

Environmental Stewardship Update

Farming for a better environment

June 2010 Issue 9

Need to boost uptake of Uplands ELS

In advance of the first Uplands ELS agreements starting on 1 July, almost 2700 farmers have received application packs, over a third of which have been returned. Farmers can apply at any time from now as we have rolling monthly start dates. Uplands ELS has been introduced following the cessation of the Hill Farm Allowance and the Tenant Farmers Association is worried that many upland farmers stand to lose funding as a result. It is a real concern and that's why we want as many farmers as possible to sign up.

So far we have:-

- Communicated directly with every eligible farmer – by post or telephone – about the change, with a national awareness raising campaign about to commence.
- Run over 70 events which have been attended by 2500 farmers and land managers, with lots more planned.
- Arranged 1000 one-to-one farm visits with advisers.

We are also holding Uplands ELS briefing events for land agents in early/mid July in the North, Midlands and South West. Details of which will shortly be available on the new Land agents [web pages](#).

It is in all our interests that hill farmers sign up to Uplands ELS without further delay, and we are appealing to stakeholder organisations to relay the following messages to hill farmers.

- **Act immediately to avoiding losing out** – delays might mean money lost to the farm business
- **Payments are significant** - the standard payments are £62 per hectare per annum (£23 per hectare for parcels of 15ha or more above the Moorland Line)
- **Call 0300 060 1117** to request an **application pack**
- **Find out more about Uplands ELS** at www.naturalengland.org.uk/es
- **Book a farm visit or attend an event by calling 0300 060 1695**

Also in this issue [Latest facts and figures](#) [Spotlight on Higher Level Stewardship](#) [Early renewal will safeguard ELS payments](#) [Practical advice on Uplands ELS Options](#) [ES helps the rural economy](#) [Join us at the Trade Shows](#) [Notice Board](#)

Latest facts and figures

The table below gives agri-environment scheme uptake as of 31 May 2010.

Scheme	Area (ha)	% of UAA	- /+ % in UAA since 1 March 2010	Number of Agreements	-/+ of Agreements since 1 March 2010	Annual Value
CSS	333,739	3.6%	-0.3	10,453	-133	£80.5 M
ESA	430,098	4.6%	-0.4	6,589	-497	£36.5 M
ELS	5,208,068	56.1%	+2.5	39,900	+2173	£133.2 M
OELS	390,018	4.2%	+0.1	2,743	+53	£39.6 M
HLS (Combined with ELS/OELS*)	490,668	-		4,480	+477	£86.8 M
HLS (Standalone)	99,139	1.1%	+0.3	648	+82	£16.7 M
Total HLS	589,807	-		5,128	+559	£103.5 M
Overall Total	6,461,062	69.5%	+2.2	60,333	+ 1678	£393.3 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). Note that, owing to ELS expiries and renewals, the in-year uptake profiles may be very uneven, particularly in the early months of this year.

Spotlight on Higher Level Stewardship

Streamlined processing means more HLS agreements for farmers

Natural England and the farming industry have made good progress in getting farmers signed up to the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) over the past 12 months.

In the 2009/10 financial year the number of HLS agreements increased by 1,674 and the area under agreement by 324,816 hectares. These represent significant increases with the total area under HLS going up from 3.5% to 6.0% of Utilisable Agricultural Area during the year.

Perhaps the most significant point of interest for stakeholders is the increased volume of HLS agreements that Natural England was able to process, following improvements to the way we administer the scheme. In 2008 we switched from a reactive scoring system to proactively encouraging applications from those whose land had the best environmental potential, by using the new HLS 'target areas' and 'theme' data. The feedback from stakeholders and customers over the last year has been positive and that the new system is more straightforward and easier to use.

We have also been working to further streamline scheme processes and recent statistics show that the new systems are making a positive difference. In 2008/9, Natural England offered about £21m worth of HLS agreements (in terms of the first year value of the 10 year agreements: the total value over the full term is of course much higher). In contrast in 2009/10, we offered over £43m in HLS first year value. This marks a step change in the service we can offer farmers.

Early renewal will safeguard ELS payments

2010 is the 5th anniversary of ES and the first tranche of ELS agreements will expire on 31 July 2010. In all some 12000 agreements will expire this year and Natural England is very keen for farmers to stay in the scheme. Farmers, whose ELS agreements expire over the coming months, need to get their renewal application submitted to us by the deadlines listed below to ensure continuity in payments.

