



This is a copy of the following published document, deposited on this repository with the permission of the publishers:

Gaskell, Peter and Mills, Jane and Lewis, Nick and Curzon, Sally (2013). *South West Uplands Initiative Evaluation, Final Report. Project Report. Dartmoor National Park.*

Published by Dartmoor National Park, and available online at:

http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/410410/2013-11-18-SWULI-Final-report.pdf

We recommend you cite the published (post-print) version.

The URL for the published version is

http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/410410/2013-11-18-SWULI-Final-report.pdf

Disclaimer

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

South West Uplands Initiative Evaluation

Final Report

Submitted to:

South West Upland Initiative Partners

November 2013

By

The Countryside and Community Research Institute
Oxstalls Campus
Oxstalls Lane
Longlevens
Gloucester GL2 9HW

Peter Gaskell (Project Manager)
Jane Mills
Nick Lewis
Sally Curzon

Tel. 01242 714122

The University of Gloucestershire is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales.
Registered number: 06023243. Registered office: The Park, Cheltenham, GL50 2RH.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Evidence has shown that South West (SW) Uplands farm businesses are heavily dependent on public support payments to remain economically viable, which makes them vulnerable to any changes in subsidies. The SW upland farms are hindered by physical conditions as well as an ageing workforce, a predominance of very small holdings and a declining workforce with few new entrants. The reliance upon livestock has also reduced farm incomes to a very low level. To assist the upland livestock industry in tackling some of the particular challenges it faces, SW Rural Development Agency (SWRDA) introduced a programme of support to link the upland livestock sector to available government funding streams under the Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE), with the overall aims of:

- bringing about improvements in the competitiveness of each individual livestock sector to help them compete in the marketplace;
- assisting farmers in meeting their changing responsibilities and facilitate improved animal health and welfare; and
- providing support for farmers in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of on-farm management.

Three projects from the South West upland areas were approved by SWRDA and started operating in the autumn of 2009 under the South West Uplands Initiative (SWUI). They were the:

- Bodmin Moor Livestock Initiative (BMLI).
- Dartmoor Hill Farm Project (DHFP).
- Exmoor Hill Farm Project (EHFP)

In November 2010, the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) was commissioned by the Cornwall Development Company (CDC), South West Upland Initiative Partners and SWRDA to carry out a longitudinal evaluation study into the impact of the SWUI.

Aim of the final report

The aim of this final report is to draw together, in one document, the key findings of the evaluation study presented in previous reports and to update the outputs achieved by June 2013.

Methods

The report findings are based on the following data collection exercises:

- **Project profiles:** The three SWUI projects are run independently and it was important to understand how the SWUI operates in each project area. A profile for each project was produced using the project's Strategic Action Plan (SAP) and dialogue with project staff to identify individual priorities and targets. The profiles identify the nature and extent of engagement between the SWUI projects and the RDPE programmes and also the relationship between the projects and broader rural development programmes.

- **Interviews with delivery staff, stakeholder partners and industry representatives:** A combination of telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews undertaken with 14 delivery staff, stakeholder partners and industry representatives to explore the impact and effectiveness of the SWUI. These interviews took place throughout the evaluation period.
- **Telephone interview surveys:** Two telephone surveys were conducted with farmers in the project areas. The first survey was conducted in January 2011 and involved a telephone interview with a sample of 90 farm businesses across the SWUI areas (30 per project area). The survey, based on a semi-structured questionnaire, collected both quantitative and qualitative information on the pattern and nature of engagement with the SWUI. The second survey was undertaken in November 2012 and was based on a sample of 60 farm businesses that have participated in the SWUI (20 per project area) and collected both quantitative and qualitative information on the financial benefits resulting from engagement with the SWUI.
- **Farmer focus groups:** Three farmer focus groups were held in February and March 2011 (1 in each project area), with a total of 36 participants, including farmers from the project Steering Groups, as well as farmers who had taken part in the telephone survey. The focus groups explored the delivery, operation and effectiveness of the SWUI and the RDPE programmes from the farmer's perspective. Particular attention was placed on how the effectiveness of the SWUI could be enhanced.
- **Value for Money (VfM):** The VfM analysis collected figures relating to the cost of provision, incorporating the costs of delivery and personnel and administrative support. Each of the 3 projects completed tables recording information on costs and benefits of their activities delivered over a 6 month period between April and September 2012.
- **Case studies:** Nine case studies (3 in each project area) were conducted during November 2012. They were selected to illustrate the achievements of the SWUI with a particular emphasis on identifying any financial benefits of participation. The case studies, based on a semi-structured questionnaire, collected both quantitative and qualitative information on the benefits resulting from engagement with the SWUI.
- **Workshops:** Two parallel workshops were undertaken as part of a single event in November 2012. These workshops, one for farmers who had undertaken SWUI activities and one for SWUI project delivery staff and managers, included a SWOT analysis and a discussion on the future direction of the SWUI. Telephone interviews were held with the Project Officers in December 2012 and January 2013 to follow up on some of the issues raised by the workshops.

Establishing the SWUI

SWUI Model

There was widespread agreement that the SWUI delivery framework was broadly correct and that there was a strategic fit with objectives of the RDPE. In particular, there was support for individual projects with delivery teams located in the project areas as these were able to become embedded in their local farming communities and to tailor their activities to meet the needs of local livestock farmers. The telephone surveys, focus groups, workshops and case studies found that participants often had a

strong attachment to the projects as they were designed specifically to help upland farmers.

There was support for an emphasis on bottom up delivery and the creation of local Steering Groups made up of local farm businesses, landowners and other interested organization to identify priorities and provide direction and leadership. However, it was felt that in the early months of the project the responsibility for driving the projects forward fell too much on the Project Officers. It was suggested that the Steering Group members had not been provided with sufficient information, advice and training at the beginning of the project development stage to adequately fulfil their role. The SWUI funding was outside the experience of many Steering Group members who were used to dealing with projects with set budgets and did not fully understand the funding framework within which the projects had to work.

SWUI roll out

The initial framing of the SWUI and the publicity surrounding its launch, while being very successful in raising awareness of and interest in the initiative, had a number of negative repercussions for project delivery. Initially, SWUI was publicised as having £1 million funding available for each project area through RDPE or bespoke projects to help increase profitability of upland farms. Some Steering Group members (and Project Officers) initially believed their role was to simply oversee grant applications from farmers for the £1 million. They were unaware of the tight constraints of the RDPE funding eligibility criteria, and the level of bureaucracy involved. The publicity also raised the expectations of the farming community, who quickly became disillusioned once realising that capital investments for core farming activities were ineligible for funding.

Project Teams had to work very hard to re-establish the reputation of the projects among the farming community and also with the Steering Groups who became disillusioned with the process. It was also suggested that Projects Officers had to focus on providing events of the highest quality in order to enhance the profile of their projects.

Engagement, Delivery and Impacts

SWUI development and maturity

All the projects have worked hard to build trust among their respective farming communities and develop a reputation for high quality engagement through their newsletters, electronic communications, one-to-one consultations and events. The projects have continued to develop their client databases and engage with new participants.

