



# High Nature Value Farming in the Upper Dales

## Report Summary

*Jonathan Brunyee & Gwyn Jones*



EUROPEAN FORUM ON  
NATURE CONSERVATION  
AND PASTORALISM



# Farming in the North Pennines AONB

Desktop research and analysis using:

- *Defra June Survey for the North Pennines AONB*
- *Farm Business Survey*
- *Desktop research*

We looked at:

- *Land use*
- *Cropping and stocking*
- *Scheme participation*
- *Farm income*



# Farming in the North Pennines AONB

- Utilisable Agricultural Area (188,000 ha) comprises 95% of AONB; includes 116,000 ha commercial holdings, 55,000 ha common land, 17,000 ha other holdings
- Commercial holdings: 50% permanent grass; 45% rough grazing. Common land is in addition.
- 671 commercial holdings. Average farm size 51ha (2010) excluding common land. LFA grazing livestock farms predominate.
- 2000-2008: number of farm holdings (+30%), mainly small. Polarisation in terms of farm size.



# Farming in the North Pennines AONB

- 2000-2008: total cattle (-11%), suckler cows (-18%), total sheep (-12%), breeding ewes (-18%).
- 2000-2008: total labour (-3%); decrease in full-time farmers and employees; more part-time farmers
- 91% of UAA under agri-environment scheme. Total payments worth £12.6m p.a. (84% = 'ELS/HLS')
- Farm Business Income – average for LFA grazing livestock farms in NE region = £40,012p.a. Increased in recent years.
- SPS & Agri-environment income very important. Agricultural output from commercial LFA grazing livestock farms estimated to be c.£54m p.a.



# High Nature Value Farming in the Upper Dales

- Semi-natural pastures and meadows are one of the cornerstones of HNV farmland and European farmland biodiversity.
- Your farms contain outstanding examples of these habitats, both on the inbye and on the open fell

They support.....

- a significant proportion of the UK resource of species-rich upland hay meadows
- virtually the entire English population of black grouse
- some of the highest densities and most important populations of breeding wading birds in the UK



# Ecosystem Services in the Upper Dales

- “the benefits provided by ecosystems that contribute to making human life both possible and worth living” (*UK NEA 2011*)
- Key services provided by farming in the North Pennines include:
- **Provisioning:** food and fibre; timber and wood fuel; renewable energy; water availability (supply)
- **Regulating:** climate (peaty soils cover 60% of area) in terms of carbon storage and carbon capture through appropriate management of moorlands; soil erosion; water quality; water flow (flood control) and pollination



# Ecosystem Services in the Upper Dales

- **Cultural:** sense of place/inspiration; sense of history; tranquillity; recreation (open access over 60% of area, grouse shooting); and biodiversity (46% designated SPA for biodiversity value)
- **Much** is already being provided by you
- **Some** of this is rewarded through publicly-funded agri-environment schemes (and greening from 2014)
- In the future, there is potential to **deliver/earn more** via Payments for Ecosystem Services especially in relation to carbon storage and sequestration and flood control (as in South Pennines and other upland areas)



# Farmer Survey

- A central element in the project was to ascertain your views, needs and aspirations in relation to your farming operation and the future sustainability (linking to HNMF)
- Looking at economic, ecological and practical issues
- A random stratified sample of 25 farmer were was taken
- This represented 44% of all holdings in the study area
  - *15 interviewees were in Weardale*
  - *1 in Tynedale*
  - *9 in Teesdale*

Lots of great information ....thank you... Gwyn to cover some of key issues arising





# Key issues arising from the farmer survey

*Gwyn Jones*



EUROPEAN FORUM ON  
NATURE CONSERVATION  
AND PASTORALISM



## What I'll cover:

- Confusion in agri-environment; lack of value given to farmer knowledge
- Meadows as an example of poor results for both agriculture and environment
- Unintended results of agri-environment for the farming system
- Some aspects of the economic health of farming
- Lack of independent advice?



## What I won't cover:

- Availability of land
- Slipper farming
- Planning laws
- Regional policy for upper dales
- Apprenticeships
- Animal health rules
- Consumer attitudes
- Prices
- .....etc.



- You'll have to read the report!

