High Nature Value Farming in the Northern Upland Chain

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The Northern Upland Chain is almost all High Nature Value farmland
Dominated by semi-natural rough grazings
Usually complemented by improved inbye nowadays
But still some magnificent hay meadows
Extensive livestock grazing on a range of habitats
Significant species populations
Provisioning services: food, breeding stock, shooting, water supply..
Regulating services: climate, water flows..
‘Cultural’ services – landscape and sense of place, access, biodiversity, archaeology, peace and quiet....
Low productivity, very seasonal, low profit, low return to labour
It’s being ACTIVE that costs money in the uplands!
Decoupled payments distort power balance where renting involved.
Driven to look for profit by other means – policy is still driving intensification
Some of most profitable businesses avoid both constraints of fells AND landlords by buying lowland farms
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
- Vermin question
Encouragement for producing less, but are the farms viable and farmers getting reasonable return for their work?
Meadow ecological quality dropping

(Starr-Keddle, 2013)
Meadow agricultural quality dropping
At which scale does support really work?

Landscape? Farm? Field?
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
Can we for the first time since modern agricultural advances have farming systems which are both profitable and HNV?
What do you think?