As the projects have developed and matured they have been able to respond and adapt to changes in the institutional and funding landscape (e.g. the demise of the SWRDA and changes to the RDPE programmes) and have continued to build and develop partnerships with regional training and business advice providers to deliver SWUI objectives.

Costs

Over the 6 month time period all projects were involved in a wide variety of activities. The project staff in BMLI and EHFP spent the majority of their time on bespoke projects whilst the DHFP staff focused more on running and organising events. This 6 month

period was a time of disruption for DHFP due to staff changes and an office move. It would also appear that more of the DHFP staff time was taken up with administrative tasks for the host body than the other two projects. The main administrative costs for all three projects related to advertising events and distributing the project newsletter to a large number of farmers in their areas.

Benefits

All SWUI projects have easily exceeded their output targets in terms of the number of participants involved in training and the number of training days received. However, the real benefit lies in the impact of SWUI activities on farm efficiency and competitiveness. Feedback from the beneficiaries suggests that it is too early to identify whether SWUI is value for money in monetary terms. Nevertheless it is clear that through the bespoke projects, training events and discussion groups the three projects have been effective in capacity building and in building up the skills and knowledge of the upland farmers so that benefits will be realised in the future beyond the life of the current project timeframe. Evidence from the farmer telephone surveys, case studies and workshops show that the SWUI projects had a positive impact on the uptake of RDPE schemes. The SWUI projects also had a positive impact on the competitiveness and efficiency of participating farm businesses through their knowledge exchange activities including facilitated learning groups and farm visits, demonstration events and seminars.

Financial benefits

The farm case studies and farmer telephone survey were able to identify cases where participation in the SWUI had resulted in quantifiable financial benefits to farm businesses. Here the main benefits resulted from cost savings derived through participating in the healthy livestock initiatives and FFIS. However it was clear from the farmer interviews that in the majority of cases it was not possible for the farmer to place a precise monetary value on the financial benefits. There were a number of reasons for this:

- Many of the financial benefits are not immediate and would be realised over a number of years. For example, farmers participating in the healthy livestock initiatives often mentioned that the full financial benefits of disease control and fertility improvements could take between 5 and 10 years to become apparent.
- The impacts of some of the activities could not be translated into direct financial benefits. This particularly applied to some of the knowledge exchange activities, such as the farm trips and visits.
- It was difficult for farmers to distinguish between SWUI effects and broader market effects.

Broader business benefits

The SWUI was valued by the majority of participants. The November 2012 telephone survey found that over 90% of the engagement was considered beneficial to the participant's farm businesses.

Few of the farmers interviewed felt that SWUI had made no difference to the way they farmed. The telephone survey also found that participation in the SWUI was making farmers think more about the profitability of their farm businesses and gave them confidence.

Lessons Learned

Strengths and weaknesses

- **Project design:** The aim of the SWUI is to target delivery to improve the efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability of livestock farming across the SW uplands. This provides the initiative with a clear sense of purpose. The 4 year duration of the SWUI has provided sufficient time to allow a significant number of activities to take place that will produce positive outcomes for the farming community. The SWUI recognised that upland farmers experience lower levels of participation and was designed to help farmers access SWRDA regional programmes (SWARM, SWHLI and SWRSP). Establishing 3 separate SWUI projects enabled a close relationship to be developed between the projects and their farming communities. The independence of each SWUI project also allows them to draw on the experience of their host bodies (CDC, DNPA and ND+).
- **Accessibility:** SWUI project delivery teams are locally based and are accessible to farmers. This has been a very important factor in building the reputation of the SWUI projects and in developing trust in the farming community.
- **Strong communication:** SWUI project delivery teams have practical farming experience and can communicate well with farmers. The SWUI projects have an important role in signposting opportunities for business development provided by other providers. The SWUI projects use a variety of communication methods to inform farmers about opportunities to improve their farm businesses. The SWUI projects are an established presence in their farming communities and play an important role in a number of different farmer networks.
- **Strong facilitation:** The SWUI projects have built a good reputation among their farming communities and have delivery staff that are locally based and have a good understanding of farming issues. This combination of factors has been important in encouraging participation in SWUI activities. Evidence from the farmer case studies and telephone survey shows that facilitation by project delivery teams has been important in instilling belief and confidence in prospective participants, enabling them, for example, to apply for grants, sign up for different initiatives, undertake training and join discussion groups. The SWUI projects also have an important role in facilitating engagement between farmers and industry professionals, such as training providers and vets. Without the SWUI projects the level of participation in RDPE schemes was likely to have been significantly reduced.
- **Adaptability:** The SWUI projects have proved adaptable to change, such as the demise of the RDAs and the introduction of new policy instruments (FFIS and REG). They have been able to respond to opportunities to draw down resources as the RDPE has developed over time. For example, the EHFP has been successful in developing a number of training activities in partnership with the region's main training provider. DHFP have also been in discussions with training providers and incorporated these into a new training initiatives. The SWUI projects have also learnt from each other and there has been some sharing of expertise and experiences between the projects. For example, the DHFP experience in building capacity and resilience through farmer networks has helped the BMLI and the EHFP develop their own farmer networks. Likewise, the BMLI experience in delivering its own healthy livestock initiative has helped the DHFP and the EHFP set up their own initiatives. The Project Officers have grown in experience and confidence as the projects have progressed. They have built strong positive relationships with their farming communities and developed a thorough

understanding of the funding landscape. This has allowed them to identify opportunities as priorities and funding streams have changed within the RDPE.

- **Healthy Livestock Initiatives:** These initiatives have been particularly well received in the project areas. Uptake has been strong and initial feedback has been very positive. The role of project delivery staff has been identified as an important factor in recruitment.
- **Other initiatives:** DHFP worked up, tested and promoted new ideas with farmers, including a project around developing new products from wool.
- **Provision of a suite of projects:** The SWUI projects have learnt the importance of providing a suite of activities covering different topics in order to engage with different sectors of the farming community. For example, EHFP recently hosted a tax planning event and around 75% of those who attended have never previously engaged in EHFP activity.
- **Provide clear guidance as to the level of funding available:** With any future initiatives ensure that no mis-information is disseminated at the start of the project about the level of funding available as this can raise expectations which if not met leads to disengagement
- **Gaps in RDPE support:** The lack of a 'flag ship' scheme to accompany the start of the SWUI projects was a major weakness and a missed opportunity to demonstrate credibility and engage farmers from the very beginning. The SWUI projects were operational and ready to begin delivery before some of the SWRDA RDPE schemes were ready. This resulted in a limited number of activities being offered by the SWUI projects in the early stages. The complex eligibility criteria for some of the RDPE schemes hindered delivery of the SWUI's aim to improve the efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability of livestock farming across the SW uplands.
- **Limited opportunities to design and resource projects:** The regional SWRDA RDPE schemes were not always sensitive to the needs of upland livestock businesses. The SWUI projects have developed a good understanding of local needs but have experienced difficulties in accessing RDPE support to meet some of these needs. There have been limited opportunities for the SWUI projects to design and resource projects to meet local needs and it could be argued that this stifled ideas from the farming community. This has resulted in some negative feedback from SWUI project steering groups and farming communities.
- **Insufficient joint working to realise the full benefits:** The potential for joint working and sharing knowledge and experiences has not been fully exploited. The level of autonomy between the projects meant that opportunities to share best practice were sometimes being missed. It was also suggested that the funding structure of the SWUI had introduced an element of competitiveness between the projects and this may have inhibited the opportunities for joint working. The communication between SWRDA/Defra and the host bodies could also have been improved with Defra taking more of an overview role.
- **Insufficient farm-level monitoring of SWUI impact:** There is little farm-level monitoring of the impacts of RDPE schemes in terms of outcomes.

