

Farming Minister visits innovative Yorkshire agri-environment schemes

Two innovative projects by farmers to create a better natural environment in Richmond, Yorkshire, were the highlight of a visit today (Friday 11 September) by Farming Minister Victoria Prentis alongside local MP and Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak.

The visit provided an opportunity to see two tests and trials in action for the upcoming Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme, which will reward farmers with public money for public goods,

Farmers in Wensleydale are looking at whether they can deliver better outcomes for our environment when given greater flexibility and autonomy to manage their land. While the farmers and land managers of Barningham Estate Farmers Group are exploring ways to encourage farmers to work together across diverse landscapes to achieve their environmental goals.

By testing and trialling elements of the new scheme, Defra is looking to work together with farmers and land managers to harness their ideas, gain their feedback and build something that works for the diverse needs of the agriculture sector, whilst also improving our environment.

This comes ahead of the landmark Agriculture Bill returning to Parliament next week. The Bill sets out our ambitions to transform British farming by delivering the new ELM scheme, which will reward farmers for public goods they produce, such as providing habitats for wildlife and improving air and water quality. Importantly, the Bill will also help farmers take full advantage of the opportunities available to them as we leave the outdated Common Agricultural Policy.

Farming Minister Victoria Prentis said:

Yorkshire has a fantastic community of farmers, who are not only highly resilient but also working hard to test out how our upcoming Environmental Land Management scheme can be as effective as possible in rewarding our farmers for enhancing the natural environment.

I look forward to working closely with more farmers, land managers and environmentalists like those I have met today from all over the country to design a scheme that will benefit the wide variety of farming systems we have in England today.

Minister Prentis and the Chancellor were able to meet with farmers in Wensleydale involved in a Payment by Results pilot, which was launched in early 2016 across two areas in Wensleydale, North Yorkshire and in Norfolk and Suffolk in the east of England with clear environmental objectives to

match the needs of each area.

The 18 farmers participating in Wensleydale have total freedom to choose how they manage their land to enhance the environment and have benefitted from the advice and training sessions provided by Natural England and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. This has been very successful, with the first major assessment of this pilot, published last year, demonstrating that the project is boosting local wildlife and motivating farmers to develop nature-friendly practices.

The Minister also heard first hand how farmers on the Barningham Estate are testing a new, collaborative system for planning and delivering environmental management on land that encompasses a variety of farming systems and a tapestry of nationally and internationally important habitats, including blanket bog, wetlands and SSSI ancient woodland.

During the visit, the group discussed with the Minister how farmers can work together to create a shared plan of how to manage their land in a way that meets their environmental objects and protects wildlife in their local area, as well as how to incentivise collaboration between groups of farmers and landowners.

Rishi Sunak, local MP for Richmond (Yorks) and Chancellor of the Exchequer, said:

Farming is vital to our rural economy and communities. From the Upper Dales to Great Ayton, from sheep to dairy to arable, through Auction Marts at Hawes, Leyburn and Northallerton, farming touches every part of my constituency.

Visiting the Payment by Results pilot in Wensleydale today gave me the chance to see first-hand that giving farmers freedom over how they manage their land, can lead to better environmental results.

I am confident that the future of farming is a bright one and I will do everything I can to help our farmers capitalise on the great opportunities ahead.

While in Yorkshire, Minister Prentis also met with Stephen Walker and Bob Dixon the owner and chairman of Leyburn Auction Mart to discuss the priorities of the livestock sector and thank them for their efforts during these challenging times.

The Agriculture Bill completed its Committee Stage in the House of Lords in July, with Report Stage in the House of Lords scheduled to begin on 15 September 2020.