



Beyond the Pillars: Wildlife and Countryside Link's policy perspective on the future of the CAP

March 2008

Wildlife and
Countryside





Bat Conservation Trust



The Invertebrate Conservation Trust



Butterfly Conservation



COUNCIL FOR BRITISH AGRICULTURE



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Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together UK voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation, enjoyment and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. Our members practice and advocate

environmentally sensitive land management and food production practices and encourage respect 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 476,000 hectares of land.

This document is supported by the organisations listed above.

SUMMARY

In 2001 Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) published its *Vision for the Future of Farming*. Since then many of the aims set out in our Vision have been achieved. Through the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the continued evolution of its “Rural Development” pillar, payments to farmers have been decoupled from production, funding for rural development measures has increased and basic environmental standards have been introduced across almost all farms through increased cross compliance conditions.

However, many of the environmental challenges we set out in 2001 in Link’s Vision for the Future of Farming, remain to be addressed and the imperative to do so increases over time. Wildlife, habitats and the quality of our landscapes continue to experience decline, and our soil and water resources remain threatened. During the intervening period we have seen the emergence of new economic and environmental challenges which now include changes to our climate, forcing a re-examination of future pressures on the environment and a re-assessment of how our land needs to be managed.

The CAP is now entering a period of further reform, bringing an opportunity to develop new approaches to sustainable land management. The direction of these reforms will be shaped not only by debate about the relationship between agriculture and our environment but also by globalisation and fundamental questions about the priorities for the European Union’s budget.

The CAP may only be one component of a vast matrix of policies that affect how our land is managed, but over the last 50 years its major influence on Europe’s landscapes and environment has been undeniable. The way support is provided by the CAP for farming, with its ensuing effects on the environment and land management, needs further change – but with careful consideration of the consequences.



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This policy perspective sets out our views on how policy should evolve to support sustainable land management, in order to address the environmental challenges we have identified in the context of a changing climate and the growing influence of a global free market.

We seek a radical re-orientation of land management policies to:

- protect and restore our wildlife and habitats;
- protect and enhance our historic environment, landscapes and woodlands;
- ensure the sustainable use of our limited water and soil resources;
- help mitigate and adapt to the challenges arising from climate change; and
- ensure the secure and sustainable production of animal welfare friendly food and other commodities.

In order to deliver this re-orientation of land management we propose moving beyond the current two pillar mechanism of the CAP, split between a decoupled farm payment and rural development support, and in its place establish a single **European Sustainable Land Management Policy**. This would be used to support positive land management activities that deliver sustainable land management and could in turn underpin profitable farm businesses and prosperous rural communities. Rather than most of the money in the CAP being paid in the form of decoupled production payments attached to legal compliance, in future payments would be targeted to those undertaking positive actions that deliver sustainable land management.

The European Sustainable Land Management Policy that we propose is in some ways a simple concept, but Link believes it has the potential to deliver an integrated and radical approach that will ensure that our land is sustainably managed in order to address the environmental challenges we face. It also seeks to end the damaging division that has existed between the European Union's agricultural and environmental policies reflected in the allocation of financial resources, and instead focuses on the common issue of good land management. This will require us to ask and to answer fundamental questions about the values we place on the environmental assets that we all share and for which we are all responsible.

We commend Link's policy perspective as a contribution to the debate on the future of the CAP.



INCREASED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND INTENSIFICATION HAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Soil:

- UK soils store some 10 billion tonnes of carbon. This is more than the annual global emissions of carbon dioxide¹.
- Trout spawning beds in 29 out of 51 river reaches surveyed across southern England contained more than 15 per cent of fine sediments, a threshold at which half the eggs and larvae are likely to die².

Air:

- Agriculture accounts for 7% of national emissions of greenhouse gases, 36% of methane and 67% of nitrous oxide emissions³.

Water:

- Water companies have spent £120 million per annum removing pesticides from watercourses⁴.

