

Environmental Stewardship Update

Farming for a better environment

February 2010 Issue 7

Environmental first for the Oxford Farming Conference

At the first major farming conference of 2010, Poul Christensen, Natural England Chair, ushered in the New Year, by emphasising the need for a progressive partnership between the environment and farming. Over 100 farmers, partners and stakeholders attended the joint Natural England / Environment Agency fringe seminar at the Oxford Farming Conference on 5 January. This was the first such environmental event to take place at this important farming event and proved a success with the audience. In an adjacent room, demonstration stands for the [Campaign for the Farmed Environment](#) and the [Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative](#) focused on the practical steps farmers can take to improve the environmental quality of their land.

At the Conference, the Rt. Hon Hilary Benn MP, launched the Government's Food Strategy, Food 2030. The Environment Secretary emphasised the importance of food supply and food production and set out three challenges: to produce more food; to produce it sustainably; and to promote a healthier diet. He stressed that food production and the environment are 'interdependent and indivisible'. Mr Benn praised the Campaign for the Farmed Environment as a good example of partnership working. He was keen to achieve as much as possible through this kind of voluntary initiative, while recognising the place for regulation.

Conservative Shadow for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Nick Herbert MP, said that he saw food security as the fundamental challenge facing the farming industry. Addressing Conference he stated that CAP was a key issue, with its future lying mainly with dispersal of funds through Pillar 2. Mr Herbert said that the desired increase in production had to be sustainable and shouldn't be at the expense of the environment. Farmers were central to the effort to reverse biodiversity decline and he saw agri-environment schemes as a vital tool for helping farmers to deliver for nature conservation.

ES update is our regular newsletter for organisations which represent the interests of farmers, land managers and others engaged in agri-environment schemes. You can access [back issues](#) of ES Update online and find out [more about ES](#) on our website.

Latest facts and figures

The table below gives agri-environment scheme uptake statistics at 29 January 2010.

| Scheme | Area (ha) | % of UAA | Number of Agreements | Annual Value |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| CSS | 366,135 | 3.9 | 10,608 | £77.9 M |
| ESA | 461,304 | 5.0 | 7,096 | £39.0 M |
| ELS | 4,959,890 | 53.4 | 37,622 | £134.9 M |
| OELS | 379,794 | 4.1 | 2,686 | £40.2 M |
| HLS (Combined with ELS/OELS*) | <i>396,731</i> | - | <i>3,831</i> | £72.7 M |
| HLS (Standalone) | 69,375 | 0.7 | 537 | £12.5 M |
| Total HLS | <i>466,106</i> | - | <i>4,368</i> | £82.8 M |
| Overall Total | 6,236,498 | 67.1 | 58,549 | £377.2 M |

* Most land in HLS is already accounted for in ELS or OELS / Numbers in italics not included in overall total / UAA is Utilisable Agricultural Area, by which is meant farmland and associated land such as woodland and scrub / Annual Value: for CSS and ESA, the figures relate to the annual value of live agreements in the current agreement year. For ES, the figures relate to the first year value of the agreements (the value may vary in other years).

Focus on: 2010 – a busy year for ELS

2010 marks the 5th anniversary of Environmental Stewardship (ES). It will be a very busy year as we aim to process 12,000 Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) renewals and increase uptake of available agricultural land in ES from 67% to 70% by March 2011. We can only achieve this with your help throughout the year in encouraging enough farmers and land managers to sign up. We outline below some key developments.

ELS Online The new improved ELS Online service is back in action. It offers the easiest and quickest way to join ELS - [click here](#) to find out what it can offer farmers and their agents.

RLR upgrade paves way for ELS applications and renewals

The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) upgrade of Rural Land Register (RLR) map data has gone smoothly. Over 90% of farmers have had their land digitised, and the remainder should be sorted out within weeks. 77% of farmers have now agreed their maps with the RPA.

Using the new data Natural England's Incentive Schemes Services (ISS) team:

- has resumed **issuing ELS application packs** – our first targets are those applications currently being processed and the 350 farmers who registered interest over Christmas,
- started sending out **Uplands ELS application packs** to those who have requested them on 9 February (see Uplands ELS item below),
- is working to a **renewals plan**. Already over half of the 2010 renewals customers have returned reply slips telling us how their preferred means of renewing their agreements. If farmers return their reply slips and follow the guidance they can be sure of a smooth renewal and avoid any breaks in payment.

For further information on ELS in 2010 contact your [Natural England Regional Office](#).

Natural England is also increasing its support to farmers and landowners who want to join ELS. Workshops, farm walks, other events and one-to-one visits will be offered free of charge from spring 2010. The aim is to increase both uptake of the scheme and the resulting benefits for the natural environment. The events will help farmers:

- apply or reapply for ELS
- apply for the new Uplands strand of ELS (see below)
- choose and locate the right options for their farm, and
- manage their options effectively.

