What have we learned from Agri-environment schemes?

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The first agri-environment pilot

1985: Broads Grazing Marshes Conservation Scheme –
first British experiment in payments for environmental management

Identifying where farmers’ underlying wishes match conservation aims:

Simple approach to keep land extensively grazed, not drained for cropping

- very successful: most farmers signed up rapidly, significant areas of marsh saved from irreversible loss
- Model for UK roll-out over 10 years........
Schemes, 1986-2015

**ESAs** designated in waves 1986 - 1994, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (15% farmland)

English Pilot **Countryside Stewardship** Scheme (CSS) launched 1991, non-ESA, often ‘high nature value’ areas (e.g. North York Moors, the Wash, borders)

Some National Parks ran their own schemes in the 1990s

Many CSS and ESA agreements transferred into HLS + (U)ELS after 2005

ELS also picked up much land outside ‘special’ areas: at its peak (2010) over 2/3 of English farmland
Trend in schemes & funds

Higher level targeted schemes: c.20% of farm area by 2012
- much more in National Parks
Strong engagement, central to business viability for many upland farms

Source: JNCC

Entry-level schemes, 2005-2012

Source: JNCC
Achievements: what worked

• Early schemes promoted by trusted local advisors who could help tailor a ‘package’ for each farm’s situation, oversee progress and offer feedback

• Menu-based approaches, some choice built in for both parties

CSS ‘special projects’ for local opportunities and needs (e.g. cirl bunting recovery, New Forest Verderers, St Kevern) encouraged 2-way development, using local knowledge
Achievements: what worked

Both capital and revenue payments

– capital £ works with farmers’ interest to maintain and enhance landscape, provides local employment

– revenue £ can ease cashflow if paid at a suitable point in the year, underpinning incomes, encouraging commitment

Raised awareness of biodiversity issues and goals, rare species, landscape character + identity

Stimulated ongoing learning and experiment, in some places –

Educational access and recreation - reconnecting with local communities

Helped diversification / adding value, for some farms
Issues grew, as time went on...

Insufficient attention to feedback & advice – for awareness, understanding, enhancement

Central, top-down management rules
- not tailored to local conditions
- remove farmer incentive / opportunity for innovation, not enough respect for local knowledge
- some conditions were too restrictive, others simply wrong!

Tensions with market drivers + capacity issues at farm level
- people, customs and cultures strained, system break-down
- insensitive procedures (e.g. some commons)
- untapped potential to work with market trends / development

Economic squeeze: too narrow and parsimonious – lacked whole-landscape solutions, new / multiple land uses, climate resilience
System breakdown

Enclosed land farmed harder with more stock

Moorland in schemes and under-managed

Evidence that funding was used to intensify and out-compete others for land outside schemes (halo effects)

Entry and payment became so costly, complex, unsupported and uncertain that some people lost interest, others became disillusioned
Drivers for innovation

• Collective action by farmers / local actors
  – Examples from England and Wales
    Dartmoor Farming Futures, Pontbren, networks….
  – Some partly ‘within’ an existing agri-environment policy framework, some entirely outside, some evolving new policy linkages
  – Often linked to adding value and marketing / branding

• Water catchment innovators
  – Framework Directive requires a new approach
  – Water companies experimenting with significant funds

• Policy seeking to find new models
  – Nature Improvement Areas, Natural Capital Pioneers
Messages matter – they affect outcomes

Community level: cultures, networks, attitudes

Farm Level: Individual, household & enterprise dynamics

Societal Level: What role does society want farmers to play?

Schemes work better when they:
- are sensitive to farm-level concerns and business realities
- work via community links, encourage people to learn together
- offer land-based businesses and families real opportunities for a positive self-image, trust and societal respect
Proposed new pilots in National Park areas – learning the lessons

• Emphasise local ownership, partnering with farmers and other interests
• Most would pay on results / outcomes, not prescription (and reward prior good practice)
• Include peer support, collective action, local and trusted advice to foster learning & experiment
• Many combine environment with business / community development – circular economy, win-wins, resilience
What could they offer?

Better tailoring + local knowledge
— Exmoor Ambition

Re-building trust
‘canvassing local farmers indicates an erosion of previously high levels of farmer commitment to stewardship, into fragmented and variable levels of engagement’ - Broads

Efficiency
Advisor-supported management plans + agreed outcomes, simpler admin procedures, ‘self-reporting and peer review to ease the monitoring / control burden’ Dartmoor

Learning and engaging
“Our farm cluster is in its early days but we’re already seeing things we can achieve working together – and sharing with the local community. I’m very interested to take part in any pilot agri-environment scheme where farmers are working together to achieve results at a landscape level.” South Downs farmer

Results
‘The most challenging thing so far is being able to count all the birds – for some farmers this has been really difficult due to the high numbers in the field... It’s a nice problem to have!’ Yorkshire Dales