

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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

Evaluation of selected advice and incentives schemes

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Aim

1. The work undertaken in this study is a key part of the Review of Advice, Incentives and Partnership Approaches, and aimed to provide an understanding of the existing framework for advice provision and delivery to farmers and land managers and to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of the framework. This report summarises the evidence gathered (through a two pronged approach – customer perception survey and case study analysis) as part of the review to help inform the development of a future framework for the delivery of advice and incentives.
2. The Review of Advice, Incentives and Partnership Approaches takes forward a key action in Defra’s Business Plan (May 2012) - to “Publish plans for a streamlined framework of advice, incentives and voluntary initiatives to enable farmers and land managers to be more competitive and yield better environmental outcomes” [by March 2013]. It is also being taken forward in the context of commitments made in the Natural Environment White Paper (published June 2011).

Summary

3. The current framework for land manager advice was listed and mapped to environmental priorities and ‘drivers’ of farm practice using a wide range of information sources, including an extensive stakeholder consultation. The effectiveness of the advice framework was assessed using a selection of schemes and initiatives that were representative of the existing advice landscape. The assessment of these schemes and initiatives was undertaken through a survey of farmers views on advice, and a series of Case Study workshops that involved a deeper examination of their financing, structure, delivery and outcomes. Key findings from the recent Integrated Advice Pilot study were also drawn upon.

Method and results

‘Issues tree’ questions

4. A series of key questions were raised at the beginning of the project which formed the backdrop for the work undertaken and guided its direction. The overarching question for the Detailed Review being: *What does the current advice landscape look like in detail and how effective is it?*
5. Two main areas of investigation arose from this overarching question, each with their own set of sub-questions (*the numbers in square brackets at the end of each question below refer to the relevant paragraph where the question is addressed*):

- i) Description and mapping of the current advice landscape
 - a. How much money is spent delivering advice (and incentives)? [8]
 - b. What different types of advice are available? [10]
 - c. What topics do existing advice streams cover (which government priorities etc)? [10]
 - d. Who provides advice to farmers and land managers? [10]
 - e. Which sectors are the main providers of advice (government, industry, 3rd sector etc)? [9]
 - f. What is government's role within the advice landscape? [11]
 - g. How and to whom different types of messages are delivered (eg knowledge transfer, regulatory, best practice, incentivised)? [9]

- ii) Evaluation of the effectiveness of advice
 - a. How effective are current advice streams and what inefficiencies exist? [31]
 - b. What are the key problems with the advice incentives landscape? [36]
 - c. How does government delivered advice interact with/affect private sector messaging? [34]
 - d. What is the customer perception of provision of advice? [18]
 - e. Which schemes have worked best in the past? [31]

Description and mapping of the current advice landscape

6. This part of the Detailed Review was undertaken as a desk study. It drew on information provided through consultation with Defra network sources as well as extensive use of web searching and previously published and unpublished reports. It was decided early on that written guidance that helped Land Managers to comply with environmental regulatory requirements was **out of scope** for this work as it was being covered as part of the Task Force on Farm Regulation and the work of the Better Regulation Programme.
7. Information on various schemes, initiatives and providers of advice, including details of funding, environmental targets, delivery agent, sector and 'drivers' of farm practice was consolidated into a tabulated list (see **Annex 1**). This data was also presented as PowerPoint slides following the mapping of each scheme/provider to environmental targets (priority) and farm practice 'driver' (see **Annex 2**).
8. Our estimates show that around £20 million per year is spent on administering and delivering government advice schemes and initiatives.
9. There are a minimum of 80 sources of advice and incentives to farmers and land managers (including from government, industry and other providers – see **Annex 1**) and it is delivered in a wide variety of formats: individual farm visits by government and independent advisers, at organised events, clinics, workshops

and 'drop ins' (such as those organised by the Farming Advice Service, for example), website information, guideline documents, information sheets, online fora, e-mail and telephone helplines.

