

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Review of Environmental Advice, Incentives and Partnership Approaches for the Farming Sector in England

March 2013

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Introduction

The current provision of advice to farmers and land managers has developed in a piecemeal way and there are now considerable opportunities for improvement. This Report sets out how we intend to meet this challenge to deliver a more integrated, streamlined and efficient approach to providing advice on the environment in England. Advice will be more accessible, clearer and easier for farmers, land managers and agents.¹ The benefits of this new approach include greater focus on competitiveness and growth potential, increased likelihood of achieving environmental outcomes and greater value to the taxpayer. This approach will also allow us to make savings of up to 25% from the £20m a year Government currently spends in this area. As the Report sets out, the amount of savings depends heavily on a number of factors.

The Review of advice, incentives and partnership approaches addressed two commitments in the [Natural Environment White Paper](#)² and deals with a number of Government commitments made in response to the [Farming Regulation Task Force](#).³ It built on the work of previous initiatives like the [Green Food Project](#),⁴ and will be taken forward in tandem with ongoing related initiatives including the Triennial Review of the Environment Agency and Natural England, and the next Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). Whilst there are still a number of uncertainties surrounding the next Common Agricultural Policy and the impacts that will have on the RDPE, our direction of travel is flexible enough to cope with these uncertainties.

This Report sets out the future direction and ‘first steps’ to drive the transition to a more coherent advice offering based on the findings from the Review. The Government is focused on the growth of the rural economy and improving the environment. This document sets out how future provision of advice will better support this aim, helping farmers to produce more food whilst continuing to protect the environment.

This Report also sets out how Government, the farming industry and farming-focussed advice providers (including environmental organisations) will work together to ensure

¹ Referred to as ‘farmers’ throughout the remainder of this document.

² Commitment 18 on Voluntary Approaches and Commitment 20 on Environmental Advice and Incentives for farmers and land managers. <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.asp>

³ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13717-farmregulationtaskforce-response.pdf>

⁴ Green Food Project (July 2012) <http://www.defra.gov.uk/food-farm/food/environment/>

better knowledge transfer of new and existing best practices and technologies. This will be critical in delivering our key environmental commitments such as those within the Water Framework Directive and Biodiversity 2020. It also supports the aims of the [UK Agri-Tech Strategy](#)⁵ in supporting growth through encouraging the domestic and global uptake of world class UK based agri-science and associated technologies, supporting their translation into high-tech agricultural systems.

What farmers and land managers have told us has shaped this review

We have focussed primarily on face to face advice about environmental issues delivered to farmers and land managers either by Government itself (in the form of bodies such as the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission) or by professional advisers on the behalf of Government (such as cross compliance advice delivered by the Farming Advice Service). We estimate that these schemes⁶ currently cost around £20m a year to run. The review has not looked in detail at advice that may be delivered during inspections or compliance visits where farmers or land managers are given information that will help them to comply with legislation. We understand that this can form an important part of the overall relationship between farmers/land managers and Government bodies but doesn't necessarily relate directly to a scheme or initiative.

The evidence from our review of current advice provision,⁷ from the Farming Regulation Task Force and from stakeholders suggests that the current provision of advice to farmers (particularly Government provided advice) is complex and fragmented. Farmers are looking for advice to be better consolidated and tailored to their needs. Figure 1 below is an illustrative representation of the complexity and number of different interactions that farmers and land managers potentially need to make in order to access advice, comply with legislation, provide information and make applications. It does not include all interactions that farmers have, nor does it suggest that all farmers are dealing with all of these organisations/interactions all of the time. It is merely an attempt to represent how complex and potentially daunting the situation can be for farmers.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/shaping-a-uk-agri-tech-strategy-call-for-evidence>

⁶ A list of the main advice schemes covered by this review can be found at Annex B

