

Living landscapes: hidden costs of managing the countryside

Our beautiful, diverse countryside matters to us all.
It lifts our spirits and boosts our economy.
But who pays to look after it?



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

NFU
www.nfuonline.com



Most of England's countryside – fields and copses, hedgerows and dry stone walls, ponds and footpaths – was created by farmers and is looked after by them now.

Over the years, agriculture has produced beautiful and varied rural landscapes, as well as food. In a crowded, highly developed nation, this green legacy is arguably one of our greatest and most precious assets. Millions of visitors from home and overseas enjoy our countryside.

But today, farmers are finding it difficult to conserve much-loved, familiar landscape features. They are under growing pressure to compete in tough world markets – to simply grow the most at the least cost.

Agri-environment schemes, which pay some farmers to conserve some features, are part of the answer. But these don't cover all the costs of keeping our countryside in good shape. Neither do the environmental requirements under the Single Payment Scheme introduced through reforms to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy.



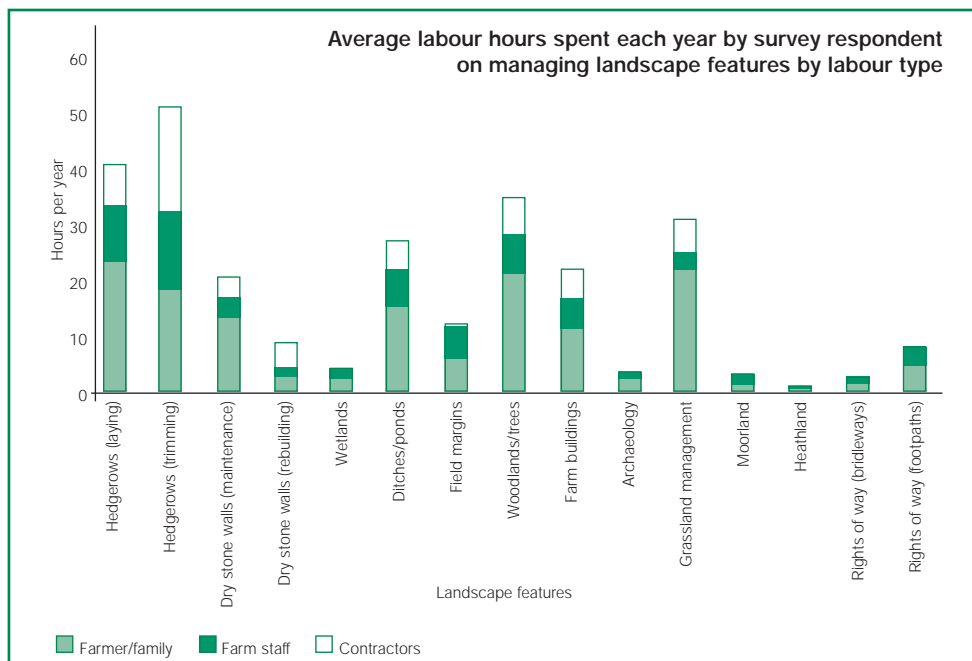
Even so, most farmers continue to look after 'uneconomic' landscape features because it fits with their values and is part of their way of life.



The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and the National Farmers' Union (NFU) have made a first estimate of the scale of this uncompensated landscape conservation work done by farmers, and what might happen if farming payments were further reduced.

In 2005 the NFU and CPRE commissioned a two-part study:

- a questionnaire was sent to a cross-section of more than 2,000 farmers to assess what landscape management work was being done
- in-depth interviews of 27 farmers who completed the survey were conducted – to further explore its findings and find out what would happen to their landscape management work if farming payments declined.





The study found:

- landscape management work on the average English farm, not supported by agri-environment funding, was **£2,410 per year** at the time of the survey. This is based on what it could cost to hire contractors to carry out the work.
- the total cost to farmers of landscape management outside agri-environment schemes across England was at least **£412 million per year**.



The study showed that if agri-environment payments or the Single Payment Scheme were cut, landscape management would decline drastically. Farmers would lack the time, money and labour to do it themselves or to hire contractors.

Some land would be abandoned, become overgrown and lose its distinctive character. The rest would be exploited ever more intensively for maximum output at minimum cost, or pass out of farming and be developed, or become fallow land.

For England's beautiful, familiar, diverse and distinctive countryside to survive, farm incomes must be maintained or landscape management work funded in a way that reflects its true costs.

Case study

JOHN ELLERINGTON

Yorkshire

John Ellerington is a Yorkshire tenant farmer with 800 hectares. His land is mainly arable, and he keeps about 300 sheep.

A keen wildlife photographer, he has carried out far more stewardship on his land than he ever received grant assistance for. "I believe all farmers should put a little more back into their farms than they take out," he says. "It's a good motto. Here, I've seen a rise in bird numbers and the return of some species once thought lost to the area.

"I've often increased the size of the six-metre boundary strip at the edge of my fields to attract birds. Lapwing numbers have grown, along with good numbers of curlew, oyster catchers and skylarks.

"This year I've had a go at hedge-laying. It's hard work, but I'm pleased with the outcome. I've planted more than a mile of new hedge over the years, introducing between two and three thousand new plants."



"A high proportion of my time is spent on countryside management"

John Ellerington

It's not just beautiful, traditional landscapes themselves that are at stake: secure food supplies, earnings from tourism, improved public wellbeing and health and thriving rural communities are all part of the benefits offered by a beautiful farmed countryside.

CPRE and the NFU believe there is a need for greater public and Government awareness of the work farmers do in looking after the countryside. Securing effective conservation of farmed landscapes *must* be a big part of the debate about further reform of the EU's Common Agriculture Policy and farm support.

Electronic copies of the joint NFU and CPRE report, *Living Landscapes: hidden costs of managing the countryside*, are available at www.nfuonline.com or www.cpre.org.uk. Copies are also available from:



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CPRE is a charity which promotes the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England. We advocate positive solutions for the long-term future of the countryside. Founded in 1926, we have 60,000 supporters and a branch in every county. To find out how to support CPRE, including information on donating, becoming a member, leaving a legacy or volunteering please ring Supporter Services on 020 7981 2870, email supporterservices@cpre.org.uk or go online at www.cpre.org.uk/support-us. CPRE is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England, number 4302973. Registered charity number: 1089685.

The NFU champions British farming and, through representation and services, helps its members run profitable and successful businesses. With more than 60,000 members, 280 local offices, supported by staff in seven regional offices and offices in London, Stoneleigh, Brussels and Wales, the NFU is the largest organisation representing the interests of farmers and growers in England and Wales.