10. Advice topics cover all four areas of environmental priority for the Government, namely soil/land use, water, biodiversity and air (as well as animal health). The most comprehensively covered areas are soil/land, water and biodiversity. Biodiversity has a large proportion of non-Government schemes and air is less well represented. Government schemes cover all three 'drivers' of advice (legal/financial incentives/best practice) with most activity being on financial incentives and best practice. The majority of schemes and initiatives are led either by government or farming industry organisations. Although both these sectors have their own qualified advisers and 'extension officers' (and often work in partnership) there is also a large commercial sector of organisations comprising independent agricultural consultants, agronomists and vets. Further sources of advice include trusts, independent and charitable organisations.
11. The bulk of the government's advice activities are targeted at administering financial incentives (including the Single Payment System, Environmental Stewardship and other RDPE-funded initiatives) or providing the farmer with best practice advice for environmental and competitiveness outcomes (through partnership approaches such as the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, Catchment Sensitive Farming or schemes which seek to incentives farmers and land managers to deliver environmental benefits like ELS and EWGS).
12. Against this background and regarding advice on regulatory compliance, the Environment Agency has a responsibility for delivering face to face advice to farmers and land managers to secure compliance with certain legal requirements (mainly associated with water pollution but also including water resource management and waste disposal). In addition, a system for providing advice to help farmers and land managers meet Cross Compliance and Single Payment Scheme obligations is a legal requirement mandated by the European Commission. Towards this, Defra funds the administration of a Farming Advice Service (FAS) that provides advice on how to implement and adhere to Cross Compliance measures. FAS currently also delivers best practice advice for addressing two wider ranging environmental issues (nutrient management and climate change) as well as competitiveness.
13. Whilst FAS is administered and funded by government, the advice itself is delivered by independent commercial advisers by way of a telephone helpline and the provision of free expert speakers to groups and events. Defra also funds the Farming Online web pages which provide a single repository for documents

and information, *and* hyperlinks to other sites hosting documents and information, aimed at meeting the vast majority of farmers' advice requirements.

14. The Rural Payments Agency provide a Helpline and online information for the Single Payment Scheme and Cross Compliance and whilst the RPA Inspectorate has a role to verify compliance with Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and the code of Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC), its Inspectors are not allowed to deliver advice *per se*.
15. The role of the agricultural industry organisations and the levy bodies in delivering advice is focussed on best practice (as opposed to advice on regulatory compliance or financially incentivised activities) and is often aimed at helping the farmer maximise competitiveness. However, the industry organisations recognise the important link between improving environmental performance and competitiveness and often work with government in partnership towards delivering both types of targets. The levy bodies and industry organisations are also closely associated with knowledge transfer activities - another aspect of advice provision which aims to promote the results of innovative research into mainstream practice.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of advice

16. This part of the Detailed Review was addressed through two separate but complementary workstreams – (i) a survey of farmer's and land manager's views ('customer perception') on a selection of 12 chosen advice and incentive schemes (see table below), selected to be representative of the wider advice landscape, (ii) Case Study evaluation for 6 of these advice schemes (see shaded schemes in the table below).
17. Selection of advice schemes for inclusion in this part of the Detailed Review was done in extensive consultation with the project working group members, Defra policy teams and external stakeholders including farm industry organisations. The schemes selected cover a range of advice 'drivers'; financial incentives, animal health, partnership approaches, industry schemes, regulatory compliance and regional delivery.

Scheme	Provider	Scope and Delivery	Main policy targets
The Entry Level Stewardship Scheme	Government (NE)	National, by independent advisers (FATI)	Biodiversity
The English Woodland Grant Scheme	Government (FC)	National, by FC advisers	Land management, biodiversity
The Campaign for the Farmed Environment	Industry and government partnership	National, and target County Coordinators	Biodiversity
Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative	Government (NE, EA and Defra)	Regional, by government officers and industry advisers (FATI)	Water quality
Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil regulation (SSAFO)	Government (EA)	National, by EA officers, FAS, other?	Water quality & Nutrient management
Nitrate Vulnerable Zones	Government (EA)	National, by EA officers, FAS, other?	Water quality & Nutrient management
The Pesticide Voluntary Initiative	Farm industry organisations	National, via Farming Industry partnership	Water, health, biodiversity
Red Tractor Schemes (Assured British Meat, Combinable Crops etc)	Food industry	National, via Technical Advisory Committee	Environment, animal welfare
Better Returns Programme	EBLEX (levy body)	National, through EBLEX co-ordinators	Livestock productivity
South West Healthy Livestock Initiative	Government (RDPE funds)	Regional, through RBS co-ordinators and vets	Livestock productivity
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)	AONB Boards via local authorities	Regional, by affiliated advisers	Land management
English National Parks	National Park Authorities	Regional, by affiliated advisers	Land management
Colour fill indicates scheme included in Case Study evaluations			