⁷ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/food-farm/>

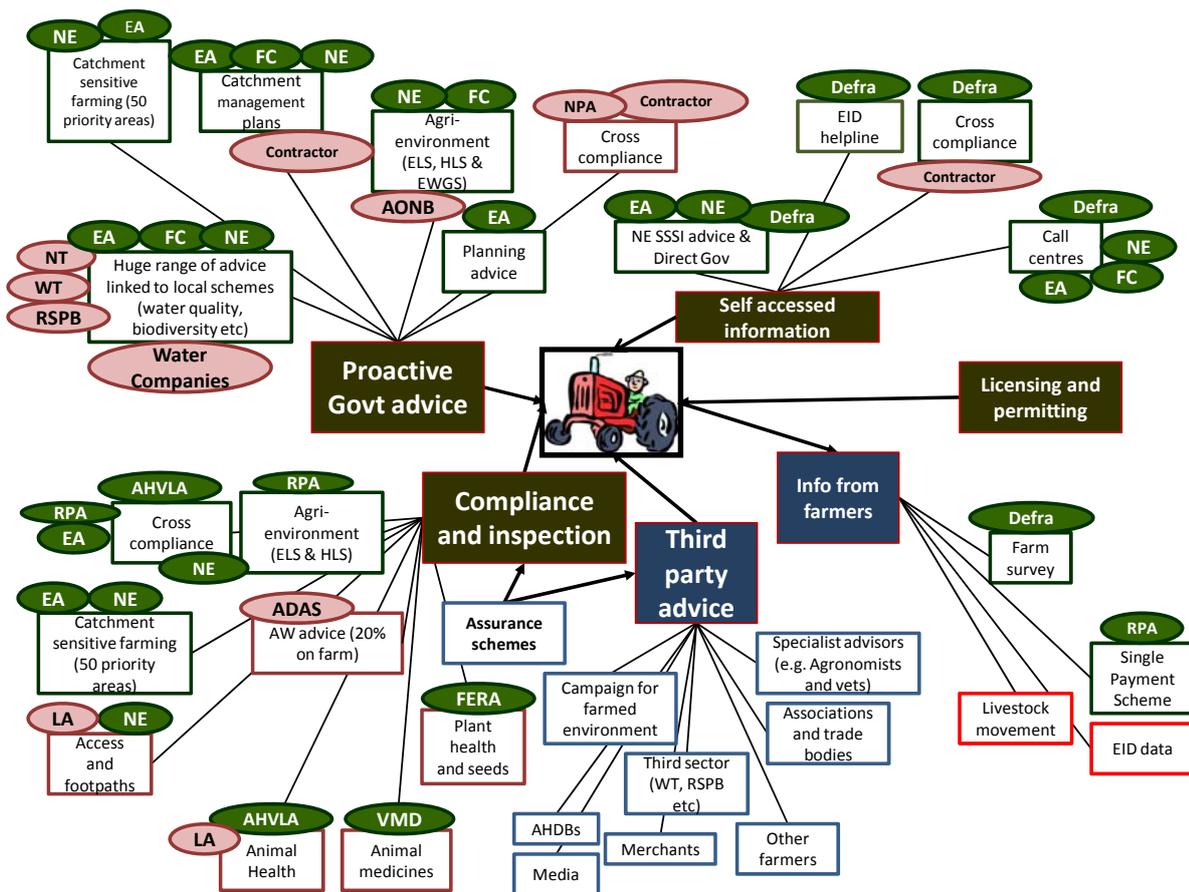


Fig.1 an illustrative representation of the complexity of the current situation

The Agricultural Industries Confederation Value of Advice report (to be published in April 2013), demonstrates the value of trusted and credible one-to-one professional adviser-farmer interactions and it recommends that the potential of this advisory resource is fully realised to help farmers mediate and bring together many complex sources of knowledge, regulation and policy objectives into the whole farm business context. The evidence from our review of current advice provision indicated that:

- **A variety of delivery approaches is preferable** - The ‘customer’ base is as diverse as the delivery base and sectors/audiences need to be well understood in order to target messages.
- **Schemes need to be targeted at clear goals/objectives** - Schemes with clear and targeted (environmental/competitiveness) goals/objectives deliver tangible outcomes.
- **Delivery at local level by trusted sources works** - Evidence highlights the benefits of local/regional delivery by trusted advisers.

- **Robust monitoring and evaluation is key** - A robust monitoring and evaluation plan along with good evidence based messaging are important for effective advice delivery.
- **Incentives are more effective if coupled with advice** - The delivery of advice alongside the provision of incentives has proved to be an important lever for encouraging uptake of the incentive.
- **Working in partnership** - Evidence shows that partnership working between Government, industry and stakeholders offers real benefits: farmers are more likely to take up messages jointly agreed between Government and industry.

