

Pathways to sustainable agriculture, 1980-2020: *forty years of policy learning in Britain and Europe*



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A story in three parts

1. Potted history: *how have policies tried to encourage (more) sustainable agriculture?*
2. Analysis and critique:
 - *What was learned and used*
 - *What was apparent but not used*
 - *Why the blind spots?*
3. Facing future challenges: an agenda for the coming decade

Reminder: Postwar farm change had significant impacts.....

Habitat loss in Great Britain, 1950s-80s

Habitat	% loss
Lowland herb-rich grassland	95
Chalk and limestone grassland	80
Lowland heath	60
Ancient woodland	50
Lowland fens and marshes	50
Upland grassland, heaths and mires	33

source: NCC (Nature conservation in Great Britain), 1984

Loss of hedgerows - over 50% in some areas, 1945-84,
Similar decline in field trees and hedgerow trees*

Reduction in aquatic ditch species of 60%, 1930-80**

*Westmacott and Worthington (New agricultural landscapes, & Agricultural landscapes: a second look), 1971 & 1984

**Baldock (Wetland Drainage in Europe), 1984

Analysing at European level:

'In general terms, it is the plants and animals of habitats vulnerable to agricultural intensification which have declined most in the last 30 years.'

(Baldock, 1984)

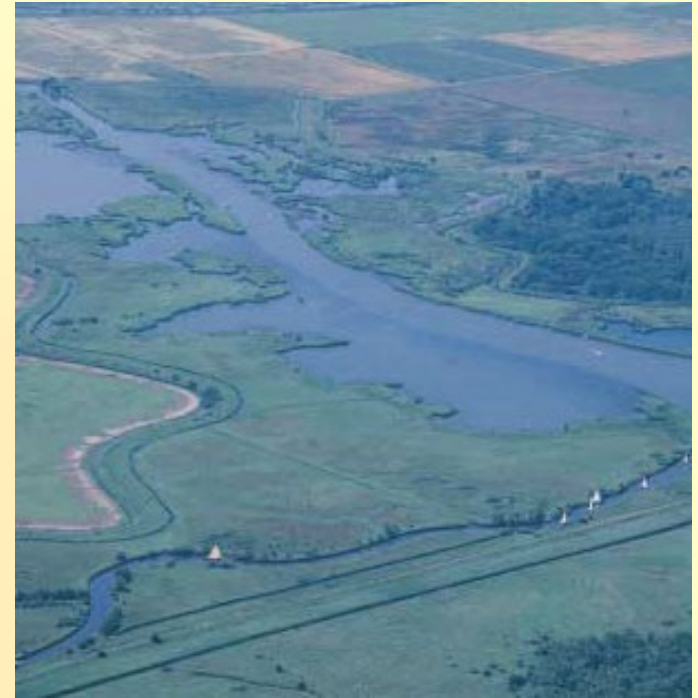
Buoyant prices, underpinned by policy, 1970s and early 80s

- Significant incentive in UK for more arable cropping, much of middle England, Wales, Scotland went (back) under the plough
 - Livestock displaced 'up the hill'
 - Marshes, moor and rough pastures seen as potentially viable cropland
- *need for countervailing policy action*

The early years: pilot schemes

1985: Broads Grazing Marshes Conservation Scheme –
first British experiment in payments for environmental management
(MAFF, ADAS, CoCo and Broads Authority)

Simple annual payments per hectare
For 5 years, to keep land extensively
grazed, not ploughed & drained for
cropping



MAFF, 1986

Similar, early experiments in Netherlands (1977-), Germany also targeted at diverse and valued areas or features.

- very successful: most farmers signed up rapidly, significant areas of marsh saved

➤ ***set a model for wider application.....***

Agri-environment schemes, UK

Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs), 1987-

- 44 designated areas - *traditional farming practices associated with high biodiversity and landscape value, but also under threat of intensification and loss* (represented 15% of UK Agricultural land)

Initially simple management requirements, more ambitious ones and capital works introduced mid-1990s

Stewardship schemes, 1992 -

- *Countryside Stewardship (England), Countryside Premium & Rural Stewardship (Scotland), Tir Cymen & Tir Gofal (Wales), Countryside Management Scheme (NI):*

Menu of management options and capital works, **targeted** by land type

New **Entry-Level approaches** after 2005, funded by top-slicing money from farm subsidies