INTRODUCTION

The environmental challenges of the 21st century require a radical change in the way our land is managed. The European Union's environmental and agricultural policies need to become ever more closely integrated if they are to deliver both the food and other commodities we require and the ecosystem services on which both people and nature rely. The reality of climate change means that the question is no longer *whether* we do this but *how*. The review of the EU Budget provides an opportunity to ensure the right policies and resources are put into place in the decades ahead.

In the UK this may mean new approaches to policies to address all of the current functions we expect from our land alongside requirements that have appeared more recently such as carbon storage and flood alleviation. This means moving towards delivering policies at landscape and river catchment scales.

The Agriculture Act 1947 and The Treaty of Rome both sought to address the agricultural situation Europe faced after the Second World War when concerns over food supplies were dominant. Recently, much progress has been made in reforming the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It has been decoupled from food production and its focus has widened to delivering environmental outcomes. We now need a more radical re-orientation of land management policies to:

- protect and conserve our wildlife and habitats;
- protect and enhance our historic environment, landscapes and woodlands;
- ensure the sustainable use of our limited water and soil resources;
- help mitigate and adapt to the challenges arising from climate change; and
- ensure the secure and sustainable production of animal welfare friendly food and other commodities.

This paper has been developed as the effects of decoupling the CAP have become apparent. It has evolved as we approach the CAP Health Check and EU Budget Review which present major opportunities to debate the future direction of land management policy ahead of decisions on the 2014-2020 EU Financial Perspective. Contributions to the debate on land management have included the UK Government's Vision for the CAP and the subsequent EFRA Committee inquiry into its recommendations. UK Government Ministers have also set out their views on the future of land use and debate continues amongst NGOs, Government agencies and academics.



“The European Union’s environmental and agricultural policies need to become ever more closely integrated”



The CAP is the major policy driver behind land use across the EU and as such this paper focuses on transforming the CAP into a European Sustainable Land Management Policy. This will require all those with an interest in sustainable land management including farmers and environmental groups to work together. Now is the time for bold and imaginative thinking by all those with an interest in the forthcoming debate, and Wildlife and Countryside Link hopes that this paper will be a valuable contribution to that process.

The Wildlife and Countryside Link vision for sustainable land management

Link is seeking land management policies that secure:

- Protection of the prime natural resources of water, soil and air, and measures for restoring them to good condition where they have been damaged
- Land that it is ecologically robust which enables wildlife to adapt to climate change
- Land management and farming practices that minimise greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere
- Land that delivers high quality landscapes and habitats where wildlife can thrive
- Extra protection and care for special species, habitats, landscapes, archaeological and cultural features and recognition of the historic and cultural value of the countryside
- Good quality public access to promote better health and understanding of the environment and the land management practices needed to maintain it
- Sustainable management of the water environment within river catchments: rivers and streams, lakes and ponds, and ground waters
- Sustainable use of soil and protection of the living organisms within it
- Sustainable food production and high animal welfare standards
- Sufficient incentives for the delivery of public goods through sustainable land management, recognising the contribution a high quality environment makes to rural businesses

Link’s vision is based upon the principle that public money should deliver a wide range of public goods alongside the sustainable production of food and other commodities, ensuring viable farming and rural businesses.



SEMI-NATURAL HABITATS HAVE BEEN LOST AT AN UNPRECEDENTED RATE TO AGRICULTURE

Habitat loss

- Around 50% of Britain's ancient woodland which remained in 1930s has now been lost or damaged⁵. Of the ancient woods recorded on the Ancient Woodland

Inventories in Britain, 48 % are smaller than five hectares⁶.

- Since 1992 an area of grassland the size of Bedfordshire has been lost⁷.
- 98% of wild flower meadows, 75% of open heaths, 96% of open peat bogs, 20% of ancient woodland and 190,000km of hedgerows have been lost since 1950⁸.

- 75% of countryside ponds have been lost since the beginning of the 1900s⁹.

Impacts on Biodiversity

- The index of farmland birds has nearly halved since 1970. Although it has now stabilised there is no sustained recovery - grey partridge numbers are down 86%

THE CHALLENGES

Support for the production of agricultural commodities through the CAP has been hugely successful in helping the farming industry to increase output and put an end to food shortages. However, this intensification of production has sometimes resulted in damaging consequences for the environment and poor farm animal welfare, and it has come at considerable cost to the taxpayer.

