UK, Dartmoor – innovation example 2

DARTMOOR FARMING FUTURES

- **Location:** Dartmoor – on 2 commons
- **HNV system:** Extensive cattle, sheep and pony grazing
- **Scale of operation:** Trials on 11,724 ha.
- **Timespan:** designed in 2010, trials to 2020
- **Keys to success:** Adaptive management approach to HNV vegetation. Farmers aware of and engaged with indicators of success, and involved in monitoring. Improved farmer engagement includes governance mechanism for approving variations to standard prescriptions.

Figure 1

Problem addressed by this innovation

Partly as a result of clarity on objectives from the Dartmoor Vision, farmers expressed concern that their existing agri-environment agreements (with their prescriptive approach to many issues, not least stocking regimes) were unlikely to deliver better environmental benefits. They also noted that they were not clear what the phrases used by agencies ('favourable status', for example) meant in practice.

Story in a nutshell

A group of Dartmoor farmers were invited to design a new approach to agri-environment in 2009. Trials, using the new design, started in 2011 and are continuing and being evaluated on two commons - one of 554ha and the other 11,170 ha. The pilot 'sits on top of' standard agri-environment agreements; the grazier association agrees a set of outcomes and participating graziers do not have to be bound by the standard prescriptions – any variations they propose have to be agreed through a formal mechanism. Some of the outcomes (move towards 'favourable status' of Annex 1 habitats) were subject to a process of clarification and simple exposition on an illustrated A3 field sheet by the relevant agency, itself an innovative development. Some of the participating farmers are now undertaking elements of the monitoring of the agreements. Recent evaluation confirms improved ownership and delivery from those participating in the trials.

What does Dartmoor Farming Futures achieve for HNV farming?

- An outcome based scheme that encourages farmer participation in identifying the most appropriate land management and monitoring and which has also involved better communication of the agreed objectives by agencies.
- Several evaluation studies confirm improved farmer ownership and delivery of actions.
- Improved land management for HNV outcomes and other public benefits.

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT NO. 696391

- It recognises the value of farmers using their skills and experience to deliver public policy outcomes on HNV farmland. It is new approach to agri-environment for the UK, focussing first and foremost on outcomes; as a result, it is not prescriptive, allowing farmers to make decisions in a framework of assessment by their own peers.
- It has brought farmers and agencies together (building on the Vision) to better understand and then agree detailed objectives, which has involved the agencies examining how to make legal and ecological concepts meaningful in the field for farmers
- Farmers monitoring parts of the agreement has secured better engagement and ownership of the trial. Ecological monitoring training was particularly successful and was based on the agency work to turn their objectives into 'plain English'.
- Recent independent evaluation confirms participating farmers have better understanding of HNV farming and what it should achieve.

How does DFF respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?

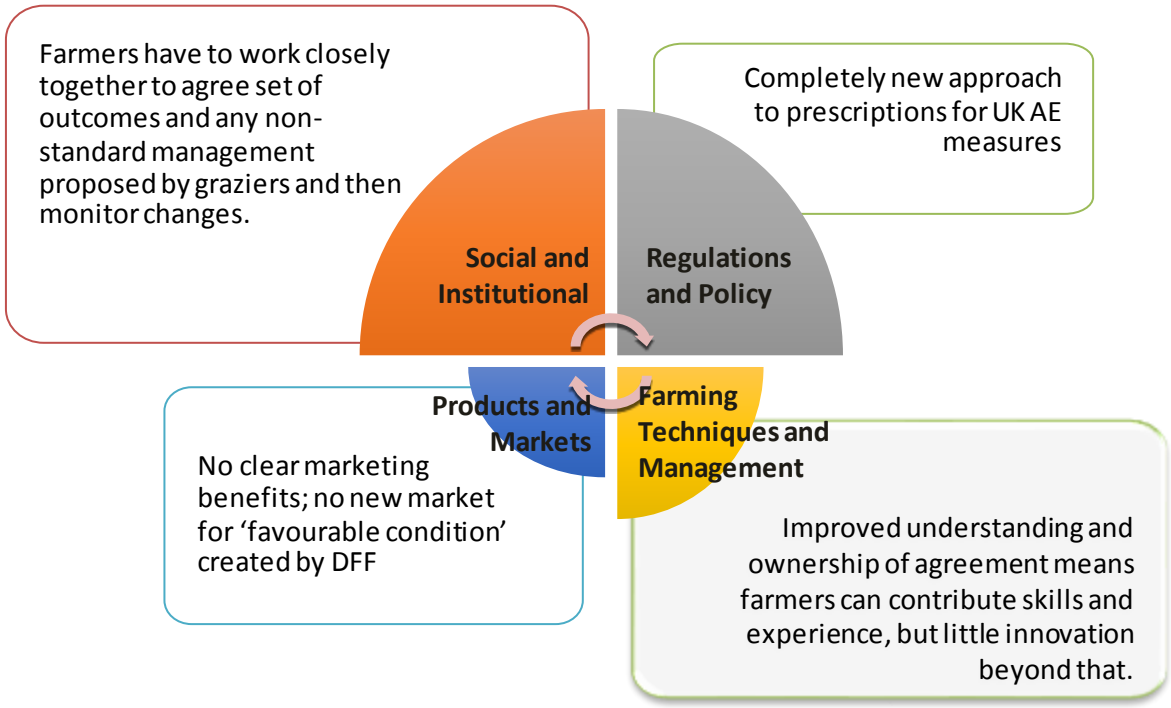

Figure 2 *Shows how this innovation addresses the four themes of the HNV-Link innovation framework.*

