

FARMING FIT FOR THE FUTURE

ANDY HAY (RSPB - IMAGES.COM)

TAKING A NATURAL CAPITAL APPROACH

National Trust, Wimpole Estate, Cambridgeshire

GOING ORGANIC

Wimpole is a 1,200 hectare historic estate and nationally important rare breeds centre in Cambridgeshire. Surrounded by an intensive arable landscape, it is one of the largest open green spaces close to Cambridge and attracts over 270,000 visitors a year.

In 2008, due to a number of factors including very poor soil quality, the Estate's 400 hectare lowland arable farm underwent a major change in farming practice, moving from conventional to organic cropping and advanced farm wildlife schemes.



SIMON DAMANT



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RICHARD MORRIS

WHY THIS APPROACH?

The National Trust chose to pilot a new 'natural capital' accounting method at Wimpole as a means to measure and report the overall change in its 'value' from adopting the new management regime.

Understanding natural capital and making better decisions about the Estate's long term management, through land management and landscape conservation measures, is a critical part of the National Trust's strategy. We were therefore very keen to investigate a new way of recording what we have, how we manage it and the relative costs and benefits that flow from that. We also wanted to better understand how protecting and enhancing the natural environment could help underpin the farm business.

THE RESULTS

Comparing the previous conventional practice to the current organic regime demonstrated that, despite the reduction in crop yields, the overall income was about the same, due to lower fertiliser costs, higher wildlife grants and a slight price premium for organic produce.

However, a significant increase in the 'public' value of natural capital was recorded. This was due to improved soil carbon storage, increased wildlife and more visitors.

The pilot highlighted that the public and private **benefits** arising from changes in management **exceeded the costs**.