

Stock types in Livestock Units (LUs)*	
Dairy cow	1
Beef cow	1
Cattle over 2 years	0.7
Cattle 6 months to 2 years	0.6
Lowland ewe and lamb	0.12
Hill ewe and lamb	0.08
Ram and teg over six months old	0.15
Ewe follower and/or store lamb	0.08
Horse	1
Pony	0.8
* These figures are for medium-sized breeds and may need adjusting	

Annex

Annex 2 Livestock Unit Allocations

	2027			2028		2029		2030	
	LSU Rate	Headage	LSUs	Hdg.	LSUs	Hdg.	LSUs	Hdg.	LSUs
Cows	1	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
Calves	0	72	0	72	0	72	0	72	0
Yearlings	0.6	0	0	72	43.2	72	43.2	72	43.2
2 Year Olds	0.7	0	0	0	0	72	50.4	72	50.4
3 Year Olds	0.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	72	50.4
Total		152	80	224	123.2	296	173.6	368	224

Annex

Annex 3

Recommended Goat Allocation

	Grazeable hectares	LSU	no. of goats
Gugh	18	2.70	13
Samson	29	4.35	21
St. Helens	10	1.50	8
Tearn	15	2.25	10
Norwetheal	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	72	11	52



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