Customer Perception Survey

18. The survey sought to acquire feedback about the experiences of farmers and land managers when accessing and making use of advice. It was conducted via telephone using a quota sampling method from two sample sources: the RPA farmer panel¹, and lists of farmers and land managers known to have participated in the 12 schemes – supplied by Defra and the RPA. Over 570 farmers from all sectors in England participated in the survey, and the target for a minimum of 50 interviews per scheme was achieved. The limitations of this sampling method are recognised as the views of the farmers surveyed may not necessarily be representative of the whole farming community, given the selective nature of sampling method.

¹ A representative sample of those using RPA services who have agreed previously to take part in further research

However it provides a useful basis on which to conduct this review. Factors important for the effective delivery of advice had already been identified as part of a related workstream - the High Level Review (see **Annex 3** for key principles) and were used to develop a questionnaire (see **Annex 4**) that would elicit responses on a number of aspects of advice provision and delivery including i) preferred/most frequently accessed sources, ii) accessibility and clarity, iii) appropriate targeting of messages, iv) consideration of social context and v) impact. The full report from the survey is published on the Defra Science and Research pages at the following link - [Customer perception of advice and incentives through a survey of farmers and land managers](#).

Sources of advice

19. Survey respondents were asked to indicate which government and industry organisations they have contacted during the last year. From the six government bodies included in the questionnaire the highest proportion of farmers had had contact with the Rural Payments Agency during the last year (53%), followed by Natural England (42%).
20. Contact with each government body was split by farm type and showed a variety of significant variations. Dairy farmers were significantly more likely to have contacted Defra (51%) and Natural England (54%) in the last 12 months, while arable farmers were significantly more likely to have contacted the Rural Payment Agency (64%).
21. The level of contact with industry sources of advice and information showed that 45% of respondents had contacted independent advisors or agronomists over the last 12 months, a proportion that is second only to the 53% who had contacted the Rural Payment Agency. It is also notable that two in five (41%) had contacted the National Farmers Union.

Accessibility, clarity and targeting of advice and messages

22. Interestingly, the survey demonstrated that farmers and land managers generally find it easy to access the advice that they need to help run their businesses and also that it is generally appropriately targeted. The lowest scoring indicator of appropriate targeting was whether the advice 'took account of (the farmers') skills, experience and local knowledge' – only 61% answered positively. Those respondents who found it difficult to access advice and information (18%) gave 'being passed from person to person' as the most frequent reason for this. Other reasons for finding it difficult to access advice were 'too much general information available (should be targeted)', 'website is confusing/do not use internet' and 'schemes are complicated/constantly changing'. The sector who found accessing information most difficult were those carrying out mixed farming.

23. Some survey respondents (21%) raised concerns about being on the receiving end of conflicting messages from different advice sources. Most cited the large number of advice schemes with often different and competing priorities as the root cause of this issue which has often led to confusion, reduced confidence in particular schemes/ initiatives and could invariably undermine uptake of improved farm management practices.

Impact of advice

24. The responses to questioning about the impact of the schemes/advice were generally less positive than most other areas of questioning: when asked 'the information/advice was successful in helping you to deliver on-farm benefits', 66% agreed; when asked 'the information/advice you received has delivered environmental benefits for your land/farm', 61% agreed. Most importantly perhaps, when asked 'the information/advice you received has delivered financial benefits', only 39% agreed.

