



More, Bigger, Better, More Joined Up

ELMS Trial – Stage 1 Summary Report

NFU South East is conducting a trial of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), focussing on land management plan design, the delivery of public goods and enabling farmer coordination. The trial commenced in June 2020 and is due to be completed by November 2021, comprising four stages:

- *Stage 1 – Farmer questionnaire and co-design of a survey pro-forma*
- *Stage 2 – Baseline Inventory, Long List of Options*
- *Stage 3 – Farm Actions Plans*
- *Stage 4 – Evaluation*

This document summarises the project activity and outputs delivered under Stage 1, comprising an online survey and an initial survey pro-forma that will continue to be developed through the later stages of the project.

Farmer Questionnaire

The online questionnaire was completed during July and August 2020, receiving a total of 441 responses from NFU farmer and grower members representing all major farming types across the region. Our exploratory questions enabled us to generate statistically robust information on farmer design preferences for the Land Management Plan (LMP), general opinions on ELMS policy and the ways in which Defra can maximise farmer engagement with ELMS.

Our full report includes a detailed analysis of the feedback, completed with facilitator input from Dr David Rose (Reading University) and Charlotte Chivers (CCRI). The guiding feedback we received on Land Management Plans was a strong desire to keep it as light touch as possible alongside three key recommendations concerning LMP design:

1. **LMP design should be flexible, helping to generate a list of feasible options and taking account of previous environmental work done on each holding.** The LMP should also include:
 - a. Information on high value, high potential (enhancement) and risk areas on the holding;
 - b. Simple maps and actions, recording a range of core farm features such as woodlands, hedgerows, watercourses, wetlands, ponds, soil type and condition, fertiliser use; and
 - c. Details of local environmental priorities.
2. **LMP design should encourage all farmers to engage** by focussing on:
 - a. A points-based system;
 - b. Multi-annual funding certainty; and
 - c. Tier 1 delivery, providing access to Tiers 2 and 3 through simple add-on options.



3. **ELMS should be simple and easy to understand** where, as a rule of thumb, if you need a farm adviser to help complete the LMP, it means the requirements may already be too complicated.

We also identified a further three recommendations highlighting ways in which Defra can maximise uptake and engagement with ELMS:

4. **ELMS should facilitate farmer clusters** and landscape scale farming, rewarding farmers with extra money for that coordinating effort. However, this shouldn't prevent farmers also going it alone.
5. Recognising that some aspects of the new system will inevitably require guidance, **Defra should review opportunities to incentivise industry-led organisations**, such as producer organisations to support business relevant decision making within the context of the new policy; and finally
6. **Defra should track ELMS uptake amongst traditionally unengaged farmers** in line with the engagement factors identified in this report.

We produced the infographic below to summarise some of the additional engagement factors identified.

9 WAYS TO MAXIMISE FARMER ENGAGEMENT WITH ELMS

According to farmers across SE England*, the new ELM scheme should...

*based on a survey of 411 farmers from July-August 2020

- Be flexible
- Be simple
- Result in clear environmental benefits
- Be financially viable
- Provide alternative ways of using marginal land
- Offer practical solutions
- Be inclusive of all farm types/sizes
- Provide readily available advice
- Reward carbon and water storage

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Survey Pro-Forma

Feedback from the questionnaire was shared with project facilitators throughout the information gathering and analysis stages. The key messages we received about flexibility, simplicity and the strong preference for a points-based system were then used to inform the initial survey proforma designed for engagement purposes with our focus groups.

In accordance with our proposal, the proforma has been designed in a manner, which aids consideration of all aspects of the farming system from soils management, nutrient planning, biodiversity, wastes and slurries, water management, public access and business resilience.

The design process initially involved the creation of three alternative options created by project facilitators Matt Craig, Paul Cobb and Tom Ormesher. We also held two online meetings where the three other main facilitators (Colin Hedley, Tim Clarke, Jen Walter) were able to review and comment on the design. Finally, Jen Walter completed the version sent to Defra, aiming for this initial proforma to be as user friendly as possible. We are nonetheless aware that this is a preliminary attempt, anticipating it to be a “straw man” for our farmer participants to review and pull apart as we refine the approach throughout this project.

We’ve arranged the pro-forma in a way that we consider will be simple and easy to understand:

- *Page 1* – Summary of points awarded
- *Page 2* – What are the environmental priorities in my local area?
- *Page 3* - What are the features and risks on my land?
- *Page 4* – What are the sustainable farming actions that could I complete this year?