The programme, funded by the RDPE, will be delivered by contractors working for Natural England regional teams. We aim to engage with 11,000 farmers through group events and a further 8000 farmers through one-to-one visits during 2010. Events will be timed around the launch of Uplands ELS and the peak of ELS renewals. For information on ELS events available in your area please [click here](#).

New ES Handbooks out

The three new 3rd edition Environmental Stewardship handbooks – ELS, OELS and HLS are now available in print and online. Follow the link to the [Natural England Catalogue](#) for details. The handbooks will be issued to farmers as part of ES application packs.

New leaflets explain ELS to farmers

Four attractive leaflets, each offering advice on the best ELS options to choose in order to achieve specific environmental results, are available to farmers now. The titles are **Farming for wildlife**, **Farming for birds**, **Farming for cleaner water & healthier soil**, and **Farming for the historic environment**.

Three of the leaflets have been produced jointly by Natural England and the Campaign for the Farmed Environment. The fourth has been jointly produced by Natural England and English Heritage. They are available to download and order from our [catalogue](#). They will also be available from Natural England Advisors at upcoming farm events and from the CFE partner organisations.



Uplands ELS arrives!

Uplands ELS - the new strand within ELS and OELS – was launched by Defra Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies, and Natural England Chair, Poul Christensen, at Blaze Farm in the Peak District on 9 February. Uplands ELS pays farmers to undertake environmentally-friendly farming practices in uplands areas. Applicants must have SDA land and not be in receipt of Uplands Transitional Payments. Uplands ELS offers easy-to-manage tailored options such as cattle grazing, stone wall restoration and maintenance of traditional buildings, and payments of up to £62 per hectare.

To make a paper application, farmers should contact their nearest [Natural England Regional Office](#). To join online, the contact is the Online Team on 01905 362700 or 01905 362711. Now is a good time for upland farmers to think about joining - the first agreements will start on 1 July 2010 with the first payments in January 2011. Applications need to reach us by 1 May for a 1 July agreement start date.

Our booklet [Look after your uplands with Environmental Stewardship](#) provides an easy-to-read introduction to Uplands ELS. In recent months, we have promoted its arrival by organising almost 40 meetings and events, attended by over 1,600 land managers. Upland farmers who want to hear more face to face can register for an [Upland ELS event](#) in their area.

Notice Board

Entry into HLS made easier

Customer feedback told us that getting a Farm Environment Plan (FEP) done was a source of delay for farmers coming into HLS. We want to get the right farms signed up as quickly as we can so we have reviewed the process and made changes.

- We have created a register of FEP surveyors so applicants can quickly and easily identify one and book a visit. Already 350 surveyors have registered.
- Availability of surveyors varies regionally, as does the uptake of HLS. We are developing ways to promote the register and to recruit new surveyors in areas of need.
- We are offering training for surveyors on the streamlined processes and associated standards, prior to registration. So far, we've had 65 requests for this training.

It's early days but we're delighted with the response so far from agents. This really does reinforce the benefits in seeking and acting on feedback from customers to help us make real improvements to the service we offer farmers and land managers.

Natural England wins 'Best Supporting Trade Stand' at LAMMA



Natural England won the award at the Lincolnshire Agricultural Machinery Manufacturers Association (LAMMA) Show. It was presented by Farmers Guardian Editor, Emma Penny, for the most attractive and professionally staffed stand. The stand offered farmers and agents a welcoming place to discuss ES at the Newark show. A talking point for visitors was our new 'Environmental Stewardship Farm Model' that demonstrates in miniature, choices of ES options and best locations for them on the farm. The model can be seen at our stand during the upcoming show season.

A helping hand during the January snowfalls

Last month saw the heaviest snowfalls in decades blanket the English countryside. Recognising the exceptional circumstances Natural England temporarily waived restrictions on supplementary feeding of livestock under AE schemes. Robin Tucker, Executive Director, said: "During the severe weather it was absolutely right to enable farmers to feed their animals without putting their agri-environment payments at risk. Farmers do a lot for the environment. This was an opportunity for us to help them in a practical and meaningful way at a moment of real danger for their livestock by relaxing the rules while the snows lasted"

Abbreviations used

AE (Agri-environment); CSS (Countryside Stewardship Scheme) ; CAP (Common Agricultural Policy); ELS (Entry Level Stewardship); ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Areas); ES (Environmental Stewardship); HLS (Higher Level Stewardship); OELS (Organic Entry Level Stewardship), RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England); SDA (Severely Disadvantaged Area).