We have sought to integrate these findings in this Report. The potential benefits are significant both in getting the right information to farmers when they need it, and in realising efficiencies from the approx £20m a year Government spend on advice streams to farmers. We will work towards the simplified model of advice illustrated in figure 2, below. The remainder of this report sets out how we intend to do this.

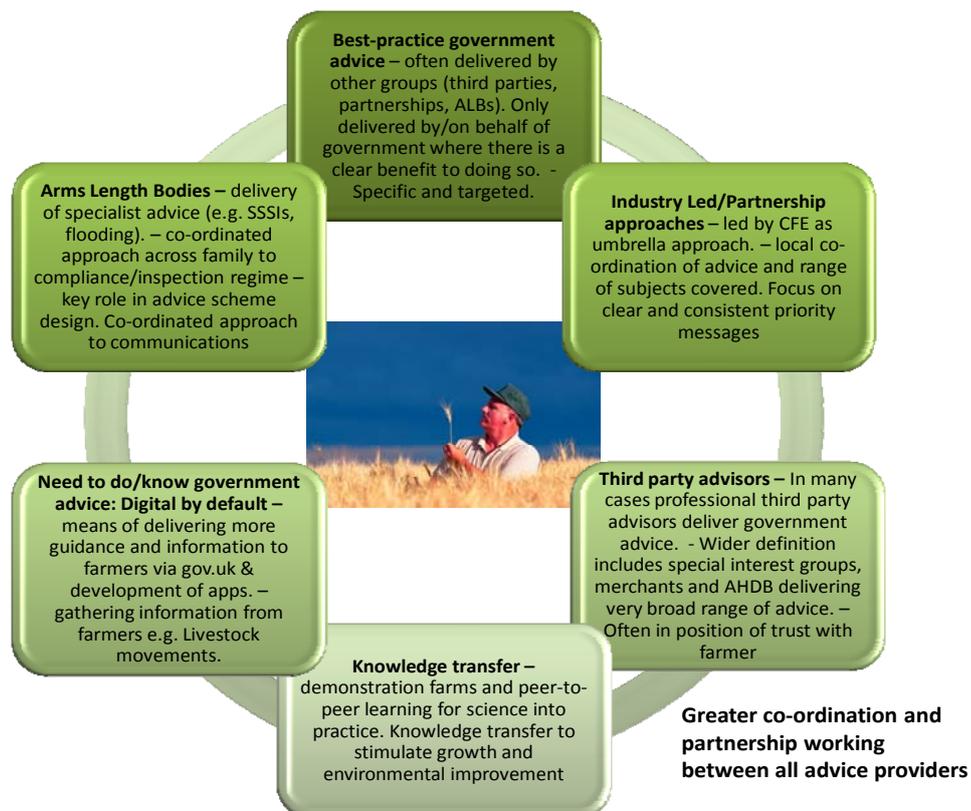


Fig.2 A simplified model for advice provision

Key actions

1. We will continue to work with the farming sector and advice providers to reduce the reliance on Government advice and improve the effectiveness of industry-led approaches

In the context of the tough spending decisions made by this Government, it is not unreasonable to expect savings from the £20m a year Government spend on advice to farmers. Government should only provide advice where there is a compelling need to do so. For example there may be a need to provide advice to those who face multiple challenges and cannot readily access sector advice, where the non-Government offering does not effectively meet all EU requirements or where Government is providing advice to improve the effectiveness of an incentive. Government advice should be fully open and contestable so as not to place other industry advice services/advisers at a disadvantage.

Industry already delivers technical advice and it is imperative that Government supports the sector's drive to increase productivity and growth through encouraging the domestic and global uptake of world class UK based agri-science and associated technologies, stimulating their translation into high-tech agricultural systems in the UK. This Report will support the [UK Agri-Tech Strategy](#) by supporting the dissemination of best practice and innovative ideas developed through demonstration farms and other knowledge transfer mechanisms.

