



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:** D R Hemus Partnership

**Region:** West Midlands

**Farm:** Wheatcroft Farm

**Size:** 387 hectares

### **Background**

Wheatcroft is a largely arable farm, located just outside Nuneaton in North Warwickshire, close to the Warwickshire-Leicestershire boundary. The main crops are winter wheat, oilseed rape, spring beans and potatoes. There is also approximately 20 ha of grass, mostly temporary Italian ryegrass leys, grown for seed.



The farm is dissected by various watercourses, including the River Anker.

The farm is situated on the edge of an urban area and is crossed by several frequently used footpaths. There is also a major trunk road close by, from which drainage passes into the watercourses that cross the farm. These factors mean that it is not just farm management that influences water quality and biodiversity at Wheatcroft. Despite this, however, the farm supports populations of several key farmland bird species, including grey partridge, tree sparrow and yellowhammer. There is also a good number of brown hares on the farm.

### **What environmental management do you already undertake on your farm?**

The farm has an Entry Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme in place. At present most ELS points are gained through over-wintered stubbles (EF6), hedgerow and ditch management (EB1, EB2, EB6, EB7, EB8 and EB9) and management plans (EM1, EM2 and EM4).

Some additional feeding of birds is undertaken, with wheat grain spread into hedge bottoms for yellowhammers and other species.

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

The ELS agreement for Wheatcroft Farm will be renewed in January 2011. It is hoped that most of the current ELS management will be continued, but the loss of the management plan options from ELS will require additional points to be gained from other options. The farm is likely to include extended over-wintered stubbles and wild bird seed mixtures – two options that

are of direct relevance to the Campaign for the Farmed Environment and which will be greatly beneficial to the abundant and diverse wildlife on the farm.

**Will you be using an adviser?**

No, although the advice of our Local Campaign Co-ordinator and other members of the local liaison group will be useful to us when finalising our plans for new environmental measures.

**What are the benefits of taking part in the Campaign?**

As well as the benefits to the farming industry as a whole, by helping to fight off the threat of compulsory set-aside, there are very compelling economic arguments for the Campaign and the case for the introduction of more field margin and in-field environmental options seems clear. It is obvious that no one really wants compulsory set-aside and support for the Campaign is the only way to ensure that this is not imposed upon all arable and mixed farms across the country. In addition to this, there is a strong case for reducing inputs on arable field margins, leaving areas fallow or establishing wild bird seed mixtures on headlands because, with regular ELS or HLS payments, this can frequently give a significantly improved profit from low-yielding land.

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

Integration of environmental management and arable farming has proved successful at Wheatcroft and we are confident that the proposed new measures to be implemented in the next cropping year will prove no different. The ELS options that are already in place on the farm make good business sense to us, and we are confident that the new in-field and field margin options that we plan to introduce will also fit in well alongside our arable farming operations.

**What is driving you to take part in the Campaign?**

Like most other farmers, Will and Richard Hemus like to see wildlife thriving on their land and they recognise the environmental benefits that the options being promoted by the Campaign can bring. However, Wheatcroft is first and foremost a successful commercial farm and it is the simple economic facts that have convinced the Hemus brothers that support for the Campaign and implementation of relevant in-field and field margin options make sound commercial sense. Implementation of compulsory set-aside through cross-compliance, the price of failure for the Campaign, would hit all farmers hard – but, even if that threat is ignored, it is clear that gross margins can actually be improved by locating ELS management options on some areas of Wheatcroft's less productive arable land.