Protecting valued landscape

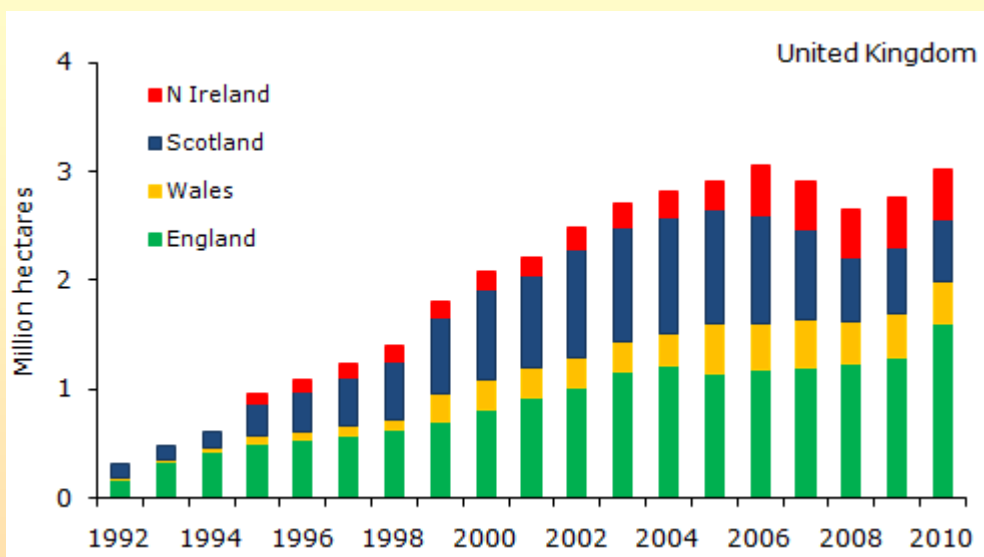


Reintroducing arable diversity

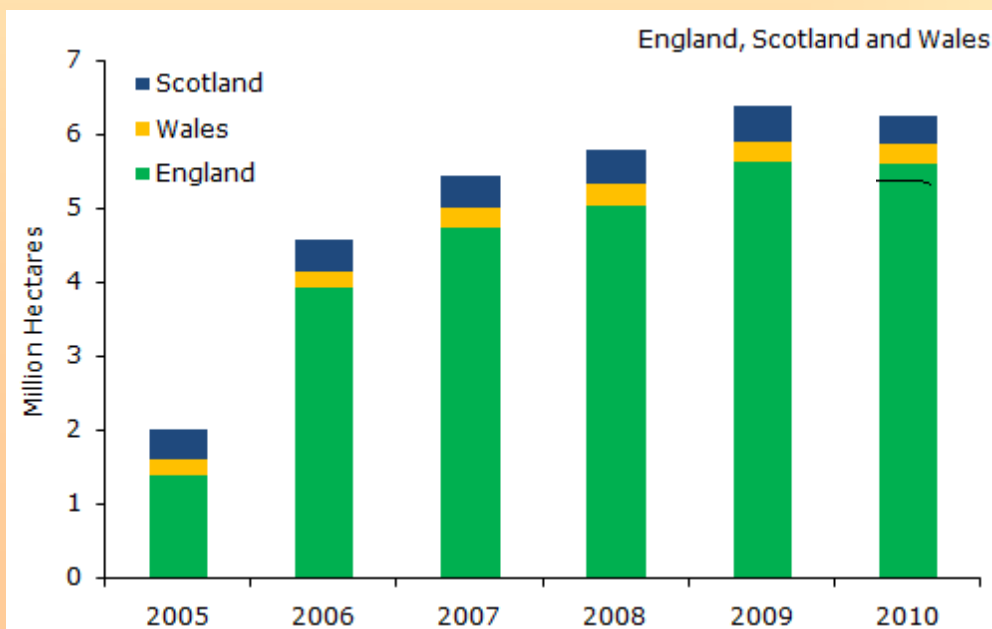


Tackling land degraded through high stocking

Growth in schemes, UK



Older 'higher level' (targeted) schemes: contracts on 16% of UK farmed area, 2010