We will also continue to follow the principles of the Farming Regulation Task Force by working in partnership with industry to develop fit-for-purpose policies which deliver the necessary outcomes, where possible, without the need for regulatory interventions. We continue to see industry-led approaches, such as the [Greenhouse Gas Action Plan](#)⁸ as complementing existing regulations and incentives.

⁸ Greenhouse Gas Action Plan (April 2011) <http://www.nfuonline.com/ghgap/>

Partnership Approaches

Partnership approaches provide an opportunity for government to achieve its priorities **working in partnership** with industry and environmental organisations rather than adding to regulatory burdens or additional budgetary demands for incentives. These approaches are more flexible, bringing partners together from a range of backgrounds, who can share expertise to produce workable solutions that benefit wildlife and the environment and contribute to the longer-term sustainability of the farm business. Partnership approaches will not replace essential legislation, but can work alongside regulation and incentives to add value and embed good practice.

Our review of evidence suggests partnership approaches are suitable to:

- Provide lead in time for industry to adjust to future challenges and to provide an opportunity for joint government/industry development (co-design) of practical, effective and acceptable solutions.
- Add value to planned or existing regulatory or incentivised approaches, providing the opportunity to ask farmers to go further than the basic requirements on an informal basis where they can demonstrate best practice.

But there are specific circumstances for which they are not suitable:

- If 100% compliance is required to meet existing regulations or targets.
- If specific actions from participants are required with limited flexibility on how requirements may be met.

We will be using five key principles in future partnership approaches:

- **Flexibility:** of delivery methods and of choice for participants over how and to what degree they participate.
- **Realistic expectations:** a partnership approach will not get 100% of farmers to participate, and those who do participate will not do so 100% of the time or to any specified standard, meaning so less impact and requiring a longer timescale to deliver than regulatory or incentivised approaches.
- **Shared goals, simple asks:** partnership approaches require a common set of objectives, clear identification of motivation and actions to undertake that are simple to understand and deliver.
- **Voluntary:** enforcement and punitive measures are out of scope for voluntary approaches, as they will be a barrier for uptake, although some element of baseline setting, targets, monitoring and evaluation are usually required.
- **Industry-led:** uptake and changing attitudes requires trusted organisations to deliver messages and take responsibility, but there is still a role for government as a partner.

Future direction:

- Government will openly share data and training materials to allow the private sector to continue to provide quality advice with the most up to date information.
- Government will look at the full remit of advice that it provides to farmers with a view to stopping advice that is also being or could be delivered by other parties. We will also look to implement an internal gateway to ensure that any future advice requirements are delivered in the most appropriate way.
- Government will continue to work with industry led partnership approaches to deliver advice that is trusted.

Key deliverables:

- i. **Government advice to become ‘open source’ to enable delivery through trusted sources.** From early 2014 all training information for Government supported advice will be made readily available to all to break down artificial barriers between Government and industry advisers, freeing up Government advice to be better targeted on those who most need it. This will encourage further partnership working between Government-funded advice and industry-led initiatives and create greater market competition around advice provision, but we will introduce safeguards to avoid duplication.
- ii. **Government will continue to support industry-led and delivered initiatives as part of the solution complementing incentives and regulations.** Lessons and wider evidence on effectiveness from the review of partnership approaches (for example the [Greenhouse Gas Action Plan](#) and [Campaign for the Farmed Environment](#)⁹) is published to accompany these recommendations.¹⁰ This demonstrates a number of positive outcomes arising from industry, rather than Government, leadership and the inclusion of a range of partners, including environmental organisations. Guidance for policy-makers has also been made available that sets out best practice for designing non-regulatory approaches which highlights the principles of successful industry-led initiatives and when they are most appropriate. It draws on examples of existing approaches and suggests the key considerations needed for design criteria. Industry-led partnership approaches provide an opportunity for Government to achieve its

⁹ <http://www.cfeonline.org.uk/>

¹⁰ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/food-farm/>

priorities working with industry and other stakeholders. Partnership approaches will not replace essential regulation which delivers legal requirements, but can work alongside regulation and incentives to add value and embed good practice.

