Wishing you a successful lambing and calving season. Let's hope the weather improves as we enter one of Exmoor’s busiest times of the year. We are busy preparing events and peer group meetings to resume at the end of April, beginning of May.

Latest News

DEFRA TRIAL GETS UNDERWAY ON EXMOOR FARMS

25 farmers and foresters in Exmoor National Park will this month (March) begin trials of a potentially transformative approach to rewarding farmers for delivering key public benefits, such as improved soil, water and habitats.

The proposal is one of around 50 Defra Tests & Trials going on around the country to help inform the development of the government’s future Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM), due to be rolled out in 2024. A public consultation on the draft scheme is open until 5th May.

During a visit to Exmoor in 2018, former Environment Secretary Michael Gove toured two Exmoor farms and met with representatives from the Exmoor Hill Farming Network CIC (EHFN), Exmoor National Park Authority and consultancy firm Rural Focus, who co-designed the scheme.

Defra has since agreed to fund work on Exmoor to demonstrate the concept in practice, with the trial expected to run from now until early next year.

Key objectives include a thorough on the ground test to catalogue the range of ‘public goods’ that each farm could potentially deliver. This would be central to farmers being able to balance the books in terms of delivering environmental benefits alongside productivity and other strands of business.

Mapping the value of natural capital right across the National Park to maximise the delivery of public goods and work towards a system of awarding payment for different environmental outcomes will also be primary activities.

Dave Knight, EHFN Chair of Directors, said: “The Exmoor farming community has worked extremely hard to get this initiative off the ground. We believe the kind of grassroots approach Defra is trying to create will really benefit Exmoor’s farmed landscape. It will better support farmers to deliver environmental benefit alongside traditional farming practices, allowing them to play an even greater part in the delivery of public goods in the National Park.”

Robin Milton, Chair of Exmoor National Park Authority, said: “With our environment and our climate in crisis, it’s vital we do more to support and enhance the great work many of our farmers are already doing to make our National Parks greener, healthier, happier and even more beautiful places. We’re extremely grateful to Defra for the opportunity to demonstrate what our concept could deliver to help inspire greener ways of farming right across the country.”

Sponsorship Update

We are delighted to report Masons Kings will continue to sponsor the network over the forthcoming year. We look forward to continuing our relationship under the newly formed CIC.
**Rural Health and Wellbeing Information – see attached**

An information sheet is attached for anyone wishing to seek support or guidance during this time. We feel it is very important to signpost and highlight the help available to our farming communities. Please print or copies will be available from Cutcombe Market and on display if you feel anyone would benefit from speaking to any of these organisations. The sheet will be found on our new website shortly.

**Future of food and farming policy update - attached**

Defra has published a policy update providing further detail of England’s agricultural policy and how the Agriculture Bill will help achieve this. It is a really useful summary and gives an outline of the delinking of the Basic Payment Scheme, the timeline for the phasing out of BPS and a description of future funding support the government is developing around support for productivity, animal health and the Environmental Land Management scheme. The update provides a positive review of policy development and is reassuring to see the recognition of the importance of food production and the environment. The update is attached or can be downloaded from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-future-for-food-farming-and-the-environment-policy-statement-2020.

**Consultation on future schemes - attached**

Defra have recently launched a discussion document on the future development of the Environmental Land Management scheme which will replace the current Basic Payment Scheme and Countryside Stewardship as the UK transitions away from the EU’s Common Agriculture Policy. The new system will be based on the approach of ‘public money for public goods’, Defra believe this will put English farmers in the best position possible to meet the objectives of protecting the environment and producing food. The document sets out the government’s initial thinking on how these objectives can be supported through the design of a new ELM scheme. Defra are welcoming responses to a series of questions set out in the attached document or can be accessed at: https://consult.defra.gov.uk/elm/elmpolicyconsultation/. This consultation is running alongside a series of Tests and Trials which are exploring different elements of how the scheme may function, on Exmoor we are fortunate to have two projects running which many farm businesses have contributed to.

**Stewardship Annual Claims**

As we approach a busy time on Exmoor it is important to make sure you don’t miss your annual claims for either *Countryside Stewardship* (CS) or *Environmental Stewardship* (ES). The claim window is open until **15 May** (Midnight) without penalty.

- CS revenue and capital claims can be made online through logging into the RPA website or paper copies can be requested by calling Defra rural services on 03000 200301, currently the options in the phone system are 2,1,4.
  - If you are making your first CS claim check the evidence requirements for options to ensure you have ready any evidence required with your first claim. For example, low input grassland options require a soil sample submitting.
  - Within CS there are many other record keeping requirements that form part of the agreement the RPA may request these records during spot checks throughout the
year therefore it is key that you check the requirements of the options and keep these up to date.

- ES claims are paper copy and posted to you, if you have not received a claim form contact Defra rural services on 03000 200301, currently the options in the phone system are 2,1,5.

If you are completing your own claim and have any questions regarding the claims process please contact the FWAG SW office on 01823 660684 or email info@fwagsw.org.uk for more information.

The application window for Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements to start in January 2021 is open.