The establishment of a second "Rural Development" pillar for the CAP under Agenda 2000, and the decoupling of most direct commodity supports from 2005, have been major steps in the right direction. However, Pillar I of the CAP (representing much the largest part of the CAP budget and a substantial portion of the EU budget as a whole) is now a fund without a clear policy objective. We believe the decoupled Single Farm Payment is an inefficient way to secure sustainable agriculture and land management. As such the time is right to develop a new policy approach that is fully equipped with the resources needed to tackle these challenges. The gathering pace of climate change and its effects on farming, and the growth in globalisation of

Link has identified the following challenges that a new policy needs to address to deliver sustainable land management in the future:

- Adapting land, soil and water management practices to tackle the causes and consequences of climate change
- Ensuring better management of our water resource to prevent declines in water quality, quantity and availability, thereby ameliorating water shortages and floods
- Improving the management of ecosystems so that wildlife declines are halted and reversed and species and habitats are able to cope with climate change
- Providing consumers with better labelling on the environmental sustainability of food products to enable them to make clear choices
- Protecting and conserving irreplaceable archaeological and historic features
- Conserving and enhancing important landscapes and their character
- Reconnecting people with the environment and promoting greater understanding of what it provides for them
- Producing food, timber and bioenergy crops in more sustainable ways

trade also create new challenges for policy and demands on public funding for measures to tackle these issues.

These challenges are explored further in this document in a series of case studies, with an indication of the level of resources that might be required to address them.

There is a need for greater clarity about which issues require action and resource allocation at the EU level, and where instead the focus should be on domestic intervention. The European Sustainable Land Management Policy will be a major part of the solution to these challenges, but to be effective it must be integrated with wider domestic and European environmental, social and economic



Biodiversity case study

Much farmland biodiversity has adapted over centuries to agricultural practice and is therefore often reliant on a continuation of sympathetic farming methods. In light of the major loss and fragmentation of habitats in the late 20th Century, and the new challenge posed to species by climate change, there is an urgent need to consolidate recent progress on stemming the decline in semi-natural habitats and farmland birds. However, stopping any further loss and rebuilding farmland as a matrix that will allow species to move in response to our changing climate will require significant resources and radical policies.

Estimates have been made of the funding that will be needed to address the needs of farmland biodiversity, using UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) costings for 2005-2010¹³ and an RSPB analysis of agri-environment delivery for the UK BAP¹⁴. Actions to deliver objectives for the most recent (expanded) list of UK priority habitats and species have yet to be costed, but they have been estimated for the previous UK BAP. These suggest a

minimum agri-environment spend in excess of £300m per annum just to secure delivery for the relatively restricted previous list of priority widespread species in England. Clearly the calculations will have to be rerun for the new BAP list, and they will also need to reflect changes in agricultural profitability seen recently: both the major increase in cereal prices and unprofitability in much of the extensive livestock sector. These are likely to increase the cost of securing the farming changes that will be needed to deliver BAP targets. Furthermore, the impact of declining Pillar I payments will need to be reflected in future calculations.

Although there will be some multiple delivery of environmental objectives through agri-environment schemes, aspirations for resource protection, landscape conservation, climate change adaptation, conserving the historic environment and enhancing access opportunities will all incur additional expense on top of this minimum figure for securing biodiversity objectives.

and those of skylarks down 54% in the last 30 years¹⁰.

- The worst-hit counties in England lost on average one native flower species every year throughout the 20th century¹¹.
- 36% of butterfly species have declined by over 50% in the last 25 years¹².



A NEW POLICY FOR SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

policies. Link believes that the scale of the environmental challenges facing EU Member States will require concerted European intervention and substantial resourcing. This European level of policy integration across a number of currently separate policy areas, will in itself be a major policy challenge but one for which agri-environment schemes already provide a precedent. A new policy approach should also have the flexibility to allow for national and local subsidiarity.

