

Creating a Brighter Future Project

Report from Meetings with Hill Farmers July 2019

The Uplands Alliance

The Uplands Alliance seeks to bring together practitioners, researchers and those involved in policy. By bringing evidence and practice together we aim to serve as a “policy lab”, piloting new approaches for delivery of policy, evaluating existing policy and practice and identifying, and seeking to fill, gaps in our knowledge.

Following the vote to leave the EU, there is an opportunity to create a future where policy and schemes recognise the special characteristics of the uplands and reward those that manage the land to maintain and enhance benefits for society.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Defra is developing plans to support the delivery of public goods through Environmental Land Management (ELM) after leaving the EU.
- 1.2 Within its remit to champion those who manage the land, the Uplands Alliance (UA), as part of the Creating a Brighter Future Project (CABF), is seeking to represent the views of hill farmers in the English uplands in the debate that surrounds the development of ELM. A project summary is at Enclosure 1.
- 1.3 With financial support from the Prince's Countryside Fund, CABF approached Defra about engaging with hill farmers as part of the ELM development process.

HILL FARMER MEETINGS

2 London Meeting

- 2.1 The CABF project facilitated a meeting between hill farmers and staff from the ELM team in London, on 18th March 2019.
- 2.2 The hill farmers came from all parts of the English Uplands (see the list at Appendix 1) and were selected to attend for being active farmers who did not normally get involved in discussions about policy at a national level. The aim was to attract a diverse mix of people (age, gender, type of farm) from as many as possible of the upland areas in England. The attendees would also be encouraged to play a role in taking the discussion forward in their respective localities.

- 2.3 Nine hill farmers attended. The notes from the meeting are at Enclosure 2, which includes a full attendance list.

3 Local Meetings

- 3.1 The London meeting was deemed to be a success and it was agreed that the hill farmers should set up local meetings in their parts of the uplands. The aim would be to involve other hill farmers and for the discussion to provide a broader perspective of the issues for upland farming associated with leaving the EU and the development of ELM.
- 3.2 Defra agreed to attend these meetings and a programme was established. A list of the meetings is at Appendix 2.

4 Aims of the local meetings

- 4.1 To seek the views of hill farmers on how best to adapt their businesses to the changes brought about by the exit of the UK from the EU
- 4.2 To enable hill farmers to help shape Defra's future farming policy including the proposed ELM scheme aimed at rewarding farmers and land managers for the delivery of public benefits.
- 4.3 To provide information to enable the Uplands Alliance and its partner organisations present the risks and opportunities for upland farming businesses with a view to influencing the development of future policy and helping to create a brighter future for England's upland communities.

5 Meeting Follow Up


- 5.1 Notes from each meeting were prepared and circulated to all who had attended.
- 5.2 The views expressed by the farmers and recorded in the meeting notes were subsequently collated to form this national, overview report.
- 5.3 The report of the hill farmers views is at Appendix 3; this has been structured around the three questions at the end of the presentation given by Defra at each of the meetings, with the addition of a 'Further considerations' heading to draw attention to some aspects of the forthcoming ELM proposals that have a particular importance for farmers in the English uplands:
- 5.3.1 What would encourage farmers to join ELM?
 - 5.3.2 What would be the barriers to participation for you?
 - 5.3.3 What environmental benefits do you think you're best placed to provide on your land?
 - 5.3.4 Further considerations.
- 5.4 Copies of this overview report have been sent to everyone who attended the local meetings.

6 Next Steps

- 6.1 Defra is asked to provide feedback on the points that have been made in a form that can be circulated to those who attended the meetings.
- 6.2 In advance of this, the CABF consultants would be pleased to discuss their findings that have been included in the report, if this would be helpful.
- 6.3 The Uplands Alliance would be keen to build on the goodwill and network of farmer contacts developed through the CABF project. This could include facilitating further discussions and researching farmer views on specific issues identified by Defra as the ELM development proceeds.
- 6.4 The CABF project does not have the funding to continue this work. Therefore, further work may be dependent on securing additional resources.