Agreement Expiry Date	Number of agreements involved	Application Deadline	New Agreement Start Date
31 July 2010	4481	1 June 2010	1 August 2010
31 August 2010	1202	1 July 2010	1 September 2010
30 September 2010	1087	1 August 2010	1 October 2010

Provided we receive a valid application by the deadline, we guarantee that the new agreement will start immediately the old one expires. We will do our best to process applications received after the deadline, for the earliest possible start date but given the large volume of agreements involved we cannot guarantee this in every case.

Recently we wrote to all ELS farmers with agreements expiring on 31 July. Their 1 June deadline has just passed and significant numbers have missed it. We will try to give these customers the earliest start date but we must first receive an application!

The message to farmers is that they need to get their renewal application submitted in good time - missing the deadline **will** most likely lead to a gap in their payments.

Practical advice on Uplands ELS Options

Three practical and user-friendly leaflets are now available and complement the lowland guidance leaflets released in January.

Each offers advice to upland farmers on the best ELS options to choose, and where to locate them, in order to achieve the best environmental results.

The titles of the leaflets are:-

- **Farming the uplands for wildlife,**
- **Farming the uplands for landscape and the historic environment,** and
- **Farming for the uplands for cleaner water and healthier soil.**



Natural England has produced the landscape and historic environment leaflet jointly with English Heritage, and the water and soil leaflet jointly with the Environment Agency. The leaflets are available to download and order from our [catalogue](#) and will also be available from Natural England Advisors at our uplands farm events and visits – call 0300 060 1695 for details.

Stewardship helps the rural economy

The direct benefits of Environmental Stewardship (ES) are the maintenance and restoration of landscape and historical features, and the protection of wildlife. But now a [new report](#) has shown that farmers who make the commitment to ES also provide additional income, employment and other social benefits for their local communities.

The key findings show that ES led to the creation of 665 new, full time equivalent, local jobs between 2005 and 2009, and an additional £64.7 million was generated by the local economy. The report also shows that ES promotes the development of farmers' social networks and farm business skills.

Robin Tucker, Executive Director at Natural England, commented “ We have known intuitively that the injection of ES payments must be helping the rural economy, but it was always hard to quantify by how much. Now for the first time we can demonstrate that ES, in addition to looking after the environment, is making a vital input to the rural economy in terms of jobs, farm business skills and wealth creation – and it makes these contributions where it matters most, at local level.”

The research also found that without the ES scheme payments it is likely that a large proportion of the scheme work would not have been undertaken. The work, commissioned by Defra and Natural England, was conducted by the Countryside and Community Research Institute, a collaboration between the University of Gloucestershire, the University of the West of England, the Royal Agricultural College and Hartpury College.

Join us at the Trade Shows

Natural England is present again at the main Trade Shows this year. We were busy at [Beef Expo](#) on 27 May and our next outing will be at the [Cereals Event](#) on 9/10 June. Come and visit us at **stand 532** where advisers will answer questions and provide advice to farmers and agents on:-

- opportunities for arable farmers under ELS and HLS
- tips on renewing or setting up new ELS agreements and
- demonstrating how this can easily be done online



We will also be supporting the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) on Stand 717, where our staff will join CFE Local County Coordinators in helping farmers with advice on ELS and Voluntary options choice.

The Oxford Farming Conference (OFC) are running a farmer's debate on Stand 434 (2.30pm on 9 June). The debate - *Campaign for the Farmed Environment: Is the campaign working and is it commercially viable?* - will be chaired by Will Gemmill (Director, OFC) with panellists Poul Christensen (Chairman, Natural England), Jim Egan (Chair, CFE National Delivery Group), Mark Avery (Director, RSPB) and Ian Pigott (Hertfordshire Farmer and Commentator). Come along and have your say.

We are also working with Kings Game and Conservation Crops who will be demonstrating CFE and ES options, such a pollen and nectar mixes, grass margins and wild bird seed mixes. With 12,000 farmers due to renew their ELS agreements this year, the demo plots will show how key in-field and field edge options can be used to help wildlife and support the farm business. So we hope that farmers will make sure that a visit to them is on their list!