We’ve attempted to produce a survey pro-forma, which is relatively easy to complete by a farmer within a few days. This could become the basis of an annual self-assessment process, where a farmer records the general extent of environmental features on their land and considers a list of improvement options to be completed in the coming year. It should be noted that this is very much a working document, not a perfect or fully finished proposal! In developing this, several considerations are worth noting:

- *Allocation of points (Page 1)* - In accordance with our farmer feedback, we’ve attempted to introduce a scoring system to the process. The general approach we propose is that “points mean prizes” where the nominal value of 1 point is £1. For some elements (Page 2 and 3) this is relatively easy to relate to the time taken to produce (e.g. approximately two to three days of work to complete the pro-forma). However, despite our best efforts it has not been possible to allocate a reliable points value to Page 4 “farm improvements” at this stage. We feel that the allocation of an incorrect points system may compromise engagement at this stage however, to help take this forward we will:



- During the surveys, ask farmer participants to broadly rate how many points they think certain actions would be worth per hectare or linear metre; and
 - Commence part of the Stage 4 evaluation early, asking ADAS to provide the Farmscoper costings for the measures proposed during Stage 2 surveys. This information can then be used a discussion point during the Stage 3 workshops as we refine our understanding of how the farmers feel the points should be awarded.
- *Listing local priorities (Page 2)* – In accordance with our farmer feedback, we all felt it was important to include a reflection of existing local priorities, which an ELMS applicant would need to take account of. Between the facilitators there was some discussion as to whether the priorities themselves should represent a score weighting, however others felt that this weighting could adversely affect the way a farmers engage with the plan. In the end the system we have decided to trial simply incentivises a desk-based exercise, in which the farmer can demonstrate they have a knowledge of the environmental priorities in the area. We’ve done this by awarding a points allocation for simply completing this section. We will need to understand whether the farmer feels this exercise is useful and how they feel it can be improved. It is beyond the scope of our trial but this aspect of helping the farmer to identify local priorities needs to be streamlined and refined in order to make it useful and practical for farmer purposes.
- *Features and Risks (Page 3)* – This section is predicated on providing a map identifying the high value and high-risk areas on the farm (as directed by our questionnaire feedback). This section is simply about recording existing baseline conditions on the farm in line with the mantra “you can’t manage what you don’t measure”. The farmer is awarded a flat rate allocation of 500 points, in order to ensure that smaller farms receive a sufficient incentive. In addition, we also include an area-based calculation recognising the differences in costs for mapping and planning for larger holdings. Whilst some were more in favour of asking the farmer to provide more detailed information on species and habitats at this stage, the pro-forma submitted to Defra takes a more simple approach, by only accounting for the high-level features that a farmer will need to be aware of in their day to day management. We’ll seek further feedback as to whether they feel this is sufficient for their purposes. In this section each mapped feature is allocated a score, so that by increasing the extent of these habitat features, farmers can increase their scores from year to year.
- *Sustainable farming actions (Page 4)* – For the purpose of creating a long list of options, this section is deliberately a long list of options largely compatible with the Farmscoper model allowing us to evaluate costs and points allocations at a later stage.



Going Forward

The next stages of this project will involve:

- *Stage 2 – Baseline Inventory, Long List of Options*, where the proforma will be trialled on 20 participating farms by our four facilitators. The proforma is principally to be used to help guide farmers through the process of taking an inventory of their farms and identifying sustainable business management and environmental enhancement options available to them.
- *Stage 3 – Farm Actions Plans*. During a series of meetings, each participating farmer will develop an action plan comprising a list of proposed options derived from the long list developed at Stage 2. These action plans will be developed under the four different group working scenarios.

It is worth noting that there are several elements of the pro-forma design that we have been considering but have not been included in the version to be trialled on-farm in Stage 2. This is because these elements mainly related to a retrospective auditing of measures delivered and standards achieved, rather than the “present tense” inventory and action planning we’re aiming to deliver at Stage 2. Nonetheless several valuable ideas have been under consideration by the project team and could merit further exploration during the Stage 3 workshops. These include:

- *Regional Uplift Factor* – One of our facilitators has designed a regional uplift assessment, which works by encouraging farmers to review the overall sustainability of their farming approach. A high score in this assessment allows the farm to proportionately increase their overall points allocation in line with their score. This incentivises regenerative and sustainable practices by potentially allowing the farmer to double their points allocation. This should be included in our pro-forma, except for the fact that it would be more relevant to explore how this operates at Stage 3 when we have a better understanding of the points allocation and the range of options selected.
- *Gold, Silver Bronze* – Our initial versions of the pro-forma all included an attempt to classify farmer scores in accordance with the scale of their public good (i.e. multi-farm - Gold, whole farm – silver and within field – bronze improvement). As an evaluation exercise this has also not been included in the Stage 2 pro-forma, but it will be more relevant to consider an option like this at Stage 3 when the different group working scenarios are investigated.

We hope that the information included in this Stage 1 report is useful to Defra as they continue to develop ELMS policy. For further information about this project please contact Jennifer Walter (Project Manager) jen@pinkmango.co.uk or Tom Ormesher (Project Director) tom.ormesher@nfu.org.uk.