

Result Based Agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBAPS) pilots

Kirsten Brewster (Scottish Natural Heritage) and Teyl de Bordes (Whitmuir Estate)

31 May 2018

"Results-based" is a term used to refer to agri-environment type schemes where farmers and land managers are paid for delivering an environmental result or outcome, e.g. number of breeding birds, or number of plant species in grasslands, with the flexibility to choose the management required to achieve the desired result.

All agri-environment schemes are of course designed to deliver environmental results. However, what distinguishes a 'pure' results-based scheme, is that payments are only made where a result is achieved, making a direct link between the payment and the achievement of defined biodiversity outcomes (or other environmental results) on the ground. Focusing payments on achieving results encourages farmers to use their knowledge and experience to decide how to manage the land in a way that benefits biodiversity alongside farming operations. In so doing, results-based payment schemes may lead to an enhanced awareness of the importance of biodiversity conservation and protecting environmental resources as part of the agriculture system.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps/articles/1_en.htm

There are many pilots taking place throughout Europe, currently there is no pilot in Scotland. Click on the below link to view a map with each pilot;

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps/fiche/map_en.htm

Interesting examples of RBAPS from Europe:

The Netherlands

The Netherlands has a strong tradition of agri-environment cooperation, but in the Rural Development Programme for 2014-20, the collaborative system has been taken to a new level. All agri-environment support is now being delivered via cooperatives. The AECS scheme is administered by 40 collectives covering the whole country. These certified collectives manage the application process and implementation of AEC measures. In one collective in Groningen 85% of farmers participate; for some other collectives uptake is lower. It is a 'hybrid system', not based on paying for 'results' but rather focused on the activities that will benefit the relevant local species (ie delayed mowing , etc.), relying on an adaptive management approach, so a field coordinator will advise farmers and some of the management can be changed annually. The current system builds on earlier schemes in The Netherlands dealing with the plight of waders in an attempt to halt the serious decline of wading bird numbers. As with schemes in most countries the success of the scheme is often linked to how attractive the payment rates are perceived to be.

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps/articles/3_en.htm

Romania

The Romanian project is run by Fundația ADEPT, a biodiversity conservation and rural development NGO. ADEPT has been working to protect the nature-rich, farmed landscapes of Transylvania and to support the traditional farming communities who have created them over centuries and who maintain them today.

<https://fundatia-adept.org/projects/rbaps-results-based-payments-for-biodiversity/>

The Romanian project addresses grasslands – specifically the dry permanent grasslands of hay meadow and pasture of Transylvania which have some of the highest floristic diversity recorded anywhere in the world and support substantial populations of rare vertebrate and invertebrate fauna. These grasslands are threatened by overgrazing in easily accessible sites and abandonment.

The project is designed to help the continuation or re-establishment of grassland management that will bring these habitats under proper long term management regimes. This “results-based” agri-environment scheme is targeted at High Nature Value hay meadows. The scheme rewards practical management that produces good quality hay and protects wild species. Instead of paying according to management prescriptions as in typical agri-environment schemes, the scheme pays for the “result”: species-rich meadows with certain plant species being measured indicators of successful outcomes. This means that farmers have the freedom to manage their meadows according to local conditions and weather, instead of having to follow precise mowing dates and other rules which do not take account of local conditions, and differences in weather from year to year. Some of the lessons of the meadow management with low impact machinery are probably transferable to some Scottish crofts and species rich grassland on the Islands of Scotland.

Austria - High Nature Value

More info: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/rbaps/articles/7_en.htm

The ‘results-based nature conservation plan’ targets High Nature Value (HNV) farmland all over Austria. In the alpine region this is mainly grassland (e.g. extensive meadows or alpine grazing land). In the foothills of the alps and the Pannonian basin arable land, vineyards and traditional orchards are also included.

There are no specific management requirements for the farmers who take part in the results-based nature conservation plan. The aim is that farmers deliver the results that have been defined for every parcel that is included in the ENP. Additionally, farmers have to document their management activities and progress towards developing the species and habitats identified as well as meeting the defined control criteria.

The ENP targets farmers who are already experienced in the management of HNV farmland, for example those taking part in biodiversity-monitoring projects, managing farm land in nature conservation areas, etc. Those farmers who are interested in applying for the scheme have to meet the eligibility criteria for the Austrian agri-environment programme. For the pilot scheme an application must be made by farmers in the first year of their participation under the agri-environmental payment system and the farmer’s commitment to the scheme is for a minimum of 5 years.

Both specific and general results are defined at the parcel level for each farm. General results define the biodiversity results that are expected at the end of the scheme, with specific results focused on things that can be monitored. General results are set in accordance with the local conservation objectives, habitats and species present in the area, such as increase of *breeding Whinchat (Saxicola rubetra)* numbers from 2 up to 5 pairs.

In addition to the results for each parcel, the scheme adviser defines a number (around three) of specific control criteria during the first field visit to each farm. These criteria serve to indicate potential unfavourable developments on parcels that would prevent the required results from being achieved. The control criteria act as indicators for the paying agency and farmers who do not meet the control criteria are obliged to refund parts of the payments.

Farmers are responsible for filling out a 'Farmers' Logbook'; these are then evaluated by the scheme experts. For the duration of the scheme, farmers are responsible for monitoring results and control criteria on a yearly basis and are subject to a midterm-evaluation of the scheme to see if the delivery of results is progressing according to plan. The documentation of results and activities will be used to help evaluate the success of the results-based nature conservation plan pilot and a number of monitoring processes are in place throughout the scheme both for evaluation purposes as well as to help farmers implement the scheme.

