

# **FARMER PERCEPTION OF BENEFITS, CONSTRAINTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SILVOARABLE SYSTEMS IN BEDFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND**

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Silvoarable agroforestry integrates the use of trees and crops on the same area of land. The development of such systems is supported by the European Union and a recent European Union project, the Silvoarable Agroforestry for Europe (SAFE) project (2001 - 2005), was tasked with reducing uncertainties of silvoarable systems in Europe. One area of uncertainty concerns farmers' perceptions of such systems and detailed interviews of a sample of fifteen farmers in Bedfordshire were made to record their perceptions. Most of these farmers thought that silvoarable systems would not be profitable on their farms and that benefits would tend to be ecological or social rather than economic. Most also thought that management and use of machinery would become more difficult. The tree component was felt to be potentially disruptive of current farm management and field drainage, and remuneration from timber too tenuous and long-term to be useful. Intercrop yield decline and management difficulties, because of tree growth, were seen as major hurdles. However, twenty percent of the farmers stated they would use silvoarable systems if convinced that they were more profitable than current arable systems. A further twenty percent said they would farm the intercrop area belonging to another party, if rent was sufficiently reduced to compensate for crop yield reductions caused by tree growth. Currently, it appears that most farmers are unlikely to adopt silvoarable systems, because they do not believe that there are adequate economic benefits to make this worthwhile. But a minority may rent the crop component of a silvoarable system from another party, or implement a full system, for perceived ecological or social benefits.