

Uplands Alliance

A network for England's Uplands

Creating a Brighter Future Project

**Meeting with
North Pennines Hill Farmers
held in UTASS Offices, Middleton-in-Teesdale
on 8th July 2019**

Meeting Notes

1 Welcome & Introduction

- 1.1 An attendance list is at the end of these notes.
- 1.2 This was a meeting for the hill farmers but everyone was invited to engage in the discussion about the issues.

2 The Creating a Brighter Future Project

- 2.1 The objectives and outcomes of the first CABF meeting, held in London on 18th March 2019, were summarised:
 - 2.1.1 To enable hill farmers to contribute to the development of Defra's future farming policy and assess the likely impacts of emerging policy on upland farming, including consideration of the livestock production trade and the delivery of public benefits.
 - 2.1.2 To identify how hill farmers can best contribute to the development of ELMS.
 - 2.1.3 To assist the UA in reaching out to support hill farmers through this period of transition.
- 2.2 It was noted that the discussion had focussed on eight issues:
 - 2.2.1 Succession
 - 2.2.2 Financial pressures
 - 2.2.3 Landlord – Tenant
 - 2.2.4 Trends in the Tenanted Farm Sector
 - 2.2.5 BPS
 - 2.2.6 Other Schemes
 - 2.2.7 The Agricultural Bill
 - 2.2.8 Environmental Land Management Scheme
- 2.3 During the meeting, the idea had been developed to invite the hill farmers, who attended the meeting, to hold follow-up meetings in their local area. This was one of nine meetings that are being held throughout the English uplands in July.
- 2.4 Short notes will be taken from each meeting and circulated to those who attended.

2.5 All the notes will be collated into one report, which will be passed to Defra. Copies of this report will be circulated to everyone who attended the meeting and it will be made available through the Uplands Alliance network.

3 Hill Farmer Views - best hopes, worst fears,

Best Hope	Worst Fear
Farmers will be empowered - allowed to farm without so many restrictions, and they will have more flexibility.	The level of control from Natural England will continue at the same level.
The risk of receiving penalties will be reduced.	Young people do not enter farming.
The impact of food miles will be considered when sourcing food.	Cheap food will be imported without regard to welfare standards.
No Brexit.	Farming becomes unsustainable – recently income has reduced, but bills have not.
More security to allow business planning and get a return on investment.	Public perception of farming does not improve.
Each farm will be recognised as being different.	Politicians continue to have more focus on the environment without support for the systems that maintain it.
The role of farming to manage the countryside will be recognised and funded.	Landlords continue to claim too much of the farm income leaving not enough for the farm.
More certainty will be introduced to allow farmers to plan in the short and long terms.	The standards of training in colleges do not improve.
The enthusiasm of farmers for what they do is harvested.	The landlord-tenant system is not improved.
Learn from past mistakes and new schemes become less prescriptive.	The breach of trust (and contract) resulting from the inability to make payments on time will continue.
New local schemes will be introduced that co-designed with farmers and adequately funded with long term commitment.	
The value that grazing livestock provide to the management of the countryside will be recognised.	

4 Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme

4.1 Louise Maguire is a member of the Tests & Trials Team working on the development of Environmental Land Management at Defra; she provided an update about the development of the scheme.

4.2 As the ELM scheme is still under development, some of the details were provided in confidence and are not included in these notes.

- 4.3 The fundamental principle of ELM is to provide public money for public goods, and Defra is seeking to co-design it with the farming community.
- 4.4 The objectives for ELM include:
- 4.4.1 Transforming the role that agriculture and other land management activities play in delivering environmental goods.
 - 4.4.2 Generating public goods from public money and being a major component of the delivery of the 25yr Environment Plan.
 - Food production is not a public good, as it is rewarded by the market.
- 4.5 Under current plans, direct payments will be phased out and end in 2027. ELM will offer support with productivity, research & development, skills development, data collection and analysis and increasing resilience. A range of funding methods are being considered, such as: reverse auctions, use of net gain from development, payment by results, nature recovery networks and support from the private sector.
- 4.6 It is proposed that ELM will pay for the provision of six public goods:
- 4.6.1 Clean and plentiful water
 - 4.6.2 Clean air
 - 4.6.3 Thriving plants and wildlife
 - 4.6.4 Reduction in and protection from environmental hazards
 - 4.6.5 Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change
 - 4.6.6 Beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment
- 4.7 To test the proposals for the new scheme, a series of pilots (Tests & Trials) will take place 2021-2024, with a view to the new arrangements starting to be implemented from 2024. The aim will be for payments to be linked to achieving agreed results (payments by results).
- 4.8 The tests and trials will feed into a National Pilot that will have the objectives of:
- 4.8.1 Testing the scheme before it is launched to make sure it works,
 - 4.8.2 Increasing confidence that the scheme will work,
 - 4.8.3 Proving that it is able to work in different locations,
 - 4.8.4 Increasing collaboration to allow work to take place at a greater scale, and
 - 4.8.5 Providing more scope for innovation.
- 4.9 Direct production subsidies will no longer be paid but productivity support, in the form of grants or loans, may be available in the future.
- 4.10 Eligibility criteria are being reviewed. Funding may be available to anyone who can demonstrate the delivery of public goods.
- 4.11 In discussion, concern was expressed that by widening the range of land that can be supported through the ELM scheme (to include village greens, highways, railways) the income for farming will be reduced.

5 Key issues for the future of Hill Farming in the North York Moors National Park

- 5.1 Natural England know what they want, but they do not know how to achieve it.