- iii. ***A regular forum to create greater integration between Government and sector led advice provision.*** Starting in May 2013 we will hold quarterly meetings with the organisations that represent professional farming advisers and Government to ensure that advice that is delivered to the sector is more consistent, information is readily made available to professional advisers and there is greater co-ordination between Government and the advice sector. The forum will offer a channel for feedback from 'on the ground' as well as a means of integrating new developments into advice packages.

What will this mean for the farmer?

- Government-funded advice is more widely accessible.
- More advice delivered by professionals and trusted organisations that understand local issues and concerns.
- Clear and focussed messages that are easier to implement on farm.
- Access to better local knowledge exchange and networks where farmers can share ideas and learn about best practice in a practical setting.
- The individual farmer will be more empowered to act through industry-led initiatives.

2. Where Government-funded advice remains necessary, we will improve its effectiveness

The current approach to Government advice provision is fragmented. It has developed over a period of time without an overarching vision or structure to ensure that synergies are made and overlaps/duplications are avoided. With this in mind, we will act to ensure any new requirements are integrated into existing mechanisms. This will stop the potentially confusing proliferation of advice schemes and initiatives in the future. We will also ensure that any new advice requirements which are born out of the next round of the CAP and [RDPE](http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/rdpe/)¹¹ are delivered in an integrated fashion with a consistent approach across the whole programme.

¹¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/rdpe/>

We will bring Government-supported advice streams together, with a view to working closer with industry to ensure that advice is delivered to the right people at the right time, and delivers better value for the taxpayer. Although there are certain legal requirements for advice provision (mainly around the requirement in the CAP to provide a Farm Advisory System) we will seek to develop a more flexible and adaptable approach that will simplify things from the farmer's perspective, and allow incorporation of any new requirements that may arise under the next CAP.

We are already drawing on the local delivery strengths of partnership approaches and co-ordinating with the [Farming Advice Service](#)¹² to help ensure that the wider Government offering on advice is better targeted according to local circumstances and needs. We will seek to build on this through the deliverables set out below.

Future direction:

- Government 'on farm' advice will only be provided where this is the best method, in the first instance through a combined offering capable of delivering advice on a variety of issues.
- We will develop a unified contractual arrangement (a framework contract), that will allow Government supported out-sourced advice to be brought together and delivered locally by trusted sources. This may be delivered by different organisations 'on the ground' to best suit local circumstances and would ensure that different types of advice could be better linked, reducing the number of Government-supported advisers any one farmer needs to speak with to get advice on environmental issues. For example the framework contract would be flexible enough to ensure that advice on cross compliance, greening measures, lower tier agri-environment options, and nutrient management could be delivered by a single advisor framework (drawing on the principles from the integrated advice pilot study¹³) instead of the four separate advice programmes that currently undertake these roles. The framework contract will be adaptable to allow for future requirements.

¹² <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farming-advice/>

¹³ The Defra funded [Integrated Advice Pilot Study](#) developed sector specific advice packages to enable farm advisers to deliver multiple policy objectives for specific local priorities.

- Where there is a specific need there will still be scope for more detailed advice schemes and advisers who will work with the sector and outsourced advisers to ensure that the advice that is being provided is integrated and compatible.
- Research suggests there is potential for up to 25% efficiency savings on the £20m a year Government spends on advice to farmers through taking a more integrated approach. Whilst it is still unclear what the next period of the [RDPE](#) will look like, **our ambition** is to progressively realise more of these savings as we unify contracts and deliver improved coherence with industry advice, while maintaining or enhancing the overall quality of advice to individual farmers.
- We will work in partnership with farming and environmental groups to improve the coordination, integration and enhancement of existing demonstration farm activities to raise productivity, protect the environment and raise the quality of environmental management, while also helping to identify research gaps. This will aim to take forward recommendations from the [Taylor Review](#)¹⁴ and [Green Food Project](#) to improve the coordination of existing knowledge transfer activities such as demonstration farms in the drive to increase production and reduce environmental impacts.
- We will continue to take steps to reduce the number of Government helplines providing advice to farmers by ensuring the procurement of future services are flexible enough to bring them together under a single helpline banner.