The CAP has supported the production of food in Europe for almost 50 years and, it is claimed, has helped to maintain the fabric of our rural environment and supported the economic viability of our farming and rural communities. However, the high environmental and economic costs of the CAP make a radical change of direction increasingly desirable. At the same time, it is important that a European Sustainable Land Management Policy continues to underpin economically and socially vibrant rural communities and farming businesses. Currently much the greatest proportion of CAP funding is allocated through the Single Payment Scheme for minimum standards of environmental management through cross compliance measures.

A much smaller budget is available for those participating in high levels of environmental management undertaken through agri-environment schemes.

This has resulted in a need to target funding at land managers who manage particularly rare and important habitats, species, landscapes or other features. More resources are needed to achieve this limited amount of targeting alone. Land managers who perform high levels of environmental management should receive a higher proportion of public funding. Those who undertake lower level environmental management should receive a smaller proportion of funding for the basic but widespread management they undertake.



**INAPPROPRIATE FARMING PRACTICES
THREATEN OUR CULTURAL LANDSCAPES**

- Loss or neglect of character is evident in 20% of England’s landscapes while just over a third of the Joint Character Areas that experienced “marked or some change inconsistent with character” up to 1998 continued this trend through to 2003¹⁵.
- Nearly half of the historic park land recorded in England in 1918 had been lost by 2005, largely as a result of changes and expansion in agriculture¹⁶.
- Agriculture has been responsible for 30% of all damage to ancient monuments in the last 50 years and 10% of destruction. A survey in 2006 showed over a third of scheduled ancient monuments were ‘at risk’ and agriculture was identified as one of the principal causes of damage¹⁷.
- In 2004 one in ten farmers reported that traditional farm buildings were in a state of serious disrepair¹⁸. Over a third of listed farm buildings have already been converted to non-agricultural uses¹⁶.

An assessment of the value of the public goods will be required to ensure that payments (and therefore the total level of resource required) are matched to the value of the public goods that are provided. This will become even more important if the prices paid for agricultural commodities on the global market rise to levels that put pressure on farmers to choose intensive commodity production over participation in environmental management.

There must be a full and inclusive consultation process at both the European and national level to develop a European Sustainable Land Management Policy and the way this is implemented in EU Member States.

A possible tiered approach to securing payments for sustainable land management

Level 3 (£££) – funding for significant environmental enhancement in target areas both for individual sites and at a landscape scale. This would include priority catchments, and programmes targeted at wider areas to fund measures that address the sustainable management of specific types of landscape features, biodiversity Priority Species and Habitats, High Nature Value areas, Natura 2000 and protected landscapes. This would also be a route to secure the production of agricultural products to significantly higher animal welfare standards and the rewilding of land.

Level 2 (££) – funding for broad and widely distributed environmental measures for resource protection and environmental enhancements, including biodiversity conservation, conserving archaeological sites and enhancing landscape features, promotion of agricultural products produced to high environmental and animal welfare standards. Receipt of Level 2 payments would be a condition for receipt of payments in Level 3 above.

Level 1 (£) – receipt of Level 1 payments (and receipt of Level 2 and 3 payments above), would be conditional on meeting cross-compliance requirements going beyond environmental and animal welfare legislation and standards in EU Directives. Land need not be in production but must be kept in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition and contribute to basic nutrient management with a percentage of land allocated for environmental management.

Baseline – minimum legal requirements for land management

In addition support may be offered for particular agricultural systems which produce consistently higher environmental outputs (organic, upland farming, High Nature Value Farming etc.)



Landscape case study

Maintaining the character of our landscapes requires action that not only maintains important habitats and features but which in places restores and enhances them as well.

Recent research from Natural England reveals that nearly 40% of our landscapes are undergoing negative changes¹⁵.

The maintenance and enhancement of our landscape features are very much dependent on the work undertaken by land managers. Research published by CPRE and the NFU in 2006 estimated that the labour input of farmers excluding all management funded by agri-environment schemes, is worth around £412 million per year alone. This figure takes no account of capital investment costs.



