

Environmental Stewardship Update

Farming for a better environment

November 09 Issue 6

Countryside Farmer of the Year announced



Nicholas Watts is flanked by Julia Bradbury (TV presenter) and Poul Christensen (Acting Chair, Natural England). © Farmers Weekly

Lincolnshire farmer, Nicholas Watts, was named winner of the coveted Countryside Farmer of the Year Award, sponsored and presented by Natural England, at the Farmers Weekly Awards 2009. Chosen for his profitable farming while promoting wildlife, and his strong links with the local community, Nicholas is thrilled to have won the award and said: "I feel very privileged to be recognised on such a scale. Farming and wildlife has become a way of life for me." Nicholas farms 850 hectares, including 100 hectare run organically, while operating a bird seed business that is set to turn over £2 million this year. His farm, at Deeping St. Nicholas, is in Countryside Stewardship and Organic Entry Level Stewardship.

A holiday to Argentina inspired Nicholas to try growing sunflowers and selling the seeds as bird food and 30 years on sales are booming. The birdseed business is an integral part of his farm, alongside a mixture of organic and conventional crops and vegetables, including peas, beans and sweetcorn. Farming techniques have been adapted to enhance wildlife habitats and lapwing, tree sparrow and barn owl numbers are booming. Customers and the general public are invited to open days and farm walks. For more information [click here](#).

The runners up in the competition were Guy Smith and Richard Bramley. Guy farms the driest place in Britain at St Osyth, Essex, where he grows milling wheat and linseed which are managed to encourage ground nesting birds such as skylarks. Richard grows cereals and potatoes at Kelfield, York. Around seven per cent of the farm is managed specifically for wildlife, including 80 species of birds, 20 of which are on the British Trust for Ornithology's red list.

ES update is our regular newsletter for organisations which represent the interests of farmers, land managers and others engaged in agri-environment schemes

Latest facts and figures

The table below gives agri-environment scheme uptake statistics at 31st October 2009.

Scheme	Area (ha)	% of UAA	Number of Agreements	Annual Value
CSS	381,318	4.1	10,723	£71.1 M
ESA	463,989	5.0	7,133	£40.0 M
ELS	4,841,899	52.1	36,761	£132.7 M
OELS	376,150	4.0	2,644	£40.4 M
HLS (Combined with ELS/OELS*)	<i>349,901</i>	-	<i>3,483</i>	£64.7 M
HLS (Standalone)	66,034	0.7	476	£11.2M
Total HLS	<i>415,935</i>	-	<i>3,959</i>	<i>£75.9M</i>
Overall Total	6,129,390	66.0	57,737	£360.1M

* Most land in HLS is already accounted for in ELS or OELS / Numbers in italics not included in overall total / UAA is Utilisable Agricultural Area, by which is meant farmland and associated land such as woodland and scrub / Annual Value: for CSS and ESA, the figures relate to the annual value of live agreements in the current agreement year. For ES, the figures relate to the first year value of the agreements (the value may vary in other years).

CFE now up and running

The 3-year, industry-led Campaign For the Farmed Environment (CFE) was launched in early November at the Bedfordshire farm of NFU President, Peter Kendall, who was joined by Hilary Benn (Defra Secretary of State), Henry Aubrey-Fletcher (CLA President) and Poul Christensen (Acting Chairman Natural England). We expect to see early impacts on ES uptake, particularly in the 22 priority counties, where Local Delivery Groups, each chaired by a local farmer and supported by a county-based coordinator, are being set up.



The County Groups are tasked with promoting the CFE targets and creating a network of Beacon Farms. The farms will provide an opportunity for farmers to view and discuss the range of ELS and Voluntary Options. These options are designed to restore the benefits of set-aside by delivering the three CFE themes: farmland birds, biodiversity and resource protection. Each County Group will have representatives from the key partners and will be encouraging farmers in their county to participate.

The CFE has strong links to ELS uptake targets, as we aim to:

- bring 70% of UAA under AE agreement by March 2011, the bulk of which will be in ELS, and
- encourage farmers already in ELS to renew their agreement from 2010 onwards with an increase in in-field options that can support the key themes of the Campaign.

To support the CFE and to promote best practice, Natural England will increase its help for farmers in 2010. We will provide more detail on this in the next issue of ES Update.

For further information on the CFE contact the Project Manager, Corrina Gibbs, on 02476 858892, by [e-mail](#) or visit the [Campaign website](#).

