

Main Film Script

Subtitles over scenes:

Main Title: **Herbivores of Hope**

Gowbarrow Hall Farm - Ullswater, English Lake District

The food story is different here.

Despite conventional thinking about livestock and the environment,  
Sam and Claire Beaumont prove that properly managed heritage livestock  
breeds are vital  
to regenerating land health and wildlife biodiversity.

While it sounds radical today,  
the interdependence between grazer, soil, plants and wildlife is the way nature  
thrived for millions of years.

Farms like Gowbarrow Hall celebrate this ancient relationship  
and are restoring their land to greater ecological health and resilience.  
We believe the most powerful and effective method to a secure future is  
through regenerative livestock grazing –  
a farming system that prioritises healing the land that sustains us.

### **Heritage Livestock & Regenerative Grazing**

Grazing animals, if managed in the right way, can regenerate soil by digesting plant material from grassland and leaving behind their dung and urine in order to stimulate natural processes and encourage the insects, invertebrates, dung beetles, earthworms and mycorrhizal fungi within the soil.

Unfortunately, more recently farming practices have become more and more reliant on inputs, such as fertiliser and supplementary feed. These are damaging to the environment as well as the economics of small farm businesses.

As a result of these issues, we have chosen to farm regeneratively. Regenerative agriculture aims to continually improve the environment, including our soil, biodiversity and capture carbon. There are numerous methods to achieve regenerative agriculture, allowing farmers to pick the best option for their landscape.

**Subtitle:**

In nature, nothing exists in isolation.

Herbivores once existed in vast numbers across almost every environment on earth.

Co-evolving with soil, plants and wildlife,  
they are a critical part of healthy landscapes.

If we just abandoned the land and didn't have any animals here, then our farm would become dominated by rank vegetation with no renewal or regeneration. The soil would become infertile with nothing to feed the wildlife above and below ground. Our ecosystem would collapse.

Cattle, ponies, pigs and our wild red and roe deer are keystone species that evolved here in Britain, and therefore these are the main animals that we have decided we must have here to maintain healthy soil and regenerate the ecosystem on our farm.

The farm is fairly typical for a Lake District fell farm, formed by glaciers millions of years ago, but gradually developed and landscaped by our ancestors over thousands of years. The farm goes from the lake all the way up to the top of the fell, with what would have traditionally been our hay meadows lower down the valley, with varying degrees of rougher grazing, wood pasture and ancient woodlands as the elevation of the land changes.

**Subtitle:**

Truly natural landscapes have a diversity of grazers.

Each diverse grazing species – both domestic and wild - play a unique role in sustaining the ecological health of a place.

Since heritage breeds evolved with local environments and climates for centuries,  
their genetic diversity is invaluable.

To preserve its unique ecological identity, farmers like Sam & Claire can choose the best breed to help regenerate the existing natural landscape.

We have been very particular about the breed of cattle we have chosen for our farm. We have a suckler herd of Shorthorn Cattle, which are native to northern England. Shorthorn cattle are a hardy breed that can survive outside in the northern British climate all year round, but they are also a breed that can grow well in our fields lower down the valley. Our beef is certified pasture-fed, which means that we don't feed any human edible grains to fatten them – we let them grow slowly and naturally.

At Gowbarrow, we are applying two main practices, one that is suitable for summer and the other for winter. During the summer we “mob graze” our lower fields. We always aim to keep them in one mob with several generations all running together, and we move them to fresh grazing as often as possible, sometimes daily, sometimes every few days. We achieve this by using electric fencing to break up our big fields into small paddocks. We do this for several reasons. Firstly, as herd animals, they evolved this way, and we find that they are far more content when together as one group. Secondly, this emulates the way that predators such as wolves would have kept wild herbivores bunched and moving regularly - if they ever settled for too long in one place, the wolf would get them! Therefore, we think that this will be as closely matched to a natural system as we can replicate (without introducing a wolf!). – *maybe use the time lapse scene, in order here?*

By keeping the cattle in one group, we are also allowing the pasture to grow as long as possible in between grazing, and by doing this we are encouraging all of the vegetation to set to seed, which provides a massive habitat and food for our wildlife (insects, voles, mice and birds). It also means that any bare soil created by the livestock will be immediately provided with a seed source ready to germinate, and provide new grass growth.

We ensure that each paddock has a very long rest period after grazing – at least 90 days, and sometimes longer. This allows all plant species to fully recover and go to seed during the rest period, which ensures the pasture improves and remains diverse. We also aim to leave a long residual of grass after each block, which means the plants haven't been damaged and they can recover and grow back quicker.

