



The Campaign for the Farmed Environment is encouraging farmers and land managers to voluntarily adopt land management practices that will retain and exceed the environmental benefits that used to be provided by set-aside. There is a range of voluntary management measures or ELS options that you can adopt on your farm to benefit the environment, whilst at the same time being agronomically practical.

Name: Stephen and Joceline Gibson

Region: North Yorkshire

Farm: Birkdale Farm

Size: 300 acres (122 hectares)



Background

Birkdale Farm is in the Howardian Hills AONB just outside Terrington. The farm is predominantly arable with 180 acres cropped land, but also has 50 acres sheep grazed pasture and around 60 acres managed for environmental schemes.

The farm has a rotation of winter wheat, oil seed rape and barley. Agronomy advice is delivered by an external agronomist, cultivations and harvesting is undertaken by contractors.

The farm supports a range of wildlife and scarce arable plants. Bird surveys of the farm have recorded 106 different bird species including barn owls and little owls.

What environmental management do you already undertake on your farm?

The farm has had an Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) and two Countryside Stewardship (CSS) agreements. Under these agreements substantial areas of wildlife habitat have been created including 5ha of wood pasture and 2ha damp grassland with scrapes for wading birds and more than 2km of hedgerows have been planted or restored.

A new ELS/Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement is being drawn up for the farm which is likely to include the following:

- Hedgerow and ditch management
- Over-wintered stubbles

- Fallow plots
- Skylark plots
- Floristically enhanced margins
- Pollen and nectar mix
- Field corner management
- Cultivated areas for arable plants

The margins around arable fields on the farm are used with a combination of options next to each other. For example tussocky grass margins adjacent to pollen and nectar mixes next to wild bird seed and cultivated plots for arable flora. This is to maximise the wildlife value of each type of margin.

How will you be/are you taking part in the Campaign?

In addition to the management to be undertaken through our various Stewardship agreements we've been actively involved with the local Cornfield Flowers project, growing on rare arable flowers in nursery plots and our cultivated margins. We also have around 7 acres of over-winter stubble that is not in an environmental scheme.

Will you be using an adviser?

FWAG have completed a Farm Environment Plan and application for the proposed HLS agreement. RSPB and the BTO have provided information relating to bird numbers and the Cornfield Flowers Project has provided information on arable flora found on the farm.

What are the benefits of taking part in the Campaign?

Environmental Stewardship will secure a set income for the next ten years which, in this time of cereal and input price volatility, is nice to know. We have gained a lot of satisfaction from the work we've done under environment schemes that has enabled us to increase the amount of wildlife on the farm and put back things such as hedges and trees that had been removed over past decades. The work we've done is also appreciated by local people who use the public footpaths crossing the farm. Although our HLS agreement has been delayed due to the recent budget freeze, it will hopefully start in April 2010. It will be reassuring to be signed up to this agreement while resources are available, especially with the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy looming for 2013.

How does undertaking voluntary management fit in with your farming business?

The environmental management delivered on the farm provides a regular income and enables me to concentrate on cropping the more productive parts of the farm.

What is driving you to take part in the Campaign?

We have a keen interest in the environment and have for many years been delivering the sorts of things the Campaign is trying to achieve. We hope our experience of managing wild bird seed mixes, cultivated arable margins and other options can be of value to other farmers participating in the Campaign.