

Environmental Stewardship Update

Farming for a better environment

November 08 Issue 1

A new approach to HLS targeting

This month Natural England launches its new approach to the targeting of Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). Our aim is that these tailored agreements secure maximum gain for the environment by channelling money efficiently to farmers and land managers who can create environmental and public benefits.

The new approach is based on 110 identified Target Areas across England. These are areas where we will get the most environmental benefit for our investments in HLS. For each Target Area we've prepared a Statement showing which agreements will best achieve the objectives of Environmental Stewardship in that area: wildlife, landscape, historic environment, resource protection and access. Over time HLS funding will become increasingly focused in Target Areas.

Outside of Target Areas we remain committed to delivering high quality agreements, and have identified a number of very important objectives for HLS management, which we call 'Themes'. Each region has its own 'Theme Statement' which will reflect our top priorities for HLS management in the wider countryside.

While making these improvements to the environmental focus of HLS, our other schemes continue to make a major contribution to England's natural environment. Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) now covers over half of agricultural land. And we continue working with Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) and Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) agreement holders to deliver important benefits.

You can find more about HLS targeting on our [website](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk) from 21st November.

ES Update is our new regular newsletter for organisations which represent the interests of farmers and land managers, and others engaged in AE schemes. Through it we will let you know about changes to schemes, provide you with facts and figures and highlight good practice, success stories and emerging challenges.

Also in this issue

[Facts and figures – page 2](#)

[Focus on: – page 3](#)
[ELS and dairy farming](#)
[Funding for capital projects 09](#)

[Notice Board: – page 4](#)

AE Schemes: Facts and Figures

21 years of achievement

Since 1987, agri-environment (AE) schemes have:

- restored more than 17,000 km of hedgerow
- created over 4,800 km of footpaths, and 2,400 km of cycle paths and bridleways
- assisted recovery of a range of species including the stone curlew, bittern, twite and curlew bunting,
- helped toward the target of bringing 95% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest into favourable condition by 2010.



Uptake of schemes

Environmental Stewardship (ES) was introduced in 2005 as the successor scheme to ESA and CSS. It is already clear that the Entry Level Scheme (ELS) is a major success, accounting for over half the area of Utilisable Agricultural Area (UAA) in England. Altogether 63% of the UAA is currently in an agri-environment scheme. This is the baseline against which we must measure future progress. The table below shows the current levels of uptake for all schemes, including ESA and CSS, which are now closed to new applications.

Scheme	Uptake - ha	% of UAA	No. of Agreements	Budget
ESA	507,877	5.4	7,813	£45.8m
CSS	445,863	4.8	12,095	£81.3m
ELS inc (O)ELS	4,879,056	52.3	33,848	£178.9m
HLS inc (O)HLS	254,192 [43,962 not also in (O)ELS]	2.7% [0.5% not also in (O)ELS]	2,614 [240 not also in (O)ELS]	£76.7m
Total wing for ELS/HLS overlap)	5,876,758	63.0	56,370	£382.7m

Data as of Sept 2008

We will take a closer look at these uptake rates in later issues of this newsletter, and discuss in detail particular topics such as the organic schemes.

Where to next with ES?

Our target is to get 70% of eligible farmland into an agri-environment scheme by the end of March 2011. We have the funding to do this from the UK and the EU. It means we need to increase the overall uptake of land by 7%. We would expect most of the new land to come into Entry Level Stewardship, with some moving into Organic Entry Level Stewardship and Higher Level Stewardship.

However, around 33% of the land in schemes is in agreements that are due to expire before the target date of 2011. Most of these are in ELS and to meet our 70% target we must renew these agreements. This will be a major undertaking, particularly the large numbers of agreements that come to renewal in summer 2010. We need your continued support and advice if we are to succeed!

Focus on...

....ELS and Dairy Farming

Nearly 40% of all England's dairy farms are now in ELS, showing that it is possible to successfully combine good environmental land management with intensively managed grassland systems. ELS is simple to apply for and administer, offers regular payments, and can be easily incorporated into established farm businesses.

ELS environmental management options include:

- Hedgerow management
- Ditch management
- Over wintered stubbles
- Protection of in-field trees
- Maintenance of woodland fencing



A Worcestershire experience

Worcestershire dairy farmer **David Goodwin** has been in Entry Level Stewardship since April 2006. He has a 150-head dairy herd producing 1.2 million litres of milk annually alongside 250 breeding ewes. The farm also produces milling wheat, forage maize and barley for his intensive beef enterprise. On being in ELS, David said "We have not found ELS to be a burden on the business and it has been easy to manage. We have found it straightforward to implement the ELS options within our existing farming practices."



Shropshire wildlife success

Shropshire dairy farmer **Clive Gurney** has been in ELS for the past three years. Clive manages a 320-head Holstein dairy herd on his 400 acre farm in an environmentally-friendly way. Clive said: "The wildlife on our farm is thriving, the hedge and ditch management has created 'wildlife motorways' throughout the farm – we have seen an increase in skylarks and linnets, and there are otters in our ponds. Stewardship also gives us a 'comforting' income, particularly useful at difficult times and in unforeseen circumstances."

....funding for capital projects in 2009

In October we wrote to agreement holders of existing ESA and CSS agreements, inviting proposals for priority capital works that could be completed by February 2009. In all we have had over 1300 responses to our letter. If a farmer or landowner was unable to take advantage of this year's opportunity they were invited to express interest in undertaking capital works in 2009. Once we have arranged the projects for this autumn we will respond by the end of December to those who expressed interest for next year.

Aylton Barn (above right), a 500 year-old cruck barn in Herefordshire, was skilfully restored using HLS funding.



Notice Board

New Environmental Stewardship handbooks

Natural England has published new Environmental Stewardship handbooks - comprehensive guides to ES and how to apply. The new handbooks cover every available ES scheme and apply to all agreements starting on or after 1 October 2008. The handbooks have been re-designed to include information on new options and they bring farmers up to date on how ES can help their farm business, and how they can apply.

Printed versions of the new ES handbooks are available from your regional Natural England office or [online](#) by following the relevant link (ELS, HLS etc). Please note, however, that we have limited stocks and will give priority to those who wish to apply for the scheme or their agents. If possible please refer to the website first



Please note that existing agreement holders must keep their old handbooks as the terms and conditions in them remain part of the legal basis of their agreement.



ELS Online now available

ELS Online is our convenient new internet-based tool for making ELS applications. Advantages of ELS online include:

- ✓ A quicker application process – some of our pilot users have reported a 47% time saving
- ✓ Points are calculated as you add features/options
- ✓ An invaluable boundary measurement tool
- ✓ Easy to download software with user-friendly functions
- ✓ A dedicated Online Helpdesk team

The Online system works by issuing you with a PIN (Personal Identification Number). Using this number and a password, you can then access the ELS Online software. There is no limit to how many ELS applications you can submit, when you have the system up and running. Once the system is installed, the speed of each application is greatly increased as you can add in land, choose ELS options and measure features at the click of the mouse.

More information is available on [ELS online](#). If you have any questions or would like some more information about ELS Online, please contact the Online Team on 01905 362700, 01905 362711 or by email at els.online@naturalengland.org.uk

Abbreviations used

Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS); Entry Level Stewardship (ELS); Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA); Higher Level Stewardship (HLS); Organic Entry Level Stewardship - (O)ELS.