



HOW TO IMPROVE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEME UPTAKE AND PROVISION

National report Scotland

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A large online survey of land managers (primarily farmers) across the North Sea Region was carried out as part of the PARTRIDGE project. A key element of PARTRIDGE is the need to improve the existing Agri-Environment schemes (AE schemes) and widen farmers' uptake of AE schemes throughout the North Sea area. The target group of this survey was arable farmers in areas where arable AE schemes were available. Here we present the findings concerning the responses of Scottish farmers. The report of results across all PARTRIDGE partner countries can be found online at <https://northsearegion.eu/partridge/output-library/> which has a more detailed explanation of the methods, the survey questions, and the overall results.

ADVICE

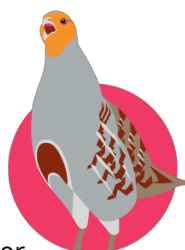
Scottish farmers with AE schemes (53%) were more likely to think farmers should pay for advice compared to 35% for participants without AE schemes, who felt that the government should pay. A higher percentage (68%) of people in both camps wanted to get advice from other advisors but a lot of people also wanted to get it from farmer clusters (43% without an AE scheme and 59% within one).

In terms of how frequently land managers wanted to receive this advice, the majority of both groups (65% no AE scheme and 40% with an AE scheme) stated that they would prefer to receive advice when they requested it, rather than once a year (14% and 30%) or other (0% and 11%). When they did receive advice, respondents were most keen on receiving advice on¹ the environmental benefits of AE schemes, how AE schemes benefit wildlife, and how measures can be practically managed, with all receiving over 65%. A contrast visible between land managers with and without AE schemes was that participants without seemed to be more concerned with legal aspects of measures (47% compared to 18%).

OPTION CHOICE: FLEXIBILITY AND DESIGN

When it came to flexibility¹, most Scottish participants wanted greater flexibility in changing the location of measures and the control of pernicious weeds. Of note was the difference in opinions of land managers with and without AE schemes, with far more participants without AE schemes (73%) wanting more flexibility in the use of herbicides compared to those within a scheme (42%). In contradiction to this, more land managers (86%) with an AE scheme wanted improved flexibility in when you should mow, compared to only 59% of people without AE schemes. More people within a scheme (60%) also preferred more flexibility in how mown grass is used, compared with only 32% of people without an AE scheme. Both groups wanted greater flexibility in seed mixes used, the locations where measures are placed and in times when derogations from the rules are required.

The most popular options that people in AE schemes had and that people not in AE schemes would take up¹, were floristically enhanced grass margins, rotational wild bird cover, methods for predation management and supplementary feeding (all over 50%). This included people not participating in AE schemes who seemed to have a desire to do more, but felt they could not.



Interreg
North Sea Region
PARTRIDGE

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EUROPEAN UNION

¹ Indicates respondents could select more than one answer

CONTRACT FLEXIBILITY

A contrast between land managers with and without AE schemes was their opinions on contract length. 60% of participants with AE schemes preferred contracts of a medium length (five to ten years) while those without selected options across the shorter side of the spectrum (annual, short and medium) rather than long or other.

PREDATION MANAGEMENT

Predator management was something that the vast majority of respondents felt should be included, with 89% of Scottish land managers indicating so. In terms of specific measures, most people (90%) thought that this should include lethal legal predator control, although a large proportion were also in favour of increasing habitat blocks to at least 1ha in size (48%) and using fencing to protect nests (57%). Having wider strips was more popular with participants with AE schemes (40%) than those without (25%).

LEGISLATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

The most common reasons Scottish people took part in AE schemes¹ was to help the environment (86%), to help the flora and fauna on their land (86%) and for shooting purposes (61%). Interestingly, 59% of people who did not participate in an AE scheme stated they established measures for free themselves, suggesting they believe there are issues with the system rather than a lack of appetite for habitat.

We also asked respondents who were not in AE schemes what could be done to encourage them to sign up¹. Over 75% of respondents indicated that more flexibility in the management of the options (e.g. ploughing dates, weed control), more options that fitted their farm, more flexible contracts and more recognition from society, would encourage them to apply.

REMUNERATION

Respondents both within and outwith AE schemes were broadly in agreement about what aspects should be covered when payment is calculated. This included the effort required (75%), habitat quality (61%) and income forgone (68%), although a higher proportion of people in AE schemes marked effort required down, suggesting that this group feel more effort is required than those without an AE scheme (53%).

Perhaps surprisingly, the majority of Scottish participants, both with and without AE schemes felt that the payment level for the wild bird seed mix option was adequate for what was needed. However, when asked, participants indicated that the payment should be in the range of £775-£875 per ha, when the actual amount was closer to £555, indicating that perhaps not all respondents were aware of the current rate.

Scottish respondents with and without AE schemes also agreed about who should pay for such measures, with the majority of both indicating that the national government should be finance them. A difference between with two was that more people with AE schemes (32%) selected the option for the private sector to pay, perhaps indicating a change in commercial interest.

¹ Indicates respondents could select more than one answer.