# Confusion in agri-environment message

- Rush control
- Cattle on the hill

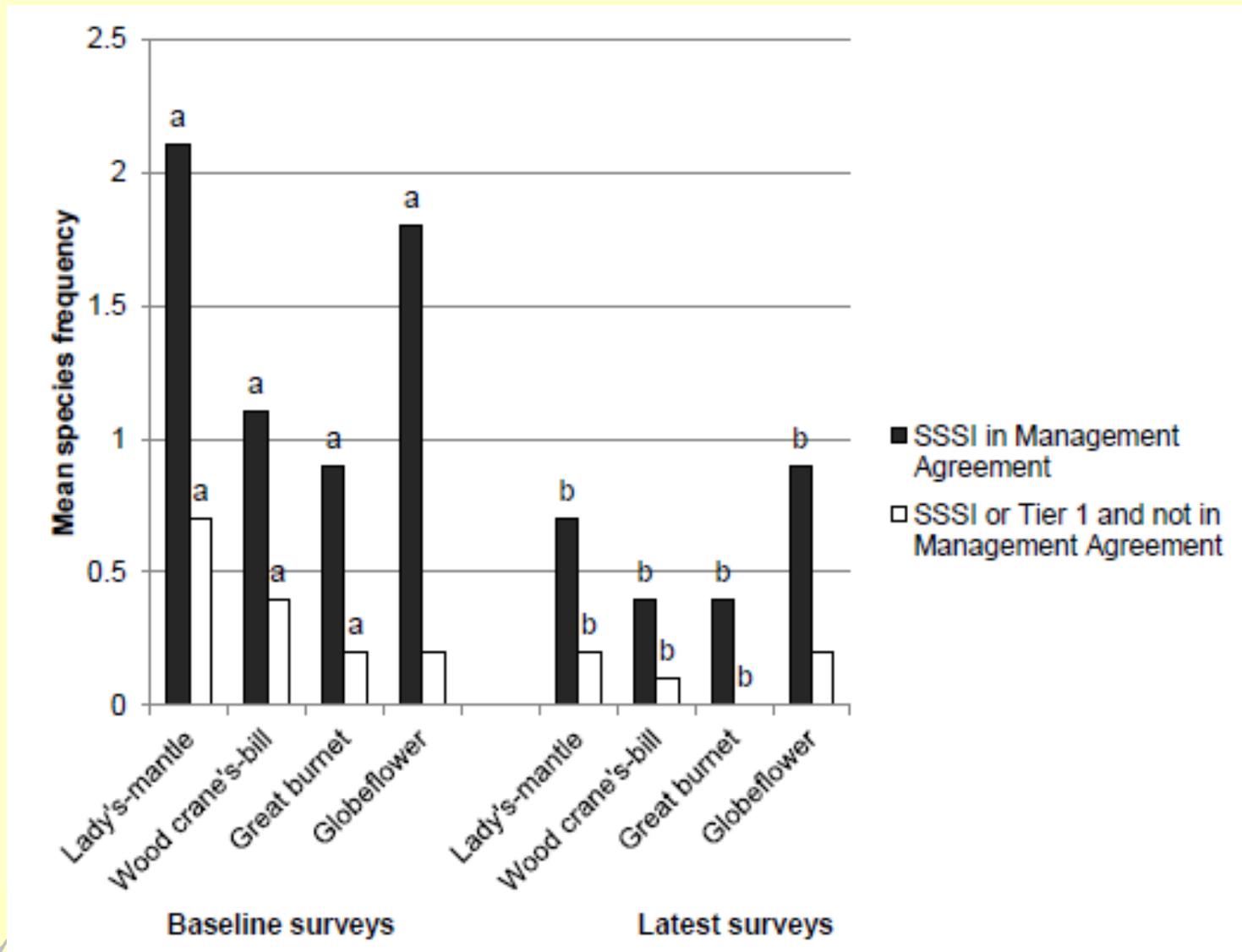
*It was a good allotment once over, but now it's going rushy due to a lack of stock. About 15 years back the ESA folk wanted cows off the allotment, now Natural England wants them back on, so now they are on again (Farmer 33)*

- Attitude to lime and basic slag
- Sheep vs. rabbits

*The fell's getting overgrown. It was never hard eaten, and never was very heathery, so it's the white grass and rushes which have expanded. The rabbits had a bad winter - it really killed them off. But then Natural England came out after and said it was undergrazed and we need to put more sheep on. And the scheme is paying for estate to keep the rabbits down!' (Farmer 36)*



# Meadow ecological quality dropping



(Starr-Kedde, 2013)

# Meadow agricultural quality dropping



*'I have meadows which people liked at start of ESA which are now 'not what we wanted' for HLS, despite all the years of faithful obedience to the ESA prescriptions. They liked these damp meadows, and then they got meadowsweet, marsh marigold or rush and it is completely unproductive. The very thing they set out wanting, they ended up stopping us doing, which is managing the meadows as productive flower-rich fields.'*  
(Farmer 17)