- 5.2 When farming took place without the same level of intervention, there were many more wild flowers in the dales.
- 5.3 Out-wintering should be allowed where it is beneficial for the stock and the habitat.
 - 5.3.1 Out-wintering has been a victim of one-size-fits-all prescriptions.
 - 5.3.2 It is inappropriate on peatland but can work well on harder, drier limestone ground.
- 5.4 More flexibility is required to allow farmers to use their knowledge and experience to manage the land according to its needs and the seasons, which change every year.
- 5.5 Young farmers are disillusioned; they want to farm, and have more freedom to make their own business decisions. They do not want to sit in meetings; this is why many were not present.
- 5.6 Farmers should be trusted to make sensible decisions based on their knowledge and experience of the land. They do not want to destroy they land, they want to improve it.
- 5.7 Could some form of self-assessment be introduced, similar to the tax system, to allow farmers to monitor progress themselves?
- 5.8 There was discussion about the size of farms. There is a view that farms are too small to be viable in agricultural / financial terms, but it is argued that the small farm sizes are an important feature of the Dales and the local communities.
- 5.9 There is talk about enhancement, but it should be recognised that maintenance is also an important management function. Continued enhancement is not always possible or desirable.
- 5.10 The failure by the RPA to make payments on time is seen as a breach of trust and contract.
 - 5.10.1 There is a need to re-build trust but this requires action from government to fulfil its obligations, as well as from farmers.
 - 5.10.2 The impact of long delays in payments is severe on small farm businesses, particularly if the farm is tenanted.
- 5.11 80% of HLS schemes in the area expire in 2020. This is introducing great financial uncertainty and financial stress on farmers.
 - 5.11.1 As a way to introduce some certainty, could existing HLS schemes should be rolled over for five years?
 - 5.11.2 Consideration could also be given to reactivating recently expired schemes.
- 5.12 The requirement for advice was discussed.
 - 5.12.1 There was support for a return to a locally based advisor, as had been included for the ESA scheme, who would get to know the farmers and the farms.
 - 5.12.2 This would make a more supportive role possible, which would be welcomed.

- 5.12.3 For this approach to be successful, much would depend on the quality of the advisers. They would need to have knowledge of farming, as well as environmental and conservation issues.
- 5.12.4 With this approach, it might be possible to achieve a more joined up approach between different initiatives and agencies; this would be beneficial.
- 5.13 In addition to the stress introduced by financial uncertainty, there are also concerns about inconsistent interpretation of rules and regulations. This leaves farmers feeling exposed to the risk of penalties being imposed, which increases the financial stress.
- 5.14 While there may be a need to include penalties in the scheme, they should not be disproportionate. They should not be applied for genuine mistakes and some phased introduction should be considered, so that only repeat offenders are penalised.
- 5.15 The level of complication of recent schemes has increased to an extent that most farmers have to employ an agent to complete the application form.
 - 5.15.1 This reduces the amount of money that comes to the farm.
 - 5.15.2 Is this level of detail necessary?
- 5.16 The Burren Scheme in the Republic of Ireland was quoted. It was reported that the application is based on a map and two pages of text. It is completed by the project officer working with the farmers to decide what is best for the farm.
- 5.17 It was agreed that it would be attractive if the new scheme provided a national framework with scope for local variations to allow flexibility to adapt to local weather and conditions that change each year.
- 5.18 Payment by results would require agreement about how to monitor outputs. Photographs could be used to achieve this.
- 5.19 It was suggested that 99.9% of visitors to farms are fine. The support that farmers provide for them is an important public good.
- 5.20 The stated ambition of the government is that farming should provide world class food and employ world class welfare standards. Farmers believe that these criteria are already being achieved.

6 Recommendations & Conclusions

- 6.1 The Uplands Alliance is considering carrying out an on-line survey to gather views of hill farmers across the country. A decision will be made after the report from the CABF meetings has been prepared.
- 6.2 Defra should be asked to respond to the report from the CABF project and this feedback should be circulated to the farmers.
- 6.3 The farmers should consider further meetings and discussions to include others who were not present at this meeting. If a further meeting(s) takes place, additional input from Defra should be requested.

6.4 Based on the length of time that the support schemes under the CAP took to develop, the new arrangements that are put in place as we leave the EU will be influencing agriculture for many years. Therefore, this is a once in a generation opportunity to contribute to setting up arrangements that work; hill farmers are encouraged to keep up to date with developments and discuss the options and opportunities with other farmers.

7 Thanks

7.1 Emma Spry was thanked for her help in setting up the meeting and UTASS was thanked for hosting it.

7.2 Special thanks were given to Louise Maguire for the ELM presentation and her input to the discussion during the meeting. The farmers valued the opportunity to talk directly to someone from Defra about these important issues.

7.3 Delegates were thanked for their attendance and all their contributions.

Attendance List

Name	Surname	Farm / Organisation
Farmers		
Reuben	Atkinson	Rose Tree Farm, Harwood
Malcolm	Bainbridge	Ettersgill House
Richard	Betton	Watersmeeting
Caroline	Collin	Hield House
Claire	Everitt	Jollybody Farm
Craig	Fearon	Borrowdale
June	Harrison	High Beck Head, Ettersgill
Mark	Hutchinson	Blunt House, Hudeshope
David	Mallon	Pallet Crag
Sam	Rawling	Kinniside
Maurice	Scott	Summery Hill, Pikelaw
John	Spry	Revelin, Pikelaw
Emma	Spry	Revelin, Pikelaw
Judith	Tarn	East Park
Other Attendees		
Louise	Maguire	Defra
Simon	Thorp	CABF
Apologies		
John	Bell	Valence Lodge
Simon	Bentley	Lanehead
Greg	Dalton	Wellhope, Weardale
Richard	Ice-ton	East Thorngarth Hill
James	Nat-trass	Westgate, Weardale
Ian	Raine	Sunnybrae
Alan	Rutherford	Waterside Farm / West Black Dene, Weardale
Mark	Wallace	Laneside, Hudeshope