Key deliverables:

- iv. ***A new integrated advice framework contract.*** We will seek to bring [The Farming Advice Service](#) (currently spend £500k pa) and any suitable schemes under the next RDPE together under the new Framework Contract as soon as practical. The [Farming Advice Service](#) contract will be re-tendered to ensure a new service delivers greater synergy with other advice, such as the lower tier of future agri-environment schemes during 2014.
- v. ***Co-ordinated and accessible information about on-farm demonstration activities for effective knowledge exchange.*** To encourage uptake of best practice and innovations contributing to sustainable intensification, an industry-led partnership of AHDB, NFU, RASE, LANDEX and others will establish the means to co-ordinate and promote existing on-farm demonstration activities

¹⁴ Taylor Review 'Science for a new age of agriculture'. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/food-farm/farm-manage/>

through the delivery of an online database that will be searchable for region, topic and sector. This will be developed and delivered in pilot form during 2013 with the intention of an official launch in 2014 coupled with an annual meeting of interested parties to with a view to identifying places where more investment is needed to fill the gaps that exist in capacity or expertise.

- vi. ***We will work with the farming sector to develop a network of local co-ordinators.*** With the broad range of issues and the diverse number of organisations and initiatives that affect the farming sector it is important that their activity is co-ordinated at a local level to make sure that there is an integrated approach to presenting the various events and initiatives. For the start of the next FAS contract in 2014 Government and the farming sector will agree a means of co-ordinating this activity at a suitable local level. This will build on the success of existing local networks.

What will this mean for the farmer?

- A more joined up offering from Government which makes it easier to find the information they need.
- Farmers will have to speak to fewer people to get the full range of advice available to them from Government.
- More Government advice will be delivered by professional advisers and trusted organisations with knowledge of local issues and concerns.
- Government advice is simpler and easier to access and navigate than it is now.
- Farmers are less likely to see transient new advice schemes and initiatives but will instead see trusted and available professional advisers who are able to provide up-to-date support and advice.

3. ‘Shifting channel’ – supporting digital by default

Government is moving away from producing printed documents, with a view to providing information online – ‘digital by default’. In line with the recommendations of the Farming Regulation Task Force to create ‘single information points’ and ‘setting a vision of moving more paperwork online’, we are creating a much more user friendly and streamlined online presence to match what is currently offered by the best private sector websites. Online guidance will be clearer and easier to find.

All Government information will be provided through a single site (www.gov.uk), which means that all the information currently held on the various websites of the Defra family will be in one place by April 2014. It will become much easier to search for and find up-to-date information. During the same period, the Government will rationalise all environmental guidance so farmers will be able to navigate more easily and quickly to a single version of relevant guidance on www.gov.uk. This should significantly reduce the time farmers need to find out about their environmental obligations. A pilot stage of work has already rationalised guidance on nutrient management and biodiversity.

The latest Farm Business Survey and Farm Practices Survey¹⁵ tells us that:

- At least 86% of farmers had access to a computer.
- Of these, 2% did not have access to the internet, 6% had dial up access, 92% had broadband access. For those with broadband, 60% reported speeds of less than 2Mbps.

The fact that the majority of farmers are already enjoying the benefits of being online is good news, but Government recognises the problems faced by some farmers and land managers in gaining access to the internet or in having the necessary computer skills. Government is committed to making sure all have reasonable opportunity to access Government advice and services.

For those who currently do not have broadband access the Government is investing £530 million in the Rural Broadband Programme being delivered by Broadband Delivery UK. This aims to bring superfast broadband to 90% of premises, with the remaining 10% hard to reach areas to receive at least standard speed (2Mbps) broadband. This is central to Government's drive to unlock the economic potential of rural communities. This is being complemented by the £20 million Rural Community Broadband Fund, which is enabling communities in the hard to reach areas to implement their own superfast broadband solutions. In the interim period, as set out in Defra's Digital Strategy, where customers are genuinely unable to get online Defra will ensure alternatives are available. We are taking steps to better identify those farmers and land managers in this group to offer support.

¹⁵ The FPS covered 60,000 of the 105,000 'commercial' holdings on the survey register in October 2012. These 60,000 holdings account for 89% of farmed area and 96% of cattle, sheep, poultry and arable land.
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/enviro/farmpractice/>

For those who could be online but are not yet, Government will target support through its agencies to assist people to get online. The benefits of conducting business online have been clearly identified, and will be essential in ensuring a viable industry that is able to compete in a global marketplace.