7 Acknowledgements

- 7.1 The Prince's Countryside Fund for the support for this project.
- 7.2 Defra for the support of the meeting in London and for providing representatives at the nine local meetings. This level of support during a very busy period is very much appreciated.
- 7.3 The hill farmers who have given their time to support the meeting in London and the local meetings.
- 7.4 The consultants who facilitated the meetings: Nigel Stone in the south, and Simon Thorp in the north.



Julia Aglionby
Chair
The Uplands Alliance

28th August 2019

Appendices:

- 1 List of English Upland Areas
- 2 Programme of Local Meetings
- 3 Hill Farmers views

Enclosures:

- 1 Creating a Brighter Future Project Summary
- 2 Notes from the Meeting held in London on 18th March 2019

Appendix 1

English Upland Areas

- 1 Borders and North Pennines
- 2 Lakes and Cumbrian Coast
- 3 Yorkshire Dales and Bowland
- 4 North York Moors
- 5 Peak District
- 6 South Pennines
- 7 Welsh Borders
- 8 Exmoor
- 9 Dartmoor
- 10 Bodmin Moor & South West DA

Appendix 2

CABF Local Meetings Programme

Date	Time	Location	Defra Rep
03-Jul-19	19:00	Exford, Exmoor	Tom Lewis (National Pilot)
04-Jul-19	12:30	National Park Offices, Helmsley	James Le Page (Advice and Guidance)
08-Jul-19	12:00	UTASS, Middleton-in-Teesdale	Louise Maguire (Testing and Trials)
08-Jul-19	19:00	Cardingmill Valley / Long Mynd, Shropshire	John Powell (Testing and Trials)
09-Jul-19	12:00	Bakewell Market	Sarah Hardy (Stakeholder Engagement and Strategy)
10-Jul-19	12:00	Low Hullock Howe Farm, Askham, Penrith, CA10 2QL	Louise Maguire (Testing and Trials)
12-Jul-19	12:00	Pavilion Cafe, Slaithwaite Cricket Club, HD7 5DQ	John Powell (Testing and Trials)
17-Jul-19	19:00	Postbridge, Dartmoor	Tom Lewis (National Pilot)
18-Jul-19	19:00	Bodmin Moor	Ellen Brown (Stakeholder Engagement Lead)

Uplands Alliance

A network for England's Uplands

Creating a Brighter Future Project

Summary of points raised by hill farmers during discussions held in the English Uplands July 2019

1 What would encourage farmers to join ELM?

1.1 Financial

- 1.1.1 Hill farms are facing the loss of BPS and a reduction in the income generated by sales. The ELM scheme must provide financial support to allow hill farmers to stay in business, and provide scope for investment.
- 1.1.2 Achieving succession is a key issue for many farmers. It is more difficult to attract and hold the young as successors to their parents, while there is uncertainty about being able to make a decent living.
- 1.1.3 The funding from agri-environment schemes is a vital part of farm income and can be seen as a form of diversification.

The overall level of funding for ELMS needs to be somewhere around the level of single farm payment we are getting now. If we lose the public money and income from produce at the same time, it will be a 'double whammy'.

- 1.1.4 Lump sum payments should be considered as a way to provide an incentive to achieve an agreed outcome. For example, this could include a move towards making a farm carbon-neutral.
- 1.1.5 If hill farmers are expected to carry out capital works to maintain the countryside infrastructure, funding must be provided at market rates.
- 1.1.6 Consideration should be given to making any support payments on a monthly basis. This would reduce the farm's concerns about cash flow.

1.2 Potential to draw additional funding from other sources

- 1.2.1 There should be flexibility to attract additional funding from other sources, or through other mechanisms (e.g. conservation covenants, Payments for Ecosystem Services).
- 1.2.2 Funding could be provided in return for achieving higher levels of public goods (e.g. access provision) or a specific outcome (e.g. water quality), or additional environmental measures (e.g. tree planting).

1.3 Long-Term View

- 1.3.1 A long-term commitment would remove uncertainty and allow effective business planning and development to take place. A 25-year agreement would be attractive.
- 1.3.2 There should be scope to adapt or change the agreement, while it is in place, to respond to changes in the farming business and other inputs to the farm.

1.4 Simplicity

- 1.4.1 The application process should be kept simple so that farmers can complete it themselves.
- 1.4.2 Record keeping should be kept to an absolute minimum.

I don't really know what is in my HLS, as someone else filled in the form.

1.5 Flexibility

- 1.5.1 Outcomes should be agreed at the start of the agreement and the farm left to deliver these in the best possible way.

Inflexibility is the flaw in the current system. I would rather have an outcome to aim at than be told to drop the stocking rate to a certain level.

- 1.5.2 A more flexible approach is required to allow different systems to be tried to match the opportunities on the farm.

I would prefer to have a written statement on what I'm going to do on the farm, rather than a map. For example, doing what is best for upland waders, space for birds to nest but not specifying on a map.

1.6 Advice

- 1.6.1 The provision of a high-calibre, suitably-trained local advisor should be considered.
 - The advisor would help with the application and delivery of the scheme.
 - Having a single point of contact would address the perceived lack of consistency in the advice being given to farmers.

Agri-environment works needs money plus locally based staff with a better rapport and understanding plus more trust. It would be a shame to lose the good work that has been done so far.

- 1.6.2 Farmers could be asked to help with the selection of people who are recruited to manage the scheme.

1.7 Monitoring and evaluation

- 1.7.1 Monitoring and evaluation systems should be included so that what is being delivered can be quantified. The systems should be kept simple so that farmers can complete the process.
- 1.7.2 On the Burren in Ireland, farmers do the inspections and other farmers pay them for the service with independent verification to check that it is all running properly.

1.8 ELM Design

- 1.8.1 Farmers should have some input to co-design the scheme, which will be flexible enough to meet local priorities.

I want the farm to look better from being in the scheme.

- 1.8.2 The new scheme should be less prescriptive. Farmers should be trusted to farm without so many restrictions; their enthusiasm, skills, experience and local knowledge should be recognised.
- 1.8.3 It is important to recognise that each farm is different for many reasons. A flexible approach is required to the way that support is provided to maximise the delivery of public goods from each farm.
- 1.8.4 Individual farms should be able to enter ELM, but it should also be possible to enter only part of a farm into the scheme.
- 1.8.5 The Scheme should provide payments to the farms that are already providing many environmental benefits. Payments should be made to maintain high standards and not just go to those farms where standards have slipped.
- 1.8.6 A requirement to enter an effective farm assurance scheme would ensure that quality and welfare standards were maintained at a high level. It would avoid paying public money to farms where standards are inadequate.

2 What would be the barriers to participation for you?

2.1 Insufficient funding or unreliable payments

- 2.1.1 Not enough income in hill farming to cover the costs and allow some profit to be made. This would result in a shortage of resources, (financial and labour) to deliver the requirements of the scheme.

2.1.2 Dilution of the funding available to farmers due to the desire to spread the limited funds round other interests that currently are not within the farming budget, such as village greens. There is a case that funding for farming should be agreed and ring-fenced.

2.1.3 A perceived move towards becoming ‘park keepers’ through a loss of production from farming and income as a result of being required to reduce stock numbers.

Success depends on the price of livestock – I would not be so keen to go into the scheme and be tied down if prices were high.

2.1.4 Continuing uncertainty about the timing of payments and the amount that will be paid.

2.1.5 Lack of any additional support for young farmers / new entrants to farming,

- This would result in young farmers being drawn away by greater salaries and security elsewhere.
- Some support to allow farmers to retire and make way for their successors will also be important.

2.1.6 Continuation of the penalty regime.

2.2 Lack of Transition

2.2.1 Many farms do not have the financial resilience to survive even a short-term funding gap.

2.2.2 Gaps in funding during the transition from the current BPS / CS regime to ELM should be identified and measures implemented to bridge them.

2.3 Collaboration

2.3.1 Collaborative working is an attractive concept, but it may be difficult to achieve in practice, especially on commons. A requirement for different types of farm to collaborate would be a barrier to participation.

2.4 Over-complication

2.4.1 Over-complication of the scheme, requiring disproportionate amounts of bureaucracy, and/or professional fees to complete applications.

The scheme sounds ridiculous and complicated and the prospect of having no market for lambs due to Brexit, phasing out payments and no money until 2024 makes me want to get another job!

