

Farming for the Future in National Parks

Case studies – October 2013

The majority of land in the National Parks is farmed, and this has shaped the landscapes we see today. Most of these diverse areas spanning both uplands and lowlands include unimproved grassland, moorland, heath and bog that depend on livestock grazing. As well as being responsible for producing high quality food, farming continues to have a strong influence on the wildlife, landscape and cultural heritage of National Parks. 17,300 people are employed in farming in England's National Parks, representing 10 per cent of total employment.

The National Park Authorities have built up strong relationships with their local farming and commoning communities, many of whom operate in quite hostile environments. We want to work with them so that they continue to provide sustainable food and a host of other public benefits, and for this to be valued by society.

The case studies contained here provide just a flavour of some of the current initiatives in National Parks. They demonstrate the important role of farming in delivering a wide range of ecosystem services; and the ways in which National Park Authorities are adding value for farmers by supporting them to achieve their business and conservation objectives.



Cattle at Widecombe Hill © Dartmoor National Park Authority

Farmers at the heart of land management

Farming Futures: Dartmoor National Park

Dartmoor Farming Futures (DFF) is an experimental pilot project aimed at developing a new approach to the management of Dartmoor's moorland. The initiative:

- offers farmers and landowners more responsibility for the design and delivery of agri-environment schemes;
- focuses on the complete range of public benefits (ecosystem services) associated with upland farming (from food production to carbon sequestration) and identifies priorities for particular spatial areas; and
- facilitates a collaborative approach to agreeing outcomes, delivering the management required and assisting with the monitoring of the process.

The initiative was developed by Dartmoor National Park Authority and Dartmoor Commoners' Council with support from the Duchy of Cornwall, Natural England, the RSPB, South West Water and the Ministry of Defence. DFF links into and complements the Dartmoor Vision developed with landowners and users to set out what the moorland will look like in 2030. It is focused on two areas of common land within the National Park; Haytor and Bagtor Commons, and the Forest of Dartmoor.

In the first stage of the pilot farmers identified a range of outcomes that could be delivered from the land – covering the full spectrum of ecosystem services from food production to water management. The farmers then used their expertise, experience and in-depth understanding of the land they farm to identify the management required to deliver these outcomes. Critical in this was the freedom to determine livestock numbers and dates for turning out and taking livestock off the common. The second stage trials this new approach under a derogation from existing agri-environment schemes. The Forest of Dartmoor trial includes a commitment from farmers to deliver 50% of the SSSI (which covers two thirds of the Forest) in favourable condition by 2020. Other outcomes include water management and spatially targeted management of the historic landscape and access. The pilots involve the farmers in monitoring both directly through visual, photographic and habitat surveys and indirectly by commissioning expert studies from third parties.

An independent evaluation concluded that the key strengths of the DFF approach include improved dialogue and understanding between the partners, resulting in closer working relationships and an increased likelihood of positive outcomes. Commoners benefit from an increased level of support, and the approach gives greater flexibility. The independent evaluation also highlighted that there was agreement amongst commoners and stakeholders that the DFF approach should be considered for inclusion in the new Rural Development Programme for England 2014 – 2020.

Further details about Dartmoor Farming Futures (including a copy of the independent evaluation by Cumulus Consultants and a short video) can be accessed at:

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/lookingafter/laf-landmanagement/dartmoor-farming-futures>



Dartmoor Farmers
© Chris Chapman

Evidence-based planning to support farming

National Park Management Plan: North York Moors National Park



© Mark Denton

The North York Moors (NYM) Management Plan, adopted by the National Park Authority (NPA) in 2012, highlights the National Park's special qualities and sets out long term strategic policies and outcomes for the Park and for its communities, businesses, visitors and organisations.

Recent years have seen growing pressure on land resources and rising food prices, and there is increasing concern globally about the need to secure food supplies. The NYM Management Plan addresses this wider issue by considering the outputs and role of the Park's key industries and what the National Park can produce to meet society's needs, at the same time as ensuring the achievement of National Park purposes.

In setting out its strategic vision for the Park's agricultural sector, the NPA has drawn on a study of farming and farm output in the National Park carried out by Askham Bryan College*. The report considers the quantity and value of agricultural output - livestock, dairy, food crops and woodland and energy crops, together with recent changes in these sectors. It also looks at the economic impact of CAP policy and agri-environment schemes for NYM farmers, future prospects and areas of the industry with the potential for growth. Crucially, the report considers how to sustain and increase productivity without harming the Park's special qualities, for example through improved skills and practices or investment in technology. Livestock and milk output could be increased through better animal nutrition and stock selection with no environmental drawbacks. Technological tools such as soil and yield mapping and GIS could help farmers use land more efficiently by identifying parcels of land which will work best for arable, pastoral or environmentally focused land use.

The report also calculates the projected increase in yields based on the application of its recommendations. In this way it informs the strategies designed to achieve the NPA's vision for farming in NYM in 15 years' time. In this vision farming is *"viable and productive and contributes to the maintenance of the landscape and natural environment and supports biodiversity. Best practice in animal husbandry and management techniques contribute to an increase in the amount of food that is produced without harming the special qualities and there are more training and employment opportunities in the sector"*.

The NYM Management Plan can be viewed at:

<http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/living-in/how-the-authority-works/management-plan>

*Agricultural Output in the National Park Current Level and Future Prospects (Askham Bryan College, 2011)

Combining expertise for better advice

Peak District Land Management Advisory Service: Peak District National Park

The Peak District Land Management Advisory Service (PDLMAS) combines expertise from the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA), Natural England, Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency working together to simplify the maze of rules, regulations and grant opportunities for farmers and land managers. It offers guidance on finding and understanding rules and regulations, accessing national agri-environment grant schemes and managing agreements, general environmental advice, farm visits and a drop-in centre on livestock market days at the Agricultural Business Centre in Bakewell. It also provides information on other forms of business advice and support such as grants for business growth and diversification.

For over 30 years PDNPA advisors have been helping farmers and land managers in the National Park. The PDNPA's own small-scale agri-environment grant scheme helps with projects that may not be suitable for the national schemes. These often act as the first step up the ladder of conservation land management - building interest and confidence, and leading to participation in national schemes.

At Big Fernyford Farm, Longnor, the working relationship between the farmer and the PDNPA spans over 20 years. Following advice on grassland management and a grant for wall restoration in the 1990s, PDNPA and Natural England supported the farmer with his South West Peak Environmentally Sensitive Area (SWP ESA) agreement, and with his change to rearing traditional Belted Galloways to deliver better management of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). More recently, the PDNPA helped the farmer apply successfully for the Peak District Environmental Quality Mark, awarded to organisations that support the local economy, protect and enhance the environment. Their advice also helped him to develop and promote direct sales of meat; to make use of business networks; and to source Leader funding (from the EU and Defra) for a processing and packaging room and holiday cottage.

In 2010, as the SWP ESA agreement came to an end the PDNPA advised on the Farm Environment Plan and a Higher Level Scheme (HLS) application, working closely with the local NE adviser who knew the farm. Local advice and knowledge was crucial in developing an HLS agreement which works practically for the farmer and delivers the conservation and enhancement desired by the scheme, NE and the PDNPA.

You can see further images and read more about the farm at <http://www.fernyford.co.uk/>