Opportunities and threats

- **Established delivery mechanism to implement future rural development policy:** The SWUI projects are an established and valued presence in their farming communities. They have established successful networks involving both farmers

and industry professionals, such as training providers and vets. The SWUI projects can continue, under the next RDP, to target delivery to improve the efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability of livestock farming across the SW uplands. There are opportunities to improve the competitiveness and efficiency of farm businesses and safeguard animal health by:

- taking the healthy livestock initiative approach forward and make it a 'flag ship' project that can reach the majority of livestock businesses across the SWUI project areas. This could include marketing a healthy livestock brand to achieve a price premium on livestock sales;
 - building upon the farmer networking activity and establish self-supporting producer and buying groups;
 - developing the range of training activities offered and design new events in partnership with training providers;
 - expanding the remit of the SWUI to include a whole farm approach which would include the economic, social and environmental aspects of business development. This could include facilitation at a landscape scale to deliver environmental benefits across a number of farm businesses.
- **Delegated decision making:** The SWUI projects have the potential to design projects to meet local needs. The SWUI host bodies are experienced in budget management and the allocation of funding.
 - **Impact monitoring:** There are opportunities to build in farm-level monitoring to measure the impacts of future schemes.
 - **Influence the next RDP:** collectively the SWUI projects have the ability to lobby for upland provision from a position of experience.
 - **Time-limited budget:** The RDPE has a time-limited budget and the SWUI will finish at the end of 2013 unless alternative funding can be secured. Key staff may seek new positions before the end of the SWUI.
 - **Legacy:** The SWUI did not become fully operational until fairly late in the 7 year RDP cycle. Many SWUI project activities have significant lead in times and the full benefit of farm business participation may not be seen for several years. Also a number of activities, such as the DHLI and EHLI, have only recently received implementation approval. There was a widespread view that the legacy of the SWUI could be damaged and the benefits not fully realised if the initiative ended in 2013, including:
 - **Damage to successor projects:** Loss of engagement with farmers due to the stop start nature of funding. This would make it difficult for any successor projects to gain credibility with the farming community.
 - **Loss of continuity:** Loss of continuity of activities that have been shown to be successful and working well.
 - **Network breakdown:** Some of the farmer networks that have been established are fragile and there is a fear that they will not continue if the SWUI projects end.

There was strong support for the SWUI to continue beyond 2013. The SWUI delivery model was seen as an effective means of improving the competitiveness, efficiency and sustainability of livestock farm businesses in the 3 upland areas. A key lesson learnt from the RDPE experience was that it took a considerable amount

of time to get the SWUI projects in place and that they were not fully operational until year 5 of the 7 year RDP cycle. It was suggested that there remains a need to improve the competitiveness, efficiency and sustainability of livestock farming in the SW uplands and that it would be more resource efficient to base future delivery around the current SWUI rather than starting again under the new RDP. However, a number of changes to the SWUI are recommended:

- An increase in delegated decision making would increase the effectiveness of the SWUI. The SWUI projects have the potential to design projects to meet local needs. The SWUI host bodies are experienced in budget management and the allocation of funding. (Future holistic approach could assess all funding sources which may add value to RDPE)
- The SWUI should draw upon the experiences of the projects and accountable bodies to improve delivery and effectiveness in all project areas.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the farmers who took part in the case studies, and telephone survey and all the project delivery staff, stakeholder partners and farmers who took time out of their busy schedules to talk to us about the SWUI and participate in the workshop. We would also like to thank Duchy College for providing figures on the uptake of RDPE training measures.

Abbreviations used

BMHLI	Bodmin Moor Healthy Livestock Initiative
BMLI	Bodmin Moor Livestock Initiative
BVD	Bovine Viral Diarrhoea
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CCRI	Countryside and Community Research Institute
CDC	Cornwall Development Company
DHFP	Dartmoor Hill Farm Project
DHLI	Dartmoor Healthy Livestock Initiative
DNPA	Dartmoor National Park Authority
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EBV	Estimated Breeding Value
EHFP	Exmoor Hill Farm Project
EHLI	Exmoor Healthy Livestock Initiative
ELS	Entry Level Stewardship
ENPA	Exmoor National Park Authority
FFIS	Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme
FECPAK	Foetal Egg Count Pack
GPCF	Grant Progress and Claim Form
LAD	Local Action Group
LFA	Less Favoured Areas
ND+	North Devon Plus
NE	Natural England
PO	Project Officer
RDPE	Rural Development Programme England
RDR	Rural Development Regulation
REG	Rural Economy Grant
SAP	Strategic Action Plan
SW	South West
SWARM	South West Agricultural Resource Management
SWHLI	South West Healthy Livestock Initiative
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
SWRDA	South West Regional Development Agency
SWREG	South West Rural Enterprise Gateway
SWRSP	South West Regional Skills Programme
SWUF	South West Uplands Federation
SWUI	South West Uplands Initiative
UELS	Uplands Entry Level Scheme
VfM	Value for Money

Table of Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	BACKGROUND	1
1.2	OVERVIEW OF THE SOUTH WEST UPLANDS INITIATIVE.....	2
1.3	AIM OF THE REPORT	4
1.4	REPORT STRUCTURE.....	4
2	METHODS.....	4
2.1	DATA COLLECTION.....	4
2.1.1	<i>Project profiles.....</i>	<i>4</i>
2.1.2	<i>Interviews with delivery staff, stakeholder partners and industry representatives.....</i>	<i>4</i>
2.1.3	<i>Telephone interview surveys.....</i>	<i>4</i>
2.1.4	<i>Farmer focus groups.....</i>	<i>5</i>
2.1.5	<i>Value for Money (VfM).....</i>	<i>5</i>
2.1.6	<i>Case studies.....</i>	<i>5</i>
2.1.7	<i>Workshops.....</i>	<i>5</i>
3	ESTABLISHING THE SWUI.....	5
3.1	THE SWUI MODEL	5
3.2	SWUI ROLL OUT.....	6
4	ENGAGEMENT, DELIVERY AND IMPACTS	6
4.1	SWUI DEVELOPMENT AND MATURITY.....	6
4.2	COSTS AND BENEFITS OR THE SWUI.....	9
4.2.1	<i>Costs.....</i>	<i>9</i>
4.2.2	<i>Benefits.....</i>	<i>10</i>
4.2.3	<i>Financial benefits.....</i>	<i>11</i>
4.2.4	<i>Broader business benefits.....</i>	<i>12</i>
5	LESSONS LEARNED.....	14
5.1	STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES.....	14
5.2	OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS.....	16

