

Briefings for MPs on CAP Reform

#2 Greening: Ecological Focus Areas



Wildlife and
Countryside



#2 Greening: Ecological Focus Areas

INTRODUCTION

As well as providing much of our food, our farmland supports our rural communities and produces vital 'public goods' such as biodiversity, landscapes, clean water and healthy soils. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the most powerful factors influencing how our farmland is managed and has a key role to play in supporting the provision of these public goods, which cannot be adequately provided by the market.¹ However, for much of its history it has driven environmentally damaging land management and whilst recent reforms have helped to turn the tide it is still not meeting its potential to safeguard food production and farming in the long-term by protecting and enhancing the environment.

The CAP is currently being reformed and the decisions taken across 2013 will have significant consequences for the quality of land management up to 2020, a year which coincides with the renewed European Union (EU) targets for halting and reversing biodiversity declines. The current reform round contains proposals to 'green' direct payments under Pillar I by introducing a number of new requirements that farmers and land managers must meet. It is possible that 30% of direct support to farmers will be conditional on these greening requirements.

¹ 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)

This is a significant sum of public money and MPs have an obligation to ensure that the greening measures introduced will deliver benefits to the environment which are effective and lasting. In particular, the greening measures must better support the production of the vital 'non-food' public goods that farmers and land managers provide. Of the measures proposed, we believe that the Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) have the greatest potential to deliver a range of public benefits in the farmed countryside, provided that EFAs account for no less than 7% of the farm area and are made up of features and land use types which are beneficial to the environment.

CURRENT SITUATION

For the first time ever, Member State governments share decision-making powers with the European Parliament and it is vital that the negotiation process between these parties delivers a policy that:

- Directs public funding to farmers and land managers who provide society with vital, but undervalued, environmental public goods.
- Demonstrates efficient spend and value for money.

Reforming the CAP so that it helps correct the market failure to value and reward the provision of environmental public goods is one clear way to do this, in addition to supporting the economic viability of UK farming.

WHY 'GREENING' AND EFAs ARE NEEDED

Despite some positive reforms to the CAP, such as the introduction of cross compliance² and particularly agri-environment schemes, the policy is still failing to drive more sustainable farming methods at the scale needed to reverse biodiversity declines and address wider environmental issues of resource degradation. As direct payments will continue to form the majority of the CAP Budget after 2013 it is vital that they work much harder to deliver wider environmental benefits in return for public support in farming, particularly in this time of economic austerity and heightened scrutiny of public expenditure. The need for further greening of the CAP was explicitly recognised by the European Parliament's in a recent report,³ and the importance of EFAs highlighted.

We believe that for an approach like the proposed EFAs to be effective, it should have the following characteristics:

- Every farm has a role to play in protecting the environment; indeed this is only sensible approach for a sector that depends on healthy and functioning natural processes. Therefore every farm should manage a modest percentage (no less than 7%) of its land for biodiversity and wider environmental protection and enhancement

² Cross compliance is the set of basic requirements that farmers must meet in order to qualify for direct payments.

³ European Parliament, 'Our Life Insurance, Our Natural Capital: An EU biodiversity strategy to 2020', 2011/2307(INI)

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- The current proposals for reform exclude grassland farms and we believe this should be rectified as grassland based farms also need to play their part in providing a healthy environment
- EFA areas should include areas of uncropped arable land, woodland buffers, over-winter stubbles, landscape features⁴ and extensively managed farmland (such as extensively grazed permanent pasture or traditional orchards)
- Additional management of EFAs should be supported through the use of improved agri-environment schemes

The EFA approach will **not harm** the productive capacity of the UK or the EU. In fact, protecting the environment is a vital part of securing our long-term food security. EFAs are not a return to set-aside and many farmers already have areas of their farm which would count towards EFAs such as hedgerows and buffer strips. Many current agri-environment options would also be suitable as EFA land and it is therefore important to ensure that farmers who are already doing the right thing are not penalised by greening proposals. It is, however, important to state that simply being in an agri-environment scheme should not be classed as meeting the greening requirements as this would deliver no environmental additionality.

WHAT ACTION CAN MPs TAKE?

All future CAP payments must be linked to positive actions that deliver more sustainable land management. As the next CAP will continue to feature two separate Pillars (I and II) of funding, positive action must be secured across both and through all payments.

Several approaches to greening are currently being discussed in Brussels. Of those, the proposal for EFAs has the most potential to secure significant environmental benefit across the farmed landscape. This is because it requires delivery at the farm level that would provide habitat benefits for biodiversity as well as wider resource protection. Whatever form proposals take, it is imperative that they enshrine the principle of biodiversity at farm level. Greening must also secure a net increase in environmental delivery from the CAP.

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

- A robust greening package of measures which requires delivery of benefits for biodiversity on every farm – via an EFA or similar approach which requires every farm to provide wildlife habitat
- Wildlife habitat that accounts for no less than 7% of the farm area
- Wildlife habitat which is comprised of land types that are environmentally beneficial, for example uncropped arable land, woodland buffers, over-winter stubbles, landscape features and extensively managed/semi-natural grassland
- No 'green by definition' status given to agri-environment or certification schemes. Simply being in a scheme should not be classed as meeting the greening requirements as this would not deliver additional benefits for the environment
- A greening requirement that forms an enhanced baseline that rural development schemes then build upon. This is vital to secure the much needed net increase in environmental delivery from the CAP

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

⁴ Including archaeological and historic sites

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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.

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