2.4.2 A lack of clear objectives for the scheme that farmers can understand and engage with.

2.4.3 Too much external interference in the farm business for too little benefit.

2.5 Land tenure

2.5.1 The scheme must address how payments can be made to the active farmers on a common, who provide the environmental benefits when lots more people have rights.

2.5.2 A requirement in the scheme to have a minimum length of tenure of the land could be a barrier to participation as many tenants are only being given short-term agreements. These may not be long enough to deliver the requirements of the scheme.

2.5.3 Landlords should not be able to hold tenants / commoners to ransom over granting approval to enter schemes.

2.6 Concern over the long-term implications of participation in the scheme

2.6.1 In just 2 years, if farmers are to participate in ELMS, many will need to make significant long-term changes to their businesses that will affect the next generation, in what are already uncertain times.

2.6.2 Depending on the level of funding available through ELM, to maintain viable businesses, farmers may be faced with a choice to either move more towards rewilding or intensify their stock management enterprises - the middle-ground is at risk.

3 What environmental benefits do you think you're best placed to provide on your land?

3.1 Maintenance of the infrastructure of the countryside.

3.2 Good farming practices deliver good levels of biodiversity.

3.3 Provision of hefted sheep flocks; the value of these flocks which are the result of breeding over centuries should be acknowledged.

3.4 Hill farms are very close to being organic and therefore their management does not challenge natural processes.

South West Water say they get 80% of their drinking water from Bodmin, Dartmoor and Exmoor and it's the cleanest there is anywhere. We need to revalue what we do, but how do you value clean water?

3.5 Many hill farms are already delivering large amounts of public goods.

3.5.1 It was suggested that consideration should be given to acknowledging this by designating hill farming areas as Environmentally Favoured Areas.

3.5.2 In particular, as their management is often more extensive, Commons should be recognised as delivering large amounts of public goods.

- 3.6 Farmers are often the main manager of the land and are able to coordinate other management carried out in support of other interests that produce environmental benefits, such as sporting, forestry and recreation.

Support for shelterbelts would be brilliant, as they provide shelter and stop run-off.

- 3.7 Management to reduce the risk from wildfire. This would reduce the risk of environmental damage and the costs of the response by fire and rescue services.

4 Further considerations

4.1 Food production and public benefits

- 4.1.1 The majority of participants in the hill farmer meetings felt that the exclusion of food production from the definition of public benefits served to undervalue this core aspect of the farming business. It also reinforces the false dichotomy between producing food and producing environmental benefits when, in fact, we ought to be looking for synergies.

If we end up importing more food to help look after our environment but the environment is being hammered in other countries to produce the food, then we are exporting the problems.

- 4.1.2 UK farming provides locally produced high-quality food that does not have large numbers of ‘food miles’ associated with it.
- 4.1.3 The farming industry supports a wide range on ancillary businesses and helps underpin rural communities.

A criticism is that the scheme is separating livestock farming and the environment and it needs to capture that food production is a positive.

- 4.1.4 The role of farmers in the local communities is important. Their families have often been in the area for generations and they support the local community structures.

4.2 The need for authoritative sources of information on land management and the environment

- 4.2.1 All of the farmer discussions turned at some point, to the matter of defining and measuring public goods outcomes. This included aspects such as the capture and storage of carbon, and improving water quality.

- 4.2.2 It was clear from the discussions that there is a lot of information in circulation about the impacts of farming, forestry and land management in general on these public benefits. However, it was equally apparent that there was no clear advice available regarding its implications for farming in the UK versus other land management options (e.g. woodland creation and/or rewilding), and in, some cases, the evidence was contradictory.
- 4.2.3 To help address this lack of clarity, it would be helpful to have information available on the Defra website on the impacts of differing land management on climate change; water quality; flood risk etc. to enable farmers to develop plans to address these issues.

