

Creating Livestock Habitat

Through Holistic Planned Grazing & Silvopasture

Location: County Sligo, Ireland

Producer: Clive Bright, Rare Ruminare



Introduction

Clive Bright farms at Rare Ruminare, where he produces 100% pasture-fed beef, certified organic, finished to an exceptional standard, and sold directly as beef boxes and rose veal.

His Statement of Purpose is simple and ambitious:

“To leisurely, profitably and perpetually farm an aesthetic landscape and produce the highest-quality meat possible.”

— Clive Bright

Holistic Planned Grazing and silvopasture are the foundation that make this possible.

An Ecology-First Mindset



The Four Ecosystem Processes

Clive approaches land stewardship through the lens of **the Four Ecosystem Processes**:

- Water Cycle
- Mineral Cycle
- Energy Flow
- Community Dynamics

Instead of fighting land that “isn’t performing,” he studies what nature is doing, what stage of succession the land wants to move toward, and how livestock can be part of that process.

Holistic Management, for him, is:

“A framework for making the best management decisions for the animals, the land, and your lifestyle — all within nature’s chaos.”

It empowers him to think for himself, observe closely, and make decisions that serve long-term resilience.

Restoring Energy Flow

Clive challenges a central assumption in modern grazing, “Why do we manage pastures at their shortest, least productive stage?”

Energy Flow



Why are most of our modern agricultural traditions based on these two?

Image by Clive Bright

In the webinar, [Successfully Grazing Through Seasonal Transitions](#), He shows how:

- taller, more diverse swards
- deeper root systems
- and greater leaf area

capture far more sunlight, withstand stress better (drought, frost), and create the soil structure needed to infiltrate heavy rain.

He builds plant height and diversity deliberately — not by adding inputs, but by using time, recovery, and managed animal impact.

Rebuilding a Functional Water Cycle

Clive says:

“To get to the root cause, you need to repair the water cycle.”

His grazing restores:

- Water infiltration
- Soil porosity
- Plant density
- Litter cover
- Root depth



A dysfunctional Water Cycle (ecologically stagnant, anaerobic, low pH) can be improved at low cost through grazing management.

Across landscapes, he observes the same pattern: when plants are allowed full recovery, **the soil transforms from anaerobic and capped into a living, permeable sponge.**

This shift underpins everything else — forage quality, stock performance, and resilience.

Silvopasture: Creating Livestock Habitat



The soil is functioning well on the left, where there are trees planted in the grassland, and poorly on the right.

Clive integrates **trees and grazing** to create the conditions livestock *want* to be in:

- shade and shelter
- thermal regulation
- access to browse trees / shrubs
- a more diverse diet
- deeper root systems improving infiltration

He sees silvopasture not as forestry or pasture, but as a **shared landscape** where animals, trees, fungi, and grasses co-create a stable, self-renewing ecology.

Tree roots fracture compacted layers, cycle minerals, bring moisture up from depth, give shade and shelter.

Livestock prune, fertilise, and stimulate understorey growth without damaging the trees — provided grazing periods are short and recovery is long.



Animal Welfare = Productivity = Profit

Clive demonstrates how natural habitat improves animal behaviour and performance. Animals under tree cover:

- move more calmly
- regulate temperature better
- utilise energy more efficiently
- choose from a wider range of plants

A diverse diet, reduced stress, and improved microclimates lead directly to better growth and higher-quality meat — without additional feed.

Community Dynamics & Diversity



“Diversity is self-organising and builds resilience into the system.”

Clive's management encourages diversity across:

- plant species
- insect life
- fungi
- livestock diets
- soil biology

The result is a system that recovers quickly, adapts to stress, and supports consistent forage production year after year.

A New Aesthetic for Grazing Landscapes

Clive challenges the “lawn syndrome” — the cultural preference for short, tidy grass. Instead, he makes the case for:

- taller plants
- layered vegetation
- woodland pasture
- complexity
- life in every direction



Clive encourages farmers everywhere to rethink what “good land” looks like.

“Where nature thrives is a great place for a cow to live.”

— Geraint Powell, Nuffield Scholar

Conclusion

What Clive shows — through his own practice— is that livestock aren’t the problem. They’re the right tool, in the right hands, with the right timing.

His farm demonstrates that by using plants, trees, grazing animals, and better grazing management to rebuild soil structure, **it is possible to graze even through Winter in a 1300 mm annual rainfall habitat.**

This is the essence of working with ecology to improve profitability.