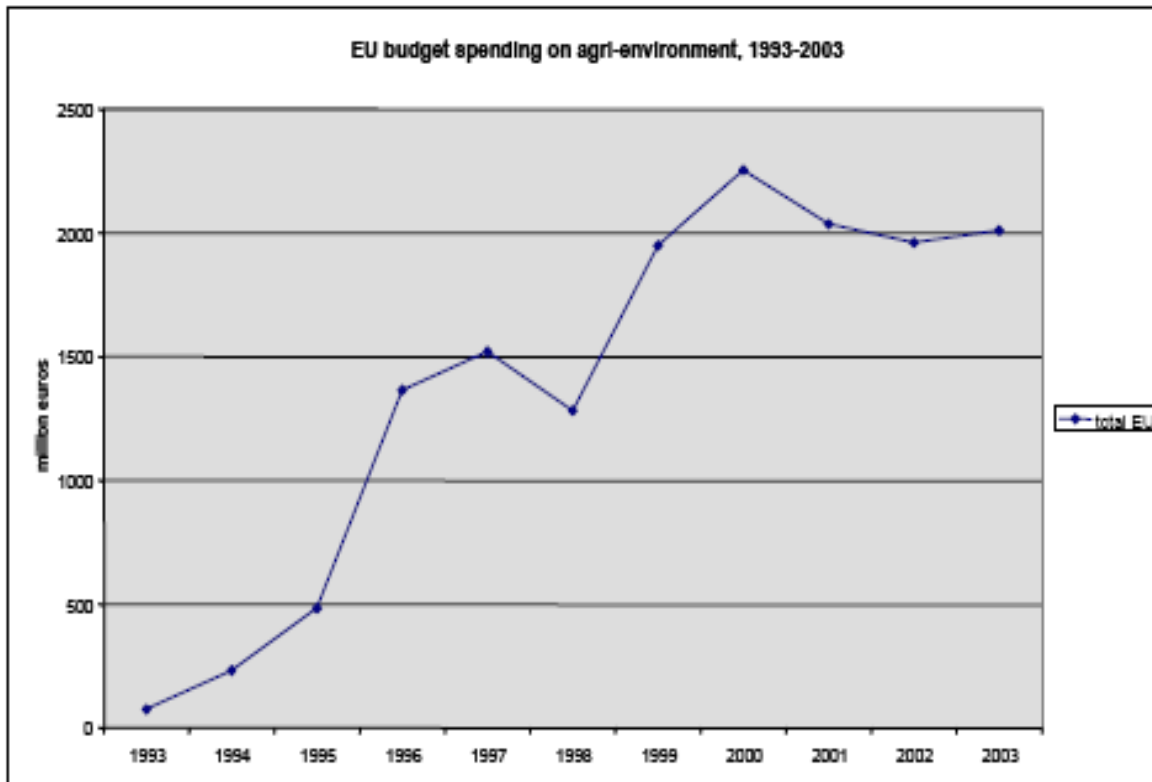
Newer, 'entry-level' approach more significant in England, very general level of 'benefit'

European experience, 1992-

- Early recognition & incorporation into Europe's Common Agricultural Policy, 1985-6, 'compulsory' from 1992
- Many early schemes took ESA model - *some whole, some part-farm, but most without capital works*
- Some *system-based (organic, integrated)* schemes – *organic now broadly established, UK picked it up also*
- Finland and Austria's accession spawned broader schemes (*income support driver*), *whole farm planning, with options*
- Rapidly, influence and uptake overtook UK picture: *more than 25% farmed land enrolled by 2003*
- New Member States (2004-) chose a variety of models, *some very complex*

Growth in schemes, EU

million Euros, 1993-2003



Source: EAGGF Guarantee section, budget execution.

By 2000,

160 programmes

2,500 measures

(Plankl, 2001, cited in Siebert *et al*, 2006)



Development of other tools

- Growth in **direct regulation** – Habitats, Nitrates, other pollution, pesticides and new water legislation
 - Seek to codify ‘baseline’ requirements of ‘good farming practice’ (*though some remains contested*)
- Adoption of link with basic farm support via ‘**cross compliance**’ conditions – *effective as a policy message*
- Use of **investments** to shift technologies / systems – *especially relevant to soils, climate*
- Growing EU focus now on **advisory services**, but provision varies hugely..... *Conflicts with privatisation trends, attempt to focus only on environment*
- England: set-aside concerns spawned ‘Campaign for the Farmed Environment’ – *too early to assess, views differ*

What lessons were learned?

- Payment schemes are popular especially in marginal farming contexts, or where other income is squeezed – they provide some continuity of income and clarity of commitment; *when capital grants are included, they support the local economy and community, too*
- Regulation has become more accepted, over time, *but may encourage ‘technical fixes’, not always sustainable systems*
- Management prescriptions can be differentiated for different goals, options can be multiple
- Regulation and incentive can work together (*carrots and sticks, checks and balances, costs and benefits*)
- Whilst widespread, demonstrable environmental benefit is elusive, many notable local successes exist

