

New report shows pilot scheme farmers boost environment outcomes

The first major assessment of a “Payment by Results” pilot has shown the project is boosting local wildlife and motivating farmers to develop nature-friendly practices.

Unlike the prescriptive approach of the current national agri-environment schemes – which pay a flat rate for actions taken rather than results achieved – the 34 farmers taking part in the Payment by Results pilot have had the freedom to choose how they manage their land to enhance the environment.

A new report published today by project partners Natural England and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority shows these farmers have recorded 43% increased score for number and diversity of seed bearing plants than nearby sites under conventional funding schemes – providing a rich food source for farmland birds during the winter months.

The trial areas for species-rich meadows also recorded a greater number of important plant species, such as pignut and eyebright, benefitting bumblebees, butterflies and birds. Participating farmers have also reported they felt more motivated to manage their land in a way that enhances the environment.

The report concludes the result-based approach has “considerable potential” for the design of the future Environmental Land Management scheme – the government’s future vision for farming outside the EU.

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

I am greatly encouraged by how well the results-based approach has worked under this pilot. It sends a clear message we should be giving farmers and land managers greater flexibility and autonomy to deliver the best results for the environment that go hand in hand with their farming business.

For too long our farmers have been subject to the red tape of the Common Agricultural Policy which has impeded innovation and stifled productivity. As we leave the EU we have a fantastic opportunity to create an ambitious new system that rewards farmers for public goods we all value.

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

Today’s report shows that if we support our farmers with the right kind of training and guidance then we can achieve really positive

results for wildlife. Farmers must be front and centre in efforts to restore the natural environment and these results reveal huge potential for the future.

Meeting farmers in Wensleydale today I have been struck by the resourcefulness and passion this pilot has inspired to deliver for nature on working farms.

The results-based approach has seen clear objectives being met and exceeded by farmers who have worked in the way that works best for their whole farm.

The pilot was rolled out at the start of 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. Through the pilot, advice and training sessions have been provided by Natural England and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority.

Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Deputy Chair and farmer Neil Heseltine said:

This report shows that a “payment by results” approach can produce fantastic environmental benefits as well as strengthening trust between farmers and government agencies.

The project has demonstrated just how important it is to have trusted local advisers who can provide the training and support to empower and incentivise the farmers, enabling them to farm in a way that’s a success for their business and for nature.

We’re absolutely delighted that Defra is now directly funding an extension of the original EU-funded pilots for a further two and a half years. That will give time to refine the approach and to use the expertise of farmers in the Yorkshire Dales to help to shape future environmental policy.