

## Sustainable Water Management at Sheepdrove Organic Farm

Sheepdrove Organic Farm is a family run, mixed organic farm of over 2,000 acres (800 hectares). In spring 2002, Sheepdrove installed a unique Reedbed System and Dissolved Air Flotation (DAF) plant to treat their wastewater. The reedbed system treats all wastewater from the farm, staff cottages and the conference centre. It operates entirely naturally – no chemicals or machinery – providing a less energy intensive treatment of wastewater as compared to conventional sewage disposal. No electricity is needed, no motors, pumps or processes that need to be activated. Water is treated very close to the source as opposed to being transported over long distances through expensive pipelines.



Treated water has been used to keep the pig wallows wet, watering trees around the farm during dry weather, and the last stage in the system – a lake clean enough to swim in – overflows to irrigate a willow plantation. Finally, the water begins its journey back down into the farms chalk aquifer, closing the loop in the water cycle. Annually, 5 million litres of water are treated and recycled with this system at Sheepdrove. In addition, the farm benefits from increased biodiversity as the creation of new wetland habitat has encouraged new species including natural predators of crop pests and carp thrive in the lake.

The farm has installed a new water catchment system, waterless urinals, aerating self-stop taps, dual heavy/light flush toilets; they have replaced water pipes, and monitor consumption. New dewponds in two fields provide livestock with water, which also saves on direct supply. In addition they are managing run-off and effluent better, so dirty yard water goes through a fueltrap and into a lagoon, while the cleaner roof water is directed to the reedbed system. All efficiency gained benefits the farm, Sheepdrove have a limited abstraction licence, so the less water they use, the better. Despite a high installation cost of £250,000 the scheme paid for itself in 18 months. In addition to the environmental benefits, improved water efficiency at Sheepdrove has given the business more flexibility in farm operations and the scale of operations and potential for new enterprises in the future. On another level, Sheepdrove benefit from the fact that their customers like to do business with a farm that considers the environment a priority and continually tries to be more sustainable.



"If we sent our dirty water somewhere else for somebody else to deal with, that would be passing on a problem, and would cost us thousands of pounds every week due to our remoteness." said farm manager, Ian Salmon. "The green option was the best for the business, paying for itself in a short time and producing sustainable edible fish and a great resource for wildlife."

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