4.3 Recognition of existing delivery and the particular benefits of certain farming systems

- 4.3.1 The English uplands are rightly regarded as delivering a wide range of public benefits and this is recognised, for example, by the designation of many upland areas as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and by the designation of a high proportion of land in the uplands as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. This is in marked contrast with the most intensively farmed parts of lowland England where much has changed in the past fifty years and adverse impacts on the natural environment have been considerable.
- 4.3.2 Concern was expressed in many of the hill farmer discussions, that there was a risk that the existing public benefits they deliver might not be recognised if the ELM scheme placed a stronger emphasis on enhancement than on maintenance and management of existing environmental delivery.
- 4.3.3 Similarly, it was considered that certain farming systems were inherently better able to deliver public goods. A particular example is that of organic systems.

With organic farming you have proven environmental benefits as no sprays or artificial fertilisers are used, so the scheme should incentivise that.

- 4.3.4 Given the complexity of measuring specific outcomes such as carbon capture, water quality and biodiversity value, consideration ought to be given within ELMs to continuing to recognise and incentivise farming and land management systems that have been demonstrated to deliver greater environmental benefits.

4.4 Land tenure

- 4.4.1 Much of the land in the uplands is currently farmed and managed by tenant farmers. There is a widespread concern that an increased focus within any new scheme on the benefits delivered by the management of

land will encourage land owners to take a more active role in direct management of the land they own in order to maximise their financial return.

- 4.4.2 Clearly, this could reduce longer-term security for tenant farmers in the future and have an adverse impact on their livelihoods and the rural community more widely.

4.5 Commons

- 4.5.1 Much of England's common land is situated in upland areas and considerable public benefits can be delivered by appropriate management of commons. However, the interactions between owners, active rights holders and passive rights holders makes for significant complexity in the targeted delivery of specific outcomes.
- 4.5.2 For this reason, it is considered vital that consideration be given in the development of ELMS to the particular challenges of delivery on common land. It is understood that some of the proposed tests and trials will seek to address this issue.

4.6 Collaboration – is it a requirement?

- 4.6.1 In several of the discussions, considerable attention was given to the matter of collaboration between farms and whether this would be a requirement for entry into the new scheme.
- 4.6.2 Such a requirement would be seen by many potential participants as a significant barrier to participation, particularly where neighbouring farms differed considerably in their farm production (e.g. a hill farm with neighbouring chicken and dairy farms) and/or in their business targets.
- 4.6.3 More positively, collaboration or cooperation was seen as desirable where it can be achieved, and necessary for the delivery of certain outputs such as water quality and flood management within a catchment.
- 4.6.4 To achieve this level of collaboration, it was consistently believed that some form of external facilitation would be required by a trusted third party.
- 4.6.5 It is understood that this aspect of the new scheme will also be the subject of certain tests and trials.

4.7 Who prepares the Land Management plans? What format?

- 4.7.1 The preparation and format of land management plans was a further focus for considerable discussion.
- 4.7.2 While the emphasis is being placed on farmers preparing their own plans, if the scheme is to deliver maximum impact, these individual plans will need to be complementary within specific areas and regions, for example, across a catchment or within a protected landscape.

- 4.7.3 As well as preparing their own plans, there was support for farmer engagement in the preparation of the higher-level planning.

4.8 Transition arrangements

- 4.8.1 It is well understood that many of the achievements of previous agri-environment schemes area at risk of being lost if there is a significant gap between the end of historic schemes and the commencement of ELM in 2024.
- 4.8.2 While this has been addressed, for example by the annual roll-on of HLS schemes, a more seamless set of arrangements would be of benefit if farmers are not to lose confidence in the new scheme.

4.9 Long-term commitment

- 4.9.1 Payment rates and agreement duration should consider the ability to manage land against the long-term commitment such as through tree planting or coastal realignment.
- 4.9.2 In certain situations, it is conceivable that maximum public benefit might be achieved by moving the management of some land in certain locations away from farming towards some other land use on a more-or-less permanent basis. Examples include the establishment of wetlands; restoration of mires; provision of new woodlands, and creating more space for nature through rewilding and or linking corridors as proposed in the Lawton review.
- 4.9.3 Clearly, such a change has very long-term and intergenerational implications as well as the more obvious implications for the commercial value of the land subject to such change. It is suggested, therefore, that consideration be given to ways in which such changes might be incentivised over very long timescales.