

# How can social indicators improve the delivery of agri-environment schemes?

Agri-environment monitoring theme: Social Science

## What are the issues?

Monitoring and evaluation work providing evidence of the effectiveness of agri-environment schemes (AES) has largely focused on identifying the environmental outcomes and the economic impacts of the schemes. Less attention has been placed on understanding the intentional or unintentional social outcomes of AES as it relates to the social world of the agreement holders. A better understanding of these social outcomes is salient as there is increasing evidence that they have important impacts on environmental outcomes and, in particular, the agreement holder's willingness to undertake environmental activities in the longer-term.

## What are the aims of the project?

The overall aim of the project was to identify and test a set of social indicators based on an evidence review that can be used by farm advisors during aftercare visits and by scheme evaluators to assess:

- the agreement holder's quality of engagement their AES agreements.
- the social outcomes of agreements; and
- their link to environmental outcomes.

The project was structured in 3 stages:

- A systematic literature review was undertaken to identify a set of social indicators that are empirically and conceptually sound.
- A data collection method (focused on survey questions) was developed that can operationalise the monitoring and evaluation of these social indicators.
- Small-scale testing of the proposed method was undertaken on 19 farms with existing Countryside Stewardship or Environmental Stewardship scheme agreements to provide a 'ground truth' of its practicality and validity.



Figure 1: Arable field margin (Source: Simon Mortimer)

## Which policy areas will the research inform?

This work will support the delivery of the Environmental Land Management Programme and the on-going monitoring and evaluation of current agri-environment schemes.

We will also be exploring other areas of work which could benefit from a better understanding of social indicators. These could be any areas which involve people undertaking environmental management or other pro-environmental behaviours – so there is a lot of scope.

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## What are the results from the project and how will they be used?

The results produced the following list of 20 high-level social indicators and their sub-indicators.

High-level Indicators	Sub-indicators
<b>Theme 1. Quality of engagement – Willingness to Engage</b>	
Interest in (and awareness of) environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of and interest in wildlife (species and habitats)</li> <li>Awareness of and interest in cultural and landscape assets</li> <li>Extent of environmental knowledge</li> <li>Extent of unsubsidised environmental activity</li> <li>Sense of environmental responsibility</li> </ul>
Attitudes and beliefs about farming (self-identity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attitudes to farming and self-identity</li> <li>Attitudes to AES</li> <li>Attitudes and beliefs about the future of farming</li> </ul>
Engagement with advice and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of engagement with environmental advice</li> <li>Level of rapport with advisor</li> <li>Level of engagement in training</li> </ul>
Level of AES experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length of previous AES experience</li> <li>Confidence in environmental skills/abilities</li> <li>Understanding of AES rationale</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 2. Quality of engagement – Ability to Engage</b>	
Succession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning for succession</li> </ul>
Lifecycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stage in lifecycle</li> </ul>
Farmer education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of formal education</li> </ul>
Farm tenure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenure status</li> </ul>
Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response to challenging situations</li> </ul>
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Control over agreement</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 3. Social outcomes – Level of Connectedness</b>	
Bonding social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extent of group working</li> <li>Extent of information and knowledge sharing</li> <li>Level of social trust</li> </ul>
Bridging social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extent of engagement in non-agricultural networks</li> <li>Engagement with general public</li> <li>Public acknowledgement</li> </ul>
Linking social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability/desire to form positive relationships with government agency staff</li> <li>Level of social trust with government</li> </ul>
Cultural capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respect amongst peers</li> <li>Advising other farmers</li> </ul>
<b>Theme 4. Social outcomes – Quality of life</b>	
Employment and working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holidays taken</li> <li>Off farm working</li> <li>Average Peak working hours</li> </ul>
Job satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work-life balance</li> <li>Being a farmer</li> <li>Freedom of decisions</li> </ul>
Quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Satisfaction with quality of life</li> </ul>

<b>Theme 5. Social outcomes - Health and well-being</b>	
Happiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Happiness</li> <li>Worthwhile</li> </ul>
Physical and mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical health</li> <li>Mental health</li> </ul>
Stress levels due to AES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workload</li> <li>Administration &amp; bureaucracy</li> <li>Inspections</li> <li>Financial issues</li> <li>Environmental enjoyment</li> </ul>

The value of collecting data on the social outcomes of AES was recognised by advisers and land managers alike. A number of alternative data collection methods were identified, including a smartphone app, on-line or telephone surveys. Further testing of the indicators in a larger pilot survey was recommended.



Figure 2: Credit: © Natural England/Steve Marston

## Where can I find further information about this and related research?

This project was led by the Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI) at the University of Gloucestershire, with Exeter University as a partner. For more information, please contact Jane Mills 01242 714137 [jmills@glos.ac.uk](mailto:jmills@glos.ac.uk)

Alternatively, please contact Beth Brockett at Natural England [beth.brockett@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:beth.brockett@naturalengland.org.uk)



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