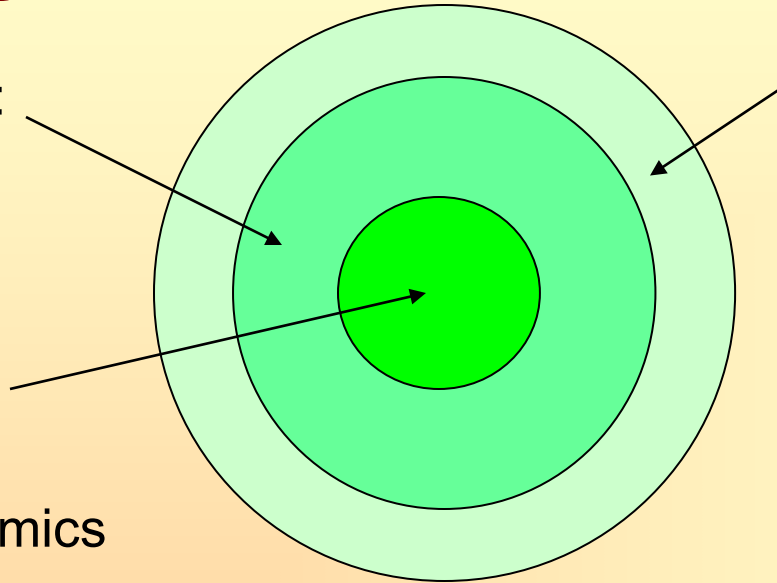
Weaknesses and gaps (1)

- Underplayed: the importance of ongoing communication & advice – *for awareness, for understanding, for commitment and follow-through*
- Centralised, over-prescription of schemes and regulatory approaches
 - *insufficiently sensitive to local conditions*
 - *removes incentive, opportunity for innovation from farmers*
- The bureaucratic challenge – *it takes **more** time and effort to design and run schemes with more ambitious targets / significant results: this is a persistent issue, for administrations*

Communication matters – it affects outcomes

Community level:
Multiple cultures,
networks

Farm Level:
Individual,
household &
enterprise dynamics



Societal Level:
What kind of
countryside
do we want, & how
to achieve it?
What role does
society want
farmers to play?

Complex, inter-linked influences upon farmer behaviour

- *Policies work better when they are sensitive to farm-level concerns (listening), work through community and network links (advising, promoting), and can offer recipients a positive self-image, trust, and societal respect (capacity-building, empowering)*

(Dwyer et al for Defra, 2007)

Issues with top-down scheme design

- UK - standardised approaches don't fit local needs or generate micro-variation (*Burton et al, 2008*)
- Czech republic – farmers signed contracts which now render businesses unable to cope (*Prazan et al, 2010*)
- Romania – schemes ignore subsistence farms in most valued areas (*too small to be eligible*) (*Redman, 2010*)
- Netherlands – farmers fed up with *diktat*: growth of environmental co-operatives (*Mills et al, 2008*)

Weaknesses and gaps (2)

- Conflict / contradictory signals from other policies persist
 - Inability to tackle underlying economic drivers and capacity issues, at farm level
 - Socio-cultural values underplayed (*people, customs and cultures, systems break-down*)
- *Big problems for sustainability?*

English Uplands, RuDI* case study

Moor

Hill sheep, cattle, ponies:
Pure hardy breeds

*Agri-environment targets
moors for stock reduction, but
also, CAP support is decoupled
and declining – too much trouble?*

In-bye / in-take

Supply ewe lambs to....

Upland flocks – hill crossed
with lowland sheep breeds;
also suckler cows

'lowland' DA

*Biosecurity regs
–disincentive to
graze / move
- buy new stock
if herd culled*

Dairy and lowland
sheep, beef fattening,
arable

*Nitrate regs: 6-month waste
store capacity - dairy farms
disappear, nowhere to send
lambs over winter*

Strategies to maintain income

- forget the hill flock, put some 'cosmetic' grazers on the hill, intensify on the in-take and in-bye and fatten more, to seek added-value
- enlarge significantly (3 x) – removes smaller starter holdings, spreads fixed costs, stretches labour - leads to simplified management / systems
- find another job / enterprise to subsidise the farm – requires time, capital and business skills – or get out

➤ **The antithesis of a sustainable farming outcome**

Why the blind spots?

- *Money and process – lots of examples*
- *Too narrow a theoretical framing – the pitfalls of a neoclassical economic approach*
- *Attitudinal factors and fashions among policymakers*

Audit and other money issues

Audit: what you can't measure and guarantee, you shouldn't fund?

'Some of the current structures and cultures of audit militate against effective delivery: they are too focused on processes and rules rather than outcomes; too focused on micro issues rather than strategy; and strongly skewed against entrepreneurship.'

