

# Sustaining marginal areas: the English uplands

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## Context and policy trends

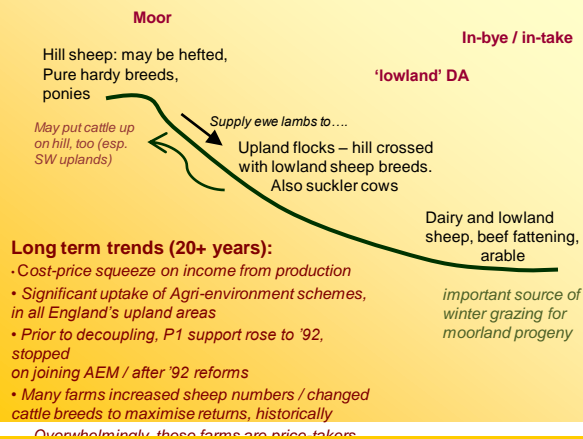
The English uplands are marginal areas, traditionally managed for extensive, grass-based production of sheepmeat, beef and some dairying. Much land is designated for biodiversity and is an important area of watershed, and carbon storage: it is largely High Nature Value (HNV) farmland.

UK policy goals since 1980 have shifted away from upland support to generate agricultural output and retain farming, towards protecting their high environmental and amenity value.

- A significant share of farmland is in longstanding agri-environment schemes (EAFRD measure 214). These schemes closed in 2005 and were replaced with Environmental Stewardship (ES). Many upland farmers will need to apply for ES in the next few years and agree to do more to maintain their measure 214 support;
- Less-Favoured-Area support has applied here for many years (EAFRD measure 212), but will be withdrawn in 2010, and replaced with a new 'Upland Entry Level Scheme' (measure 214), reflecting a policy to target RDP funds more strongly towards environmental outputs;

• Pillar 1 was fully decoupled in 2005, with increasing 'voluntary' modulation, up to 20% by 2013.

### 1) Farming Systems: how it was



## Results

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the system changes identified. In summary:

- traditional inter-linked management of hill farming systems is breaking down under the influence of Pillar 1 decoupling, agri-environment schemes, and modulation. The impact of biosecurity responses to recent disease epidemics has also been detrimental.
- on an increasing share of farms, the moorland is managed separately from the commercial farm business, which is concentrated upon more intensive management of in-bye and valley bottom land. Moorland grazing is often achieved using ponies or hardy cattle; driven largely by environmental payments and requirements.
- upland dairying is in decline and there has been a loss of holdings as many farms have undergone significant enlargement, in order to survive. As medium-sized units disappear, this reduces the opportunities for young farmers. The changes have reduced landscape diversity and the number of people working on upland farms.
- agri-environment schemes, whilst valued for helping to keep features maintained and providing work for farm families, have not prevented increasing 'zoning' of landscapes into 'special areas' managed extensively for environmental purposes, and 'other areas' managed intensively for production. This can cause "hard-boundary" effects that are detrimental to many upland species.
- farmers express concern about a perceived decline in traditional hill management and a

### Policy gaps

It could be claimed that the basic hill farming system is no longer financially viable. Many farms use diversification or off-farm work to bring in extra income, but most are still heavily dependent upon support from Pillar 1, agri-environment schemes and LFA. Thus hill farming structures survive largely with income from other sources, because the present generation of farmers is culturally attached to this way of life.

Very few farms add value to their produce or know their final customers well. Relatively few have received support or advice from Axis 1, 3 or 4 of the RDP, since 2000.

Farmers express feelings of alienation and being misunderstood by the Managing Authority and key delivery agencies. There is a lack of trust which is likely to undermine RDP achievements. Agencies are seen as distant, too concerned with their own targets and unable or unwilling to work with farmers to make best use of the funding and learn from local

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## Case-study areas

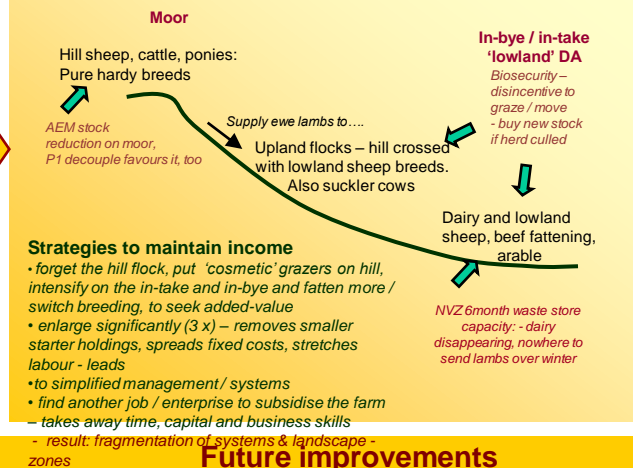
Two contrasting upland areas were selected: the Forest of Bowland AONB and Exmoor National Park.

In both, the relationship between longstanding marginal farming and environmental quality is acknowledged.

## Method: iterative and developmental

1. review of relevant literature and farm survey results since 2000 (incomes, practices, structures);
2. in-depth interviews with a sample of 12 farmers in each area (including main farm types and sizes), identifying how businesses have changed over ten years and assessing the influence of policy, as opposed to other drivers;
3. discussion of stage 1-2 findings at workshops for interviewees and local RDP delivery agents;
4. presentation and analysis at stakeholder seminars – one local, one involving national experts;
5. meetings with main RDP delivery agencies, triangulating information from stages 1-4;
6. feedback of final analysis to all involved, 'ground-truthing' of conclusions.

### 2) Current policy impacts



## Future improvements

We suggest a more territorially-focused, multi-purpose model for sustainable rural development in the English uplands, enabling the full range of CAP measures to be applied in a more co-ordinated and accessible way, tailored to each local area.

### Enhanced policy design

The main problem with the current system is the separation of environment and business elements. The environmental schemes risk not delivering the goals that they seek, because farm changes are working in the opposite direction, as farmers seek to cope with major business challenges. An enhanced approach might add:

- more emphasis upon sustainable business models - using Axis 1 and 3 measures for training, research, collaborative exchange, adding-value;
- social support to enable resilient environmental management systems - using Axis 3 and 4 to help farming communities recognise and maintain what is important to them;
- enhanced financial underpinning - as CAP reform increases the competitive exposure of HNV marginal farms, their case for support to maintain viability, not just for additional environmental goods, increases. This could be:
  - from a new 'Less Favoured Area' (LFA) payment;
  - from new payments targeting the long-term provision of 'ecosystem services' - a Pillar 2 mechanism that is not the 'income forgone' model of agri-environment;
  - from redistribution of Pillar 1 decoupled aid, to give a higher share to the most marginal

### Enhanced policy delivery

We suggest a new approach to economic and social regeneration in the uplands, working closely with farming families and other relevant sectors. The policy should be locally-based, more open to the involvement of beneficiaries and steered in a transparent, responsive way. Much stronger dialogue and ongoing policy learning, involving farmers and agency officers together, would build up trust, over time. This could enhance social capital and increase beneficiary commitment to policy objectives.

## Other lessons

- Continuity is important. Greater policy stability and co-ordination at the macro-level would reflect businesses' long-term development cycles and farming continuity.
- To understand what is happening in these areas and why, an integrated evaluation of combined impact of all policies is necessary.
- Policy makers cannot effectively target schemes unless they understand better the business motivations and responses of beneficiaries.
- To enhance environmental performance, more emphasis upon social capital and economic performance may sometimes be cost-effective.