Sweden- conservation performance payment scheme for Lynx and Wolverine

The Swedish conservation performance payment scheme for Lynx (*Lynx lynx*) and Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) offspring was first introduced in 1996 with modifications made in 2000. It is targeted at areas of Sami reindeer herding in the north of Sweden - typically wildland, forest and tundra and has been taken up widely across the 51 Sami communities.

The objective of this scheme is the protection and preservation of two large carnivores, native to Swedish Lapland. The Lynx and Wolverine are endangered carnivores on the World Conservation Union Red List, both at risk of habitat loss and illegal hunting.

Payments are made according to the number of Lynx and Wolverine offspring observed each year as a proxy for the total population. The annual target is to record 90 Wolverine offspring and 80 Lynx offspring which are thought to indicate overall populations of around 400 of each species. The level of payment is determined according to the cost of the damage that each Lynx or Wolverine offspring is expected to cause throughout their lifetime.

The payment level in 2007 for each certified Lynx and Wolverine offspring was SEK200,000 (~€22,045). Monitoring of the carnivore populations is a complex process, taking place primarily during the snowy season and involving a trained representative from the Sami village and a representative from the managing authority (to verify results). In addition, payments can be made for the regular and occasional occurrence of lone Wolverines (SEK 70,000 [~€7,716]) and Lynx (SEK 35,000[~€3,858]). The payments are made to the Sami villages as a common pool resource to be distributed as they see fit. In many cases the herders have a say in how the money is distributed but not always. Until 2000 there was a cap on the total amount of money that was to be spent on

performance payments irrespective of the number of offspring. The level of payment is determined according to the financial damage that each animal is expected to cause throughout its lifetime.

The payments are financed publically by the Swedish government and managed by the Swedish Environmental Agency - not by the Swedish Board of Agriculture (which manages agri-environment payments).

There is relatively limited empirical evidence to suggest whether the scheme has had a successful impact on species numbers. However, both Lynx and Wolverine populations have increased and it is thought that this is at least in part due to the scheme. A key success factor in the scheme has been improved relationships between officials and the Sami community. However, challenges still remain around what are perceived to be onerous monitoring requirements and insufficient payment levels.

Burren- Ireland <http://burrenprogramme.com/>

The Burren is an area in the west of Ireland that straddles the counties of Clare and Galway. The area is extremely rich in semi-natural habitats shaped by centuries of traditional farming with livestock, including large expanses of common grazing land. Much of the area is designated under Natura 2000. By the 1990s the traditional farming system had evolved with a shift to intensive silage production and less use of the semi-natural common grazings, as a result habitat quality had started to decline. BFCP works with farmers to develop and promote a model of conservation farming for the Burren.

From the research and development phase it was clear that a combined or hybrid approach was necessary: the results-based payment provides an essential incentive to on-going grassland management under a format that allows farmers to make their own decisions on how to achieve conservation results and through a transparent and 'meritocratic' payment system; but to continue with their farming system, many farmers also need the support for capital improvements provided by the management-based payments for clearing scrub, repairing walls, providing water and improving on-site access. The programme consists of three Measures. Under Measure 1 (Production of species-rich limestone grassland) the payments are based on the results achieved in terms of grassland condition. Advisors may give some guidance on how to achieve the desired results. Measure 2 includes management-based elements, such as payments for scrub removal, which are designed to support Measure 1 objectives; Measure 3 provides area payments for designated habitats.

The scheme has not been subject to any formal ecological monitoring or evaluation. Most farmers see the scheme as self-monitoring in the sense that they monitor habitat condition as part of the scoring process. The results of this monitoring show a gradual increase in habitat quality over time.

Annual checks take place on all 160 farms during which around 1000 fields are assessed for Measure 1 payment. The initial assessments are conducted by trained farm advisors (11 in total, paid for by the farmer) and are repeated annually. Farmers themselves have been trained to apply the scoring system and are encouraged to 'challenge' allocated scores – only a handful of farmers have chosen to do so thus far and in all cases they have been satisfied with the explanation given for their score.

The BFCP team independently review all Field Scores as part of their farm plan checks. This usually entails a site visit. In some cases, all fields are scored again by BFCP staff, in other cases only fields which show a change in score are checked. Fields which change by 2 or more scores are always checked. In addition to the above, DAFM (funders) officials conduct a 5% whole farm check annually.

England

Probably the most relevant to us in Scotland are the trials running in England at the moment. The EU Directorate General awarded a 3-year grant to Natural England and the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) in 2016 to jointly run a pilot study, known as the Results-Based Agri-environment Payment Scheme. The project has two main projects; both grassland trials on 153 ha breeding wader land and 36 ha species rich grassland and arable trials covering 25 ha of winter bird food and 17 ha pollen and nectar plots.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/results-based-agri-environment-payment-scheme-rbaps-pilot-study-in-england>

Future considerations

This document just gives a brief glimpse of the RBAPS trials that are taking or have taken place throughout Europe. A recent poll of 1,000 Scots conducted on behalf of Scottish Environment LINK revealed overwhelming public support in favour of a farm subsidy system that delivers for the environment. 77% of respondents saying they would like to see farm support be conditional to land managers showing that they are supporting wildlife and are reducing climate impacts. Result Based Payment schemes provide a novel approach to consider as part of the shape of future agri-environment schemes. They offer an opportunity for farmers and land managers to provide the evidence that they are making a difference to the biodiversity and nature on their holdings, within a system that is more flexible and less prescriptive allowing them to manage the land they know so well.

However, as with other approaches, RBAPS carry their own risks and challenges and may not always be the most practical approach for all situations and in all localities. However a simpler, locally accountable and more integrated approach to agri-environment policy that is driven by results and evidence of what works encourages new thinking and helps to build trust and cooperation, does seem to have much to offer.

**A lot of this information has been lifted from the websites of the various schemes. We would encourage you to follow the links in this document to get an even better understanding of them and view more detailed information.*