*I have a neighbour whose fertilised field was so good that they were using it as a seed source, but who was then told that he is not allowed to fertilise it' (Farmer 36)*

Farmer 37's dry SSSI field had been taken over by soft brome while he was in ESA; its quality was judged so poor that he was not allowed to enter it into HLS



# Quantity of hay dropping



Former yield (bales)	Recent yield (bales)
200 (Farm 7)	150 (Less strict)
47 (Farm 7)	22 (Strict HLS)
100 (Farm 41)	60

- *We used to have half as much hay again as we needed, but now we don't get enough. You get one good crop in 5 years (farmer 36)*
- *It used to be time to cut the hay when it came to top of wall; now it only reaches half way up' (farmer 41).*



# Cost to farmer AND environment?

*We have more costs to get the same result with our stock AND we're seeing the land going back – farmer 48*

*I'm not sure that all of what I'm being asked to do is giving results – the rush cover on my allotment is an example. It's especially bad when I've compromised on numbers and yield - farmer 23*



## Farmer's experience undervalued?

- *People who don't know advise people who do - farmer 17*
- ***It would be good to have training for [AE] officers; attending a seminar or reading a book is not enough! – farmer 54***
- *Let's have 'talkability' – not from a book and no recourse to threats straight away! - farmer 33*
- ***They take no notice of a farmer's experience - farmer 44***
- *We CAN work together, but only if they can listen to farmers - farmer 37*
- ***They need to show more respect to farmer's knowledge in way things are managed. The dales not as pretty as they were! I think you need to monitor what you've had people doing and adjust things accordingly - farmer 48***



# Unintended consequences....

- Agri-environment has the effect of:
  - Reducing the stock on fell and how long it can be up there
  - Controlling/reducing the inputs to meadows and delaying mowing
- Farmer 41 *'We can respond to the [wider] pressures [on farm economies in the Dales] by getting bigger, but then we end up with ranching and having to compromise on the environment. Or we can increase our stock numbers and buy in more stuff, and that also involves compromises on the environment. The way I see it, if we want something else, there's no alternative but to pay for it.'*

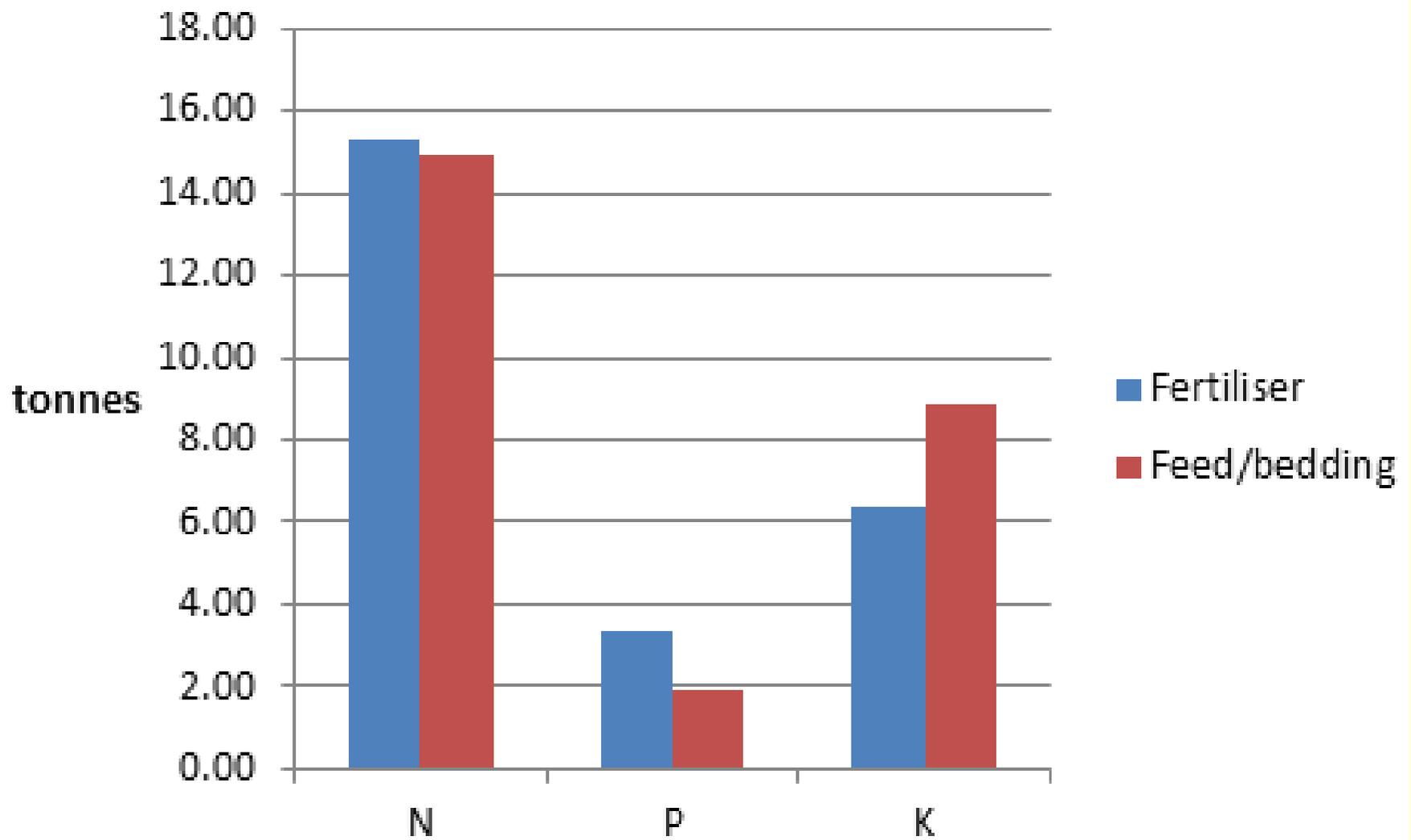


# Payments taken together aren't encouraging an extensive system

- Agri-environment seems not to be 'paying for it'?
- *Farmer 23: 'Being a High Nature Value farmer is good, but seems to come at a price!' - TO THE FARMER!*
- *Payment rates need to be increased to reflect the costs' - farmer 36*
- Not possible to expand to compensate
  - Little land comes up
  - Some sporting owners now trying to manage fell without sheep
  - Rents increasing, partly reflecting ability to 'slipper farm' the subsidies
- So, intensification: *People used the money to buy round bales, bringing in thistles and the like, when it was maybe expected that they would reduce their stock' – Farmer 17.*

