

Committee Name:	West Riding County Meeting	Meeting Date:	3 rd October 2019
Circulation:	NFU members & NFU Online	Location:	Darrington Golf Club, Pontefract
		Chairman:	Rachel Hallos
		Secretary:	James Copeland
		Tel:	01904 451550

By Invitation: James LePage – Head of Advice & Guidance (Environmental Land Management), Defra and John McNally – Guidance Lead (Environmental Land Management), Defra.

In Attendance: 45 members in attendance

West Riding County Meeting

1. Welcome

Rachel Hallos (RH) welcomed members and confirmed that the minutes for the March meeting were correct. All agreed.

2. Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS)

RH set out the NFU ELMS ask that a future voluntary scheme must be:

- Accessible – to all farm types and systems, across the country. Its needs to cater for different skill levels of land managers and fit within farming systems/ businesses.
- Cost-effective – to be good value for money for both farmers and public funds. The scheme needs to be practical and offer fair reward with timely payments that take account of the risk of delivery for farmers.
- Transparent – where all parties are clear of their commitments and expectations. There needs to be clear accountability with realistic requirements for farmers e.g. records.
- Responsive – to farm practice, type and tenure; the different systems and how these can change over time, including the option for businesses to enter part of a farm into a scheme, alongside whole farm agreements. It also needs to recognise time lags for achieving certain environmental outcomes, and agreement start dates should fit with farming practices with monthly start dates available.
- Relevant – reflecting different areas of the country and landscapes. The scheme needs to have a national delivery framework that incorporates local priorities, and be developed in conjunction with local farmers and land managers on the ground.

RH then explained the engagement and actions the NFU had taken to date to ensure a future environmental policy includes a mix of incentive scheme types. Any new scheme must also recognise that farms need to be profitable and competitive businesses to manage land for environmental benefit and that food production and positive environmental outcomes can go hand in hand.

RH set out the ongoing challenge that we face. Whilst the NFU continues to work with DEFRA on the scheme's development, our concern remains in DEFRA's proposed timescales and the ability of ELMS to change as farmers react to the new farming policy. We support the National Audit Office review which called upon DEFRA to widen the range of farmers and land managers involved in ELMS pilots to test their willingness and ability to participate in the scheme. The report also recommended DEFRA gets a plan in place with realistic timescales and considers the impact this policy change will have upon the profitability of farming.

RH introduced James LePage from Defra and explained that today's meeting was in response to our call that DEFRA must increase their engagement with commercial farms to ensure this scheme is a success.

3. ELMS – James LePage (JLP)

JLP opened by providing an overview of his role and that Defra are keen to listen to members, before giving a background about himself.

The discussion included:

- A reminder that Defra are at an early staged thinking, but still a significant number of potential changes
- An overview of Defra Vision's and history to this vision. This included the 25yr Environment Plan, the Health and Harmony Consultation, and Draft Agricultural Bill (subject to ongoing political uncertainty)
- Details that the Agricultural Bill includes the reduction in BPS payment, delinking of Cross Compliance and mechanisms to set up future AES
- JLP then explained Public Goods as a mechanism to persuade the Treasury that the industry needs funding
 - Topics include climate, access, etc. as farmers don't receive a direct payment for these from the market, so we need to find a way of rewarding this
- Outlined the ELM Public Goods – including flood risk mitigation, climate change and clean air
- The Current Scheme Thinking
 - Schemes have been around since 1987 delivering a significant number of benefits
 - Treasury now sees them as good value for money
 - Current CSS have payment and admin burden issues
 - There are still many challenges over prescriptions that don't match local issues
- Make things better
 - Looking at a lighter touch
 - Still looking for Public Goods
 - A need for more flexibility
 - But any outcomes must get past the treasury, whilst being fair "a fair reward for what farmers put in"
- A new scheme is likely to be tiered
 - Tiers that meet multiple outcomes, including targeted areas, accessible by all or coordinated landscape change
- Local Voice
 - Still exploring different mechanism for different groups (farmers, wildlife groups, community groups, National Parks, etc.
 - What is right for your area and who should decide
- JLP then outlined the increased role for local farmers and a need for local farmers to engage with groups that may decide a future local focus
- JLP then described a possible price mechanism; this could include private monies for land use change that meets their needs. Some examples have used reverse auctions for this as current prices are lower than AES so the treasury likes this, but often only works for a single outcome. Defra are also looking at upfront capital loans/grants that pay for a group of farmers or others to deliver this.
- Proposed timelines were discussed – T&T are conceptually trialling things, but the Pilots will then pay a few farmers to test things on the ground. This will then be ramped up for everyone to be rolled out in 2024 onwards.
 - Current timelines are subject to the Agricultural Bill and current Government policies
 - Confidence in CSS – reputation has been lost
- Concern was raised that the very farmers who are likely to go into any new ELMS scheme are likely to move to a stronger business model and remove all 'nice to have' environmental work they have created over the past 20+ yrs. These farmers can't access CSS and will see a reduction in BPS until 2024, leaving the Treasury with a bigger challenge to find the right price point for a business to move from production to environmental outcomes.
- The general concept to tiered scheme was discussed.
- JLP finished his presentation and RH thanked him for his time

Tom Bayston addressed the room and informed the members of the passing of David Wood, a longstanding local NFU member.

RH reminded the room about “Shift happens!” and Doug Avery, AKA “The Resilient Farmer” speaking in Harrogate on the 17 October.

4. Finish and close 9.00pm

RH closed the meeting and thanked the member and speakers for attending

5. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Annual General Meeting (AGM), Tuesday 19 November at Hazlewood Castle, Paradise Ln, Leeds, Tadcaster LS24 9NJ