Benchmarking customer perception of specific schemes

25. The survey data enabled a scheme to scheme comparison to be made for each facet of advice (see section 3 of the customer perception survey report). Such comparisons serve as a benchmark regarding how farmers and land managers have perceived the provision of advice from different schemes. It should be noted that this benchmarking is only indicative as there are inherent differences between the surveyed schemes (in terms of their target audience, level/area of coverage, budgets, length of existence etc).

26. All of the 12 schemes score relatively highly with regards to 'accessibility and clarity' (mean = 77%, range = 57-89%) and 'appropriate targeting' (mean = 70%, range 51-87%). Interestingly the two lowest scoring schemes on 'accessibility and clarity' were on regulatory compliance, arguably an area where these two parameters are most important.

27. Perhaps the most interesting comparisons arise from the questions on environmental or financial benefits. One observation is that AONBs and National Parks do relatively better on the perception of 'environmental benefits' than any of the other categories. Conversely the Better Returns Programme scores lowest in this category (having done above averagely well in the other categories).

28. Regarding perception of financial benefits, the scoring overall is much lower (mean = 39%, range 12-68%). The English Woodland Grant Scheme scores highest in this category which could reflect recent increased support for potential use of woodland as biofuels sources. Nitrate Vulnerable Zones score lowest in this category.

Case Studies

29. This strand of the detailed review sought to undertake an in-depth assessment of (i) the effectiveness of 6 selected advice/ incentive schemes, (ii) what constitutes good and bad practice, and (iii) the structures and administrative requirements of these schemes with a specific focus on the advice elements. It was taken forward through a detailed consultation with the relevant scheme providers, via a series of scheme focused workshops using an assessment criteria based on a set of structured questions (see **Annex 5**).
30. At the workshops, the scheme providers gave their honest opinions on the performance of the schemes in terms of their effectiveness and areas where things have not worked so well. Relevant Defra policy officials were also in attendance at these workshops to ensure the views put forward were balanced. The outputs from these workshops helped to inform the key questions around (i) the effectiveness of current advice and incentive schemes (ii) the existing inefficiencies and challenges. The key messages from the workshops are summarised below. Summaries of the outputs from all 6 workshops are available in **Annex 6**.

Effectiveness of current advice and incentive schemes

31. Outputs from the workshops and extensive consultations with scheme providers showed that most schemes examined had been able to raise their level of effectiveness to varying degrees over a period of time by building on lessons they had learnt from the past. This observation resonates with results from the customer perception survey which showed relatively strong performances from most schemes assessed.
32. Four of the 6 advice schemes examined (CSF, ELS ETIP, EWGS and SWHLI) combined the provision of advice with some form of incentive. Evidence from the workshops showed that this approach (referred to as the multiplier effect) has proved to be very effective in increasing the uptake of advice. Targeting and tailoring advice based on an in-depth understanding of the target audience and their lifestyles, while delivering through a variety of communication mediums/activities (e.g. printed, online, themed farm works, clinics, Vet days etc) has also been very effective, particularly in the livestock sectors. It is believed that targeted campaigns are effective in reaching progressive farmers (10 – 20%), while a ‘blanket bombing’ approach (employing multiple media formats) could reach the ‘hard to reach’ farmers. The work of the EBLEX – BRP has shown that livestock farmers have a clear preference for printed information compared to electronic formats.

33. Delivery through skilled and trusted advisers (relationships built over time) is seen to be essential for effective advice delivery by scheme providers, and any future framework should seek to ensure such expertise is maintained. Scheme/initiatives with clear and targeted objectives focused at specific outcomes (e.g. water quality) are better able to monitor and evaluate their performance – linking outcomes achieved to advice provided. A robust monitoring and evaluation plan coupled with good evidence based messaging are also believed to be key components for effective advice delivery. The experience of CSF highlighted the benefits of having a distinct brand (e.g. having a unique logo) that enables the delivery of integrated messages from multiple organisations under a unified banner – reducing the risk of confusion to farmers.
34. In terms of delivery models, delivery through local channels is thought to be the most effective approach and generally employed by most schemes. Delivery by 3rd sector advice providers through the Farm Advice Training and Information Programme (FATI) framework agreement, co-ordinated by NE regional teams as in the case of ELS-ETIP and CSF has worked well and brought capacity to the advice market. It has been effective in providing an avenue for interaction and cross pollination between government funded and private sector advice provision. A similar delivery model used by the RDPE funded SWHLI which is delivered through an academic institution, (the Duchy College Rural Business School) has equally been effective. The Healthy Livestock project is delivered to farmers through events organised by local vets and livestock advisors who are trained and co-ordinated by a team of regionally based training co-ordinators employed by the RBS.
35. Most of the schemes assessed have also highlighted the benefits of partnership working with industry and stakeholders. Evidence from most schemes show that messages jointly agreed between government and industry were more likely to be taken up by farmers.

