FARMING IN THE ENGLISH UPLANDS

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Note: this is an abridged version of the final report. It has been produced to comply with Cabinet Office guidance for the pre-election period. The full report will be produced as soon as possible after the election.
Farming in the English Uplands: Summary of research

This report provides an evidence base for agriculture and the environment in the Less Favoured Areas (LFA) of England, drawing on information from published literature and other key data sources including the June Survey, Cattle Tracing Scheme, Farm Practices Surveys and Agri-environment Scheme data. The key findings are:

- Many of the semi-natural habitats which exist in the uplands are UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) Priority habitats supporting a range of scarce and rare species. The Countryside Survey recorded no significant change in the area of Broad Habitats between 1990 and 2007 but there were changes in habitat quality, particularly where there was high botanical interest. Improved Grassland was the main Broad Habitat type found in each of the upland regions except the North York Moors where Dwarf Shrub Heath was dominant.

- The predominant farming activity in the LFA is grazing livestock, although dairy farms are also important in some regions. Many farms are very small. Those estimated to require less than 1 full time equivalent person accounted for 27% of farmed land in the LFA in 2009, rising to more than 40% in the South Pennines/Peaks and South West DA regions. Most farms either long established or first generation family farms with succession key to continuity. Around half of the land on LFA farms is owner occupied with most of the remainder (43%) under tenancies of 1 year or more; most upland farmers own some of the land on their holding.

- Nationally, grazing livestock numbers have fallen since 2004 with total cattle and sheep numbers falling at a greater rate on LFA farms than on lowland farms. Over this period in the LFA, the number of breeding ewes has fallen by 12%, beef cows by 13%, dairy cows and the number of other cattle and calves by 11%. The combined effect of these changes in grazing livestock has been greatest in the North York Moors, South West Moors and South Pennines. It appears that beef cow and breeding ewe numbers have not reached pre-headage payment levels in the LFA although direct comparisons are made difficult due to definitional changes in the underlying datasets.

- Reductions in grazing have mainly been associated with moorland and, to a lesser extent, rough grazing with agri-environment schemes and the economics of hill stock cited as the main reasons for these reductions by farmers. Future intentions suggest little overall change in grazing levels and the compulsory requirements for Uplands ELS should help in future to retain stock on moorland.

- Over the LFA as a whole, the anticipated shift in the balance of stock from cattle to sheep (and other grazing livestock) appears to be taking place very gradually although the rate of change has been greater in the South Pennines than in other upland regions. There appears to be little sign of further short term large scale changes in the balance of stock.

- Changes to farm practices are also important from an environmental perspective. Outwintering can provide environmental benefits through reduced ammonia emissions, if appropriately managed. In 2008, 88% of LFA grazing livestock farmers outwintered

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1 [www.countrysidesurvey.org.uk](http://www.countryside.org.uk).
2 [Land Cover Map 2000](#) and Land Utilisation Survey Map, Stamp, 1931.
3 36% of those grazing moorland suggested that they had either stopped or reduced grazing levels in the previous 4 years compared to 17% for rough grazing and 11% for better quality grassland. Source: 2009 Uplands FPS.
4 Undergrazing now affects 6% of unfavourable upland SSSI habitats compared with 8% in 2008 and 7% in 2007.
5 2008 Defra Farm Practices Survey.
sheep and 20% outwintered cattle compared to 61% (sheep) and 20% (cattle) of lowland grazing livestock farmers.

- In the LFA, 75% of grazing livestock farms and 95% of dairy farms spread manures but of these, 28% and 6%, respectively, make no assessment of nutrient content. Half of LFA grazing livestock holdings and 80% of dairy holdings apply nitrogen fertilisers (compared with 43% and 83% of lowland grazing livestock and dairy farms, respectively) with more than 80% of LFA farms calculating nitrogen requirements using “farm experience”. A lack of assessment may have implications for farm profitability as well as air and water quality.

- There are similarities in terms of incomes, attitudes and skills between upland and lowland farms of the same type. The differences tend to occur between farm types, rather than between upland and lowland farms of the same type. On average, grazing livestock farmers in the LFA tend to be slightly younger than their lowland counterparts. In terms of attitudes, dairy farmers tend to be more business orientated favouring profit and succession compared with grazing livestock farmers who tend to be more lifestyle focused and interested in the environment.

- Maintaining the traditional upland way of life was important/very important to the majority of upland farmers. Just over 40% of indicated they would do all that they could to remain in farming and a further 40% indicated they would try to remain in farming. Of those farmers aged 65 years and over, less than a third planned to retire.

- Average incomes for grazing livestock farms (lowland and LFA) are lower than for other farm types. Average incomes for LFA dairy farms are somewhat higher but lower than their lowland counterparts. Without income from the Single Payment, agri-environment schemes and the Hill Farm Allowance, LFA grazing livestock farms would have made a loss in each of the last three years. 41% of LFA farm businesses would have covered their costs in 2008/09 without these payments.

- Diversification options in the LFA can be limited. Results from the Uplands FPS suggest that 56% (±3%) of LFA farms had a diversified activity or other income. Of those with no current on-farm diversification, 3% (±1%) were actively developing a new activity whilst the majority thought there was no scope (56% (±4%)).

- Around 70% of land farmed in the LFA is managed under agri-environment schemes (AES); more than half of this is within Environmental Stewardship (ES), the remainder in Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) and in Countryside Stewardship (CS). ESA and CS agreements will expire by 2014 and transition to ES will be important. The Uplands FPS suggests that more than 80% of upland ESA and CS agreement holders would be interested in joining another agri-environment scheme.

The full research paper will be published on the Observatory website in due course.

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