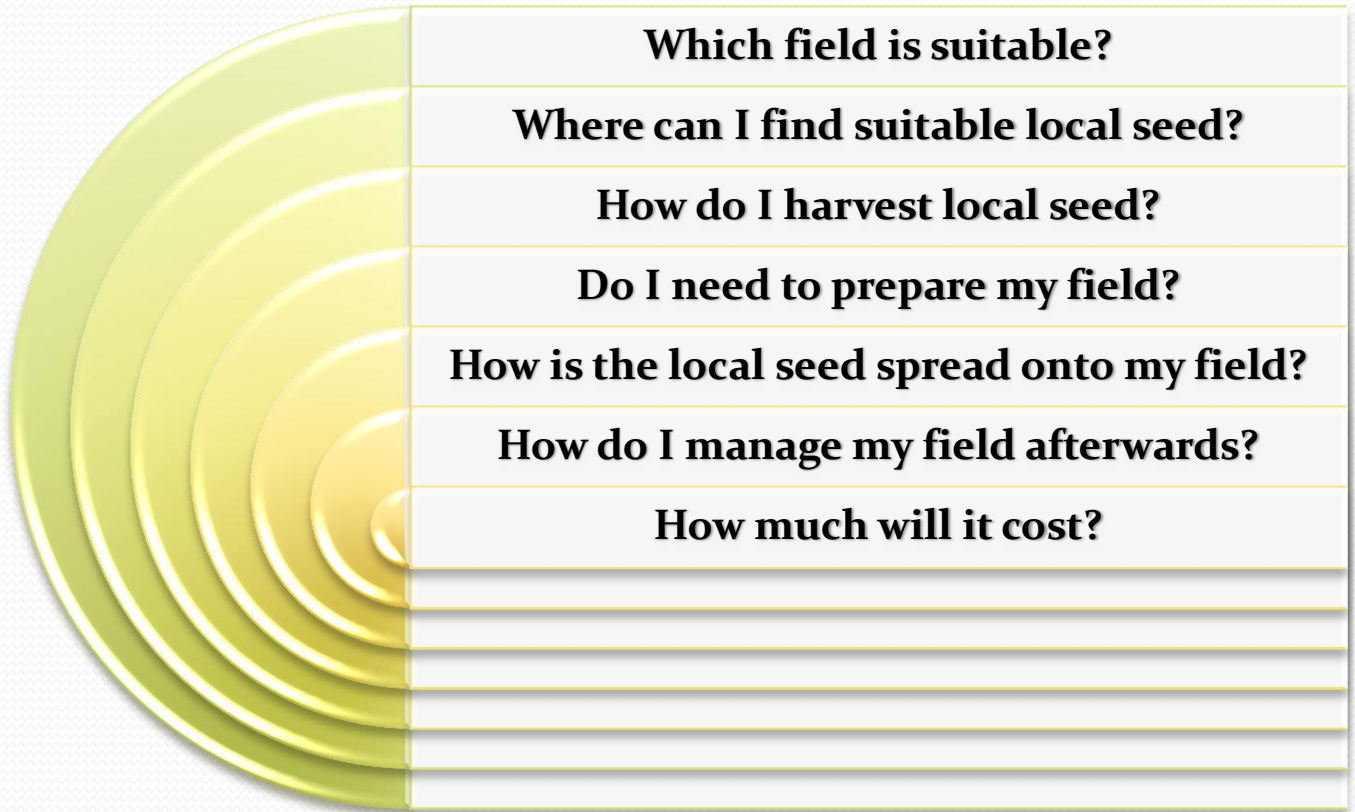


# **A Guide to Habitat Creation & Restoration Using Local Seed**



*This guide has been produced by Farmercology consultancy to explain the main steps involved in restoring or creating wildflower meadows. We have experience in undertaking this type of work & have worked closely with Natural England as well as landowners on such projects.*



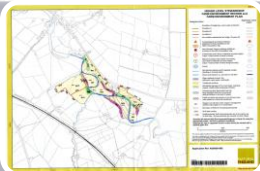
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# Key steps to creating your wildflower meadow through Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)



Your Farm Environment Plan (FEP), produced by Farmercology consultancy highlights potential fields suitable for meadow creation or restoration.



Soil tests are taken to determine key nutrient levels (P, K & N).



Farmercology consultancy survey your receiver field in detail to provide baseline information.



Farmercology consultancy match your receiver field to a donor site that will provide the wildflower seed.



