

Common grazings – more disadvantage for HNV farmland in the new CAP?

Gwyn Jones, EFNCP, 5/8 Ellishadder, Culnancnoc, Portree IV51 9JE, Scotland
dgl_jones@yahoo.co.uk +44 (0)788 411 6048

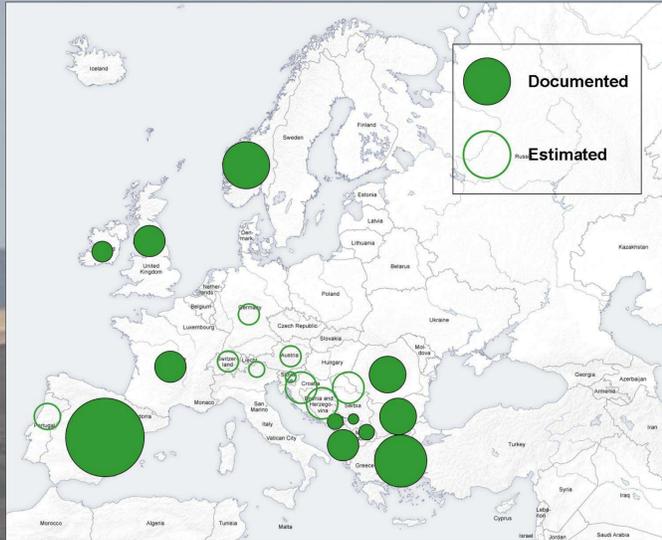
Common grazings make up a significant proportion of High Nature Value (HNV) farmland in a number of European countries. Scottish common grazings mostly fall under a relatively strong regulatory framework and in some respects are a 'best case' example. Data from unpublished official sources and a questionnaire of the clerks of local grazings regulating committees were used to investigate the degree to which common grazings are or potentially will be disadvantaged by a move to support mechanisms which are area-based, non-historic and wholly decoupled from production. The preliminary results suggest that common grazings may well be disadvantaged. Continued or enhanced delivery of public goods on common grazings implies taking their special needs into consideration in the course of the current CAP reform.

Common grazings

Common grazings are lands where more than one farmer has the right or is permitted to graze. Significant areas (at least 80 million ha) survive in Europe, especially in geographically marginal zones. Almost all are comprised of semi-natural vegetation and fall within the definition of High Nature Value (HNV) farmland.

Common grazings vary considerably in terms of the rights of the grazier and in terms of management practices. However, two features are more or less universal:

- graziers usually manage a larger area than that over which they can prove individual rights on paper
- graziers' management decisions and their ability to make them are constrained by the need to reach agreement with their fellow graziers



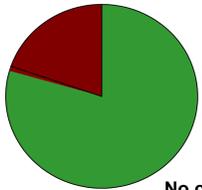
Estimated distribution of common grazings in Europe by country

Common grazings in Scotland

Scotland has approximately 594440 ha of common grazings. Situated mostly in the north and west, they are, apart from around 10000 ha, subject to the Crofters Common Grazings Regulation Act 1891. The vast majority are governed by their own grazings regulations, implemented by a grazings committee, and subject to the oversight of the Crofters Commission and Scottish Land Court. This system combines, in theory at least, a large degree of formal self-regulation by shareholders and a powerful set of safeguards and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Common grazing makes up around 13% of all the UAA of Scotland and is found in 20.55% of all claims for CAP support through the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS). In some parishes it accounts for >80% of all declared forage.

With common grazing
21%



No common grazing
79%

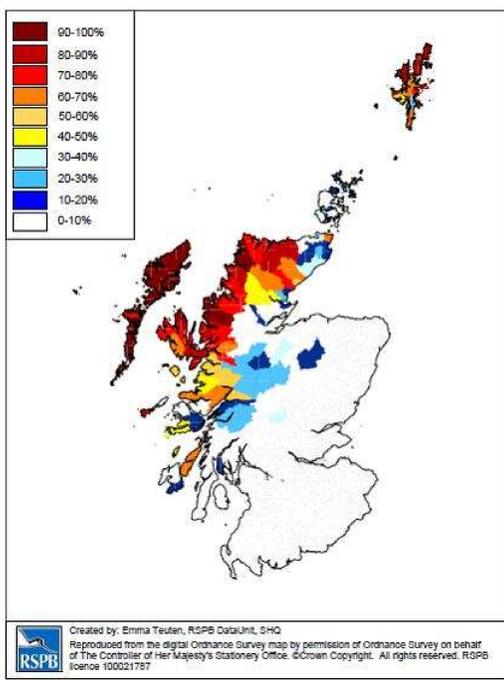
Above: Proportion of all Scottish IACS claims in 2009 declaring common grazings

Right: Proportion of IACS claims declaring common grazings by parish (NUTS IV), 2009

Below: In Kilmuir parish on the Isle of Skye (12136 ha of forage), common grazing accounts for 80% of the IACS-claimed area and is found in >>95% of claims



Percent of all IACS claims declaring common grazing



Created by: Emma Teufel, RSPB DataUnit, SHQ
Reproduced from the digital Ordnance Survey map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. RSPB Licence 100021187

Changing CAP mechanisms and common grazings

The history of the CAP since the 1992 McSharry reforms has been one of a gradual shift from a limited number of Community-wide support mechanisms directly linked to production through a number of intermediate steps to a complex set of ever more decoupled subsidies, each of which has a wide variety of local implementation models.

