



Saving Our Magnificent Meadows 08/03/2017

Past and potential future roles of agri-environment schemes

Steve Peel, Senior Specialist Eco-agronomy

SOMM shares aims with agri-environment



- To transform the fortunes of vanishing wildflower meadows, grasslands and wildlife.

This has been a major objective of ae schemes since 1987 and particularly since 2005 with Higher Level Stewardship.

- by improving condition of existing priority habitat (PH), restoring non-PH grassland and creating PH from a non-grass starting point.

- Do research, develop techniques and provide guidance (eg Technical Information Notes 061-068*).
- Incentivise land managers to deliver biodiversity; annual payments of £145 - £280/ha plus 100% cost of seed.
- Choose right site (Keys in FEP and BEHTA manuals), develop good relationship with land manager, tailor agreement to site, follow-up with 3 visits in 10 years.

*<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20150909000001/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/9001>

Big Scale – could meet Lawton ambition of ‘better, bigger, more and joined’



HLS Options	Area (000 ha)	Spend (£M)
HK6 – Maintenance of existing Priority Habitat (PH) in good condition (Keys 2a and 2b).	34	57
HK7 – Restoration of PH in poor condition, or non-PH grassland with high or moderate potential (Key 2c).	68	113
HK8 – Creation of PH from arable or set-aside with high or mod potential (Key 1)	5	11
GS supplement: 100% of cost of seed or green hay.		

Restoration and creation agreements can work brilliantly

Natural England Commissioned Report 0107

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- Advisers nominated 73 successful sites in 2010-11.
- Most were creation rather than restoration.
- 85% qualified as BAP Priority Habitat
- Typically took 8-15 years



..but what is the overall picture of success?

MA01035 Baseline survey 2007

HK8 Creation

- Random sample of 36 agreements, starting as arable or set-aside.

HK7 Restoration

- Random sample of 76 agreements.
- 9% were PH, mostly in moderate or poor condition.
- 72% semi-improved.
- Only 36% of agreements specified seed introduction.



Results for option HK8 Creation



After 5 years in agreement (2006-2011):

- **33% met threshold for Priority Habitat,**
- **17% were in condition A.**
- **A further 30% met threshold for semi-improved.**

Results for option HK7 Restoration



Change in condition after 8 years in agreement (2006-2014):

- **23% improved**
- **66% stayed the same**
- **11% declined**

Possible reasons for lack of progress:

27% had soil phosphorus index 2 or higher

81% had not received seed or green hay

Teething problems? But similar issues in later agreements.

M&E project LM0443– awaiting publication

More generic reasons recommendations of the MESME project 2010-11



Better agreement set-up

- more ***tailored*** to the site. (Includes choice of site, and need for seed).

Better QA

- should be ***peer review*** by experienced colleagues
- national in-house ***monitoring of quality*** (c.100 agreements/ year) .

Better aftercare

- regular ***visits*** essential. Assess progress, feed back to agreement-holder, record results, follow through.
- c. 5% of visits with an experienced colleague.

Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective (MESME):

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5662762122870784?category=4679230129438720>

More recent evidence

HLS monitoring projects in 2014 found agreement quality and outcomes improved when there was:

- **Regular contact** between adviser and Agreement Holder;
- Commitment for **continuity** of advice and support. (But in 7 years only 24% of agreements had kept the same adviser, and 23% had 3 or more advisers).

M&E projects LM0432 and LM0433



Key messages



- We have the techniques to restore and create, but
- to transform the fortunes of vanishing wildflower meadows, grasslands *and wildlife* we need scale.
- At their best, agri-environment schemes work really well
- Could be improved with Payment-by-Results
- Whatever scheme we have, success will need *well-informed land managers, trusted advisers, good QA and good aftercare.*