Farmercology organise the preparation of your receiver field by cutting or grazing to achieve short sward & create areas of bare ground by appropriate means, such as:

- Harrowing (chain, power, disc)
- Spraying with herbicide to kill off the vegetation
- Heavy grazing



Farmercology consultancy organise seed harvesting from donor site, transport & spread across your meadow. Green hay needs to be tedded to disperse seeds. Typically takes place in August/September.



Graze after 2 – 3 days following introduction of seed & manage in the long term as hay or pasture.



You pay any contractors used in the operation & submit your claim form & receipted invoices for the work carried out to Natural England. Continue to manage your meadow & watch it transform from year to year!



# Using local seed will greatly increase the chances of successfully restoring or creating a meadow rich in wildflowers

## 1. Is your land suitable ?

Ideally the site you are hoping to return to a wild flower meadow should have a low nutrient status – both Phosphorous (P) and Nitrogen (N) will limit the ability of some plants to flourish and so there must be low amounts in the soil. We will take soil samples to confirm this. If the results show a high nutrient status it may mean that wildflower meadow creation is not possible and you may need to look at ways of reducing the levels or find an alternative field. The soil tests will also help to decide which plant species will be most suitable to introduce.

## 2. Where can I find suitable local seed?

Natural England have an inventory of sites suitable for use in habitat creation. We will match your site with a local donor site based on your soil results, how you manage the site and on the community of plants that it may support.



**Using Local Seed**

The use of local seed has many advantages over commercial seed.

- A more natural looking meadow characteristic of the local area is achievable.
- Some species are not found in commercial seed mixes (e.g. orchids) but can be successfully transferred in local wild seed.
- The seeds are better adapted to local conditions and there is a higher rate of germination and therefore a better chance of success.
- Local seed is much cheaper too!



## 3. How do I harvest seed?

Local contractors can be employed to harvest local wildflower seed. It can be gathered in a variety of ways but the most common methods are to either use specialist equipment, such as a brush harvester (which mainly collects the seed), or to use common farming methods, such as baling or gathering hay using a forage wagon when the hay is fresh and still green. There are advantages and disadvantages to both methods.



## 4. Do I need to prepare my field?

Again local contractors can be employed to prepare your site ready for seed introduction or you can do it yourself! Most importantly is the need to have a closely cropped sward and to create bare ground – as much as 50 % or more - to allow the seed to settle in. How this is done is site dependent but typically cutting or grazing the field prior to seed introduction, along with chain (disc or power) harrowing, or using a herbicide (e.g. Glyphosate) where appropriate, is required.



# Green hay strewing is one way of introducing seed to restore or create your wildflower meadow

## 5. How is the local seed spread onto my field?

Various methods have been tried and are still being refined but it depends both on the site and on the way in which seed has been collected. Baled green hay has been spread by hand and by bedding machines in a process called 'Green Hay Strewing'. This process has also been undertaken by spreading loose hay via muck spreaders and feeder/forage wagons. This method gives excellent results.



### Weed control

Weeds such as creeping thistle, ragwort and broad-leaved dock may take advantage of the bare ground you have created within your field. It is very important to control them as they may limit the success of your wildflower meadow. In the first year you can also expect willowherbs & chickweed but with appropriate management these should disappear.



## 7. How much will it cost?

The cost is variable, but typically to restore or create 1 hectare of species-rich meadow through the introduction of local wild seed, it costs between £500 and £1000. Under HLS, the cost is completely covered & you need to submit a claim form and your receipted invoices to Natural England once the work has been carried out and you will be reimbursed for the full amount.

### Further information

Natural England have produced a series of Technical Information Notes (TINs) associated with habitat restoration and creation. You can access these from their website:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/research/technicalpublications.aspx>

## 6. How do I manage my field afterwards?

### Short term

If seed has been introduced through green hay then it is important to ted the hay to shake out the seed. Just as important is allowing stock into the field 2/3 days after seed introduction, preferably cattle, so that they trample the seed into the ground.

### Longer Term

In the longer term the management depends on what you are using the field for. If the field is a hay meadow then shut the field up in April, take a hay cut in late July & aftermath graze as you would normally. For pasture the management may involve exclusion of stock or allowing grazing only in late summer in the first year to allow the wildflowers to set seed & establish. In subsequent years low level grazing over the summer will still be required to allow a high proportion of the wildflowers to seed & further develop their seed banks. For both management regimes low inputs of manure may be required for an initial period (2-3 years after seed introduction) & you may need to carefully control stocking levels to avoid damaging the newly developed roots.

### What to expect

You can expect to see some results after the first year. In hay meadows, species such as common knapweed, oxeye daisy & meadow buttercup will be evident & after 2 years even more species should appear!