



Briefings for MPs on CAP Reform

#1 Rural Development Programmes



#1 Rural Development Programmes

INTRODUCTION

The UK's countryside provides us with a multitude of benefits. As well as providing much of our food, it supports our rural communities and provides many 'public goods' such as biodiversity, landscapes, clean water and healthy soils. Its landscapes contain features of historic and cultural importance and present opportunities for recreation, thus influencing our health and well-being. In terms of wildlife, the UK countryside is home to many of our most iconic species and habitats, from Corncrake to Cornflower, and blanket bog to lowland heath.

Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), which are funded by Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), play a key role in supporting the provision of these public goods in our rural areas – goods which, by definition, cannot be adequately provided by the market.² RDP funding supports economic and social measures which are designed to assist rural communities to improve their competitiveness, improve the quality of life and provide basic services. It also provides incentives to improve animal welfare and funds training and advice for farmers. Core to all RDPs are , which allow farmers and other land managers to manage their land with wildlife in mind.

¹ Pillar I provides direct support for farmers

² European Network for Rural Development, 'Public Goods and Public Intervention' (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=D44F5AC8-F0D1-373F-E090-B782D2D22384)

Within the UK, each country produces its own RDP and develops its schemes within this to reflect the characteristics of their environments and the particular needs of their rural communities. Examples of Agri-environment schemes developed within the UK include the Higher Level Stewardship in England, Rural Priorities in Scotland, Glastir in Wales and the Northern Ireland Countryside Scheme.

At present, the UK government is negotiating within Europe on the future shape of the CAP. The next RDPs within England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are also being developed at present and the resources available for these will be influenced by the outcomes of the CAP reform process. However, at this early stage there are real opportunities for MPs to ensure that the RDP in their part of the UK delivers not only for rural economies, but encourages the protection and provision of the important public goods rural areas provide.

WHY STRONG RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES ARE SO IMPORTANT

RDPs can provide taxpayers with good value for money by supporting the delivery of the many public goods and benefits our rural areas provide. Millions of people in the UK care deeply about the country's wildlife, landscapes and environment and benefit both directly and indirectly from these public goods.

RDPs can therefore demonstrate the key principle for the use of taxpayer's money – that and ensure that those embracing the provision of non-marketable, public goods from their land should be rewarded for this.

The UK government is a signatory to the EU Biodiversity Strategy which commits us to halting and reversing declines in biodiversity by 2020. Well-resourced agri-environment schemes will be the decisive factor in whether or not we achieve this aim.

Investing in nature and the countryside through an RDP also makes sound economic sense. The environment is worth billions to the UK economy every year, providing ecosystem services such as pollination, water purification and flood defence.³ Well-designed and adequately funded environmental measures therefore deliver clear benefits to society and represent a genuine return for public investment in agriculture. Such measures provide the most effective means of conserving landscape features and biodiversity in farmland habitats under threat, whilst also helping to maintain viable farming and rural communities and delivering wider economic and social benefits.

³ UNEP-WCMC (2011), 'UK National Ecosystem Assessment: Synthesis of Key Findings' (<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>)

#1 Rural Development Programmes

RDPs can contribute to wider social and economic delivery, and play an important role in maintaining viable farming and rural communities, providing training for farmers and support for improved standards of animal welfare.

A CASE STUDY

Agri-environment schemes in the UK form a key part of the four countries RDPs. Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) in England helps to illustrate that a well-designed, targeted scheme provides multiple benefits for the environment, rural communities and society as whole. There is strong evidence to suggest HLS can reverse the declines of species such as the Grey Partridge and Reed Bunting at the farm scale, and is the key tool for restoring many of the most degraded priority habitats in England. There is also strong evidence that HLS has distinct socio-economic benefits. For every £1 of HLS scheme payment that goes to the agreement holder, £1.43 is generated off-farm in the local economy,⁴ indicating that investing in HLS realises a significant return for the taxpayer and local economy.

⁴ CCRI (2010), 'Estimating the Incidental Socio-economic Benefits of Environmental Stewardship Schemes' (<http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/foodfarm/reports/es-socioeconomic/esschemes-socioeconomic-summary-100330.pdf>)

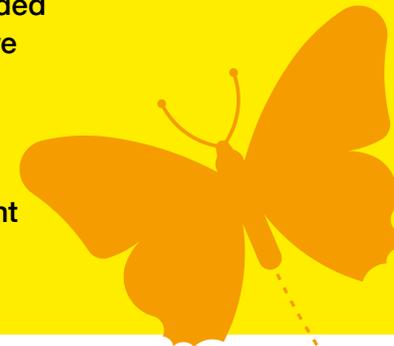
WHAT ACTION CAN MPs TAKE?

RDPs are by some distance the most important source of funding for the nature conservation in the UK. However, as part of the wider EU Budget, the amount of funding they receive is under significant pressure.

The UK must send a message to other EU Member States that the CAP, which accounts for 40% of the overall EU Budget, must work much harder to demonstrate better value for money for the European taxpayer. Well-funded Rural Development Programmes which have the environment at their core, will be the best way to achieve this.

As an MP, you can help to achieve this by keeping the pressure on the UK Government to maintain a strong negotiating stance in Europe based on the following:

- Safeguarding of the Pillar II budget, under which RDPs sit
- Prioritisation of funding for the natural environment, recognising its importance to conserving wildlife, protecting natural resources that underpin farm viability and the knock-on benefits it brings for rural economies
- Support for the transfer of funds from Pillar I to Pillar II, to enable Member States to boost their funding for RDP programmes



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact **Julie Middleton** at **Wildlife and Countryside Link** on **020 7820 8600** or **julie@wcl.org.uk**

Briefings for MPs on CAP Reform

WHO WE ARE

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together 40 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. Our members practice and advocate environmentally sensitive land management and encourage response for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic environment and biodiversity. Taken together our members have the support of over eight million people in the UK and manage over 750,000 hectares of land. We have been working for many years to try and ensure that rural development policy delivers all that it can for the countryside whilst rewarding those who embrace this responsibility in the management of the land.

Wildlife and Countryside Link

89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7TP

T 020 7820 8600
www.wcl.org.uk

Registered charity no. 1107460
Link | February 2013

THIS BRIEFING IS SUPPORTED BY THE FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONS

