

Circulation: NFU members, stakeholders

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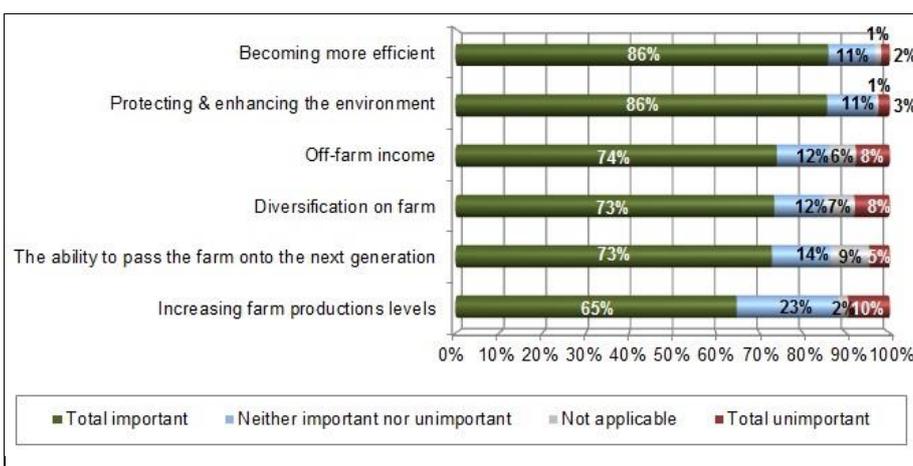
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## South West NFU Farming in Designated Areas Survey Spring 2020



### Background

- Between January and March 2020, the NFU carried out research amongst farmers in the South West, to give them the opportunity to state how having a designated (including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Park or environmental designations such as SSSI) area on their land has affected managing the land and developing the farming business.
- 346 NFU farmer and grower members completed an online survey via email invitations and email bulletins.

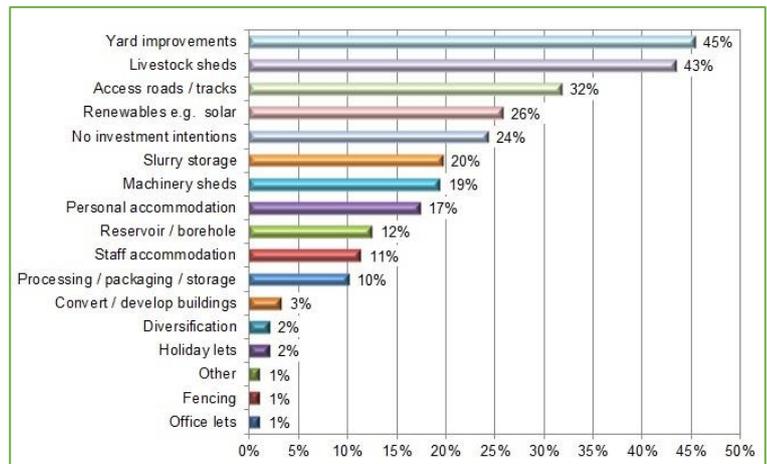


When asked about what would be important for farm viability in the next 5 years farmers surveyed in the South West prioritised **becoming more efficient** and **protecting & enhancing the environment** (86% respectively saying these areas will be important).

### Results related to designated areas (NPs and AONBs)

- 53% of those surveyed have at least some farmed land within either a National Park (NP) and / or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- We asked those that have land within either a National Park and / or AONBs, whether having landscape designation was beneficial or disadvantageous for their business.

- Whilst this group was **more likely to feel having landscape designation was disadvantageous** than beneficial in 6 out of 8 types of area or activity listed,
  - it's worth noting that a significant proportion in each case stated that designation was neither beneficial nor disadvantageous.
- Between 35% and 51% of this group gave this response across all areas or activities and it was the most common response for 3 out of 8 items listed e.g. **getting access to funding** (51%), **consultancy costs** (50%) and **receiving support & advice from NP / AONB staff** (49%)
- Respondents were most likely to report disadvantage due to landscape designation in relation to **developing farm buildings** (53%) and or **modernising farm buildings** (48%). Only 6% and 7% respectively feel designation is an advantage in these areas. Many comments in point 2.2.4 later in this report provide insight into the restrictions many face in terms of getting planning permission and also for the other disadvantages below.
- 47% feel that designation is a disadvantage in terms of **upgrading infrastructure** such as accessing broadband, etc. and only 4% reported benefits. Similarly, 42% feel held back in terms of **opportunities to diversify** however 18% do feel designation is beneficial here.



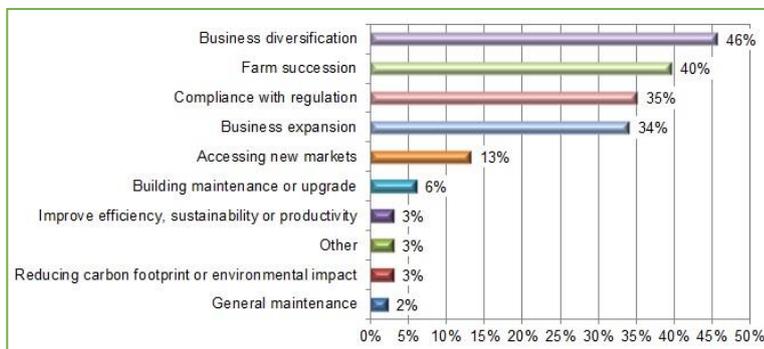
- 7 out of 54 **comments (13%) described beneficial effects** of being within designated areas.
  - *'They are good at showing how our holding fits in to a wider landscape and contributes to a wider ecosystem'*
- 38 out of 54 **comments (70%) described negative effects** of being within designated areas.
  - *'Diversification - other land use - tourism - getting planning permission to improve an existing tourism business is a nightmare and very costly.'*
  - *'General public and their dogs do much damage and without rangers on the ground the farmers take the financial hit for damage to land, gates, hedges and especially livestock being maimed or attacked often ending in death. Illegal parking is becoming a massive issue with farm machinery and emergency vehicles unable to get to their destinations'*
  - *'Planning very difficult'*
  - *'Planning!'*

## Views on more National Parks being created within the UK

- Among all respondents surveyed, a plurality has no view either way (45%) in relation to more National Parks being created within the UK. **Farmers were more likely to be unsupportive (33%) than supportive (22%) however.**
  - Those that **farm within a designated area are more likely to be unsupportive** than those outside (39% compared to 25%) and conversely also less likely to be supportive (17% compared to 28% respectively).
- **Those that farm within the Cotswolds AONB are much more likely to be unsupportive** than those outside (48% compared to 26%).
- **Those that farm within the Dorset / East Devon AONBs are much more likely to be unsupportive** than those outside (51% compared to 31%).

## Intention to invest in new infrastructure or buildings or to convert existing buildings in the next 2 years

- **76% of farmers surveyed in the South West intend to invest** in various types of infrastructure (i.e. 24% reported no investment intentions).
  - Nearly half of those surveyed (45%) intend to invest in **yard improvements** and 43% will be upgrading **livestock sheds** to improve animal welfare for example. A further 19% will be investing in their **machinery sheds**.
  - In terms of other buildings, 17% will be carrying out works on their **personal accommodation** and 11% will focus on **staff accommodation**.
  - Other common types of investment included upgrading **access roads / tracks** (32%) and 26% are aiming to install **renewable technologies** e.g. solar panels. 20% will look to improve their **slurry storage** and 12% will be adding resilience to their water supply with a **reservoir or borehole**.



## Reasons behind intention to invest in new farm infrastructure / buildings in the next 2 years

- **Business diversification** (46%) was the most common driver amongst those surveyed and a further 13% are looking at **accessing new markets**. This was followed by 40% who are looking ahead to their **farm succession**.

- Over a third of this group (35%) are making investments in order to ensure **compliance with regulation** and a similar proportion are putting capital into **business expansion**.

One farmer made the following observation:

• *'If you don't keep investing, you will go backwards'*

## Environmental designations on land holdings

- 45% of all farmers surveyed in the South West region had one or more environment designations with the most common being SSSIs (25%) and Scheduled Ancient Monuments (23%)
- 12% have a Country Wildlife Site or Nature Conservation Area while a similar proportion has a Special Area of Conservation on their land holding. Less common designations are Special Protection Areas (3%) RAMSAR site (2%) and World Heritage Site (1%)
- Just over half (53%) of those that have one or more environmentally designated areas on their holding understand what is required to achieve favourable condition.
  - 21% do not understand while 26% are not sure.

**Based on previous experience or your general impression, how beneficial or disadvantageous is it for your farm business to have an environmental designation (e.g. SSSI) in terms of the following?**

- 39% feel that environmental designations are generally beneficial in terms of **getting access to** funding compared to only 8% that feel it's a disadvantage.
- 32% think there's benefit in terms of **receiving support and advice from NP/ AONB staff** (8% reporting disadvantage).
- In contrast, 34% think environmental designations can hinder **opportunities to diversify your farm** (only 16% reported benefit).

- 6 out of 27 comments (22%) were largely positive towards having an environmental designation.
  - *'We clearly see the value in looking after and creating wildlife habitat and landscape that allows the opportunity for diversification. It is an opportunity for farmers to carry out positive PR and foster a positive and valued relationship with the public.'*
  - *'As with earlier question, knowing NE staff personally makes life much smoother and creates opportunities'*
- 13 out of 27 comments (48%) concerned largely negative effects in terms of having an environmental designation.
  - *'Difficulty with controlling scrub invasion on SSSI downland - with funding having been reduced for management. Sheep have been struggling financially, making it difficult to get sheep to graze the SSSI land adequately.'*
  - *'We have always had environmental areas so have learnt to work with them. My main criticism is of the RPA and their lack of help when trying to either enter new agreements or apply for derogations. They seem to want to make it as difficult as possible to apply for these agreements, which doesn't attract us to want to re-apply.'*

**Do you think achieving a favourable condition for your designation(s), as written, is achievable in the context of climate change and any other factors?**

- Between 50% and 89% of relevant farmers with each type of designation feel that achieving favourable condition is possible.
- 25% of those with a Special Protection Area feel that achieving favourable condition is unachievable (15% for SSSIs, 13% for Scheduled Ancient Monuments and 12% for Special Area of Conservation).

- *'Am of the opinion that SSSI condition requirements can be very narrow, not allowing a site to adapt with a changing climate. Maintaining the sites as low-input systems would make more sense than wildlife gardening for particular species'*
- *'We will never achieve favourable condition as we are restricted by NE's suggested management of them. They have no clear idea of what favourable condition they want, the best they'll admit to is favourable recoverable'*
- *'A change of personnel at Historic England has taken us from open war to pragmatic co-operation. Good condition is suddenly achievable because of changes at their end!'*

**Note:** Please note that these results are from a survey before the coronavirus started to have an impact on businesses and all our lives. We anticipate that even with this the large majority of the results are still relevant. For further details on the impact of Covid 19 and the SW NFU strategy to recover from it please use [this link](#).