



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: Richard Hardy
Region: East Yorkshire
Farm: Grange Farm, Wetwang
Size: 173 ha (427 ac)



Background

Grange Farm is a tenanted farm situated just north east of Wetwang and supports a typical Yorkshire Wolds rotation of winter wheat, winter and spring barley, winter oilseed rape and vining peas. I farm single handedly, sharing work and resources with a neighbour during busy times.

What environmental management do you already undertake on your farm?

I joined ELS in April 2008 and so didn't benefit from management plan points. All ELS points come from boundary and in-field options; hedgerow management, and overwintered stubbles feature heavily, but I've also used the beetle bank option to reinstate boundaries between fields and create wildlife corridors.

Areas of nectar flower mixture and wild bird mix and two and four metre margins make up the rest of the points required. A total of 2.5 hectares were taken out of production in 2008, but I think I will reduce my reliance on overwintered stubbles when I renew ELS, taking advantage of awkward corners and more wild bird seed mix areas to make up points.

A VFA bird survey in 2008 identified corn bunting on the farm and I am keen to target options towards this species if possible. Lapwing and skylark are also present in good numbers and I would like to work to maintain or increase numbers if possible.

We've had a really good take of our wild bird mix areas and I've sown the grass margins and nectar flower areas down with some interesting mixes; slower growing, shorter grasses and grass/flower mixes consisting of vetches, phacelia and sainfoin. These mixes were a lot more expensive in terms of seed, but it's paid off with easier management and a more satisfactory end result.

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

By continuing with ELS and by recording voluntary measures where appropriate; most years the farm has in excess of the 20 ha of overwintered stubble needed for the ELS agreement. By managing the balance in line with CFE guidelines I can make a significant contribution to the campaign. Also as chairman of the Driffield branch of the NFU I will be helping to promote the Campaign through farm walks and through contact with other local farmers.

Will you be using an adviser?

Probably not to help fill in the form. The ELS at Grange Farm doesn't come up for renewal until 2013 and it was relatively straightforward - I even managed to submit it online, which made the whole process a lot less time-consuming. As we grow peas on contract for Bird's Eye as part of their biodiversity policy we had a visit from Martin Phillips of FWAG and this helped form the basis of my initial agreement. I also plan to have the VFA bird survey repeated in 2011 to monitor progress of the existing scheme.

What are the benefits of taking part in the Campaign?

Participation in ELS is key to the campaign and we've shown at Grange Farm that you don't necessarily need the management plan options to put together a viable and cost-effective ELS agreement. The campaign has also helped to focus on specific options to produce more targeted ELS and voluntary options for those farmers who want to encourage particular species.

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

We've always done a fair bit of hedge and tree planting and aim to use 250 or so hedge plants a year gapping up and replacing field boundaries. I think it is part of maintaining the environmental value of the farm and investing in the future.

What is driving you to take part in the Campaign?

Apart from the obvious financial reasons for setting up an ELS agreement - £30/hectare can't really be ignored in today's financial climate - I think it's important we try to avoid having compulsory measures imposed upon us and that voluntary measures are more likely to have a better outcome.