Key challenges with current advice and incentive schemes

36. One area that has continued to be of concern to schemes funded through the RDPE is the onerous RPA and EU reporting requirements which continues to place a significant burden on their administrative budgets, as well as the restrictive rules around the funding stream. A key inefficiency for most schemes is the continued difficulty of influencing the ‘hard to reach’ farmers, as innovative approaches are required to engage this segment of farmers in a cost effective way. The absence of adequate monitoring and evaluation programmes in quite a few of the schemes considered is of significant concern as this limits their ability to effectively assess performance against set objectives. Experience from CSF has shown that at catchment level it could take as much as 6-8 years to build trusted relationships required for effective advice delivery. Some believe that this

should be considered alongside sound cost benefit analysis in view of the desired long term outcomes of a scheme in putting in place detailed timing strategies (entry and exit) in the planning of schemes from the outset. Improving how we share information and intelligence should enhance our ability to access 'hard to reach' farmers and influence 'Earned Recognition'.

37. The complex nature of the current NVZ regulations and the measures required to comply with them, coupled with the large number of farm holdings within designated areas have significantly limited the impact of previous NVZ advice and support programmes. Since 2008, advice has been delivered through national and regional awareness raising and training events as well as through a telephone helpline, albeit by multiple organisations. However there still remains significant numbers of farmers within an NVZ who claim to be unaware that they are in one. There is currently no formal scheme or project to deliver proactive advice specifically on NVZs, and issues surrounding this area-based designation need to be addressed going forward.

Summary and conclusions

38. Part of the problem with the current advice landscape appears to be the number of stakeholders with often different, but often overlapping agendas: farmers, government (and its agencies), industry organisations, European Commission, independent consultants and so on. The following summary and conclusions have been drawn from the evidence gathered.

Summary

39. Much of the Government's advice activities relate to the administration of financial incentives (including the Single Payment System and other RDPE-funded initiatives), or the Defra coordinated Farming Advice Service (FAS), which advises farmers on Cross Compliance—something the Government is legally obliged to provide by the European Commission. FAS also provides best practice advice on nutrient management, climate change and competitiveness.

40. There is some concern around the way FAS is delivered in England. The present FAS only supports advice delivered through organised group events and a telephone helpline. Many consider the absence of 1:1 on-farm/ in situ advice provision, and its' obvious benefits, to be a weakness.

41. The wide range of stakeholders within the advice delivery landscape has resulted in a situation where there are well over 80 different schemes, initiatives and sources of advice available to farmers and land managers. These cover regulatory compliance, best practice and financially incentivised schemes. An

added complication is the sheer diversity of the 'customer base' -each farm is essentially a unique geo-biological system organised and managed by different individuals with different values and priorities/goals.

42. The evidence reviewed suggests that the current advice delivery landscape is providing reasonable support to farmers and land managers in their delivery of environmental benefits, however the lack of coherence between activities, as well as the absence of a shared view of 'the customer' both at national and local levels all account for the observed inefficiencies and duplication that consequently impacts on its effectiveness.
43. Partnership approaches between Defra and industry (for example the Campaign for the Farmed Environment) as well as agency partnerships with NE, EA and the Forestry Commission (for example Catchment Sensitive Farming, ELS and EWGS), have made significant contributions on the provision of environmental and best practice advice to farmers and land managers.

