

The Future of Farming in the South Downs National Park Farmers' Workshops – Brief Report

Introduction

Three farmers' workshops involving around 50 farmers and advisers were held over the period April-June 2017 with the working title 'Your chance to influence the Future of Farming the South Downs National Park'. The aim of the workshops was to start building an evidence base to shape a future scheme in the South Downs, and to discuss what a new scheme might look like and how it could be market tested. The workshops involved sessions on priorities and principles, delivery and practicalities (drawing on lessons learned), and shaping a new scheme. Feedback from the earlier workshops informed discussions in the later workshops. Attendees from the workshops were primarily drawn from the farmer groups/ clusters within the South Downs National Park (SDNP). They were led by Andrew Lee and Nigel James, and planned/facilitated by Paul Silcock, Cumulus Consultants Ltd.

Results

Farmer engagement was good; the workshops worked well and we have received very positive feedback. Aside from farmer engagement, the two main outputs relate to **(i) shaping a future policy/scheme** and **(ii) developing a pilot scheme based in the SDNP**. Preliminary feedback relating to these is set out below:

i Shaping a future policy/scheme (requirements/desires)

- Positive - attractive to public, meaningful to farmers.
- Respect and value farmers and farming.
- Flexible and bespoke (with advice).
- Training for farmers (what's important on farm, rationale for management).
- Education (schools, public) and Health & Wellbeing.
- Communication – broader society (including expectations).
- Be clear on environmental benefits.
- Recognise farmers are there to produce food.
- Recognise the vulnerability of farm businesses to declining support.
- Importance of family farms and mixed/livestock farming.
- Son of Basic Payment - some farm support should remain.
- Devolution to lowest level e.g. clusters.

ii Developing a pilot scheme proposal based in the SDNP

1. South Downs Unique Selling Points
 - National Park (NPA) led/co-ordinated.
 - Cluster way of working – up and running already so easier to 'bolt-on'.
 - Commercial businesses and small farms.
 - Lowland landscape/habitats.
 - Mixed/livestock farming.
 - Visitors and surrounding population.
2. What would a pilot scheme do 'on farm'?
 - Go above and beyond Stewardship (building on existing Basic Payment Scheme/ Environmental Stewardship).
 - Involve several clusters in local design and delivery.
 - Have SDNPA support alongside Natural England farm adviser support.
 - Address specific local priorities e.g. soils, carbon, water, visitor management, habitats and species, pollinators, landscape and heritage, education, local food, diversification, viable/profitable livestock farming and mixed farming (need to prioritise and be selective).
 - Use innovative methods.

- Engage partners (e.g. water companies with regard to Payment for Ecosystem Services).
3. What might be involved in a 'wrap around' programme of activities?
- Communication – South Downs National Park Authority role, social media.
 - Education – schools, public.
 - Demonstrate value – community, treasury (natural capital).
 - Research & Development.
4. Practicalities
- Timescale – next two to three years.
 - Budget (TBC).
 - Delivery bodies (SDNPA, NE).
 - Target outputs and outcomes.
 - Monitoring and evaluation.

Next steps

Next steps include producing a summary report from the workshops, producing a pilot scheme proposal to send to Defra (to bid for funding) and weaving farmer feedback into a future agriculture policy document (TBC). This work will be progressed over the next few months.

Paul Silcock
Cumulus Consultants Ltd
28 June 2017