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Balanced Farming with Oliver Keown: Prioritising Production & Sustainability

About Oliver & Diane Keown's family farm

Oliver & Diane Keown's family farm, located in County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, is a real-world example of how productive farming can co-exist with rich biodiversity. Working with Ulster Wildlife and through government environmental schemes, the Keowns apply a balanced, adaptive approach to farming—placing soil health and habitat protection at the core of their operations.



Challenge: Protecting Diverse Habitats While Sustaining Production

Located on a biodiverse landscape with a mosaic of habitats—from purple moor grass and rush pasture to sphagnum and heather—the farm is subject to strict environmental rules. This complexity presents a challenge: how to align grazing practices, livestock management, and environmental protection while staying productive within schemes like the Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS).



THE SOLUTION

The Keowns developed an integrated system tailored to their mixed landscape. Their approach includes:

- **Land-Specific Stocking:** Matching breeding stock and livestock stages to the specific land type (hill vs. lowland).
- **Hill Farm Management:** A zero-input, low-carbon system for suckler cows to protect peatlands and plant diversity.
- **Lowland Farm Practices:** One annual application of organic fertiliser and rotational paddock grazing to improve meat quality and reduce time to slaughter.
- **Environmental Enhancements:** Hedgerow and tree planting for biodiversity and biosecurity.
- **Scheme Participation:** Active involvement in government environmental programmes to support long-term sustainability.

IMPACT AND RESULTS

The farm has shown that combining traditional and innovative practices can boost both ecological and economic performance.

- **Biodiversity Boost:** Tree and hedge planting has enhanced natural habitats and increased resilience.
- **Improved Livestock:** Native Aberdeen Angus cattle have shown better growth performance under this system.
- **Efficient Feed Use:** Grass, grown with minimal inputs, remains the farm's most effective feed source.

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Watch the video:

