High Nature Value Farming in the Northern Upland Chain – time for action

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What is High Nature Value farmland?
What is HNV farming?

- Farming that creates conditions of high biodiversity (diversity of wild fauna and flora);
- and/or maintains particular wildlife species of conservation concern (threatened species).
- This “nature value” results from particular farming characteristics.
Figure 2  General relationship between agricultural intensity and biodiversity

Source: after Hoogeveen et al., 2001 (see Appendix B for further explanation).
Photos: Peter Veen (left); Vincent Wigbels (right).
Landscape diversity and species richness

Key characteristics of HNV farming.

Low-intensity in terms of:
- Livestock / ha
- Nitrogen / ha
- Biocides / ha

% land under semi-natural vegetation:
- Grass, scrub
- Trees
- Field margins

Type 1

HNV

Type 2

Diversity of land cover:
- Crops
- Fallows
- Grass, scrub
- Trees
- Water bodies
LOW biodiversity, though may have ‘nature value’.
HNV farming characteristics:

- **The type of land cover:**
  - Mainly semi-natural pasture or meadows
  - Or a mosaic of semi-natural pasture with crops

- **The way the land cover is used for production:**
  - Low intensity use of land, livestock, machinery, chemical inputs and purchased feeds
  - May be high intensity use of labour
Usually economically small and socio-economically vulnerable
Can we for the first time since modern agricultural advances have farming systems which are both *profitable* and *HNV*?
The Northern Upland Chain is almost all High Nature Value farmland
Provides a whole range of other ecosystem services
Project objectives

• Work with, and through, four groups of farmers in the four Protected Areas to:
  – celebrate and raise awareness of the importance of extensive upland farming;
  – identify and increase understanding of the threats to these HNV farming systems;
  – identify opportunities for securing their long term future; and,
  – inform future land management policy and support measures.
Process

• 4 pilot areas of different sizes

• Different approaches – but all with farmers at their heart

• Detailed analysis of:
  – Nature value;
  – Land management practices
  – Farm economies
  – Farmer views on key issues and opportunities

• Report for each area
Final stage...bringing it all together

• Include recommendations for trialling potential new approaches
• Produce a concise and accessible summary report
Low productivity, very seasonal, low profit, low return to labour
It’s being ACTIVE that costs money in the uplands!
Decoupled payments not linked to active farming are real problem
Driven to look for profit by other means – policy is still driving intensification
Schemes encourage lower production, but are the farms viable and farmers getting reasonable return for their work?
Meadow ecological quality dropping

(Starr-Keddle, 2013)
Understanding between conservationists and HNV farmers could be better

- Lack of understanding of hill farming, its economics and of the connections within the system
- Lack of understanding of the legal duties and obligations on government on the part of farmers
- Sometimes agreements seem based on unbalanced power relationships
Impediments to new entrants to HNV farming

• Economics of the system and of renting land
• Economics of retiring from farming
• Patchy training opportunities
• Lack of infrastructure, e.g. broadband, for young families living in the uplands
Other weaknesses of HNV farming

- Poorly understood by general public (and not just by walkers…)
- Difficulties of collaborating for mutual benefit
- Difficulties of liaising with others as a group
- Patchy independent advice delivery
- Planning system
- Walling
Project is asking two questions:

• What practical steps should be taken to make HNV farming in the Northern Uplands more efficient & profitable?

• How can the influence of HNV farming and farmers in (from?) the Northern Uplands be increased?
Practical needs:

• **The economics of HNV farming:**
  – Better understanding of farm economics and variability in it, best practice with livestock
  – Reforming both Direct Payments and Agri-environment
  – Make if viable both to start farming and to retire
  – Encourage efficiency through collaboration

• **Treat environment as part of a farming system:**
  – Mentality of agri-environment delivery
  – Support for appropriate investments in holdings

• **Long-term approach to farm advice**

• **Know what you want to achieve and monitor progress locally, as you go, using appropriate indicators in ‘real’ test areas**
Extending influence – messages to project:

• *Product is good & meets demand (backed by science)*
• *Current CAP*
• *Prepare for next CAP*
• *Farmers want to discuss key issues with Natural England and together to come to solutions*
• *Farmers want an active role in designing and delivering schemes*
• *There should be proper payment for ecosystem services*
Extending influence – key audiences:

• Government
  – Civil servants and politicians

• Consumer (the public)
  – Of food
  – Of the public goods
  – funding for collaboration, and working to next CAP

• Schools (pupils and teachers)
  – Get onto influential panels
Extending influence – need for a farmers’ forum (Northern Upland Federation?):

- **Need a group of farmers working together**
- **Need to collaborate with similar areas in long term relationship**
- **Need to get start-up funding for collaboration**
- **If constituted properly, could apply for CAP funding to achieve some of its objectives…**
- **Timescale – need to get working now and be at full capacity by time next CAP discussions start**