When the cattle first enter a fresh paddock, the pasture is very tall, with ideally all plants set to seed. They start by grazing the tastiest plants in the paddock - a bit of clover here, a bit of cocksfoot there, and maybe a nibble on a hedgerow. We try to ensure that any plants or parts of plants that they don't eat are either fully trampled or covered in manure so that the carbon that the plant has captured by photosynthesis is compressed against the soil surface. This means the biomass that was above ground is now available to be digested by worms, beetles and other insects and ultimately returned to the soil. This process kickstarts the cycle of growth and renewal once again, feeding the plants, pulling more carbon dioxide from the air and returning it to the soil through the root system.

**Subtitle:**

Soil is nature's carbon bank.

It holds more carbon than air.

By building and protecting our soil through regenerative grazing practices, billions of tonnes of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> can be sequestered each year.

This balance, produced by a healthy grassland ecosystem,

is a natural way to reverse our warming climate,

one that herbivores, grasses and soil have been doing to cool the planet's atmosphere for millions of years.

During the winter, the cattle head up to the wood pasture, woodland and rough grazing and crags on the upland part of our farm. This area is left to largely empty during the summer (apart from the low density wild deer, pigs and ponies) so that the grasses can grow as long as possible, and the trees, shrubs and scrub can regenerate fully before winter. By using this large area of deferred grazing for winter, we are again closely matching the way that cattle evolved before domestication, and reducing the hay that we need to make right down so that we only need to feed hay in times of snow fall or when the weather is extreme. We find that the cattle especially thrive amongst trees and wood pasture, enjoying the shelter and shade but also the varied diet provided by the leaves, scrub and woodland vegetation.

The Fell Ponies we have here are an important part of helping us manage the different species of flora that we have on the farm. The way they graze and digest plant species is very different to cattle, which is important to maintain a diverse landscape.

The fell ponies are similarly kept in one group, however, we give them the full run of the wood pasture and our top fell to allow them to decide where to be and when. As fast running animals we feel that they need as much space as possible. Unlike cattle, which are ruminants, the ponies are monogastrics and so graze and digest in a completely different way, which helps to provide diversity within the pasture.

We also keep Kune Kune pigs, a breed native to New Zealand, which are particularly good at living outdoors here all year, and foraging mostly on what they have available to them naturally (mainly grasses, insects and worms, but in the autumn, they eat some of the acorns and beech mast that fall to the floor in our ancient woodlands). The disturbance that they provide to the soil aids natural regeneration by providing bare soil for seeds to germinate in.

We also have wild Roe and Red deer running across our farm and do cull these to maintain a sustainable population, and help our tree seedlings which can be severely damaged by deer overpopulation.

Historically the farm was used as a deer hunting park by the Howard family at least as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Early last century the park was turned into the landscape that is more representative of what we have today. When it was a deer park, we expect that it would have had a lot more trees, which were cleared to create the fields we see today. We are attempting to restore the area we call the park, to try and create a more diverse wood pasture as it must have been hundreds of year ago.

As farmers, we have a duty to produce healthy food for a growing population. We also need to prevent overgrazing and damage to our soils, and therefore we need to maintain a stable livestock population. As a result, we cull some animals every year, and sell the beef and pork direct. We also sell cattle, ponies and pigs to other farmers for them to use as breeding stock in order to maintain healthy genetics, and hopefully contribute to their regenerative farming systems.

After only 12 months farming in this way, we are already seeing positive changes to our environment. In the wood pasture, there are new tree seedlings naturally regenerating and many more species of wildflowers than we have ever seen before, including orchids, betony, wild thyme and ling heather. A Curlew was heard calling in one of our meadows here for the first time in living memory last year, and we heard it again this summer. These are all signs to us that we are doing the right things, and hopefully over time we will see more biodiversity return to the farm.

Subtitle:

Unlike other food movements,  
regenerative grazing is led by family farmers  
dedicated to reversing land degradation.

Often, we are told what is best for the planet by people who have little connection to the land like celebrities, food corporations and even chefs.

Yet, no one else has a stronger motivation or a closer relationship with the land than the independent, family farmer.

It's time we listen to those with an ecological consciousness.

As evident at Gowbarrow Hall farm, when managed thoughtfully in nature's image, livestock are not the problem, but our most powerful tool to regenerating our planet back to health.

#eat2REGENERATE