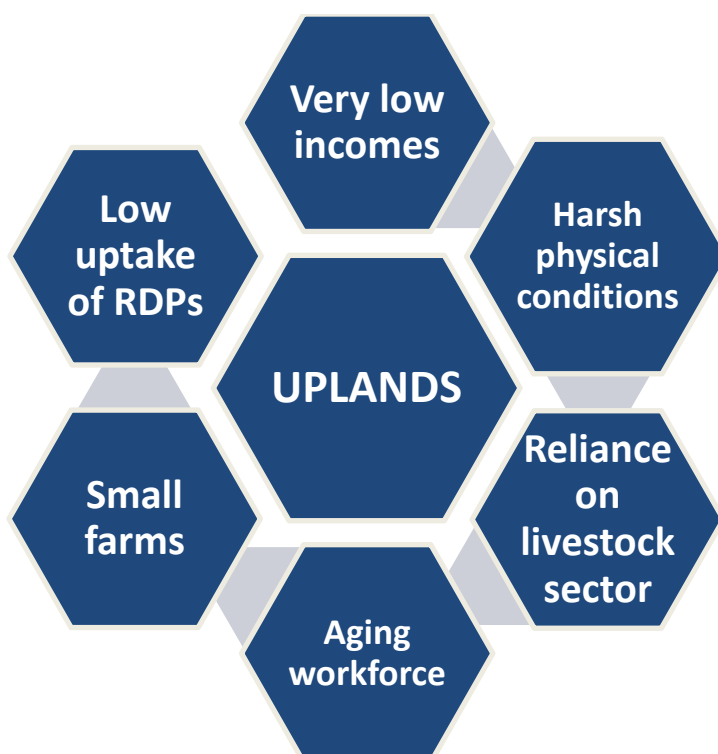
1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Much of the impetus for the development of the South West Uplands Initiative originated from work undertaken by the South West Uplands Federation (SWUF), a farmer led initiative representing hill farmers from Bodmin Moor, Dartmoor and Exmoor. The SWUF commissioned research into the economics of upland farming in South West (SW) England which clearly showed how upland farmers were dependent on subsidy to retain the levels of profitability in their upland business, currently 40% of the Farm Business Income of a typical SW hill farm. This makes the sector very sensitive to any changes to public support payments which may occur post-2014 as a result of the CAP reform process. Consequently, there is concern over the future of farming in these areas and a fear that abandonment of farming practices could have a negative effect on habitat and species management, leading to a loss of priority habitats and changes to the landscape of the region. SWUF demonstrated the need for special support for the upland areas to ensure that the agricultural systems that are so important to their unique landscapes are retained and are economically viable.

The particular difficulties faced by the SW uplands areas were recognised in the SWRDA Regional Implementation Plan. These were recognised as areas that are hindered by physical conditions as well as an ageing workforce, a predominance of very small holdings and a declining workforce with few new entrants. The reliance upon livestock has also reduced farm incomes to a very low level (Figure 1.1.1).

Figure 1.1.1 The problem with the SW Uplands



To address some of these issues, a programme of support was introduced to assist the livestock industry in tackling some of the particular challenges it faces. These were:

- to bring about improvements in the **competitiveness** of each individual livestock sector to help them compete in the marketplace
- to assist farmers in meeting their changing responsibilities and facilitate **improved animal health** and welfare
- to provide support for farmers in enhancing the **efficiency and effectiveness** of on-farm management

The South West Uplands Initiative (SWUI) is one of a number of livestock initiatives that have been developed by the South West Development Agency (SWRDA) as part of its responsibilities for Axis I and Axis III of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)¹.

1.2 Overview of the South West Uplands Initiative

SWRDA invited the region's three main upland areas; Bodmin Moor, Dartmoor and Exmoor, to put forward a proposal to assist in transforming their livestock sectors. SWRDA's goal for the SWUI is to help livestock enterprises in the upland areas become more profitable and sustainable, thus underpinning the unique character of these areas.

The guidance prepared by SWRDA to inform the development of the proposals suggested that each proposal should include:

- Identified priorities for that particular upland sector.
- Actions/options to deliver those identified priorities.
- RDPE project outlines.

The guidance envisaged that each area would set up a Programme Group made up of local farm businesses, landowners and other interested organisations to facilitate the process and to oversee the delivery / projects phase. Each Programme Group would then be invited to identify strategic priorities for the development and improved profitability of the livestock sector in their area. This could include measures to reduce operating costs, increase market value and the creation of new markets (Figure 1.2.1). The guidance also stated that if appropriate, the Programme Group could apply for funding to employ a dedicated project officer in order to increase development capacity within their area as part of the above. The role of the Project Officer could include promoting the opportunities available through RDPE for farmers, working in association with the South West Rural Enterprise Gateway (SWREG) and facilitating applications for the projects of strategic significance.

¹ Responsibilities for the socio-economic elements of the RDPE (Axis I,III and IV) were transferred to Defra in July 2011.

Figure 1.2.1 Role of Steering Group



Three projects from the South West upland areas were approved by SWRDA and started operating in the autumn of 2009 under the South West Uplands Initiative (SWUI). They were the:

- Bodmin Moor Livestock Initiative (BMLI).
- Dartmoor Hill Farm Project (DHFP).
- Exmoor Hill Farm Project (EHFP).

Each of the projects has similar governance and operating structures with a Programme Group, commonly known as the Steering Group, directing the activities of a dedicated project officer. Although the projects together are known as the SWUI, they are independent of each other.

Thus to summarise, the initiative was envisaged as a bottom-up approach with governance and operating structures occurring through a local Steering Group comprised of local people from the upland area. The initiative was viewed as autonomous in that it allowed the initiatives to identify their own priorities according to local needs. It was also promoted as having £1 million of available funding for each initiative.

In November 2010, the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) was commissioned by the Cornwall Development Company (CDC), South West Upland Initiative Partners and SWRDA to carry out a longitudinal evaluation study into the impact of SWUI.

1.3 Aim of the report

The aim of this final report is to draw together, in one document, the key findings of the evaluation study presented in previous reports² and to update the outputs achieved by June 2013.

1.4 Report structure

Section 2 of the report outlines the research methods used to gather the information for the evaluation. Section 3 summaries the inception and early phases of SWUI along with the challenges faced by SWUI resulting from the initial publicity for the initiative. In Section 4 findings are presented on SWUI engagement, delivery and impact. Section 5 presents the lessons learned from the evaluation.

2 Methods

2.1 Data collection

The report findings are based on the following data collection exercises:

2.1.1 Project profiles

The three SWUI projects are run independently and it was important to understand how the SWUI operates in each project area. A profile for each project was produced using the project's Strategic Action Plan (SAP) and dialogue with project staff to identify individual priorities and targets. The profiles identify the nature and extent of engagement between the SWUI projects and the RDPE programmes and also the relationship between the projects and broader rural development programmes.