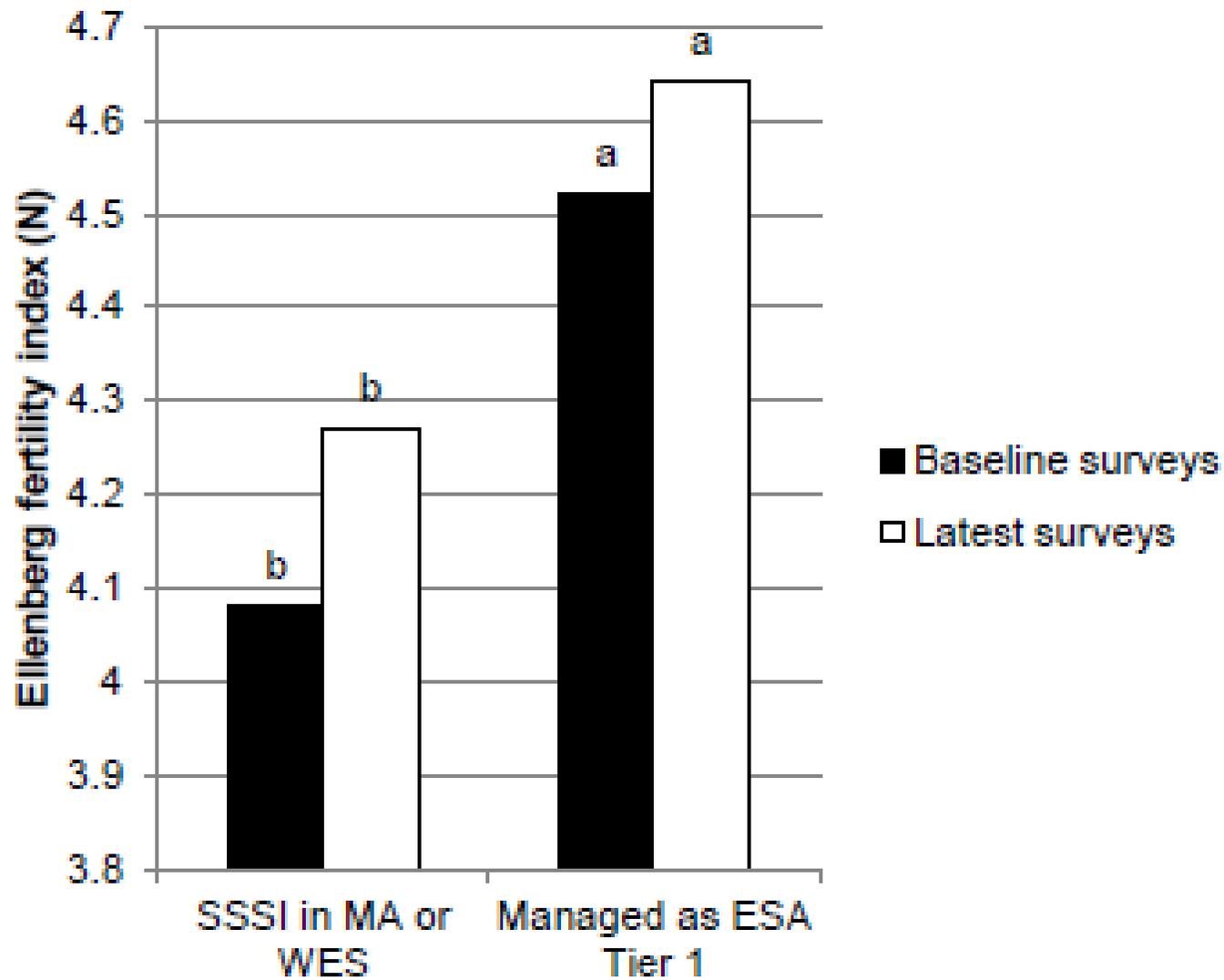






**Figure 21. Comparison of bought-in N, P and K inputs by source**





(Starr-Kedde, 2013)

