THE COUNTRYSIDE STEWARDSHIP SCHEME

TRADITIONAL FARMING

in the modern environment

10 years of Conservation

ENGLAND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

DEFRA Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
What is Countryside Stewardship?

- The Government’s principal scheme for conserving and improving the countryside.

Farmers are paid grants to follow more traditional farming methods that enhance the landscape, encourage wildlife and protect historical features.

Why do we need it?

The traditional English landscapes and features we all love are largely the result of farming over the last few hundred years. Features such as stone walls or barns, once very important to farmers, are now part of our heritage. But modern methods of farming are changing the landscape, and some landscape features have been lost.

Traditional farming systems also provided good conditions for a rich diversity of wildlife. Modern techniques have, to a large extent, destroyed these conditions and reduced the diversity of wildlife. Some species have, as a result, become much more dependent on uncultivated land, such as moorland.

Nowadays, we are more aware of how farming shapes the countryside. We appreciate the wide variety of landscapes and the rich diversity of wildlife that live in them. We want to conserve and improve this heritage, and the farming industry is keen to help.

By conserving our countryside in this way, we not only help our wildlife, we also play our part in the international agreement to maintain the natural diversity of animals and plants throughout the world.
History and Development

How did it start?

Countryside Stewardship began as a five-year pilot project to see if farmers would, in return for payments, make changes to their land management practices that would help restore the loss of important habitats and features. The pilot scheme was set up by the Countryside Commission (now the Countryside Agency). It was extremely popular and successful.

Following an independent evaluation, the scheme was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) in 1996. As a Government Department, MAFF was better placed to provide the resources needed as Stewardship expanded. MAFF has now been replaced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

How does it work?

Stewardship is one of two complementary environmentally friendly schemes, both of which aim to conserve important wildlife, landscape and historic features of the

Hedgerow
The other scheme is Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) which conserves 22 nationally important areas, such as the Lake District. Stewardship operates in those areas of England outside ESAs.

Stewardship aims to conserve a range of traditional countryside landscapes and features by:

- sustaining the beauty and diversity of the landscape
- improving and extending wildlife habitats
- conserving archaeological sites and historic features
- improving opportunities for enjoying the countryside
- restoring neglected land or features
- creating new habitats and landscapes

Each county has specific targets for the landscape types and features that are important within their area. Priorities and objectives for particular areas are agreed with partner organisations such as English Nature, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group and the National Parks.

Anyone who owns or manages land can apply for Stewardship, including voluntary bodies and local authorities. But since the budget is limited, only those applications that offer the best environmental value for money can be accepted. On acceptance into Stewardship, a ten-year agreement is made to manage the land in an environmentally friendly way in return for payment.

Stewardship is now one of ten schemes to protect the environment and support the rural economy and communities. These schemes are operated as part of the England Rural Development Programme. The ten schemes are:

- Countryside Stewardship Scheme
- Environmentally Sensitive Areas Scheme
- Organic Farming Scheme
- Farm Woodland Premium Scheme
- Woodland Grant Scheme
- Hill Farm Allowance Scheme
- Rural Enterprise Scheme
- Vocational Training Scheme
- Energy Crops Scheme
- Processing & Marketing Grants Scheme
What sort of work is involved?
All types of conservation work are involved – such as restoring an old orchard, rebuilding a dry stone wall, regenerating a hedgerow, managing a hay meadow, creating an uncropped margin alongside a field of growing crops and providing wildlife habitats. Stewardship also provides new opportunities for walkers, schools, etc to visit farmland. Payments depend on the type of land management agreed and range from £4 to £525 per hectare.

How will I recognise Stewardship land?
Gold-coloured plaques are displayed at most site entrances. Where access is provided, you will see a map displayed at the entry point.

Who runs the scheme?
DEFRA’s Rural Development Service (RDS), based at DEFRA offices in the regions.
There are now more nesting sites for one of Britain’s rarest birds that lives on chalk downland — the stone curlew — whose numbers are now gradually recovering.
Bittern

Suitable nesting sites have been created for another of Britain’s rare birds – the bittern. This is a heron-like bird that needs a particular type of reedbed.

