

# Results-Based Agri-Environmental Payment Scheme - Pilot in Wensleydale, UK



**SUMMARY** The Results-Based Agri-Environment Payment Scheme (RBAPS) was developed as a pilot. It operated in Wensleydale on species rich meadows and grassland for breeding waders. Farmers had complete flexibility on how to manage their land, but the annual scheme payment was linked to their level of success in delivering the biodiversity outcome. The project aimed to test whether this outcomes-focused approach motivated farmers to deliver better quality habitats for wildlife compared with the conventional approach.

## Contract Type



PES contracts including AECM

## Public Goods

## BIODIVERSITY

## Field of action



## Basis of Payment



Result-based

## Involved contract takers



Individual

## OBJECTIVES

- Set up results-based agreements for environmental outcomes in upland grassland farming systems
- Assess the environmental performance of habitats under result-based agreements
- Compare the result-based approach to control sites within the pilot boundary
- Test accuracy of farmer self-assessment of results
- Test cost effectiveness of the result-based approach
- Explore agreement holder and stakeholder attitudes to result-based approaches

## CONTRACT DETAILS

**Involved parties** This pilot of a results-based payment scheme (RBAPS) was coordinated by Natural England and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority for DEFRA. 19 farmers volunteered to participate in the Grassland pilot in Wensleydale. Written agreements were signed by each farmer individually. The pilot initially ran 2016-2018 with 19 participants. It was extended for a further two years, until the end of 2020.

**Conditions of participation** included i) land put into the pilot agreement must not be managed under any other agri-environment scheme for the duration of the RBAPS Agreement; ii) common land and shared grazing is not eligible; iii) agreement land must not be designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) or Special Area of Conservation (SAC); iv) for grassland - habitats had to reach the minimum baseline score for a payment to be eligible to enter the scheme.

**Management requirements** There were no set management prescriptions given to farmers in the RBAPS Pilot. Instead, farmers were free to manage as they see fit to achieve outcomes in their specific location, allowing them to use their own local knowledge and expertise. This increased flexibility at the field, farm, local, and regional level.

**Payments** were made to farmers on a tiered system based on the quality of their respective sites. Payments were made yearly after results have been reported.

**Training & advice** were key elements of the pilot study and were offered to farmers by Natural England and the farm team within the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority on technical expertise, species identification, survey techniques and in some cases individual training. Providing training for self-assessment was resource intensive, although this reduced over the years.

**Monitoring** of indicators either directly (plant species for species rich grassland) or by proxy (habitat condition as indicator for benefitting wading birds). The main monitoring for the pilot was focused upon environmental performance of the approaches and of the control sites. Each site was assessed each year. This monitoring was undertaken by an advisor and through self-assessments by farmers. Farmers were given training on the assessment methodology and maintained close dialogue with the advisors to understand the monitoring criteria. For instance, in the meadow option farmers accompanied advisors on the baseline assessments and did that assessment together.

## SUCCESS FACTORS

- Trusting relationship between National Park farm team and farmers
- Very good working relationship between Natural England and the National Park farm team
- The environmental performance of all the results-based measures was better than their equivalent control sites
- Flexibility for the farmer regarding site management
- Allowing the farmer to draw on their own knowledge and expertise
- Extensive support and training provided to farmers, in particular on assessing the condition of their site

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-based-agri-environment-payment-scheme-rbaps-pilot-study-in-england>