- **Social and institutional:** This innovation has significant benefits for farmer participation in a scheme. If the agreement is better understood and is deliverable then it results in less effort to ensure the terms of the agreement are met. It does however require trust between both parties. This results in lower administration costs and enables professional effort to be targeted on outcomes rather than administration. The State was involved in one significant innovation, which was a new way of setting out and explaining its policy objectives (Favourable Conservation Status for Annex 1 habitats) to farmers. This involved a good deal of work on the part of local staff, followed by training events etc., but its character is if anything more social and institutional than regulatory, despite being carried out by employees of the State – never before had such a search for common language and practical explanation of policy taken place in this way.

THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT NO. 696391

- **Regulations and policy:** While non minimising the innovation of doing anything different within a national agri-environmental scheme in England, the irony is that, for an innovation centred on an agri-environment scheme, the impact on regulation and policy is less than might be imagined. and while the participating grazings and commoners have a certain freedom from the standard prescription, the innovation has its limits. There is no impact on payment levels, while the standard prescription remains as the default option for graziers even on the participating commons (a good half-way house for a pilot, but given the underlying logic of the experiment that the standard prescriptions are less effective than they should be and potentially ineffective, the possibility of significant numbers of graziers opting for the default may not be sustainable in a roll-out). More disappointly, there has been no attempt to integrate the lessons of DFF into the national scheme, nor to roll it out even to other Dartmoor commons under AE contract, nor to extend the scope of the innovation on these or other experimental commons. Neither have the farmers' self-monitoring efforts been collated and analysed or somehow incorporated into wider monitoring or evaluation processes.

- **Farming techniques and management:** While the pilots allow a potentially much greater range of management approaches and techniques to be legitimised as appropriate for delivering AE undertakings, there is no reason to think that it has so far spawned approaches or techniques which are in themselves innovative; that possibility remains open however.

- **Products and markets:** The lack of a link between 'quality' (or even hours of work expended) and payment level means that strictly speaking this innovation has not led to a new 'product' nor a new market for the farmers' products. Taking this extra step would be challenging but should at least be considered in depth.

The process that made it happen and critical factors for success

- Two groups of farmers given the opportunity to design a new agri-environment scheme.
- The design and trials are underpinned by existing AE agreements and consents to deviate from agreement prescriptions granted.
- Funding for design and facilitation provided by National Park, Duchy of Cornwall and Natural England. Trials funded by AE agreements.
- Similar design (outcome based) produced by both groups of farmers. Farmers then presented their ideal model and granted consent to trial.
- Process require sufficient time (farmers busy), farmer led agenda and independent facilitator. Need to build trust.
- Trust-building and confidence to vary prescriptions also closely-related to Natural England's explanation of its objectives for Annex 1 habitats

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT NO. 696391

Partly due to the Vision farmers were critical of the current and past agri-environment schemes claiming the schemes failed to reflect local conditions and local farming systems. In response to the criticism a Government Minister suggested that the farmers design a better approach. A group of farmers designed a new scheme based on outcomes for a range of public benefits and later given the opportunity to trial this innovative approach on two commons.

Dartmoor National Park Authority, Natural England and the major land owner (Duchy of Cornwall) provided funding for facilitation to enable farmers to design scheme.

Important that sufficient time allowed for farmers to design. Security for trials provided by under-pinning by existing AE agreement with consent to deviate from prescriptions. Annual monitoring programme and sign-off mechanism reduces risk to both parties.

Lessons learnt from this innovation example, and its potential replication

- Need to build trust between farmers and agencies. Provide sufficient time for progress to advance, balance action with engagement, speak to farmers in way they can understand
- An outcome based AE scheme is applicable to all farming systems.
- Ideally suited to common land the approach could be used on farm land.
- Willing farmers (leaders), independent facilitation (who can explain the benefits to all) and sufficient time.

Figure 8

- The list of outcomes to be delivered includes a number of public benefits/ecosystem services in addition to the more usual ecological and historic environment outcomes.
- Capacity provided by common agreement useful but not essential, the approach can be adapted for a farm.
- Farmers participating have more understanding and ownership of agreement. Similar approach under consideration elsewhere (Exmoor).
- Farmers enabled and encouraged to contribute experience, skills and local knowledge.
- Clear outcomes are reported each year. Flexibility enables farming practice to respond to climate and vegetation growth. Reflects local conditions.
- Ownership within farming community is high and it has increased trust between farmers and between farmers and agencies.
- BUT changes within the statutory agencies have created problems, since new staff do not understand the reasons for the trials.
- Greater clarity as to how this pilot is regarded in national policy and how/when its lessons will be rolled out to other areas (even within Dartmoor) would be very beneficial. A clear process of using farmers' monitoring data would also help build positive feedback loops.

Disclaimer: This document reflects the author's view and the Research Executive Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

THIS PROJECT HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION HORIZON 2020 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION PROGRAMME UNDER GRANT AGREEMENT NO. 696391