2.1.2 Interviews with delivery staff, stakeholder partners and industry representatives

A combination of telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews undertaken with 14 delivery staff, stakeholder partners and industry representatives to explore the impact and effectiveness of the SWUI. These interviews took place throughout the evaluation period.

2.1.3 Telephone interview surveys

Two telephone surveys were conducted with farmers in the project areas. The first survey was conducted in January 2011 and involved a telephone interview with a sample of 90 farm businesses across the SWUI areas (30 per project area). The survey, based on a semi-structured questionnaire, collected both quantitative and qualitative information on the pattern and nature of engagement with the SWUI. The second survey was undertaken in November 2012 and was based on a sample of 60 farm businesses that have participated in the SWUI (20 per project area) and collected both quantitative and qualitative information on the financial benefits resulting from engagement with the SWUI.

² South West Uplands initiative Baseline Report: February 2011; South West Uplands initiative Midterm Report: February 2012; South West Uplands initiative End of 2012 Report: May 2013.

2.1.4 Farmer focus groups

Three farmer focus groups were held in February and March 2011 (1 in each project area), with a total of 36 participants, including farmers from the project Steering Groups, as well as farmers who had taken part in the telephone survey. The focus groups explored the delivery, operation and effectiveness of the SWUI and the RDPE programmes from the farmer's perspective. Particular attention was placed on how the effectiveness of the SWUI could be enhanced.

2.1.5 Value for Money (VfM)

The VfM analysis collected figures relating to the cost of provision, incorporating the costs of delivery and personnel and administrative support. Each of the 3 projects completed tables recording information on costs and benefits of their activities delivered over a six month period between April and September 2012.

2.1.6 Case studies

Nine case studies (3 in each project area) were conducted during November 2012. They were selected to illustrate the achievements of the SWUI with a particular emphasis on identifying any financial benefits of participation. The case studies, based on a semi-structured questionnaire, collected both quantitative and qualitative information on the benefits resulting from engagement with the SWUI.

2.1.7 Workshops

Two parallel workshops were undertaken as part of a single event in November 2012. These workshops, one for farmers who had undertaken SWUI activities and one for SWUI project delivery staff and managers, included a SWOT analysis and a discussion on the future direction of the SWUI. Telephone interviews were held with the Project Officers in December 2012 and January 2013 to follow up on some of the issues raised by the workshops.

3 Establishing the SWUI

3.1 The SWUI Model

There was widespread agreement that the SWUI delivery framework was broadly correct and that there was a strategic fit with objectives of the RDPE. In particular, there was support for individual projects with delivery teams located in the project areas as these were able to become embedded in their local farming communities and to tailor their activities to meet the needs of local livestock farmers. The telephone surveys, focus groups, workshops and case studies found that participants often had a strong attachment to the projects as they were designed specifically to help upland farmers.

'We are trying to find people who want to do things and you have to go and search them out because they won't come to you.' Being located on the moor was seen as being essential. [The respondent] thought it would be difficult to build up the same relationship with farmers if they were located more remotely.

There was support for an emphasis on bottom up delivery and the creation of local Steering Groups made up of local farm businesses, landowners and other interested organisation to identify priorities and provide direction and leadership. However, it was felt that in the early months of the project the responsibility for driving the projects forward fell too much on the Project Officers. It was suggested that the Steering Group members had not been provided with sufficient information, advice and training at the beginning of the project development stage to adequately fulfil their role. The SWUI funding was outside the experience of many Steering Group members who were used to dealing with projects with set budgets and did not fully understand the funding framework within which the projects had to work.

3.2 SWUI roll out

The initial framing of the SWUI and the publicity surrounding its launch, while being very successful in raising awareness of and interest in the initiative, had a number of negative repercussions for project delivery. Initially, SWUI was publicised as having £1 million funding available for each project area through RDPE or bespoke projects to help increase profitability of upland farms. Some Steering Group members (and Project Officers) initially believed their role was to simply oversee grant applications from farmers for the £1 million. They were unaware of the tight constraints of the RDPE funding eligibility criteria, and the level of bureaucracy involved. The publicity also raised the expectations of the farming community, who quickly became disillusioned once realising that capital investments for core farming activities were ineligible for funding.

When they were developing the project [the respondent] thought that they would be bidding for large chunks of money. Their understanding of what the staff were going to be doing was handling the logistics of managing 2 or 3 large projects.

[The respondent] said it was all very confusing. There was going to be £1 million for each project. Then there wasn't. The respondent said they could not remember where the figure came from but the farmers certainly believed it. The respondent said that they were all asked to provide a list of things they would like to increase the profitability of the farmers on ~~~~ but 90% of it proved to be ineligible. The respondent said that a lot of people didn't bother after that.

The Project Teams had to work very hard to re-establish the reputation of the projects among the farming community and also with the Steering Groups who became disillusioned with the process. It was also suggested that Projects Officers had to focus on providing events of the highest quality in order to enhance the profile of their projects.

4 Engagement, Delivery and Impacts

4.1 SWUI development and maturity

All the projects have worked hard to build trust among their respective farming communities and develop a reputation for high quality engagement through their newsletters, electronic communications, one-to-one consultations and events (see

Table 4.1 to 4.3). The projects have continued to develop their client databases and engage with new participants.

Table 4.1.1 BMLI events 2010-June 2013

2010	2011	2012	2013
EID	Cross Compliance	Suckled Cow Fertility	Healthy Livestock Project Update
Soils for Profit Promotion	Bio-Baler Demonstration	FECPAK	Healthy Livestock FECPAK Training Event
TB Activity in the Uplands	Mobile Handling	Moorland Soil Efficiency	BMLI Benchmarking Meetings
Out Wintering & Forage Crops	Rural Succession & Tax Planning	Dartmoor Trip	BMLI ICT Training Courses
	Women in Farming	Welsh Farm Visit	BMLI ICT Tablet Training Event
	Bull Fertility and Improved Breed Performance	BMLI Benchmarking Inception Meeting	Cross Compliance Awareness Event
	Ram Fertility & Easy Care Management	Improving Breed Performance and Healthy Livestock Update	Northern Ireland Study Tour
	Cumbrian Trip	Computer Workshop	Healthy Livestock Project Update
	Anthelmintics & Worm Resistance	Out-wintering / Fodder Crops	Healthy Livestock FECPAK Training Event
	Renewable Energy	Healthy Livestock Update	BMLI Benchmarking Meetings
	Rural Planning		BMLI ICT Training Courses
	Farming and Forestry Improvements Scheme Workshops		BMLI ICT Tablet Training Event
	Live to Dead Grading Days		Cross Compliance Awareness Event
	CAP Reform Debate		Northern Ireland Study Tour
	Respiratory Management		Healthy Livestock Project Update
	Suckled Cow /Calf Grassland Utilisation & Nutritional		