For the majority who are already online Government will seek to continually improve the digital offering, so that information and advice is better targeted to individual farmer's needs and links to wider services offered by Government and third parties. Farmers will no longer have to wade through a sea of paperwork to identify advice or scheme requirements, but will have rapid access to the right information at the right time.

Future direction:

- There will soon be a single point (www.gov.uk) for all Government information for farmers.
- Online/digital will be the first port of call for guidance/information on farming from Government. Tools will be provided that negate the need for hard copy mail outs of guidance/information reducing costs for Government and making it easier to update and tailor information.
- Government will continue to invest in the roll-out of rural broadband, and will ensure those who do not have access to broadband are not disadvantaged.
- Government will support those who could be but are not online to access digital content, through a range of 'digital-assist' activities.

Key deliverables:

- vii. **www.gov.uk will be the first port of call for authoritative and easily accessible government information.** The Defra website will move to www.gov.uk in April 2013 with the rest of the Defra family following by April 2014 – creating a single focal point for online advice and guidance.
- viii. **Defra Digital Assist Roadmap, summer 2013.** Defra will set out a roadmap for how the Defra network will support farmers in the transition to digital content. This will focus on helping farmers to get online (e.g. through use of existing drop-in centres) and explaining the wider benefits of making business transactions online. We will be looking to work with industry and trusted intermediaries to make sure we provide targeted support to those who most need it while delivering the best possible value to the taxpayer.

- ix. **Government will take action to identify those farmers and land managers who cannot access broadband by summer 2013.** This information will be used to put in place measures to ensure all those affected have access to important advice and guidance (such as cross compliance guidance, below).
- x. **Cross compliance guidance for England will be primarily digital by 1 January 2014.** The Rural Payments Agency and Defra will draw on the experience of the 2013 cross compliance guide to ensure the 2014 England Scheme Guide will be provided in easy to use online formats. We will publicise this change well in advance. Action will be taken to ensure all have access, drawing on our analysis of farmers broadband access (as above), and including consideration of those farmers and businesses with special circumstances or in Severely Disadvantaged Areas.

What will this mean for the farmer?

- It will be much easier for farmers to find the information they need online.
- Farmers who want, but currently cannot access the internet due to limitations in line speed / capacity should have improved services as a result of Government investment in rollout.
- Farmers who have difficulty in accessing the internet will have the support that will be available to help them develop the skills they need.
- This will help farmers access information when and where they need it, and also encourage the wider adoption of additional internet-based tools that can strengthen farm businesses.

Annex A: Table of key deliverables

No.	Deliverable	Deadline
i	Government advice will become 'open source' to enable delivery through trusted sources.	Early 2014
ii	Government will continue to support industry-led and delivered initiatives as part of the solution complementing incentives and regulations.	April 2013
iii	A regular forum to create greater integration between Government and sector led advice provision	May 2013
iv	A new integrated advice framework contract for government provided advice	2014
v	Co-ordinated and accessible information about on-farm demonstration activities for effective knowledge exchange	Pilot 2013, full roll out 2014
vi	We will work with the farming sector to develop a network of local co-ordinators.	April 2014
vii	www.gov.uk will be the first port of call for authoritative and easily accessible government advice.	April 2013 for central Defra, April 2014 for the rest of the Defra family
viii	Defra Digital Assist Roadmap	Summer 2013
ix	Government will take action to identify those farmers and land managers who cannot access broadband.	Summer 2013
x	Cross compliance guidance for England will be primarily digital	January 2014

Annex B: List of main Advice schemes covered by this Review

Key Government funded Advice and Incentive Scheme/initiatives covered by the Review
Catchment Sensitive farming (Defra, Natural England)
Entry Level Stewardship (Natural England)
Higher Level Stewardship (Natural England)
Nitrates Vulnerable Zones (Environment Agency)
England Woodland Grant Scheme (Forestry Commission)
Farming Advice Service – Cross Compliance, Nutrient Management and Climate Change (Defra)
Wide range of RDPE Schemes focusing on a broad range of issues at a local level (e.g. South West Healthy Livestock Initiative and Soils for Profit)

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