



UK Arable industry win-win experience on business and biodiversity

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Origins of the Voluntary Initiative (VI)

- Established 2001 by industry (Farming Unions, Crop Protection Association, Contractors association, Land Owners)
- Key Message is Promotion of Best Practice in Pesticide Use
- Broad level of support within industry and Government and now widely accepted on farm
- Cost for first 5 years estimated at £45-47 million



Broad participation is a key factor in the success

Steering Group Members

- Agricultural Engineers Association
- Assured Food Standards
- Agricultural Industries Confederation
- Association of Independent Crop Consultants
- BASIS
- Country and Landowners Business Association
- Crop Protection Association
- Department of Trade and Industry
- Devolved Government Representatives
- Environment Agency/SEPA
- Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
- Farming Unions
- Food Standards Agency
- Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF)
- Natural England
- National Association of Agricultural Contractors
- National Proficiency Tests Council
- Pesticide Safety Directorate
- PAN-UK
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Water UK



Major Activities - farmers

- CPD scheme for spray operators (NRoSO), 22,400 members of which over 19,000 are active members
- Sprayer Tested annually under NSTS, 89% of arable area tested this year
- Completion of a Crop Protection Management Plan – over 1.5 million hectares now covered
- Complying with best practice especially for insecticide use, water protection and application.



Successes of the VI

- Improved awareness amongst farmers
- Nationwide improved surface water quality with respect to pesticides. 19% reduction overall. Greater reductions of pesticide levels in water, of up to 60%, in pilot catchments showing benefit of interaction but with large variability in results and uptake
- Development of risk assessment tools and decision trees.
- Measurable biodiversity benefits e.g SAFFIE.
- BETA training for agronomists, >800 qualified



Voluntary measures work

- Widespread adoption on farm
- Widespread industry support including NGO's
- Measurable benefits
- Government support



SAFFIE – Sustainable Arable Farming for an Improved Environment

- Sustainable Arable Link programme, funded by Government and commercial and non-commercial organisations
- 5 year project
- Co-operation between a range of partners including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Crop Protection Association and the Voluntary Initiative.



SAFFIE – Enhancing arable biodiversity

- Arable farmland accounts for over 20 % of the UK land area and is a key habitat for biodiversity
- Winter cereals occupy almost half of arable land
- The SAFFIE project identified 6 practical ways in which farmers can enhance arable biodiversity
- Most arable farmers can adopt some common practices if given the right signals, although different solutions are required for different species



SAFFIE – Enhancing arable biodiversity

- Skylark plots increase chick numbers by up to 50 %
 - Leaving small, unsown areas in winter cereals improves foraging access for adult birds, increasing chick survival.
 - Currently an option in the Environmental Stewardship, the England agri-environment scheme





SAFFIE – Enhancing arable biodiversity

- Wild flowers in field margins increase beneficial insects by up to 80 %
 - Adding selected wild flowers to grass mixtures encourages a range of insects, including beetles, butterflies and bumblebees. Adding flowers costs up to £1000 / ha (1440 Euros / ha).
 - Currently an option in the Environmental Stewardship, the England agri-environment scheme





SAFFIE – Enhancing arable biodiversity

- Opening up grass margins improves farmland biodiversity
 - Scarification with a power harrow in March / April opens up margins. Bare ground encouraged beetles, annual wild flowers and bird access.



Environmental Stewardship – Entry Level Scheme (ELS)

- 5 year agreement, open to all farmers
- Farmers have to meet a points target
- Options include
 - 2m (or 4m or 6m) buffer strips on cultivated land / grassland
 - over-wintered stubbles; beetle banks; skylark plots; wild flower mixes in field margins; mixed stocking
 - hedgerow management; stone wall maintenance.





Environmental Stewardship – High Level Scheme

- 10 year agreement and aims to deliver significant environmental benefits
- Capital works grants available
- Options to be prioritised on farm type and characteristics of the area but could include
 - Hedgerow maintenance of high environmental value; Enhanced wild bird seed mix plots; Maintenance, restoration or creation of reedbeds and fens; Maintenance, restoration or creation of species-rich, semi-natural grassland.



Environmental Stewardship

- Rural Developed Programme funded agri-environment schemes in England.
- Launched in March 2005
- Two scheme tiers – Entry Level and High Level. Also Organic Entry Level (OELS)
- There are approximately 29,600 ELS and OELS agreements covering 4.3 million hectares (nearly 50% of agricultural land in England). There are more than 1,500 HLS agreements covering more than 110,000 hectares.