Source: BMLI

Table 4.1.2 DHFP events 2010-June 2013

2010	2011	2012	2013
Trailer Training	Soils Protection Review	Sheep Nutrition	Fire Training
ATV training	Beef Healthy Livestock awareness	Food Safety in Catering	Dartmoor Women in Farming Vet Emergencies Talk
Sheep EID workshop	sheep mobile handling day	Anthelmintics Evening	Farmer Agency Training
Cross Compliance Workshop	Cattle mobile handling day	Emergency First Aid	Dartmoor Women in Farming Visit to Organic Café
Fire Plan Meeting	Food Safety in Catering refresher	Fec Pak Demonstration Event	Succession Talk
	Farm Walk and Collie Demonstration	Farm Walk and Working Collie Demonstration	Farm Walk and Talk
	Exmoor Farmers to Dartmoor	Talk British Wool Marketing Board	Farmers Forum
	Emergency 1st Aid	Unravelling the Tale of Moor Wool	Planners Day on Farm
	Computers in Agriculture	Dartmoor Women in Farming Social Media event	Devon County Show
	Farm Ride	Dartmoor Farmers visit to Exmoor	Next generation
	Sheep EID	Welsh Farmers to Dartmoor	Have a go with a FecPak
	Wool Culture Forum	Dartmoor Women in Farming Tourism talk	David Heath Visit
	Succession Planning and Inheritance Tax Planning	Butchery Practical; lamb cuts and joints	Tick Event
	Dartmoor Farmers to Cumbria	Next Generation Discussion Evening	Farm Walk and Sheep Shearing Demo
	CAP Reform Event	FecPak Demonstration Event	Minerals Deficiency Talk

Source: DHFP

Table 4.1.3 EHFP events 2010-June 2013

2010	2011	2012	2013
On farm Wind Event	Business Management & Planning	FFDG & FBP Xmas gathering	Exmoor Healthy Livestock Programme – Nutrition Workshop
Sheep Movement & Tagging Information Evening	Capital & Money	Farm Book Keeping Course	Farm Office Series – two workshops
Launch of Forward Farming Discussion Group	Tax Planning Information	Welfare of Animals in Transit	Farm Office Series- one workshop
Soils & Grassland Event	Computer Induction workshop	Farm Business Programme - Capital & Money	Exmoor Forward Farming Group – meeting on succession
Soils & Grass Growth	BVD Information	Pesticides Training (3 sessions)	Tax Planning evening
Communications	Environmental Schemes	Farm Book Keeping Course	Applying for a Farm Business Tenancy
Live/Dead visit	Grassland Study trip to Wales	Farm Business Programme - Land Options	Know Your Costs workshop
Soil Protection Review Workshop	Land Options	Women in Business Evening - EWFG	Exmoor Mires Project meeting
Understanding Farm Accounts	Gorse and Scrub Control	Basic First Aid Course	How to complete your Single Farm Payment form online
	Exmoor Women's Farming Group Launch	Farm Book Keeping Course	Exmoor Forward Farming Group visit to farm
	Micro-Hydro visit to Wales	Forward Farming Discussion Group	Lamb Butchery course
	Anthelmintics Information	Welfare of Animals in Transit	Exmoor Healthy Livestock Programme – Parasites in Cattle & Sheep

	Diversification	Farm Business Programme	Exmoor Forward Farming Group –Grassland visit
	Visit to Dartmoor Farms	Basic First Aid Course	Attendance at Sheep SW
	Farm Walk	Grassland Study trip to Wales	Family Business Growth workshop
	Farm Business Programme - farm walk	Pest Control Course	Best Practice in use of Veterinary Medicines on Farm
	Farm Business Programme - Soils & Grass	Trailer Reversing Course	
	Two day study trip to Scotland	Forward Farming Discussion Group - farm visit	
	Sheep Dog Handling	Visit to Quicke's Cheeses	
	Farm Business Programme - Communications	Farm Business Programme - Marketing	
	How to get started with CTS online	Farm visit, Pops Farm	
	Butchery Demonstration	Dartmoor Collaboration visit	
	Farm Business Programme - Basic Farm Accounts	Farm Business Programme - farm visit, Higher Bodley	
	Cross Compliance Information	Forward Farming Discussion Group - farm visit, Worth Farm	
	Exmoor Women's Farming Group	Exmoor Forward Farming Group (amalgamated group) visit to farm	
	Farm Business Programme - Business Management	Cumbrian Study Tour - two days	
	CAP Reform Information	Homoeopathy at Wellie Level	
		Exmoor Forward Farming Group – Understanding the Wool Market	
		Sheep Dog Handling training	
		Exmoor Forward Farming Group – Sheep Health Development	
		Cross Compliance Information evening	
		Exmoor Mires Project meeting	
		Exmoor Forward Farming Group – Post ESA options	

Source: EHFP

As the projects have developed and matured they have been able to respond and adapt to changes in the institutional and funding landscape (e.g. the demise of the SWRDA and changes to the RDPE programmes) and have continued to build and develop partnerships with regional training and business advice providers to deliver SWUI objectives.

4.2 Costs and Benefits of the SWUI

4.2.1 Costs

Over the 6 month time period all projects were involved in a wide variety of activities. The project staff in BMLI and EHFP spent the majority of their time on bespoke projects whilst the DHFP staff focused more on running and organising events. This 6 month period was a time of disruption for DHFP due to staff changes and an office move. It would also appear that more of the DHFP staff time was taken up with administrative tasks for the host body than the other two projects. The main administrative costs for all

three projects related to advertising events and distributing the project newsletter to a large number of farmers in their areas.

4.2.2 Benefits

All SWUI projects have exceeded their output targets set by SWRDA in terms of the number of participants involved in training and the number of training days received (Table 4.2.2.1).

Table 4.2.2.1 Outputs achieved Measure 111: Vocational Training and information Actions

	Number of Participants involved in training		Number of Training Days received	
	Whole life Target	Achieved to date	Whole life Target	Achieved to date
BMLI	140	834	130	319
DHFP	20	454	40	260
EHFP	60	668	20	277

Source: GPCF

Figures provided by Duchy College show that there has been a significant uptake of the two main RDPE training schemes (SW Skills and SWHLI) in the three project areas (Table 4.2.2.2).

Table 4.2.2.2 Uptake of WS Skills and SWHLI training

	SW Skills		SWHLI	
	8hr training days	No. Unique learners	8hr training days	No. Unique learners
BMLI ³	987	559	416	456
DHFP ⁴	969	612	483	535
EHFP ⁵	1012	727	612	616

Source: Duchy College Rural Business School

However, the additional benefit lies in the impact of SWUI activities on farm efficiency and competitiveness. Feedback from the beneficiaries suggest that it is too early to identify whether SWUI is value for money in monetary terms, however it is clear that through the bespoke projects, training events and discussion groups the three projects have been effective in capacity building and in building up the skills and knowledge of the upland farmers so that benefits will be realised in the future beyond the life of the current project timeframe. Evidence from the farmer telephone surveys, case studies and workshops show that the SWUI projects had a positive impact on the uptake of RDPE schemes. The SWUI projects also had a positive impact on the competitiveness and efficiency of participating farm businesses through their knowledge exchange activities including facilitated learning groups and farm visits, demonstration events and seminars.

