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The rise of regen

Now in its fifth year, Groundswell returns to its Herts site on 23-24 June. CPM picks out some of the key features ahead of the event later this month.

By Charlotte Cunningham

Whether you're practicing it itself or are just starting to get an idea of what it's all about from Twitter musings, regenerative agriculture is a hot topic at the moment.

And putting these ideas into practice is Groundswell, the regen ag show focused on no-till farming techniques and mixed farming systems — which returns to its site at Lannock Manor Farm, Herts this year, after COVID-19 stopped play last summer.

For those who haven't been to the event, Groundswell presents practical ideas on how to farm in a new environmental and political climate while regenerating your core asset — the soil — explains Alex Cherry, event director. “With over 100 exhibitors, Groundswell is an independent event featuring sessions, workshops and exhibitions from a wide range of innovative farming companies, as well as field scale direct drill demonstrations.”

The overriding theme is set by the 5 Principles of Regenerative Agriculture, so with that in mind, what can growers expect to see at this year's event?

New for 2021, the site itself has had a bit of shake up with two new exhibitor and demo fields. “All the sessions are taking place in temporary structures dotted in between the exhibitions,” explains Alex. “The keynote conference sessions and rainfall simulator demonstrations will take place in the big top tent. The Earthworm Arms Bar area has evolved with live music taking place on the Wednesday evening and dozens of independent food traders.”

In terms of technical information, visitors won't leave short of knowledge, with more than 100 sessions taking place over the two days — featuring speakers from a wide range of interests in regenerative agriculture. ►



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The value of livestock

With nearly half of Groundswell attendees at least experimenting with livestock as one of the key components to a truly regenerative system, Groundswell has collaborated with Pasture Fed Livestock Association to put on a variety of sessions covering themes including how to get animals back onto the land and the birth of regenerative dairy farming.

The Ethical Butcher with their story of how Regenuary took on the vegan movement at their own game, and veteran butcher, Richard Summers, will be sharing his knowledge on how to maximise the value of a carcass.



events showcase



There will also be a number of panel discussion sessions and workshops, including the Affinity Water Catchment Hub, Kellogg's Origins Soil Tent, The Fungi Tent.

► Discussions on future agricultural policy in the UK will be tackled head on with the Secretary of State, The Rt Hon George Eustice being interviewed by Baroness Rosie Boycott. While Janet Hughes will be on hand to delve into the Sustainable Farming Initiative and how Defra plan to make the delivery of public good attractive.

There will also be a number of panel discussion sessions and workshops, including the Affinity Water Catchment Hub, Kellogg's Origins Soil Tent, The Fungi Tent, Speaker's Corner, The Discussion Tent, The AHDB Soil Pit, and new for 2021 — the 'Food for Thought' Area exploring the links between soil health and a healthy diet.

Looking at the physical features of the event, direct drill demonstrations will take place on both days, which will see 15 machinery manufacturers — including names like John Deere, Kuhn, Horsch and Sky Agriculture — direct drilling into standing cover crop with minimal soil disturbance.

Visitors will also be able to check out a number of trials and crop plots, including NIAB independent trials, Bi-Cropping, Agroforestry, Heritage Wheats, no-till potatoes and biostimulant trials on spring wheat.

Also on show this year will be a range of composting demonstrations. Among exhibitors is The Land Gardeners, who are showing off their unique process that turns raw organic matter inputs into high quality humus in as little as eight weeks.

"Groundswell is a unique agricultural show in the fact that you can spend a day learning the principles of conservation agriculture and regenerative systems, while also engaging with the organisations who can help make it a reality," says host farmer, Paul Cherry. "Groundswell offers a welcoming environment for two days of information exchange with some of the leading "soil caretakers" — the farmers, scientists and the organisations who all have a role in shaping the future of UK farming." ■

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COVID health and safety

After postponement of Groundswell last year and taking into all the considerations with coronavirus, the events team is reassuring visitors that Groundswell will be adhering to the latest government guidelines while going fully ahead with 3500 planned attendees. "With new site layout allowing more space for traffic flow and all structures having open-sides, we're confident the event will be as COVID secure as it can be. Visitors will be reminded to adhere to the latest social distancing rules and wash hands regularly," notes Alex.