

# Agriculture policy for A Living Landscape



The future of farming is key to the health of our natural environment



Field margin in arable farmland (photo: Laurie Campbell)

## How can agriculture policy help create A Living Landscape?

Agricultural policy determines how most of our landscape is managed (over 70% of UK land is used for agriculture). It is the key to securing better management and restoration of our natural environment across the UK. The current Common Agricultural Policy Health Check provides an opportunity to review and improve this policy.

Supported by the Government, sustainable farming can protect soils, safeguard water supplies, create ecologically-rich landscapes, and play a greater role in flood management, as well as providing us with food and viable businesses for farmers. Small-scale habitat creation, hedgerow restoration and changes to grazing management can create a joined-up and 'permeable' countryside which is better for wildlife and people – A Living Landscape (see Fig 1). The Wildlife Trusts work with farmers across the UK and last year we provided more than 10,000 days of land management advice.

In the UK, over £3 billion per year is spent on support systems for farmers. In the past the production-led nature of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has driven changes to agriculture. In recent years, CAP has begun to support more environmentally-friendly production methods.

### How are farming subsidies currently being spent?

Currently, CAP funds are split into:

- \* Pillar 1 (£2,354m) providing support on all farmable land regardless of production via the Single Farm Payment (SFP)
- \* Pillar 2 (£382m) broadly rewarding farmers for environmental management

## What do we propose?

### Use the CAP Health Check to drive much-needed changes

The EU is currently reviewing the CAP under the 'Health Check' process and looking ahead to the reforms needed in 2013. This is partly a response to challenges including climate change and the need to redirect subsidies to safeguard the natural environment. The Wildlife Trusts believe that CAP resources should fund sustainable land management that safeguards our natural environment, not just our wildlife but also the services that land provides, such as clean water, carbon storage and flood alleviation. The Health Check provides an opportunity for the Government to press for:

### Transferring additional funds from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 so more is spent on protecting our natural environment and helping us to adapt to climate change:

- \* Paying land managers to deliver environmental services, such as carbon sequestration and flood water management (see Fig 2)
- \* Ensuring that Pillar 2 funds are available to protect wildlife-rich areas, such as Local Wildlife Sites; and investing Pillar 2 funds in the creation of ecological networks that improve the permeability of the landscape

### And at the same time we need to:

- \* Ensure there are better environmental outputs from agri-environment schemes. Pillar 1 funds that remain should be used to increase environmental benefits by boosting the cross compliance element of the Single Farm Payment.

In England, the Higher Level Scheme (HLS) of Pillar 2 is providing high quality management and restoration, but over a limited area. Tir Gofal, the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship agri-environment scheme, is the first in Europe aimed at promoting whole farm conservation and management.

	Pillar 1	Pillar 2 (agri-environment schemes)
England	SFP (£1,520m)	Entry and Higher Level Schemes (ELS/HLS) (£269m)
Scotland	SFP (£388m)	Land Management Contracts (£59m)
Wales	SFP (£220m)	Tir Gofal, Tir Cynnal, Tir Cymen (£39m)
N Ireland	SFP (£226m)	Countryside Management Scheme (£15m)

Figures for 2006<sup>1</sup>

## Set-aside loss

While not designed as an environmentally-focused CAP measure, much set-aside land has benefited wildlife. However, last year around 200,000 hectares – an area the size of Nottinghamshire – were lost when the set aside requirement was reduced to 0%. The Wildlife Trusts believe this loss should be offset by the introduction of an environmental fallow requirement on all arable farms to include buffer strips, winter stubbles and low input crops.

## What are the barriers to agricultural policy delivering A Living Landscape?

### Political upheaval

Food security is dominating the agricultural agenda along with the increase of biofuels. Rapid rises in fuel and fertiliser prices are reducing the profitability of more marginal land and farmers are under pressure to cope with the impacts of climate change such as unseasonal flooding.

### Reduced impact of agri-environment support and cross compliance

Funding for Pillar 2 is comparatively small given our urgent environmental needs. While England's Entry Level Scheme has an annual budget of £150m it does not deliver high quality results for wildlife. The Single Farm Payments under Pillar 1 also have limited environmental requirements under cross compliance measures.

<sup>1</sup> Figures from Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2007 Defra (2007) for calendar year 2006

## Case studies



(photo: Emily Brown)

**Fig 1. Conserving wildlife-rich landscapes –** Dorset Wildlife Trust's Pastures New project works with local farmers and communities to enhance and restore species-rich grasslands in West Dorset. The project provides advice, business and marketing support and capital funding, some of which comes from Entry and Higher Level Stewardship.



(photo: Nick Mott)

**Fig 2. Delivering ecosystem services –** The Farming Floodplains for the Future project, run by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, forms part of the Government's 'Making Space for Water' programme. Through the Higher Level Stewardship farmers are paid for delivering floodwater storage by creating wet grassland in river floodplains.