³ Postcodes PL14, PL15, PL17, PL30, PL32

⁴ Postcodes EX6, EX20, PL7, PL19, PL20, PL21, TQ10, TQ11, TQ12, TQ13, TQ20

⁵ Postcodes EX16, EX31, EX32, EX33, EX34, EX35, EX36, TA4, TA22, TA23, TA24

4.2.3 Financial benefits

The farm case studies and farmer telephone survey were able to identify cases where participation in the SWUI had resulted in quantifiable financial benefits to farm businesses. Here the main benefits resulted from cost savings derived through participating in the healthy livestock initiatives and FFIS. However it was clear from the farmer interviews that in the majority of cases it was not possible for the farmer to place a precise monetary value on the financial benefits. There were a number of reasons for this:

- Many of the financial benefits are not immediate and would be realised over a number of years. For example, farmers participating in the healthy livestock initiatives often mentioned that the full financial benefits of disease control and fertility improvements could take between 5 and 10 years to become apparent.
- The impacts of some of the activities could not be translated in direct financial benefits. This particularly applied to some of the knowledge exchange activities, such as the farm trips and visits.
- It was difficult for farmers to distinguish between SWUI effects and broader market effects.

The case study interviews provided a more detailed picture of the financial benefits of participation in the SWUI:

Extract from BMLI Farm Case Study 1

Mr. N is a very enthusiastic participant in the BMHLI. He says that significant economic gains can be achieved through improving disease control. He thought the initial 3 hour consultation with the Vet was very useful and gave him a better understanding of what needed to be done on the farm. He has also attended many of the livestock health events organised by the BMHLI.

“Blood testing is the future... I went to a meeting the other night, one of the vets was talking and you learn something every time. The way I look at it you are never too old to learn...”

Mr. N has had the disease and fertility testing done. He is very interested in improving the quality of his stock and has learnt a lot about what to look for in a bull. The information on ease of calving will be very useful and help avoid problems with his heifers. Being part of the BMHLI has put him in contact with farmers and breeders who have shared their knowledge on the advantages of bull testing. This has helped him select bull replacements.

Participation in the BMHLI is already leading to some financial benefits. It has helped to tighten the calving pattern on the farm. The tight calving pattern allows matching groups of calves to be sold together which improves the price. The livestock sold at auction is identified as being from a BMHLI herd and this tells buyers that the livestock is from a disease monitored farm. In time this will bring a higher price. There is also potential to expand the marketing of the BMHLI to some of the major regional auctions where there is more competition from buyers. It should be possible to get even higher prices at these regional markets. Mr N hopes a price premium will be developed for stock from disease monitored farms. Being disease free should also lead to economic benefits through higher fertility and growth rates. Mr. N says that vaccinating against the common diseases should improve fertility rates by at least 5%.

Extract from DHFP Farm Case Study 2

The B's were made aware of grant opportunities through the DHFP. Without the projects involvement they would not have applied for an FFIS grant, which saved them £8,500. The DHFP also made them aware of the availability of a CSF grant which saved them around £5,000. Mr B believes that the DHFP has made it easier for organisations to keep hill farmers informed. Previously, these organisations would have gone through the National Park and pulled farmers in on an ad hoc basis. As the DHFP knows the individual farm business he feels they are better able to target relevant advice.

4.2.4 Broader business benefits

The SWUI was valued by the majority of participants. The November 2012 telephone survey found that over 90% of the engagement was considered beneficial to the participant's farm businesses. Few of the farmers interviewed felt that SWUI had made no difference to the way they farmed. The telephone survey also found that participation in the SWUI was making farmers think more about the profitability of their farm businesses and gave them confidence.

The farm case studies found that the SWUI had contributed to business development through facilitating knowledge exchange through events and activities whilst also strengthening farmer to farmer networking and interaction between farmers and agricultural professionals as illustrated below:

Extract from EHFP Farm Case Study 2

As part of the Exmoor Farmers group C has visited the Dartmoor Commons Association and a wood fuel provider both of which were highly informative. Also S, as a member of the Farming Forward group, has participated in some interesting visits to Scotland and Cumbria. S has also benefited from group membership as it has helped her to re-integrate herself back into the local farming community having been away for some time at college.

C has found that one of the main benefits from attending events and group membership is the number of people they have met.

"If you were at the market you would look in the catalogue and the name and their sheep were in the ring and you knew the name of the farm and you might say 'hello' as you pass. But now we are all talking to each other and I think that is really important".

He does not feel that they know each other well enough yet for any collaborative ventures, although he believes that there could be a time where they might have a machinery ring, for example.

"There might be some of us who will pile in some money and work together, instead of contracting. It just needs one or two strong leaders. There are a lot of co-operative things that might develop, there is potential. I think it is one of those things that will grow over time. At the moment it [EHFP] is performing a really good job of getting everyone together".

Extract from BMLI Farm Case Study 2

Mr. K is actively involved in a number of farming groups, but the BMLI has put him in touch with a new group of people. He has learnt a lot from the BMHLI especially talking to the vets.

“That’s one of the advantages [of the BMHLI] is that you have got time with the vet... It gives you a bit more time to do your herd health plan and just time to talk about what problems you might or might not have, what you need to test for... That’s the advantage of having time with the vet and so many hours to do the blood testing and so on.”

He also valued the farm trips organised by the BMLI where he got to talk to and spend time with other Bodmin Moor farmers.

“A lot of us who went away on the tour, we sort of knew each other but we’ve got to know each other a lot better for going away and you get a chance to speak whereas normally you’re so busy and you don’t get a chance to speak.”

Extract from DHFP Farm Case Study 1

Involvement in the Women’s group has increased T’s social network across the generations and has broadened her outlook:

“Because you are talking to more people they say “I have been on this, I recommend that” and you think well if they think it is good I might try it”. The social side and meeting people, it makes you more aware and more likely to try different things. I think having that point of contact instead of letting things go round and round, it moves things forward.”