(Lee, HMG, 2001)

Funding pressures

- *Money may be lost if measures don't spend within the period = shift resources to where they get spent fast / easily: lower cost-effectiveness*
- *Budgets altered unexpectedly – 'tap on, tap off' syndrome creates cynicism and disengagement among farmers and delivery teams*
- *The 'high administrative overhead' issue – schemes without advice and tailoring are much cheaper to deliver, but much evidence suggests this is a false economy. Many schemes have low-paid staff, little ongoing support, almost no feedback*

Economics misrepresents some key points

Theory versus practice

Environment as a distinct ‘externality’ and ‘public good’ – implies commercial under-supply, need for public provision (forever?)

Relations are more complex: marketed goods CAN embody sustainability attributes; farm families are pluri-active so many ‘non-productive’ assets serve other functions (e.g. leisure, diversified business, inheritance, community asset) – hybrid and negotiated solutions are possible

Sustainability / environment conflicts with food production goals – need separate policy instruments (Tinbergen’s rule, 1956)

This is often both impractical and inefficient – it all depends upon context; consider organic farming or FSC forestry

Payment logic must be compensatory, to avoid ‘trade distortion’

Real markets are imperfect already: compensation alone won’t incentivise joining or improved performance, assumes current distribution is somehow ‘optimal’

Policy attitudes and fashions *(UK in particular)*

1. Environment has replaced production as the key goal for policy support, but environmental agencies and departments still feel marginal, so seek to defend territory: *'clean, mean and green' tactics and attitudes*

Problem is, many farmers feel marginal, now: food disconnect, big changes in policy, social needs invisible & unvalued.....

➤ ***A recipe for mistrust and misunderstanding***

2. A 'points scoring', threshold approach for joining a scheme may seem a great way to be 'transparent' and reduce the cost of pre-application admin, whilst giving 'choice',

but it's a daunting challenge to the time-strapped punter who still has to work out how it fits with the business

So, where are we now?

- Current policy instruments make a difference, but not enough, *only cover some goals, many are overly complex and constrain inventive adaptation, 'off the peg' not made to measure, good advice / 'soft' support is often under-resourced*
- Climate, carbon and energy agendas require broader tools and experiments: *landscape scale, collective action, spatial integration of multiple uses and goals*
- Underlying business drivers (mainstream) are still seen as antagonistic to long-term sustainability, BUT
- In the UK, notable private / NGO sector initiatives show innovation, integration (economy, society, environment) and success – *new environmental entrepreneurs, enlightened estates, farmer-led groups, 'alternative' communities, some retail/food industry moves*

Future Needs from Agriculture: – policy implications

- A more complex mix – *food security and safety, climate adaptation and mitigation, energy, biodiversity, soils, landscape, water protection, rural quality of life** - most goals are inter-related; but different areas have different potential due to a unique mix of assets / contextual influences
- Suggests a framework approach from the centre (EU, national), + much more support and design at local level
- Needs knowledge and experience drawn from multiple sources (*'experts', practitioners*): partnership approaches, focusing upon **sustainable business models** appropriate to different places and groups of actors

*Dwyer, Land Use Policy, 2011

Thinking more broadly

- People are central to all this - Public attitudes and farmer awareness have changed*, are still changing:
 - *Need to challenge and change lifestyles*
 - *Need to plan long-term*
 - *No-one has 'the answers'*
- *Policy needs to do much more to facilitate awareness, exchange, change, experiment*
- Trust is essential, but currently low in many institutional relationships: *need to rebuild*

*Ingram & Mills, in IEEP study for the EC, forthcoming

Learning from analysis – what is needed?

More **locally-designed** approaches with greater farmer and ‘expert’ ongoing involvement:

- *not take-over, but dialogue, pooling knowledge and experience*
- *experimenting and developing, taking risks, learning by doing*



Policy models informed by **alternative theoretical concepts**:

- *seeking leverage in markets*
- *adopting common/collective logics & ethics*
- *enabling and encouraging innovation and transformation*

Exmoor pilot study: an 'Ecosystem Services delivery' model

- Build a partnership based around a local-area strategy for sustainability, developed with agencies, experts, farmers, private funders (*South West Water*)
- The offer must 'stack up' financially, must work with business development (*change is inevitable*)
- Let farmers contribute expertise, create a climate to encourage helping each other, so all those involved learn something – a 'community of practice'
- Framework: a formal collective agreement could tie farms to a shared strategy, but detailed management needs individual tailoring, + broad range of environment and business tools (*market research, new kit, training, infrastructure for adding value / marketing environment*)

(Dwyer and Short, 2011)

**These are not new ideas, but maybe their time
has finally come?**



- Thank you