THE COST

Delivering the public goods society needs and expects from sustainable land management has a value. Realising this value will come at a considerable cost (see case studies contained within this document) and therefore we do not necessarily envisage a direct saving on the current CAP budget, although there are likely to be both direct and indirect economic benefits from the reform of agricultural policy. Furthermore, choices need to be made about the way the policy objectives are delivered, not just through providing financial incentives, but also through a combination of regulation and other economic and social policies targeted at rural areas.

The decoupling of farm payments from production is having a profound impact on the profitability of businesses engaged in farming and land management. The complete abolition of direct CAP payments will mean some agricultural systems that contribute significantly to achieving sustainable land management, and which as a result provide environmental public goods, will become less profitable and could cease to be undertaken altogether in some areas. There could be declines or losses of important habitats, rare species and culturally significant landscapes. A European Sustainable Land Management Policy should provide a mechanism, within the international trading system, that offers sufficient incentives to ensure these environmentally important activities can continue.

Meeting the challenges we have identified will require some radical changes in land use and land management practices. Sometimes this will require transitional funding assistance to meet higher baseline standards or to assist in restructuring to more environmentally sustainable land management practices. Where transitional support is provided this should be accompanied by adequate environmental and business advice.

Additional funding, where needed to deliver the increased animal welfare standards that the public increasingly demand, must not be at the expense of funding for the vital environmental measures that are also required. Equally, care must be taken to ensure continued widespread land management support across the countryside as well as targeting some resources where they are most needed.



CONSUMERS' EXPECTATIONS ARE GROWING

Mounting environmental and animal welfare concern:

- 75% of people in the UK believe they can improve the welfare of animals for the better through purchasing power¹⁹.

- 62% of people believe animal welfare does not receive enough importance in agricultural policies in the UK¹⁹.
- 59% of the public strongly agree that they prefer to buy goods which have been produced using the highest possible animal welfare standards²⁰.

Active countryside use and enjoyment:

- 77% of UK adults, or about 38 million people, say they walk for pleasure at least once a month²¹.
- On their 527 million walking trips to the English countryside per year, walkers spend somewhere in the region of £6.14 billion, generating income in excess of £2 billion and supporting up to 245,000 full time jobs²².

EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS ISSUES

The policy framework to secure sustainable land management should rest on a shared minimum standard of environmental performance across the EU. This needs to be an essential component of the European common market in goods and services. Beyond the agreed standards of normal good farming practice, incentives should be provided at EU Member State or regional level where these are necessary to ensure the most positive contribution of sustainable land management towards the environmental challenges of the 21st century.

Ongoing provision of public goods will need to be secured in different ways around the EU, but within a common framework. This will involve Member States sharing the burden of setting objectives and resourcing the delivery because the environmental assets and wealth in the EU are not evenly distributed. A European Sustainable Land Management Policy will need to respect locally differentiated approaches taken by EU Member States. In the UK, we anticipate the cornerstone of support will continue to be agri-environment schemes, although other approaches may be more suitable in other EU Member States and regions. For example, although a European Sustainable Land Management Policy would not compensate farming activities *per se* because they were uneconomic (as currently happens in Less Favoured Areas), it would embrace support for activities under-rewarded by the market where these secured essential sustainable land management.

This could include farming that maintains High Nature Value areas (such as that often found in upland and marginal areas), the historic environment, protected landscapes, or the marketing of outputs from farming practices that deliver higher animal welfare standards. It is important that proper recognition is given to the fact that some incentives may not always be compatible: for example some resource protection measures may be damaging to buried archaeological sites. A transparent and participative assessment system will be required to identify and resolve such conflicts where they arise.



Water Case Study

Headline indicators of water quality have shown marked improvement in both river water and coastal waters over the last 15 years. This has been largely due to the investment of some £15 billion by the water industry in improvements to sewage treatment works and the network of sewers.

Despite this investment, the ecological quality of our rivers, lakes and coasts continues to be threatened, communities face growing flood risk and water companies struggle to find clean sources of drinking water to replace those lost to pollution. The key pressures driving continued degradation include diffuse water pollution from agricultural systems, soil compaction leading to runoff and erosion, the canalisation and erosion of riverbanks, and intensive land drainage.

