

Campaign for the Farmed Environment

The Voluntary Approach

As news is revealed of a voluntary approach to set aside mitigation, we now see the launch of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE). The scheme's main aim is to allow farmers to demonstrate that they are able to undertake voluntary land based measures themselves without any more regulation.

The scheme seeks to retain and exceed the environmental benefits that used to be provided by set aside land and actively encourages farmers and landowners to adopt voluntary land management practices, under the scheme's three main focus areas:

Resource Protection is aimed at considering appropriate measures for water and soil protection, this can be undertaken by introducing buffer strips adjoining water courses or cover crops in the correct places. The options under this area allow farmers to address run off, erosion and flooding and as a result can contribute to the enhancement on many surrounding waterways in accordance with the water framework objective.

Farmland Birds... It is accepted that farmland birds contribute to the farming environment and under this focus area it is considered that farmers should focus on availability of seed food throughout the winter and into spring with encouragement given for green covers rather than desiccating these areas, to encourage more feeding areas. Nesting areas are considered to be equally important and the scheme is looking for farmers to adopt fallow areas for skylarks, and buffer strips and field margins, in addition these areas will create insect foraging habitats for the birds to thrive on. Consideration must be given to your location and farming system.

Farm Wildlife considers the management and creation of farm habitats and wider protection measures for farm wildlife such as the introduction of flower mixes for butterflies, bees and other insects, the introduction of cultivated headlands on free draining soils and buffering of water courses for bats, newts, voles and other creatures.

There are further considerations if you are already in ELS, and firstly when your existing agreement expires you will be encouraged to re-join considering revised management options in accordance with the scheme. If you are not in ELS then you will be encouraged to join and if you do not participate in ELS then there are a number of voluntary options to consider under in accordance with CFE.

The campaign is seeking to meet targets by 2012 and if we fail to meet these targets then a compulsory approach could be adopted? The scheme is intended to be co-coordinated by local liaison groups and all farmers with a holding over 10ha will receive a farm record form in January 2010 to record any voluntary measures undertaken having looked at the options available to you.

Whilst at present the scheme is termed voluntary there are fears that it not enough farmers respond to the scheme then it will undoubtedly turn to another compulsory scheme!