5 Lessons Learned

5.1 Strengths and weaknesses

- **Project design:** The aim of the SWUI is to target delivery to improve the efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability of livestock farming across the SW uplands. This provides the initiative with a clear sense of purpose. The 4 year duration of the SWUI has provided sufficient time to allow a significant number of activities to take place that will produce positive outcomes for the farming community. The SWUI recognised that upland farmers experience lower levels of participation and was designed to help farmers access SWRDA regional programmes (SWARM, SWHLI and SWRSP). Establishing 3 separate SWUI projects enabled a close relationship to be developed between the projects and their farming communities. The independence of each SWUI project also allows them to draw on the experience of their host bodies (CDC, DNPA and ND+).
- **Accessibility:** SWUI project delivery teams are locally based and are accessible to farmers. This has been a very important factor in building the reputation of the SWUI projects and in developing trust in the farming community.
- **Strong communication:** SWUI project delivery teams have practical farming experience and can communicate well with farmers. The SWUI projects have an important role in signposting opportunities for business development provided by other providers. The SWUI projects use a variety of communication methods to inform farmers about opportunities to improve their farm businesses. The SWUI projects are an established presence in their farming communities and play an important role in a number of different farmer networks.
- **Strong facilitation:** The SWUI projects have built a good reputation among their farming communities and have delivery staff that are locally based and have a good understanding of farming issues. This combination of factors has been important in encouraging participation in SWUI activities. Evidence from the farmer case studies and telephone survey shows that facilitation by project delivery teams has been important in instilling belief and confidence in prospective participants, enabling them, for example, to apply for grants, sign up for different initiatives, undertake training and join discussion groups. The SWUI projects also have an important role in facilitating engagement between farmers and industry professionals, such as training providers and vets. Without the SWUI projects the level of participation in RDPE schemes was likely to have been significantly reduced.
- **Adaptability:** The SWUI projects have proved adaptable to change, such as the demise of the RDAs and the introduction of new policy instruments (FFIS and REG). They have been able to respond to opportunities to draw down resources as the RDPE has developed over time. For example, the EHFP has been successful in developing a number of training activities in partnership with the region's main training provider. DHFP have also been in discussions with training providers and incorporated these into a new training initiatives. The SWUI projects have also learnt from each other and there has been some sharing of expertise and experiences between the projects. For example, the DHFP experience in building capacity and resilience through farmer networks has helped the BMLI and the EHFP develop their own farmer networks. Likewise, the BMLI experience in delivering its own healthy livestock initiative has helped the DHFP and the EHFP set up their own initiatives. The Project Officers have grown in experience and

confidence as the projects have progressed. They have built strong positive relationships with their farming communities and developed a thorough understanding of the funding landscape. This has allowed them to identify opportunities as priorities and funding streams have changed within the RDPE.

- **Healthy Livestock Initiatives:** These initiatives have been particularly well received in the project areas. Uptake has been strong and initial feedback has been very positive. The role of project delivery staff has been identified as an important factor in recruitment.
- **Other initiatives:** DHFP worked up, tested and promoted new ideas with farmers, including a project around developing new products from wool.
- **Provision of a suite of projects:** The SWUI projects have learnt the importance of providing a suite of activities covering different topics in order to engage with different sectors of the farming community. For example, EHFP recently hosted a tax planning event and around 75% of those who attended have never previously engaged in EHFP activity.
- **Provide clear guidance as to the level of funding available:** With any future initiatives ensure that no mis-information is disseminated at the start of the project about the level of funding available as this can raise expectations which if not met leads to disengagement
- **Gaps in RDPE support:** The lack of a 'flag ship' scheme to accompany the start of the SWUI projects was a major weakness and a missed opportunity to demonstrate credibility and engage farmers from the very beginning. The SWUI projects were operational and ready to begin delivery before some of the SWRDA RDPE schemes were ready. This resulted in a limited number of activities being offered by the SWUI projects in the early stages. The complex eligibility criteria for some of the RDPE schemes hindered delivery of the SWUI's aim to improve the efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability of livestock farming across the SW uplands.
- **Limited opportunities to design and resource projects:** The regional SWRDA RDPE schemes were not always sensitive to the needs of upland livestock businesses. The SWUI projects have developed a good understanding of local needs but have experienced difficulties in accessing RDPE support to meet some of these needs. There have been limited opportunities for the SWUI projects to design and resource projects to meet local needs and it could be argued that this stifled ideas from the farming community. This has resulted in some negative feedback from SWUI project steering groups and farming communities.
- **Insufficient joint working to realise the full benefits:** The potential for joint working and sharing knowledge and experiences has not been fully exploited. The level of autonomy between the projects meant that opportunities to share best practice were sometimes being missed. It was also suggested that the funding structure of the SWUI had introduced an element of competitiveness between the projects and this may have inhibited the opportunities for joint working. The communication between SWRDA/Defra and the host bodies could also have been improved with Defra taking more of an overview role.
- **Insufficient farm-level monitoring of SWUI impact:** There is little farm-level monitoring of the impacts of RDPE schemes in terms of outcomes.

5.2 Opportunities and threats

- **Established delivery mechanism to implement future rural development policy:** The SWUI projects are an established and valued presence in their farming communities. They have established successful networks involving both farmers and industry professionals, such as training providers and vets. The SWUI projects can continue, under the next RDP, to target delivery to improve the efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability of livestock farming across the SW uplands.
- There are opportunities to improve the competitiveness and efficiency of farm businesses and safeguard animal health by:
 - taking the healthy livestock initiative approach forward and make it a 'flag ship' project that can reach the majority of livestock businesses across the SWUI project areas. This could include marketing a healthy livestock brand to achieve a price premium on livestock sales;
 - building upon the farmer networking activity and establish self-supporting producer and buying groups;
 - developing the range of training activities offered and design new events in partnership with training providers;
 - expanding the remit of the SWUI to include a whole farm approach which would include the economic, social and environmental aspects of business development. This could include facilitation at a landscape scale to deliver environmental benefits across a number of farm businesses.
- **Delegated decision making:** The SWUI projects have the potential to design projects to meet local needs. The SWUI host bodies are experienced in budget management and the allocation of funding.
- **Impact monitoring:** There are opportunities to build in farm-level monitoring to measure the impacts of future schemes.
- **Influence the next RDP:** collectively the SWUI projects have the ability to lobby for upland provision from a position of experience.
- **Time-limited budget:** The RDPE has a time-limited budget and the SWUI will finish at the end of 2013 unless alternative funding can be secured. Key staff may seek new positions before the end of the SWUI.
- **Legacy:** The SWUI did not become fully operational until fairly late in the 7 year RDP cycle. Many SWUI project activities have significant lead in times and the full benefit of farm business participation may not be seen for several years. Also a number of activities, such as the DHLI and EHLI, have only recently received implementation approval. There was a widespread view that the legacy of the SWUI could be damaged and the benefits not fully realised if the initiative ended in 2013, including:
 - **Damage to successor projects:** Loss of engagement with farmers due to the stop start nature of funding. This would make it difficult for any successor projects to gain credibility with the farming community.
 - **Loss of continuity:** Loss of continuity of activities that have been shown to be successful and working well.

- **Network breakdown:** Some of the farmer networks that have been established are fragile and there is a fear that they will not continue if the SWUI projects end.

There was strong support for the SWUI to continue beyond 2013. The SWUI delivery model was seen as an effective means of improving the competitiveness, efficiency and sustainability of livestock farm businesses in the 3 upland areas. A key lesson learnt from the RDPE experience was that it took a considerable amount of time to get the SWUI projects in place and that they were not fully operational until year 5 of the 7 year RDP cycle. It was suggested that there remains a need to improve the competitiveness, efficiency and sustainability of livestock farming in the SW uplands and that it would be more resource efficient to base future delivery around the current SWUI rather than starting again under the new RDP. However, a number of changes to the SWUI are recommended:

- An increase in delegated decision making would increase the effectiveness of the SWUI. The SWUI projects have the potential to design projects to meet local needs. The SWUI host bodies are experienced in budget management and the allocation of funding. (Future holistic approach could assess all funding sources which may add value to RDPE)
- The SWUI should draw upon the experiences of the projects and accountable bodies to improve delivery and effectiveness in all project areas.