While Environmental Stewardship and Catchment Sensitive Farming schemes may provide a partial framework for water protection, inadequate funding, their limited geographical coverage and voluntary nature mean that the benefits accrued tend to be local and uncertain. Similarly, the limited

coverage of revised Nitrate Vulnerable Zones and proposed Water Protection Zones will fail to provide a baseline of good practice for all farmers.

The consumer currently meets some of the costs of diffuse pollution. Water companies have already spent a billion pounds on treatment works to remove pesticides and over the period 2005-2010 they will invest a further £460 million on removing nitrates, pesticides and cryptosporidium. Just running the new systems will cost over £10 million a year with all the associated energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

We need comprehensive action to tackle diffuse pollution at source, manage water resources and improve the water storage capacity of the farmed landscape to help tackle flooding. This might mean where appropriate changing cropping patterns and land use as well as investing in the fencing of rivers, reducing nutrient application and livestock density, reversing land drainage and restoring floodplains.



Any policy for sustainable land management should be compatible with sufficient provision of high quality food and renewable energy. This will not require complete self-sufficiency, but nor should it result in relying on a global approach to food and energy security that is focused purely on the economics of the free market. Furthermore, since global sustainability must lie at the heart of the policy, the export of environmental problems would be both counter-productive and unethical where this export would be more damaging to the global environment. Thus the development of the policy must acknowledge the need for sustainable production methods and the global ecological footprint of the supply chain. This will enable consumers to make informed choices about the sustainability of what they consume, while maintaining a fair and equitable global trading regime.

A case may be made for intervention at the EU level to secure other public goods and address other market failures in agriculture and rural development. We suggest these might include improving competitiveness, addressing peripherality, securing structural change, cohesion objectives and income support where the social fabric of farming communities is vulnerable, but essential to securing desired environmental outcomes. A European Sustainable Land Management Policy could contribute to some of these objectives. However, such objectives should all be delivered in a way that does not threaten sustainability and maximises any co-benefits. Further EU intervention in these areas needs to have clear objectives, respect for the single market, efficiency of intervention, and avoidance of damaging environmental impacts. Support currently offered under Axes I and III of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) needs to be scrutinised carefully using these criteria before they are taken forward.

In particular, it is essential that support to secure food, timber and fuel security, or to address the problem of climate change, does not prevent the achievement of the environmental objectives of sustainable land management.

In conclusion we repeat our view that the question is no longer *whether* EU policy can deliver more sustainable use of its land, but how. We commend our perspective as a contribution to that debate.



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NOTES

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- 21 Ramblers Association
- 22 Christie and Matthews 2003

PHOTOGRAPHY

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Ernie Janes (rsfb-images.com) *Swaledale towards Muker, North Yorkshire, England.*

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CPRE/Derry Brabbs *Arkengarthdale, Yorkshire Dales.*

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CPRE/Derry Brabbs *Fairfield Church Romney Marsh, Kent;*
Plantlife/Kate Still *Farmers learning about arable plant conservation at a training day in Cambridgeshire;*

CPRE/Derry Robinson *Fields near Middle Farm, Feltwell, Norfolk.*

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CPRE/Derry Brabbs *Golden Valley near Hereford, Herefordshire;* Butterfly Conservation/Martin Warren *Marsh fritillary on Milkwort 2;* Andy Hay (rsfb-images.com) *Agriculture: Hawthorn, hedge, berries, Green lane, Norfolk, Farm.*

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(Left and middle) Countryside and Community Research Institute, Cheltenham; Andy Hay (rsfb-images.com) *Cattle at Barcye Farm RSPB, Dumfries & Galloway, Scotland.*

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CPRE/Derry Brabbs *Near Winchester, Hampshire;*
CPRE/Derry Brabbs *Farmland Near Winterbourne Stoke, Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire;* Digital Planet Design Sean Locke *Vegetable aisle.*

Back cover

Mark Hamblin (rsfb-images.com) *Common Poppy, Papaver rhoeas, and Scentless mayweed, Tripleurospermum inodorum, en masse in arable field.*

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