Conclusions

44. Against this background, and according to the evidence from this project, any future framework should ensure that schemes are effectively targeted at clearly defined (environmental) goals, and that the nature/make up of the customer base is well understood, so that the most suitable communication formats are employed.
45. Given the progress of the 'Digital by Default' agenda, one of the major challenges will be to bring about a revolution in the way that farmers and land managers use information technology, and in particular the extent to which they use the internet.
46. The importance of utilising/ encouraging greater delivery at local/regional scales is also highlighted by the evidence. Our review considered two schemes where advice was delivered at these scales and the successful outcomes reported by both sets of providers are not coincidental: a stakeholder workshop on this topic supported the view that local/regional delivery can be very effective and also cost efficient. However, one provider of a regionally delivered scheme also mentioned the importance of clearly communicated long term goals and exit strategies which also recognise resource implications, and the need to balance these with the long timescales required to develop trust between adviser and customer.
47. Findings from the [Integrated Advice Pilot study](#) highlighted the value of employing an integrated approach in the development and delivery of targeted (sector specific and locally focused) advice that balanced farm business needs with environmental priorities. This approach has the potential to help tackle perceived tensions between competing priorities and the conflicting messages that result,

which has seldom lead to confusion and potentially acted as a barrier to uptake of advice. As such, future advice and incentive schemes could benefit from adopting this approach to ensure consistency of messaging so as to better meet the needs of farmers while providing improved value for money.

48. It is unlikely that there will be a net increase in the level of funding for the future delivery of advice and incentives to farmers and land managers in England. Most in the advice sector are aware of this, as well as the need for an improved system. However, it is crucial that any restructuring of the sector is managed in such a way that vital expertise is retained to enable future targets and outcomes to be reached.
49. A large amount of advice is associated with RDPE-funded initiatives. The common message from the Case Study Evaluations (which included 4 RDPE-funded schemes) was that the reporting requirements in these instances are disproportionately onerous. This constitutes a major inefficiency of the current system and is something that is a barrier to use.
50. An interesting example of a schemes perceived to be successful was the South West Healthy Livestock Initiative (SWHLI) see **Annex 6**. While not applicable to replicate in all advice programmes, it is important to understand any factors particular to that delivery model that made it successful, so that best practice may be propagated in any future framework. In summary, most of SWHLI is administrated through a single academic Institute (the Duchy Colleges Rural Business School) situated in the South West. It has access to a widely distributed set of beneficiaries within the six counties and uses a number of regional co-ordinators to train the specialist advisers (in this case the vets) on how and what advice to deliver in order to meet the goals of the initiative. Another factor may have been the use practical incentives such as diagnostic kits for those who sign up to particular strand of advice. This would be consistent with the view that advice accompanied by an incentive (financial or non-financial e.g. bespoke action plan) is much more effective than advice delivered on its own.

Key Conclusions:

51. From the above conclusions, the following key points have been drawn:

- 1: All future schemes should be directed at specific goals, whether these are environmental, competitiveness, or both.**
- 2: Defra and its partners should continue to invest in developing a better understanding of our customer base, as this will be integral to maintaining the success of a future framework.**
- 3: A future framework should be designed to satisfy the Digital by Default agenda, and this means that Defra and partners should find innovative ways to increase the use of IT—and particularly the internet—among our customers.**
- 4: Key principles for employing an integrated approach in tackling environmental issues alongside the business needs of farmers in the development and delivery of targeted advice (as demonstrated by the Integrated Advice Pilot study) should be built upon and harnessed by future schemes.**
- 5: The obvious benefits of more local/regional forms of delivery should be realised, though the risks must be well managed.**
- 6: Detailed planning strategies (entry and exit) based on sound cost benefit analysis and which take account of long term goals and resource implications, should underpin the development of schemes from the outset.**
- 7: Any attempt at re-structuring the advice landscape should identify and retain the high-level of expertise and capacity that is already out there.**
- 8: The reporting requirements for RDPE funded initiatives represents a major inefficiency that is widely recognised – opportunities should be taken to address this in future EU negotiations.**
- 9: Examples of best practice from the evidence should be emulated in any future framework.**