## Relative importance of income sources

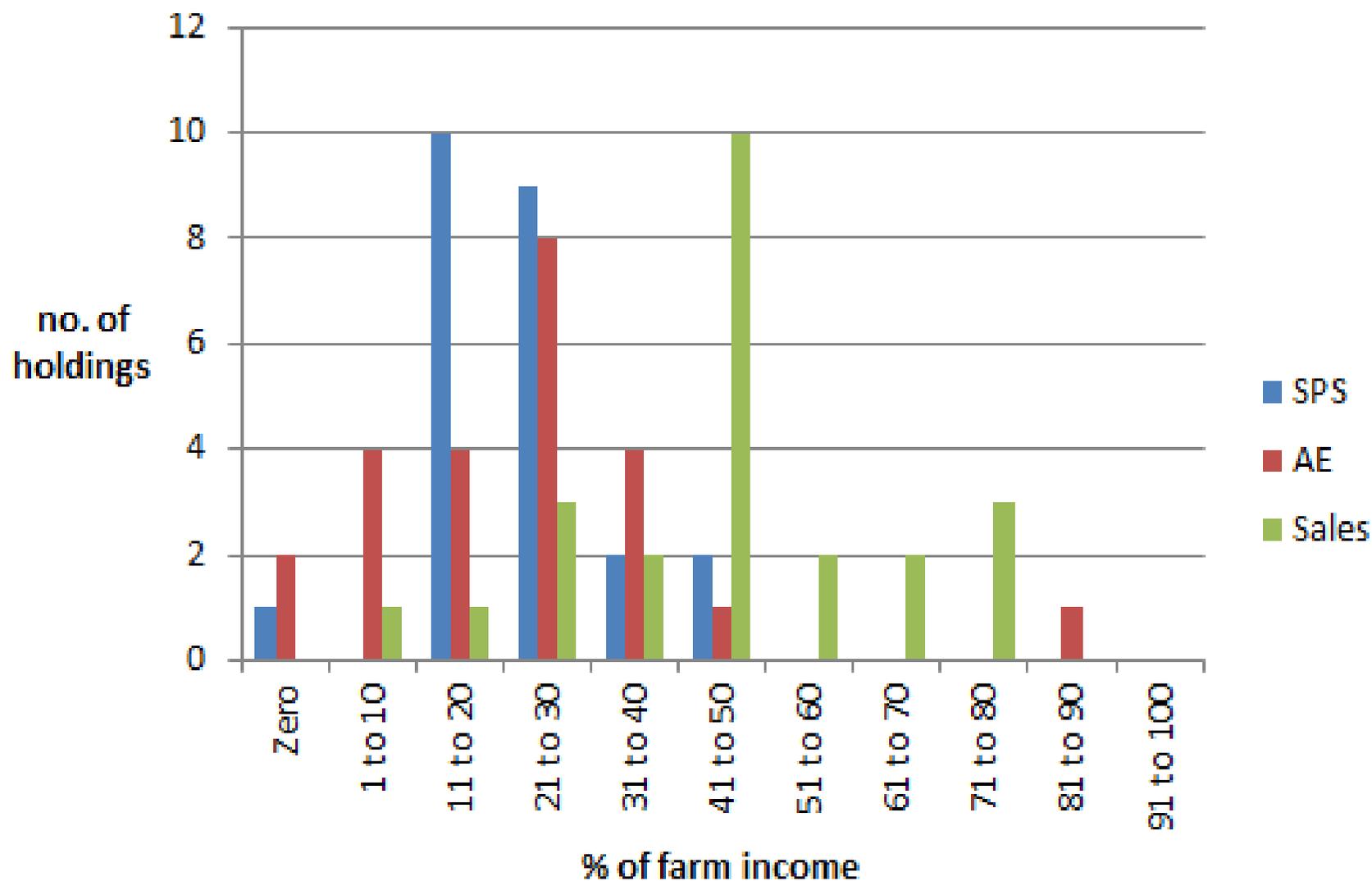
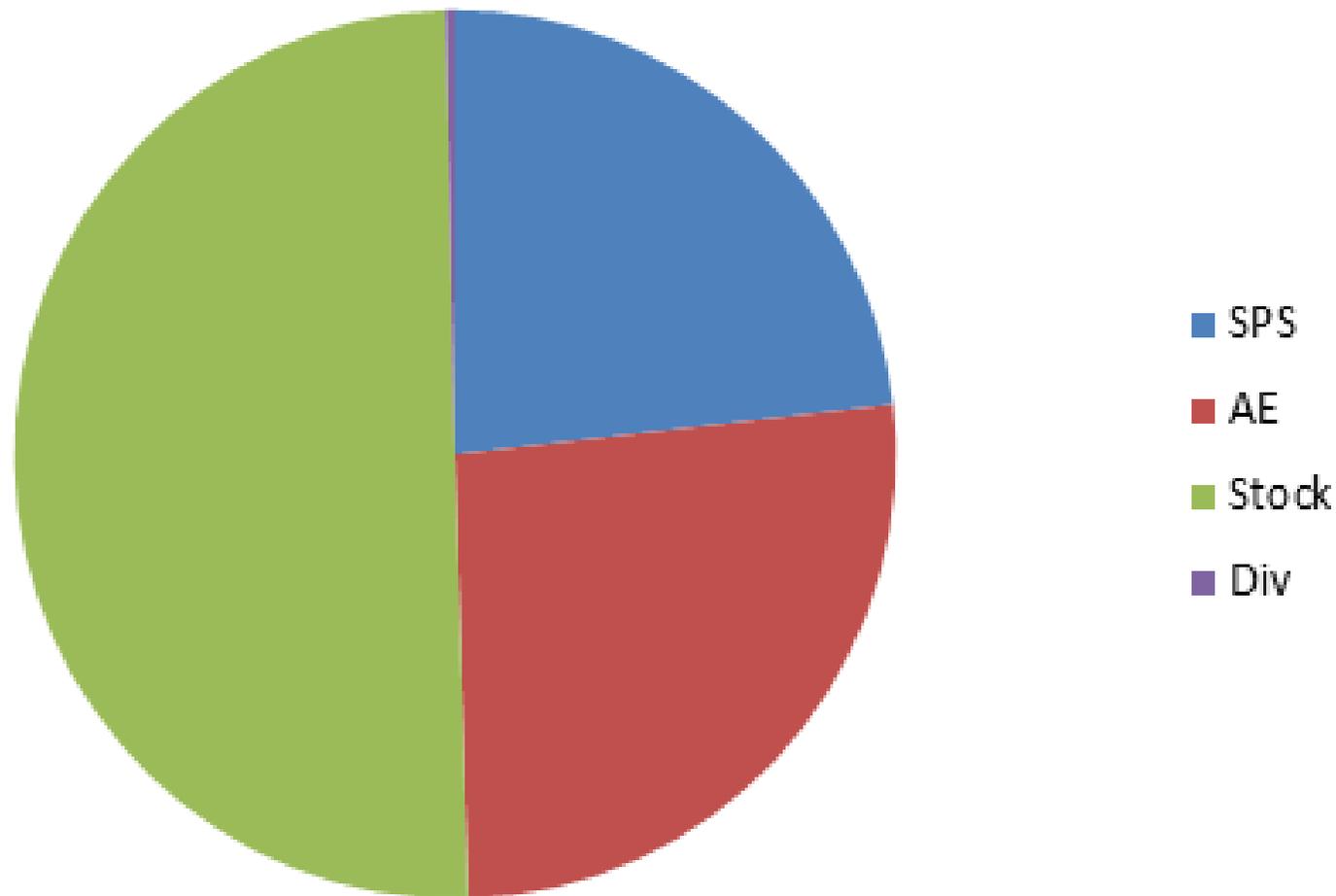