Although some Member States retain some element of coupling in their support to livestock farmers, the trend is towards area-based support mechanisms and, broadly, to support which is both decoupled and unrelated to historic patterns of payment distribution.

In Scotland, Single Farm Payment is paid on a historic basis, but is wholly decoupled. Less Favoured Area support is also paid on a historic basis and is decoupled, though subject to a minimum stocking level (0.12 LU/ha). A substantial proportion of the budget is allocated to agri-environment support; grazings committees are eligible to apply for these on common grazings.

Our research aimed to ask two questions in the case of Scottish common grazings:

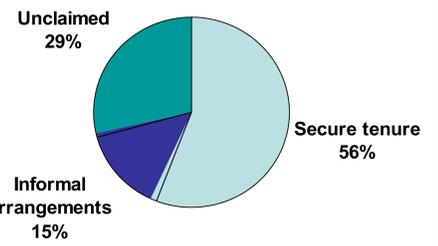
- what might be the effects of a shift to a regionally-based fully-decoupled Pillar 1 area payment on common graziers?
- to what extent have common grazings benefitted up to now from the shift from direct payments to area-based agri-environment support?

Single Farm Payment

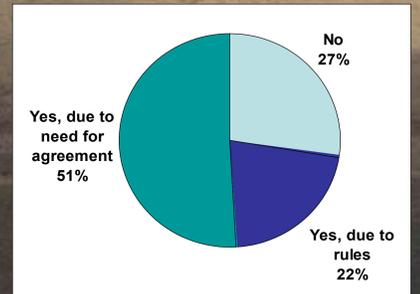
The use of grazings shares to support IACS claims was investigated in a sample of ¼ of all common grazings. Only 43% of shareholders were using their grazings share to claim SFP. 71% of the forage area is being claimed, but the active graziers are managing 100% of the area. 15% of the forage, while being claimed, is available only on an informal or short-term basis.

- under a decoupled regionally-based SFP implementation model, shareholders could only be sure of receiving 56% of the payment available to a neighbouring farmer on a similar sole use hill farm
- under a non-historic system, there is no reason why the unclaimed 29% - around 150000 ha over the whole of Scotland, should not be claimed for the first time, putting further stress on the budget
- according to grazings clerks, shares on 68% of grazings are currently being used to support claims by producers who are not active graziers on that grazings

Surprisingly, only 54% of clerks agreed with the proposition that only shareholders active on their grazings should be allowed to claim shares.



Breakdown of shares according to IACS claims 2009, Portree & Inverness SGRPID office areas



Grazings clerks' responses to the question "Is it more difficult for common grazings to access agri-environment schemes than it is for similar hill farms?"

Agri-environment participation

The overwhelming majority of grazings clerks considered that it was more difficult for common grazings to access agri-environment schemes – the type of Pillar 2 payments which some commentators claim are the only way to deliver targeted, value-for-money support. Of the sampled grazings not in schemes, almost ¼ cited inability to get agreement as the main reason. 39% of clerks agreed with the proposition that all shareholders should decide on scheme participation and 21% of grazings distributed agri-environment money to all shareholders, not just the active or participating.

These difficulties are reflected in actual participation – only 25% of grazings are in any agri-environment scheme (and 53% of those are in non-discretionary schemes now being phased out).

Conclusions

While the current system of SFP and LFA implementation in Scotland is essentially decoupled, long-standing inactivity is not rewarded due to the historic basis for payment. Recent inactivity by claimants occurs to a limited extent, but a move to a non-historic payment would pose significant challenges as long as there was no coupling to activity. A minimum activity requirement, such as a minimum stocking on the actual grazings might be one partial solution. Delivering payments through the committees would be possible, but would require strengthening of their capacity to deliver.

Despite apparently combining a high degree of regulation with local autonomy and self-governance, grazings committees on crofters common grazings would seem to be inefficient at accessing agri-environment payments due to the conflicting interests of active and inactive shareholders. This creates at very least extra transaction costs for common graziers and is best solved through clear guidance from Government that reward should be linked to costs and responsibilities.

CAP reform needs to consider the needs of these HNV farmlands at all stages of the discussions. Crofters views are being sought in the next stage of the research on whether the framework within which the existing grazings committees work should be amended.

Acknowledgements

This project was funded by the European Commission (DG Environment); Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Scottish Natural Heritage; Shetland Islands Council; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Highland Council. EFNCP wish to thank the Scottish Government, RSPB, SAC and especially the many crofters who gave information or shared their views for their assistance. The views expressed in this poster do not necessarily reflect those of the funders or of those who rendered other assistance.