

UTASS Briefing: 24th January 2025



Agricultural Transition Plan (ELM) Update

The delivery of the Agricultural Transition Plan has, like HS2 and many other Government projects, suffered from serious delays in delivery. This has been particularly felt by farmers that expected to be able to access new environmental schemes like SFI to be able to compensate for the reduction in BPS as it is phased out.

The Government has always said that SFI should not be seen as a replacement for BPS but support for a new more sustainable direction for farming by encouraging and rewarding good soil, air water and bio-diversity management. However, despite this and ministerial protestations that food production is of paramount importance, for many tenant upland farmers it is the only potential option to replace the loss of BPS. This has become even more important with the announcement in the last budget that for the first £30,000 delinked payments would be reduced by 76% with no payments for any portion of the delinked payment over £30,000.

In the Durham Dales many farmers have been in 10-year HLS schemes most of which have been extended to 2028. HLS claimants have not benefitted from the recent Countryside Stewardship (CS) payment reviews and increases. This has made CS Higher Tier look much more attractive but, at the moment, there is not a process for HLS agreement holders to move to CS.

Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier

Defra have announced that CS Higher Tier should open in the summer for applications through an online portal as part of Rural Payments. A limited number of farmers have already been invited to apply. Defra are planning to announce a process for other interested farmers to register their interest in February 2025.

Many farmers want to plan ahead and prepare their businesses for the end of direct payments. As explained above many cannot apply to join either the Expanded SFI, which includes the old CS Mid-Tier, or CS Higher Tier. The situation has not been helped by the sudden closing of the CS capital grants scheme apart from grants for preparatory surveys for CS Higher Tier schemes.

It is extremely frustrating but, at the moment, there is little farmers can actively do in regard to the new schemes proposed in the Agricultural Transition Plan to fill the income deficit left by phasing out BPS.

For further information and assistance please contact UTASS on 01833 641010.