

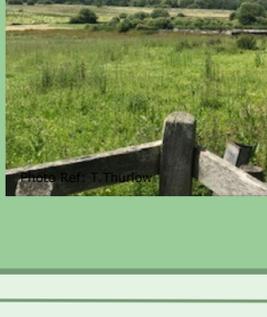
Rother Valley Farmers Group (RVFG) Newsletter



Issue 3. 2020

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Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Keeping Your Options Open?

It would be fair to say that the current Countryside Stewardship Scheme is not without some problems and needs careful thought and planning to ensure a successful application complements the farm system and is financially viable. However some of its teething problems have been addressed and more farmers are assessing whether it has a role on their farms, particularly in light of recent extreme weather and the prospect of the BPS declining from 2021.

Some of the arable options in particular look commercially attractive and provided the window for payments are factored into the business cash flow an agreement could provide some welcome financial certainty over the next five years, offer opportunities to improve fertility and soil health, and also allow a farmer to explore techniques which may become mainstream through the new Environmental Land Management Scheme. Although the scheme is competitive a strong application should be accepted and if the applicant is a member of the Rother's Valley farmers Group then our endorsement will result in the scoring being enhanced by a further 20%.

Provided the application pack is ordered by the end of May there may still be scope to apply for this years July 31st deadline. However we are keen to run a workshop this autumn to help those of you who may be considering applying in 2021 and want some help to start planning in good time. If you are interested please email us and so we know there is sufficient interest and we'll come back to you after harvest with some potential dates in the autumn.

Colin Hedley

Joint Farmland Bird Training Event

The Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board (AHDB), the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) and the RVFG, held a farmland bird training event in January this year. The key message was to highlight the importance of the farmed environment in the survival of a number of birds.



Farmer's actions have the potential to significantly impact upon bird numbers. The population numbers of many farmland bird dependent species has declined over recent decades. The event offered specialist tailored advice highlighting what can be done to support strong populations of many farmland bird species. For further information & details please see the [RVFG Annual Report 2019-20](#).

Rother Valley Farmers Group (RVFG)

2nd Annual Report 2019/20

[Click here to read the Annual Report](#)



Photo Ref: Moor Farm, Petworth, M. Chandler (Farmer & RVFG Member) 2018

Public Money for Public Goods

It was great to welcome Professor Ian Bateman on the 26th February 2020 to give an excellent and well received presentation on 'public money for public goods', explaining in detail what these terms mean that will soon be the foundation of future English agricultural policy. In essence, the approach requires paying farmers and landowners for environmental goods, such as clean water and habitat diversity (upon which much wildlife depends for its survival), that don't in themselves have a market price and as a consequence are typically exploited, leading to environmental pollution and degradation. As the UK prepares to leave the EU and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the UK Agriculture Bill is currently making its way through Parliament and will set in place the legislative framework for new agricultural support schemes that include payment to farmers/landowners for public environmental goods. After a morning session of presentations, Prof. Bateman came out into the field with a group of farmers to help lead a practical session focusing on the identification of environmental public goods around the farm and how these might fit within the new ELMs scheme.



Farmers in the UK currently (2020) receive approximately £3.5 billion annually under the CAP, more than 80% of which is paid as 'direct payments' based on how much land is farmed; the remaining 20% pays for rural and environmental schemes¹. The Government has guaranteed the current annual budget to farmers throughout the life of this Parliament and committed to phasing out direct payments over a 7 year period starting in 2021. A new agricultural support scheme called Environmental Land Management (ELMs) is being devised and trialled, with the aim of finding the best method for paying farmers to produce 'public goods' for environmental improvements, notably for soil improvement and the benefits this can yield for wildlife, biodiversity, climate change and water resources. Public good payments will also extend to animal welfare. This approach will require trade sanctions to restrict food imports from producers who cannot reach the same standard, to prevent the undercutting on price of UK farmers.

There has been strong recent debate about whether food production itself should be considered a public good and be central to the Agricultural Bill. Professor Bateman showed the social-economic problems associated with making food a 'public good' – this might help landowners/farmers but will not provide affordable food to poor people. Food prices are fixed by market forces beyond the farm gate. Certainly, there has been recent public consensus in the light of the Coronavirus pandemic to rightly encourage and support local (domestic) food production and there is also a need to provide a safety net for farm incomes for the long term prosperity of the farm (and food) sector, however, this is a different argument to using public money to pay for environmental goods. I would maintain that in the face of a climate emergency an environmentally sustainable farm sector is needed in order to secure a sustainable farming and food industry in the UK, and not the other way around, and Government funding needs to prioritise measures on this basis.

In reality, there will have to be a compromise which will hopefully recognise that food production and the environment need to go hand-in-hand on an equal footing. Added to this understanding is the likelihood that technology will change farming significantly in the future, responding to changing climates and environmental pressures, including the growing interest of consumers in where their food originates and online information that will enable tax payers to find out where food is produced and how.

Ses Wright

Notes: 1: House of Commons Library, 11th May 2020, website link: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8702/>



Water Quality Summary Updates

Following a request by RVFG farmer representatives at the RVFG Steering Group Meetings, Southern Water have produced Drinking Water Quality Summary Sheets for your information. The document summarises the main drinking water quality issues in the Rother.



These summary sheets will be circulated alongside this newsletter. It would be great to have your thoughts and feedback, please email us at info@arrt.org.uk

Wildlife Habitat Created by Rother Valley Farmers

Helping to highlight the wildlife created and conserved by local farmers. The Arun & Western Streams Catchment Partnership is a government funded initiative that regularly brings together business partners across the local Rother, Arun and Western Streams areas in order to better deliver projects that impact upon environment. Every year the partnership is asked to provide information on the delivery of environmentally related projects, whether from private water industry, the EA or local environmental organisations/charities (such as ARRT and the RVFG). It would be super if at some point the RVFG could deliver an update on the type and scale of environmental initiatives delivered by local farmers. At present this type of information is generally not available. We would like to hear from RVFG farmers if they think such information should be publicised and whether they have such information available (perhaps in an anonymised form if needed?). To help progress this concept please email us at info@arrt.org.uk

Forward Look:

As you will all appreciate, we have had to look at new ways of working in response to the Coronavirus outbreak. RVFG events are being re-scheduled to the second half of the year with exact dates to be confirmed as Covid 19 restrictions are eased.

- Evening Pollinators Training -16/17 Sept. 2020
- RVFG Liaison Meeting - Oct. 2020
- Midhurst Society Talk. How green is our valley? non-members of the Midhurst Society are charged £5 -19th Nov. 2020
- Zero-carbon farming: RVFG is partnering up with AHDB and CFE to deliver practical guidance to RVFG members - 22nd October 2020 afternoon session after the morning's AHDB Monitor Farm event on farm carbon auditing
- November 2020 RVFG Update & Soil Health Meeting - date TBC
- RVFG members future applications to CS programmes for 2022 - December Date TBC



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