Successful applications will run from 1st January 2021 to 31st December 2025. If your ELS or HLS expires in 2020, or if you have land not currently in any agreement, you should consider an application this year. Agreements starting in 2021 will be covered by UK legislation not EU. This means there are some changes to the scheme including the removal of penalties for overclaiming which can result in significant reclaims of grant and also the ability to terminate your agreement early to enter the Environmental Land Management scheme when it is launched. This means if you are holding off waiting to see what future schemes might involve you now have the opportunity to put in an application in the interim without impacting future options.

What is Countryside Stewardship?

Countryside Stewardship is the Government’s agri-environment programme that offers funding in the form of annual revenue and capital grants for farmland management that:

- Protects and restores wildlife habitats
- Reduces flood risk
- Protects and improves water quality
- Preserves landscape and historic features
- Creates resources for wildlife including pollinators and farmland bird

here are several Countryside Stewardship schemes to choose from including:

- **Hedgerow and Boundaries Grant** – Two year scheme to restore hedgerows and stone walls/banks. A maximum £10,000 grant is available per holding. – **Closing date for applications 1st May 2020**

- **Higher Tier** – Five year scheme for those with a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or key habitat. Application is developed with a Natural England adviser. – **Closing date for initial applications 1st May 2020**

- **Mid Tier** - You can either apply for: – **Closing date for applications 31st July 2020**
  - A full scheme Mid Tier application which includes both land management options and capital items.
  - **Wildlife Offers** – four simplified ‘packages’ including Arable, Lowland Grazing, Mixed Farming or Upland. No capital items available, but can be applied for online.

- **Water Quality Capital Grants** – Two year agreement for water quality capital items only, with a maximum £10,000 grant available, in target catchments. – **Closing date for applications 31st July 2020**

- **Woodland Management Plans** – Open for applications all year round. Funding to produce a 10 year management plan for woodland over 3ha. Payments of £20 per ha for first 100ha and £10 per
ha over 100ha.

**Woodland Tree Health** – Open all year round. Funding to supply, plant, weed and protect young trees following felling due to a tree health issue, including Chalara dieback of ash or *Phytophthora ramorum* of larch and sweet chestnut.

**Woodland Creation Grant** – Open all year round. A standalone grant providing funding to supply, plant, weed and protect young trees, with a maximum payment of £6,800/ha. Minimum agreement area of 3ha with a minimum block size of 0.5ha which must be at least 20m in width. The minimum area is reduced to 1ha for agreements that will act as part of measures to improve water quality or reduce flooding within target areas. A maintenance grant to help with the upkeep of the new woodland of £200 per hectare for up to 10 years is also available.

The schemes are open to all farmers and landowners and can be part farm, you only need to include land which has an option on it within your application. The schemes are competitive and scored against local priorities and depend on what habitats, historic features and water bodies you have on your farm. Developing an application can be time consuming and complex; it’s best to get ahead of the game and start thinking about which options you’d like to apply for now. The array of options to apply for can be found in the grant tool finder: [https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants](https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants)

**Farm Plastic Recycling Scheme 2020 – attached poster**

The dates for the 2020 farm plastic recycling scheme have been launched collections will be at Cutcombe Market (19th May) and Blackmoor Gate (21st May) with other collections across the region during April and May, bookings can be made online or by calling FWAG on 01823 660684.

**Peer Support Groups**

*Meetings will resume end of April/ beginning of May after lambing and calving.*

**Countryfile Alert**

The Exmoor Women in Farming Group featured on Sunday night’s (8th March) Countryfile talking about rural isolation, knowledge exchange and transfer and the benefit the group has in our local farming community. If you missed the show don’t worry you can catch up on iPlayer here: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000g74c/countryfile-holnicote-estate](https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000g74c/countryfile-holnicote-estate)

**Network Officer - Out of Office**

The Network Officer will be out of the office from 17th March for around 2 weeks, returning at the beginning of April. If the matter is urgent and cannot wait until her return. Please contact Robert Deane on [robert@rural-focus.co.uk](mailto:robert@rural-focus.co.uk) or call 07736 395768. Hollie Govier (Work Placement) will be working occasionally into the office during this time too.

**Latest from NFU**

**Becoming Social Media Savvy**

Somerset NFU are working with IntroTweet, award winning social media experts, to give a workshop on social media and how to get the best out of it. Whether it is to help sell your business, a diversification project or the industry, come along to find out more. Help to tell farming’s story. Help to sell your business. Help be the voice of British farming. **Thursday 12th March 7pm with light refreshments provided NFU Office, Blackbrook Business Park, Taunton, TA1 2FU.** If you would like to attend, please let us know by calling 01392 440 700 or email [south.west@nfu.org.uk](mailto:south.west@nfu.org.uk)
Commercial Adverts

Lambing Help required

We have members looking for seasonal lambing/calving work if you have an opportunity available or would be interested in work. Please register your interest with Katherine (in strictest confidence). A £25 commercial advert fee applies to all successful vacancies fulfilled.

For further information on any of the above. Please contact Katherine Williams on 07970795808 or katherine@ehfn.org.uk

Check out our new website www.ehfn.org.uk