Figure 23. Relative importance of income sources in farm output (diversification ignored as trivial)

# Relative importance of income sources



**Figure 24.** Breakdown of estimated total income for 13 'non-intensive' farms in the upper dales



# Livestock system has huge costs on many farms

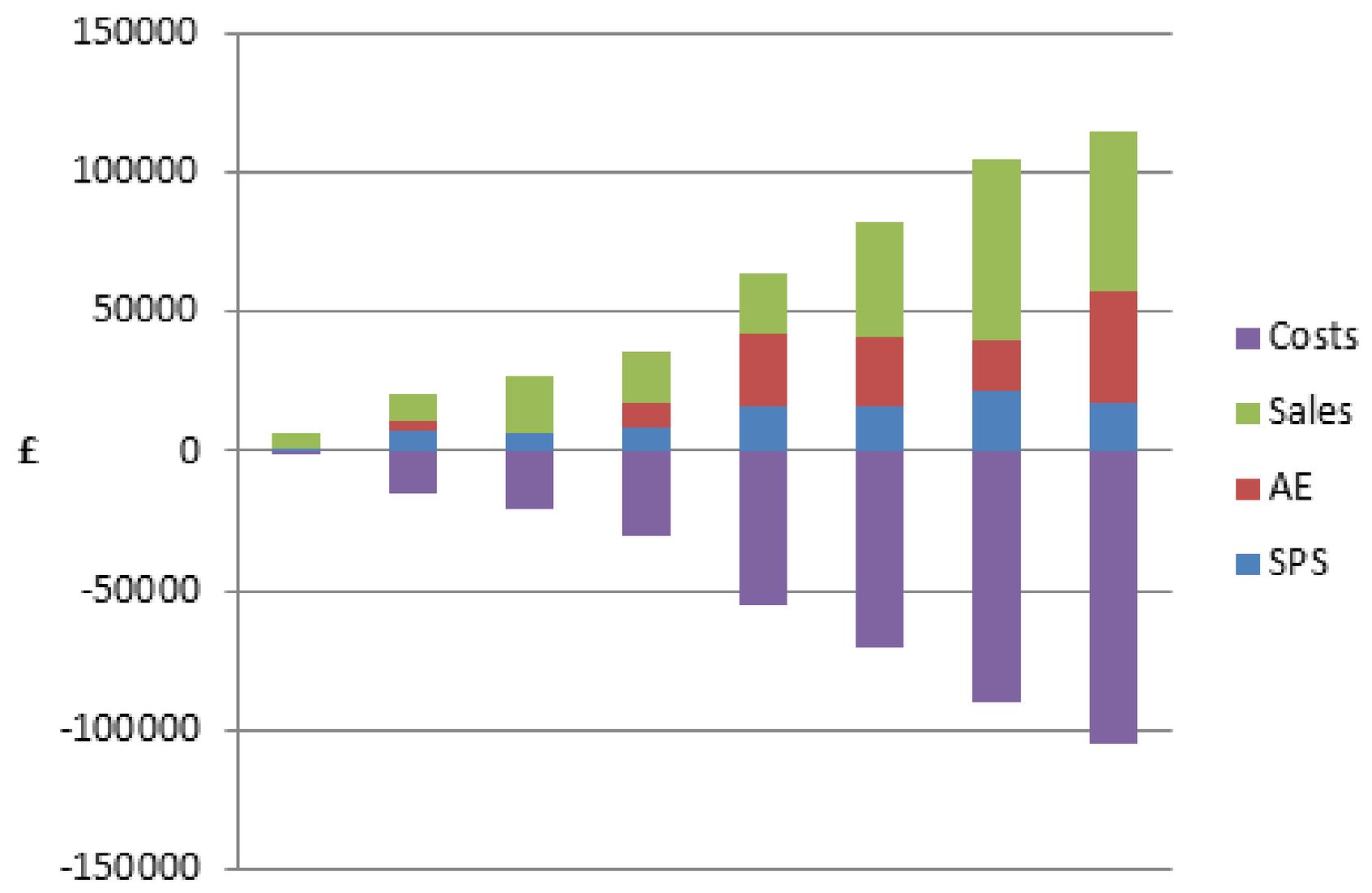


Figure 25. Optimistic assessment of output and costs on 8 upper dales farms

# High vulnerability AND low incomes!

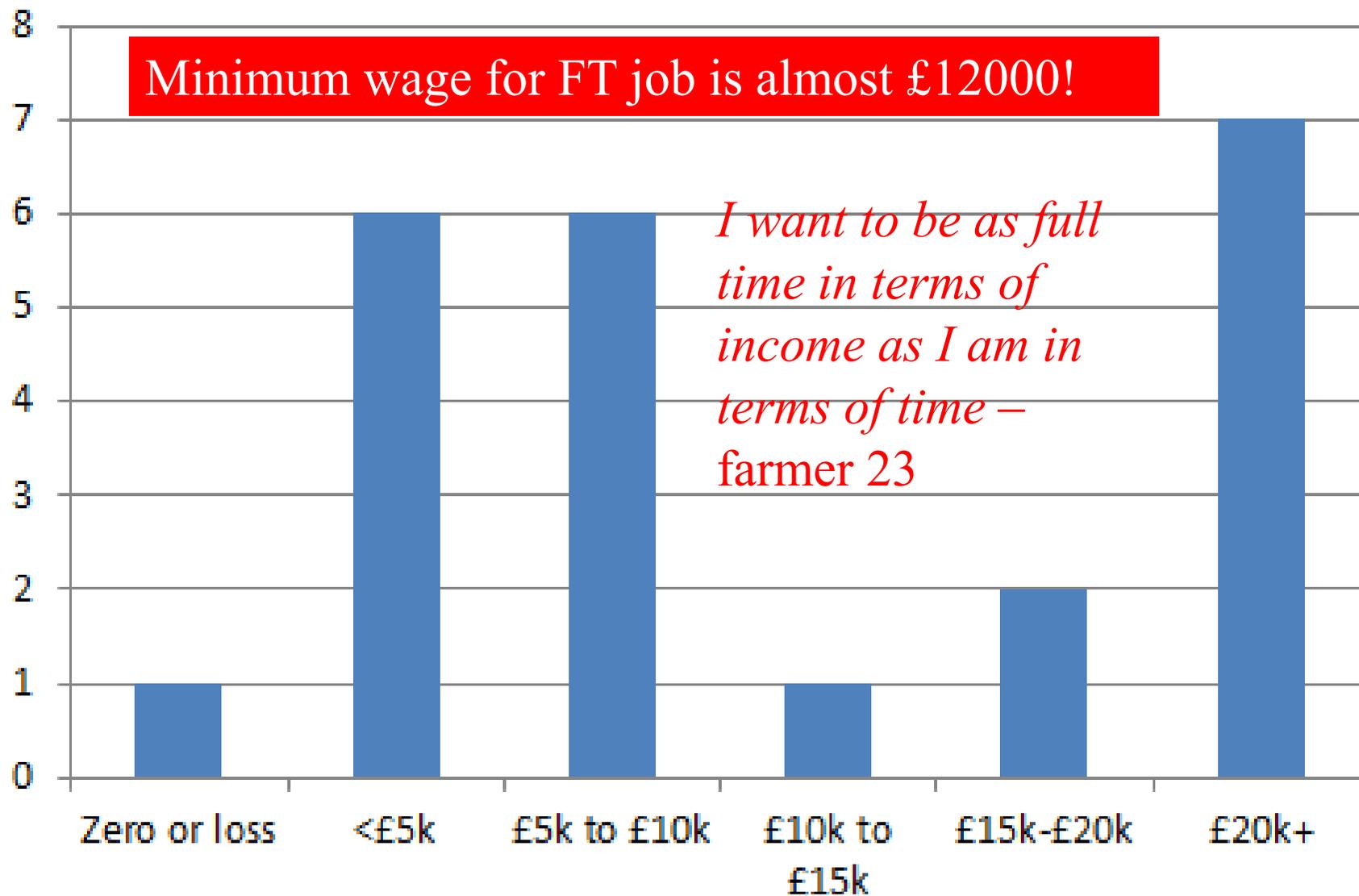


Figure 22. Variation in reported Farm Business income

# Lack of independent advice

- On farm business decisions
  - Whether to invest in capital works
  - Whether to take on land and on what conditions/ at what rent
- Agri-environment
  - On the farm
  - On the common/stinted pasture
- Difficult for advice service to be independent when short of money...



# Farmer Questions and Feedback

**Comments on please.....**

**Report coverage**

**HNVF and ESS**

**Key issues arising**

