



ENCOURAGING FARMERS TO GET INVOLVED IN AGRI-ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVES

Many farmers already engage in environment initiatives, such as Catchment Sensitive Farming, and take voluntary action through Campaign for the Farmed Environment and The Rivers Trust Pinpoint advice. Farmers also adhere to environmental standards such as the LEAF Marque.

This guidance, based on research and experience from working with farmers, aims to help farm advisors, businesses and others encourage more farmers to get involved in agri-environment initiatives.



Factors that may prevent farmers from getting involved

- The perception that what's good for the environment is at odds with being productive.
- The lack of a tangible product or output to show for the work - improved soils and a healthier river aren't as visible as new hedges or fencing, for example.
- An expectation of criticism from environment groups.
- Concerns that inspections, fines and added bureaucracy will result from getting involved in these schemes.
- Lack of support from farm advisors to deliver the more complicated aspects of schemes.
- Concern about the longevity of funding for these schemes.
- Environment organisations failing to share evidence to explain why they are asking farmers to get involved.
- The assumption that being environmentally friendly will place restrictions on the farmer.

How to engage farmers

Proactive contact

It may not be possible to persuade all farmers to attend meetings, or get involved with existing schemes. Therefore, the best way to engage initially may be to write or call requesting a meeting. A last resort would be to knock on their doors. But let's face it, no one likes a cold caller, so this needs to be planned carefully.

Stress the agronomic advantage

Make sure you're able to give an indication of how these actions will benefit the farmer in terms of improved soils, increased crop rotation and higher yields. Creating local case studies (ideally backed by other local farmers) will be crucial here.

Be flexible in your approach

Better relationships need to be built between farmers and environmentalists. Being inflexible and prescriptive might hinder the achievement of your objective. It is essential to adapt based on the circumstances of individual farms.



Make sure the benefits are crystal clear

Be clear in communicating what the farmer will have to show for their involvement – whether it is an infrastructure improvement, cleaner water or healthier soils. It is important to start with tangible, evidenced benefits. Once a rapport has developed it will then be easier to discuss more challenging areas where benefits are not as clear cut.

Celebrate farmer achievements

Don't be shy in celebrating the work happening in the agriculture sector. There are lots of ways to showcase success - you could work with the media to showcase what farms are doing, raise awareness with the public and others at events such as county shows, and hold or participate in award schemes.

Get farmers involved in citizen science

If farmers have a better understanding of what the problem is, based on evidence, they are more likely to be receptive to agri-environment measures. Citizen science offers a great opportunity for them to take more of a hands-on role by monitoring water quality, or carrying out species and soil surveys.

Speak to other relevant organisations and build trusted alliances

It is essential that other organisations and groups trusted by farmers support these schemes and measures. Speak with the NFU, farming clubs and other farming associations to generate support and buy-in. Consider creating farmer-led groups to discuss specific issues, share best practice and innovation, and identify solutions.

Understand the farmer's circumstances

Every situation is different and to understand how best to work with a farmer you will need to understand their individual situation, including length of tenancy agreements and succession plans. Developing such a relationship takes time, effort and understanding.



We're all in this together

Stressing the multi-sector nature of the issue is important so as not to play the 'blame game'. This will help temper any feeling of finger pointing that farmers may have.

Identify 'Champions'

These are likely to be farmers themselves, or trusted people farmers go to for advice, such as contractors. Farmers are likely to be influenced by others within the farming community so it is worth spending time building relationships with a few of these key people who could then become champions. They can then help build relationships and encourage more in the farming community to get involved in environmental schemes and techniques.

Results take time

Having farm advisors in place for a sustained period of time to build trusted relationships with farmers, as well as increase their own knowledge of farm holdings, is essential if results are to be delivered.

This guidance has been compiled from research carried out by Alex Inman on behalf of WWF-UK.

WWF-UK would like to thank Alex Inman, Rob Wise (NFU), Barry Bendall (The Rivers Trust) and the farmers who participated in our research which led to the development of this guidance.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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