Notice Board

Reduced budget for additional HLS capital works

As readers may be aware, Defra and its delivery bodies have been asked to contribute £162m to the Government's overall £6bn savings this year – that is 5.5% of Defra's budget for 2010/11. Part of this will be achieved by a reduction in the RDPE budget this year. This is a first step in the drive to reduce the public sector deficit and Natural England is working to balance this requirement with the need to protect the environment.

Existing commitments for HLS agreements and capital works are unaffected, and we are still able to offer new HLS agreements including capital works. But there will be a significant reduction in the number of new in-year capital works, within existing agreements, that we can fund. This means we will need to prioritise funding for projects which deliver the greatest environmental gain. We will be in a better position to discuss the possibility of agreeing additional capital works (for the current and future financial years) with agreement holders when we have a clearer picture of budget priorities later in the year.

A hill farmers checklist - so they don't miss out on payments

Farmers and agents who previously claimed Hill Farm Allowance (HFA), which has now ended, are being encouraged to take the necessary steps to ensure they continue to receive all the financial support available.

The Uplands Transitional Payment (UTP), made by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), is available to farmers who claimed HFA in 2010, who farm in Severely Disadvantaged Area land (SDA) and who have an existing Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) or Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) agreement.

Those who are ineligible for UTP are encouraged to sign up to Uplands ELS, which replaces the HFA as soon as possible to avoid a gap in their payments (see [Need to boost uptake of Uplands ELS](#)).

To make sure that farmers and agents apply for the correct support, those who have used their Single Payment Scheme forms to indicate they wish to receive UTP in 2011 are **strongly advised to check their UTP eligibility** with the help of the following checklist:

Are you eligible to claim Uplands Transitional Payment?

You must be able to answer yes to **all** of the questions below, in order to be eligible to claim UTP:

- I submitted a valid claim for HFA 2010.
- I farm at least one parcel of SDA land which will be in a CSS or ESA agreement on 1 January 2011. This CSS/ESA agreement does not have to be in my name and not all of my UTP claim has to be under a CSS/ESA agreement.
- I farm at least 10 ha of eligible SDA (including SDA commons).
- I keep eligible breeding sheep and or cattle (see booklet for retention dates and breeds).
- The forage land I farm is available to be grazed for a period of 7 continuous months, on a date starting between 1 January and 31 March 2010.
- The forage land I farm is available for me for at least 4 of those 7 months.
- I follow cross compliance across all my holding.

- I agree to keep at least 10 ha of land in the SDA in agricultural production continuously for 5 years from the date of my first HFA payment.
- The land I am using to claim UTP is not and will not be entered into an Uplands ELS agreement by me or any other person until my ESA or CSS agreement expires.

Full details of eligibility rules, including the availability of UTP for those on common land, can be found in the [UTP Section](#) of the RPA website or via the RPA Customer Service Centre on 0845 603 7777

Those who are not eligible for UTP are encouraged apply for Upland ELS by calling Natural England on 0300 060 1117 or visiting www.naturalengland.org.uk/es

Help for Land Agents working on ES

Land agents play a vital role in helping farmers join ES which why we have launched a new [webpage](#) especially for land agents. The new pages provide direct access to all of the latest news, publications and guidance. We're also creating a register of agents working on ES in each region. There are different categories of registration depending on the agent's needs and/or activities.

Agents who register will:

- Get regular updates on events, information and guidance regarding ES.
- Be listed as being able to provide a service to local land owners who want assistance with ES applications or FEPs.

Agents who wish to register should complete and submit the Agents [Registration Form](#). For more information, please contact **Dawn Metcalfe on 0300 060 1611**.

The Farm Visitor

We have recently launched a newsletter aimed at the 800 Farmers who provide educational access. The newsletter, which will be printed for the first two issues and then distributed by email, aims to provide a forum for farmers with educational access to share ideas.

The first issue which included articles about opening up a farm to a range of visitors including Brownies and Young Farmers has been very well received. With request for future articles about class rooms on farms and how best to encourage more schools and clubs to visit . [Click here](#) to read the first issue of *The Farm Visitor*.

Abbreviations used

AE (Agri-environment);CAP (Common Agricultural Policy); ELS (Entry Level Stewardship); ES (Environmental Stewardship); OELS (Organic Entry Level Stewardship),RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England);

ES update is our regular newsletter for organisations which represent the interests of farmers, land managers and others engaged in agri-environment schemes. Click [here](#) to access [back issues](#).