



HOW TO IMPROVE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEME UPTAKE AND PROVISION

Results from an online questionnaire undertaken by
PARTRIDGE, Interreg North Sea Region

BACKGROUND

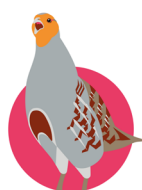
The PARTRIDGE project is an Interreg North Sea Region project running from mid-2016 to mid-2023, with 12 European partners in six participating countries (Belgium-Flanders, Denmark, England, the Netherlands, Germany-Lower Saxony, and Scotland). For more information about the project please visit northsearegion.eu/partridge.

PARTRIDGE seeks to provide practical solutions for the countries within the North Sea Region to help them achieve their 2030 Biodiversity Targets on arable farmland, set by the European Union, after their failure to meet the Biodiversity Targets for 2020. A key element of this is the need to improve the existing national Agri-Environment (AE) scheme systems and widen their uptake by farmers throughout the North Sea area.

This four-page document summarises the key findings from a large-scale online survey that explored the attitudes and experiences of farmers who have access to AE schemes, between March 2021 and May 2021. It was specifically designed to provide policymakers with key information to encourage farmers' willingness to engage with AE schemes and single-out factors that help to overcome the barriers to participate in AE scheme.

KEY MESSAGE

We expect that implementing the lessons learned here will result in an expansion of AE schemes and improve the results of those already enrolled in AE schemes. Incorporating these lessons into agricultural policy is an essential step on the road to achieving our 2030 Biodiversity Targets.



Interreg
North Sea Region
PARTRIDGE
European Regional Development Fund



EUROPEAN UNION

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Encourage farmers not currently participating in Agri-Environmental schemes to join a scheme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We found that, in our survey, farmers with and without arable-focused AE schemes were not that different. There were only five instances where we found a difference between them.

These were: the length of contracts they prefer, whether they are prepared to pay for advice, how often they wanted advice, who should pay for AE schemes, and how flexible AE schemes should be when considering agricultural management (herbicide use, manure spreading, etc.).

ENCOURAGE FARMERS

The key results highlight that, to encourage farmers not currently participating in Agri-Environmental (AE) schemes to join a scheme, the following points should be addressed:

- Provide targeted government-paid advice - i.e., free to the farmer, in combination with a step-in model that allows new participants to join with only a few (or a sub-set of) options and shorter-term contracts (1-2 years). Advice is key, only 5% of those without AE schemes said that they did not need advice.
- Payment levels need to be fair but are not the only concern. For 37% of respondents without AE schemes, where payment levels are an issue, increases in payments of 29% would offset this.
- Allow some flexibility in agricultural management of options (use of herbicide, manure spreading) but do not compromise on aspects affecting the biodiversity goals of an option (for example, mowing dates that are set to protect ground-nesting birds).





EXPAND PARTICIPATION

To expand participation for those already in AE schemes the following points were most important:

- Providing targeted government-paid advice - i.e., free to the farmer, advice would encourage farmers to adopt more AE measures, although some (22%) of those with AE schemes would be prepared to pay for advice. They also wanted advice more often. Advice was considered very important, only 3% of those with AE schemes said that they did not need any advice.
- Farmers with AE schemes would be interested in longer contracts and in providing more options than they currently have.
- Some farmers (30%) already in an AE scheme would be interested in schemes funded by the private sector (carbon or biodiversity offsets for example).
- Some farmers in AE schemes (29% of our sample) thought payments should be higher, suggesting an increase of 18%.
- Address the problems experienced by participants – find solutions, quickly allow for derogations without requiring extended bureaucracy. Ensure that these derogations do not compromise the goals of the schemes.
- Building up experience in AE schemes encourages a desire for additional AE options and longer contracts. This is especially the case if the benefits for farmland wildlife are measured and recognized by the public and politicians, resulting in recognition for the farmers involved.

The **full version of our report** on the results of our survey can be found in our Project's Output Library <https://northsearegion.eu/partridge/output-library/>

Key options needed in arable AE schemes

Each national AE Scheme should, at the least, include the options below to reach the Biodiversity Targets 2030 on arable land



Beetle bank



Conservation headland



Cultivated uncropped margin for rare arable flora/weeds



Floristically-enhanced grass margin



Rotational wild bird cover



Permanent wild-flower cover



Unharvested cereals



Stubble with cover crop



Supplementary overwinter food for wintering birds



Methods for predation management