Focus on: 4 steps to renewing ELS

In the next 3 years some 30,000 ELS agreements will expire. We want customers to renew their agreements and carry on the good management of the last 5 years. Under EU rules farmers will need to submit a new application and, with new options available, they will want to choose the best ones for their farm. The **4 key steps** to renewal are:

Step 1: we send customers (with agreements expiring in 2010) a letter in December explaining what to do. They should complete the reply slip indicating (a) whether they want to renew by paper or online, (b) whether an agent will handle the application, and (c) whether different land is being entered into ELS

Step 2: from early February 2010 we will send a final claim form (for the expiring agreement) and an application pack. We will contact people applying online with a PIN number to get them started.

Step 3: customers need to complete their application and final claim form speedily so we can ensure that there won't be a gap between the old and new agreement. The deadlines are shown below.

Old Agreement Expiry Date	Completed Application Due in by	New Agreement Start Date
31 July 2010	1 June 2010	1 August 2010
31 August 2010	1 July 2010	1 September 2010
30 September 2010	1 August 2010	1 October 2010
31 October 2010	1 September 2010	1 November 2010
30 November 2010	1 October 2010	1 December 2010
31 December 2010	1 November 2010	1 January 2011

Step 4: Natural England will process the final claim form and application and issue a new agreement

Tips for renewing ELS in 2010

- Customers who require **Rural Land Register amendments** should resolve these first with the Rural Payments Agency before requesting an application pack.
- The easiest way to renew will be through **ELS Online**. It takes less time, automatically calculates points, has a measuring tool for boundary features and the customer is in control of the land parcels to be entered into an agreement., This helps the customer to get quickly to a valid application. For more information call the Online Team 01905 362700 or 01905 362711 or visit the Whole Farm Approach [website](#).
- Upland farmers with SDA land may opt to renew into **Uplands ELS**, a new strand of ELS running from 1 July 2010. An explanatory booklet [look after your uplands](#) has already been sent to upland farmers. Those who decide Uplands ELS is not for them can still renew their ELS agreement as set out above.
- In 2010 there will be even **more advice and support** for ELS entrants (see next issue of Environmental Stewardship Update for details).

Notice Board

Partnership is key to success of AE Schemes

A new report (along with a very useful summary document) on [agri-environment schemes](#) in England analyses the impact of 22 years of AE schemes on England's farmed environment. It documents the contribution AE schemes have made to the farmed countryside, showing how they deliver jobs, investment and education, sustain wildlife and heritage and help combat climate change. They successfully combine the twin goals of caring for the environment and maintaining food production.

Acting Chair of Natural England, Poul Christensen, says that AE schemes: "have helped forge a fruitful partnership between farmers, land managers and conservation. This partnership must underpin our approach to the challenges now facing the farmed environment. We must ensure that the legacy of the last two decades is sustained beyond 2013 when the current AE funding programme comes to an end."

Processing ES agreements in December and January

Due to the timing of new mapping data from the Rural Land Register (RLR) and enhancements to Environmental Stewardship, Natural England will need to make short-term changes to the processing of new ELS agreements. We are minimising the impact of these changes on our customers, but over the Christmas and New Year period Natural England's ELS Online system will be taken offline and application packs for ELS (including Organic ELS) will not be issued. HLS will be unaffected.

- The temporary suspension of ELS Online and new application packs will run from 4 December 2009 to late January 2010.
- Farmers will still be able to join ELS by returning a valid paper application to Natural England before Christmas.
- Farmers who want to apply later will be able to see the scheme changes in new handbooks available online from early December, and request an application pack.
- ELS Online and ELS application packs will be available again at the end of January. Any applications received in February will be given a 1 March start date.

Robin Tucker, Natural England's Executive Director for National Delivery, said: "We do not undertake such major changes lightly, and we have taken steps to minimise the impact on farmers. We will keep farmers and advisers well informed and supported through this period of change. We're keen to maintain our excellent reputation for delivery, with 100% of applications processed within target times and 96% of payments made within a month." More details are available at [Q&A for Customers](#).

Natural England pays £100m into the rural economy

In October some 15,000 claims, worth over £82 million, were paid under the classic schemes (CSS and ESA). This significantly exceeds both the volume and value of payments processed by the same time in 2008. Adding in the last two months' payment runs on ES means that we have paid out £100m recently through the Rural Payments Agency. At a time of economic hardship we are doing our bit to pay agreement holders on time.

Abbreviations used

Agri-environment (AE); Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) ; Entry Level Stewardship (ELS); Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) ; Environmental Stewardship (ES); Higher Level Stewardship (HLS); Hill Farm Allowance (HFA); Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS), Severely Disadvantaged Area (SDA); Utilisable Agricultural Area (UAA).