We have identified six landscape types and five landscape features that are important to our heritage.

Landscape types

Traditional farming methods varied, depending on the type of land being farmed. Over thousands of years, different agricultural practices have created different landscape types.

Chalk and limestone grassland

This grassland forms our typical downland landscapes. It needs traditional grazing and careful control of scrub and weeds. These areas are rich in archaeology, wildflowers and butterflies.

Waterside land

These areas are important as nesting grounds for wading birds and wildfowl and as places where people enjoy walking and picnicking. The areas need careful management to make the best use of their special character. Water quality in streams, rivers and ditches must be protected, particularly where fish live and breed.

Coastal areas

Large numbers of visitors are attracted to coastal areas for bird watching, walking, picnicking or enjoying the sea. Stewardship can conserve the beauty through traditional grazing and help by providing more footpaths, picnic areas and viewpoints.
Lowland heath
These are ancient landscapes on acidic, sandy and peaty soils, which have been created by past management systems. They need scrub and bracken control, and need to be grazed. They are important for some rare species – and for their feeling of wilderness.

Upland
This includes open heather moorland, flower-rich meadows, walls and hedges, small wooded glens and many prehistoric field systems. Less intensive farming methods are vital to conserve these features and their wildlife.

Old meadows and pastures
These are valuable, but threatened, habitats. They include hay meadows, which support a rich mix of grasses and flowers, and unimproved pastures, important for plants, butterflies and other insects. The small fields and associated hedges, trees and ponds are reminders of an earlier age and some contain archaeological remains.

Landscape features
As traditional farming practices shaped our landscapes, they also added attractive and interesting features.

Historic features
Thousands of years of agricultural activity can be seen in the pattern of farms and fields, and the large number of archaeological features in the countryside. These are all vulnerable to landscape change, either from agriculture or development.

Twite
Upland farmers have been helped to provide the correct habitat for the twite – a rare British bird and one of only two species in this country feeding its young entirely on seeds. The birds need a mixture of habitats in the uplands: flower-rich meadows to provide feed and well maintained heather for nesting. Stewardship pays farmers to leave the meadows uncut and to keep heather in good condition.
Old orchards

Small traditional orchards with widely spaced trees are valuable for their contribution to local landscapes and their links with local history. They also support a variety of wildflowers, lichens, insects, and birds such as owls and woodpeckers. The trees are old and are often scarce varieties of apple, pear, cherry, plum or damson. They can also be cider or perry orchards or cobnut platts and may be in commercial use.

Field boundaries

These include stone walls and hedgerows, which can:

- mark ancient boundaries
- indicate past land uses and field systems
- be the oldest visible feature
- provide nest sites for birds
- shelter mosses, flowers, trees and shrubs.
Field boundaries can be restored by management which:

- follows traditional practices – like maintaining hedges by hand
- reflects local customs
- uses local materials
- is sensitive to wildlife and landscapes

Stewardship can help by:

- rebuilding walls
- replacing stone facings
- regenerating hedgerows and hedge trees

A rable land

Arable, or crop growing, land is found mainly in East Anglia, the Vale of York and the southern downlands and also as part of mixed farming systems in middle and southwest England.

In these areas modern farming systems have contributed to:

- declining numbers and varieties of flowers and plants
- declining numbers of birds and mammals
- damage to some archaeological sites.

Stewardship can help by:

- creating wildlife habitats such as uncropped, grassy field margins
- creating wildlife habitats beside rivers and streams
- restoring boundaries of fields
- establishing grass strips to protect areas such as field boundaries and ponds from farming operations
- managing crop edges to encourage insects and flowers
- creating new public access such as walks, rides and lanes.
**Countryside around towns**

Large numbers of people can benefit from improvements to the landscape and to the variety of wildlife in these areas. Stewardship can help by:

- creating new habitats
- restoring hedgerows, ponds and trees
- creating new public access such as footpaths, bridleways and play areas.

