Farming

changing times

Introduction

How the land is managed within the Yorkshire Dales National Park, determines the landscape's conservation, and the protection of some of Britain's rarest habitats and species. Farming plays a significant role in this and farms are important rural businesses and employers that are vital to rural society. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) provides support and assists farmers in a number of ways:

- Enhancing the environmental qualities of the Yorkshire Dales National Park by working with farmers, landowners and key partners to secure good conservation management.
- Work with key partners to advise on, and signpost farmers to, the full range of rural development funding.
- Provide local farm businesses with advice and assistance to help with applying for grants and schemes.



Swaledale sheep at Hardraw, Wensleydale (©Paul Harris)

How farming has shaped today's landscape?

Agriculture has given the Yorkshire Dales landscape much of its character. The dry-stone walls, field barns and traditional farming settlements typical of the scenery, are born of a farming lifestyle which has developed over recent centuries. The 90% native deciduous woodland cover of 8,000 years ago, has been progressively cleared and now covers only 1% of the National Park (Less than 5% total woodland cover). Signs of early farming include outlines of enclosures formed by Iron Age people over 2,000 years ago. Also, terraced arable fields or strip lynchets can be seen, used since the 7th century by Anglian and then early Medieval farmers. Between the 12th and 16th centuries, monasteries with their power and wealth, established outlying farms or granges from which their vast flocks were managed. Even when land fell into the hands of private individuals owning large holdings, following the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536, wool remained the most valuable crop.

At the end of the 18th century a great revolution took place in farming. The growing urban population, fuelled by the Industrial Revolution, drove the need to increase agricultural output.

Walls were built, barns constructed and field systems developed high up on the hillsides. The old lime kilns present throughout the Dales, stand as witness to 19th century land improvement. Though small areas of land have been enclosed by walls over the centuries, the main enclosures came towards the end of the 18th century. Enclosure Acts were passed by Parliament, leading to the sub-division of meadow, pasture and much of the rough common grazing. Many small farmers and cottagers lost their common grazing rights, as they couldn't meet the statutory conditions imposed by enclosure commissioners. The field barn is one of the most characteristic features of the National Park. Most were built in the 18th and 19th centuries to serve carefully devised farming. Field barns provided winter housing for cattle. They were built next to, or in a meadow, to store hay produced for winter fodder.

Improvements in communication, roads, canals and later the railways, removed the need for communities to grow subsistence arable crops in unfavourable conditions. Grass became the main crop. Today around 40% of the National Park is enclosed farmland while over 50% is open moorland (rough grassland and heather moor). Livestock rearing, mostly sheep, but also beef cattle and dairy cows in some of the lower dales, is the mainstay of the farming economy. Valley side land is grazed throughout the year, while many of the valley bottom meadows grow hay and silage for winter livestock feed. Some sheep are farmed on the high moors, while large areas of heather moorland are managed for grouse shooting. Maintaining the landscape, wildlife and heritage value of the National Park, while managing productivity within the current economic climate, presents some complex challenges. Farming, a way of life and integral to the landscape character, are under intense pressure to change.

Go to Out of Oblivion for further historical information on Agriculture.



Dairy cattle near Settle Wensleydale (©Stephen Garnett)

Changes to Farming

Policy and Funding

Many of the pressures on farming also impact the landscape, however they are mostly beyond farmers control. Farming responds to a complexity of economic, environmental, social and cultural factors, operating within a political framework and is currently experiencing significant change. During the last 20 years, the environmental impact of land management practices has been more widely recognised, along with the onset of climate change and implications of Brexit.

The 25 Year Environment Plan produced in 2018 by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), is the UK Government's aim to be the first generation to "leave our environment in a better state than we found it". In response to this, the 10 English National Parks have devised a Delivery Plan, with 4 interconnected streams of work, Nature Recovery, Climate Leadership, Landscapes for Everyone and Sustainable Farming and Land Management. The vision for National Park's Farming and Land Management is stated as:

"National Parks in England to be celebrated as living, working landscapes where sustainable farming and land management systems deliver a wide range of public goods; farmers receive a sustainable and realistic income, and National Park Authorities play a central role in shaping those systems for a 'triple dividend': enhanced environment, improved productivity and more vibrant communities."

This will be achieved by working collaboratively with Farmers, Landowners, Defra and various other partners, to action the following: (Full list of actions can be found here)

- develop an effective Environmental Land Management scheme
- increase understanding of and buy-in to future farming policy and its focus on delivery of public goods
- Linking national priorities to the local context
- Ensuring that the current investment in agri-environment and Basic Payment is sustained but focused on 'public payments for public benefits' that support viable farm businesses.
- Developing the model of National Park Authorities as 'environmental brokers', blending public-private and green finance, contributing to resilient rural communities and economies.

Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme

There is an increasing importance to promote environmentally sustainable farming and land management practices, intensified by the UK's commitment to zero carbon emissions by 2040. Britain's formal exit from the EU has provided an opportunity to re-think how farming and land management is supported, to provide economic, social and environmental benefits for both farmers and the public. The Yorkshire Dales Farming & Land Management Forum are contributing to the development of the national ELM Scheme, through consultation responses. The YDNPA are using Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) as the locally tailored scheme that fits the management plan objective. ELM is the governments flag ship agri-environment scheme to replace the current schemes and be the post-Brexit scheme for land management. Current agri-environment schemes and grants, such as the Countryside Stewardship, are critical for the survival of many farms in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. They provide financial incentives for farmers and land managers to farm using practices that have a positive impact on biodiversity, the landscape, water, air and soil quality. However, the change in subsidy payments and the development of new post Brexit grant schemes like ELM, will also change how farming is funded. To give farmers and land managers time to adapt, ELM will be implemented over a 7-year transition period to ensure this is financially viable.

Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) is a dedicated grant programme for farmers and land managers in National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The FiPL Programme is part of the government's Agriculture Transition Plan. It will enable farmers and land managers to apply for grants to support projects that will enable them to be ready for the move to the Environmental Land Management scheme in 2024. The programme is delivered by each protected landscape with outcomes that reflect the protected landscapes objectives within their Management Plans. Farmers are encouraged to submit project ideas that

help them mitigate climate change, enhance nature, enhance the visiting publics enjoyment of the area and to support the historic environment and sustainable farm businesses. For the Yorkshire Dales National Park this will enhance the barns and walled landscape, benefit special habitats like hay meadows, enhance habitats for species such as the curlew and provide new diversification opportunities for farm businesses.

Payment by Results/Outcomes

There is strong support amongst farmers and conservation groups to develop a new, more collaborative approach that rewards farmers for the environmental outcomes or results environmental outcomes or results they deliver rather than for following detailed prescriptions. For example, rewarding farms by paying them more if they increase the diversity of wildflowers in their hay meadows. Defra have been funding a trial (RBAPS , originally funded by the EU) with Wensleydale farmers to understand how environmental benefits and costs work in practice. Similar pilot schemes have also been investigated for flood management by National Trust farm tenants.

Supporting Sustainable Farming Businesses and Diversification

The YDNPA is supporting farms to ensure they are sustainable businesses. 'High-nature value' farming is critical to the long-term well-being of the National Park's special qualities and to achieve this it is essential that farms are not running at a loss or that staff are not working below minimum wage (see objective in the National Park Management Plan). Not only is there a requirement to reform agri-environment support, core business profitability needs to be improved to increase business margins, rather than just business turnover. In addition to this, Planning policy in the Yorkshire Dales Local plan is supportive of appropriate business innovations and developments, providing opportunities for non-farming enterprises. For example, tourism ventures can have a really positive impact to a farms finances and the wider rural economy.



A working farm benefiting from the tourism trade (©YDNPA)

Changing Land Use

Changes in policy, funding and strategy have provided farmers and land owners financial support to bring environmental benefits to their land. Below are some of the ways in which farms and the environment are benefitting from this.

Peatlands

As farming intensified, wetter marginal land on the higher ground was drained or 'gripped' for irrigation; however, this contributed to significant degrading of peatland. Healthy peat bog is a unique habitat, home to a rich biodiversity of species and it is now understood to be essential for carbon sequestration.

Restoring peat bogs will play an important role in the UK reaching its net zero emissions target by 2040. The YDNPA has been working with other partners to support the Yorkshire Peat Partnership to work with land owners to restore damaged peat bogs. Through sustainable livestock grazing, prevention of erosion and managing wildfire risk, farmers are enhancing the biodiversity of peatlands, benefitting carbon sequestration, whilst producing high quality lamb and beef.

Trees and Woodland

Farmers are being given greater access to funding to support the plantation of new woodland and manage existing woodland. The Dales Woodland Strategy, devised by the Dales Woodland Forum, is a partnership of landowners, charities and public bodies and sets an ambition to enhance the landscape by creating 6,000 ha of woodland habitat in the Yorkshire Dales National Park by 2030.

Wildlife

The YDNPA is working with farmers and landowners to achieve and maintain stable or increasing populations for 90% of priority species by 2026. Many of the National Park's plants and animals are nationally important, therefore financial incentives are being developed to improve the management of habitats, such as hay meadows and limestone grasslands, so that wildlife can thrive.



Hay meadow (©John Akrigg)

Flood Management

Flood Management has been trialled with a number of National Trust farm tenants National Trust farm tenants to understand how it will be practical and financially viable for farmers to support this through the ELM scheme. A key element of the scheme is to provide 'public funding for public goods', in this case supporting farmers to assist in flood management would be beneficial in reducing the damage and disruption flooding causes to communities and services. Flooding can be managed by measures such as, better soil management to reduce soil compaction, planting of

‘buffer strips’ by watercourses, hedgerows, or trees blocking moorland grips re-meandering and reconnecting a river to its floodplain. The trial was beneficial in understanding how specific measures can be integrated into a farms current practices, without hindering the financial viability of their business and productivity of their land.

Hill Farming Terms

Ewe: Adult female sheep
Tup, or ram: Adult male sheep, used for breeding
Hogg: A spring born lamb, until first shearing from 8 to14 months
Meadow: Grassland, cut for hay or silage
Pasture: Grazing land
Hay: Cut grass, dried and stored for animal feed
Silage: Cut grass, mixed with additives and stored moist for animal feed

The Farming Year

April: Lambing time. Hoggs return from winter pasture.
May: Ewes and lambs are moved to higher pasture. Cattle begin calving and are turned out to grazing. Meadows are muck spread or fertilised.
June: Silage is cut and baled for winter feed. Hoggs are sheared.
July: Ewes are sheared and dipped to kill parasites. Wild flower meadows are at their best. Hay time.
August: Second silage cut is taken where possible. Walling repairs begin. Lambs separated from ewes and bulls put with
cows. Traditional agricultural shows take place eg Kilnsey .
Sept/Oct: Ewes are dipped for sale at autumn markets eg Hawes. Breeding and fatstock lambs and suckler calves are sold. Autumn calving takes place. Walling continues.
Nov: Tupping time. Hoggs are sent away for winter. Cattle are housed for the winter. Winter muck spreading.
Dec: Indoor maintenance and repairs. Cattle vaccinations (pneumonia).
Jan/Feb: Sheep are brought down to lower fields during snow. Sheep are scanned and those with twins are kept housed.
March: Increase in care needed for spring calving cattle and ewes in lamb. Preparation for lambing. Fertiliser dressing for meadows.