Stewardship can be particularly helpful to the Community Forest projects that were initiated in 1989. The aim of Community Forests is to provide natural open space on the edges of major towns and cities. The environmental improvements are creating a rich mosaic of wooded landscape, farmland, nature areas and public open space.

**Hedgerows**

Over 6,000 miles of hedgerows have been restored – enough to stretch from here to Japan, or across the Atlantic and back.
What is access?

One of the aims of Stewardship is to improve opportunities for enjoying the countryside by providing new public access to farmland, and for walks, picnics and games.

How does it work?

At the entrances to Stewardship sites you will see a map displayed, giving details of the area available to the public. Other access is also provided for educational groups. They are free of charge, and offer a wide range of opportunities – coastal walks to see a historic monument, walks on the edge of a town, through traditional farming systems or to see modern farming adapted for conservation. Many will have some special features such as old stone walls or interesting wildlife.

Footpaths

Over 700 miles of permissive footpaths have been provided for the enjoyment of the public – enough to stretch from Land’s End to John O’Groats.

How can I find out more?

• Details of access in each county are available free of charge from DEFRA HQ, local libraries, Tourist Information Centres and local authority countryside and highways departments.

Or you can visit the DEFRA Conservation Walks website www.countrywalks.org.uk
Educational access

This promotes the use, enjoyment and study of the countryside by students – from primary school age to postgraduate research. There are a great variety of access sites, which are mainly found on working farms, and they all provide examples of how conservation work can be carried out as part of a farm business. You can find out more on the DEFRA Conservation Walks website www.countrywalks.org.uk
The future

There are around 14,000 farmers and land managers in Stewardship and the number continues to grow. And there is even more money available – £500 million over the next six years. Over this time, it is planned to add more than half a million hectares of land to the Scheme and more than treble the existing number of ‘Stewards’, so many more important areas and habitats will be included. This means that we shall see more and more improvements to our landscape, and know that we are conserving our heritage. And we shall have greater opportunity to enjoy the richness of our countryside and the diversity of our wildlife.

To make sure the money is well spent, Stewardship is independently monitored and evaluated. The reports are available on the DEFRA website

www.defra.gov.uk
To find out about DEFRA Conservation Walks, you can ask for copies of the Conservation Walks Access Register for your county from:

DEFFRA
Countryside Stewardship Branch
Room G15
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London SW1P 3JR
Tel: 020 7238 6907
Fax: 020 7238 6058

or visit: www.countrywalks.org.uk

There is also a wealth of information on Stewardship and other schemes on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk

Or you can contact your DEFRA regional office:

Reading - South East Rural Development Service
Room 221
DEFFRA
Coley Park
Reading
RG1 6DT
Tel: 0118 958 1222

Nottingham - East Midlands Rural Development Service
DEFFRA
Block 7
Government Buildings
Chalfont Drive
Nottingham
NG8 3SN
Tel: 0115 929 1191

Cambridge - East Rural Development Service
DEFFRA
Block B
Government Buildings
Brooklands Avenue
Cambridge
CB2 2DR
Tel: 01223 45 27 27

Worcester - West Midlands Rural Development Service
DEFFRA
Block B
Government Buildings
Whittington Road
Worcester WR5 2LQ
Tel: 01905 763355

Newcastle - North East Rural Development Service
DEFFRA
Government Buildings
Kenton Bar
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE5 3EW
Tel: 0191 286 3377

Crewe - North West Rural Development Service
DEFFRA
Electra Way
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 6GJ
Tel: 01270 75 4000

Leeds - Yorks and the Humber Rural Development Service
DEFFRA
Government Buildings
Otley Road
Lawnswood
Leeds
LS16 5QT
Tel: 0113 230 3750

Bristol - South West Rural Development Service
DEFFRA
Westbury-on-Trym
Bristol
BS10 6NJ
Tel: 0117 959 1000

If you want to know more or are interested in applying for a stewardship grant you can ask for an information pack on:

The Countryside Stewardship Scheme (and how to apply)