



The case for including payments for public engagement in the Environmental Land Management Schemes (ELMS)

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"No one will protect what they don't care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced."

Sir David Attenborough

"It is in everyone's interest to provide opportunities for ALL children to connect with farming, the countryside and where their food comes from, so they can become active participants not simply passive consumers."

Nina Bell, The Country Trust

Public engagement is essential to the success of Environmental Land Management (ELM) and will amplify the impact of the ELM budget significantly. As they currently stand, the incentives outlined in the ELM schemes are unlikely to have the desired impact without winning the hearts and minds of people across society by helping them to understand their role in nature recovery, climate change mitigation and how our food choices shape the planet.

There is a strong political, financial and societal case for incentivising farmers and land managers to share their knowledge, passion and skills and for access to remain central to ELM schemes. However, if public engagement and education access payments are not fully accessible to *all* farmers across the country, we would effectively be closing the door on hundreds of thousands of children in urban areas who would benefit most from farmers welcoming them onto their farms and into the countryside.

For benefits to materialise it is therefore essential that public engagement is included in the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) which will be open to *all* farmers, as well as Local Nature Recovery (LNR) and Landscape Recovery (LR) which will only be available for farmers in priority areas.





Image credit: The Country Trust

1. The Political Case

"We need to put people, nature and climate at the core of our food systems. The UK government is leading the way through our new agricultural system in England, which will incentivise farmers to farm more sustainably, create space for nature on their land and reduce carbon emissions." George Eustice (November 2021)

Public engagement is central to the 25 Year Environment Plan which the Government is obliged to implement under the *Environment Act 2021*. Chapter 3 of this plan requires Defra to 'encourage children to be close to nature, in and out of school, with particular focus on disadvantaged areas'.

Public engagement was also identified as one of the Public Goods outlined in the *Agriculture Act 2020* that DEFRA has committed to delivering through the new Environmental Land Management Scheme. *Clause 1(1)(b)* of the *Agriculture Act* allows payment for educational infrastructure to ensure our farmers have the right facilities to host farm visits and increase wider awareness among the public, and especially school pupils, about the crucial role our farmers play in maintaining our countryside and producing the food we eat.

2. The Financial Case

An engaged public, who understand the environmental impact of their food choices, are more likely to steer the market to support good environmental land management. Such citizen support translated into market support will amplify and reinforce the policy mechanism of ELM. The budget for ELM (£3 billion) alone is unlikely to be sufficient to counteract the negative environmental impacts of the market.

For a relatively modest spend on public engagement in ELM, there is potential to make a big difference. Influencing children and adults from all backgrounds to support the kind of farming systems that deliver public goods such as climate change mitigation, nature recovery and clean air and water will be key to the success of ELM. The need to ensure urban and peri-urban farms can survive and thrive under the new regime should be an additional goal given their proximity to large public audiences and ease of access.

3. Levelling Up

If this Government is serious about “levelling up” it must ensure the change from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) to the ELM Scheme is going to benefit all of the public. There is no better way to demonstrate that public money really is being spent on public goods than to encourage people to access farms, to learn about how their food is produced and to enjoy the biodiversity, clean water and air that ELM will deliver. Farmers cannot be expected to host such visits without support for their time, and the provision and maintenance of facilities and interpretation materials. There is a fundamental inequality in access to the land and countryside that must change so we can all play our part in creating a better environment for the next generation

Education, Training and Recruitment to tackle Climate Change

- Schools are keen to enable their pupils to learn about farming and food production, and currently there are insufficient farmers willing to host such visits. Real world, real place learning is powerful for both children and adults. At a time when concerns about child health, access to the outdoors and food security are at an all-time high, and there is so much conflicting information about how our food is and should be produced, we must ensure the relationship between farmers and schools grows and that this growth is supported by a firm foundation within government.
- Well-organised visits to sustainable farms and market gardens could attract and enthuse a new generation to work in agriculture, horticulture and forestry. The UK Government must invest in the long-term recruitment and training of people with skills for land based work. School trips, open days, work experience and volunteering are a vital first step along this road, more likely to change the culture around land work than any other form of public relations.
- Public engagement will lay the foundations for “agricultural literacy”, enabling children, young adults and career changers to identify the opportunities for careers and lifestyle choices that will mitigate and adapt to climate change, rather than exacerbating it.

Health

- While Covid 19 puts the NHS in acute danger of being overwhelmed, it is the high cost of chronic illness such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity and poor mental health that represents a long term threat to our health and social care system and future prosperity.
- Children are eating fewer vegetables, taking less exercise and are experiencing more emotional difficulties than ever before.¹ Spending time outside in nature has proven physical and mental health benefits. It has been shown that people who visit farms where their food is produced are more likely to make healthy food choices because they have had an opportunity to understand where their food comes from and make connections between how their food is produced and what they eat.

4. Sample Public Engagement options for SFI, LNR and LR

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One option is that the existing public engagement options in Countryside Stewardship could roll over into new schemes, or new standards could be adopted as suggested below.

Option 1

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)

A basic public engagement and access standard, open to all farmers, growers and foresters. For example:

- 4 x 2 hour school visits per year (£1250)
- 1 x open day for the general public with at least 30 participants (£500)
- Incentives for the maintenance of footpaths and interpretation boards to help walkers understand the crops and wildlife management on the farm.

Local Nature Recovery (LNR)

The LNR should set priority peri-urban areas around cities with deprived communities and focus LNR public engagement spending on a programme of school visits, open days, volunteering and social prescribing, with a co-ordinator who can do outreach to schools, and signpost farmers towards training and resources necessary for public engagement.

It would be ideal to start with 10 pilot areas.

It would be ideal to also pilot the development of some Community Supported Agriculture schemes as a method of facilitating public engagement.

Incentives for permissive access should be included in LNR, allowing farmers and land managers to create new footpaths and other routes where there is a local demand for them. This could help to provide more opportunities for public access closer to people's homes.

Landscape Recovery (LR)

Landscape Recovery Projects should also include optional fully costed incentives for the creation and maintenance of permissive footpaths and interpretation boards in order to encourage public access.

In the social impact assessment of these projects, priority should be given to projects which are proactive in involving the local community and those which enable access for under-served communities, who have limited access to open green spaces on a regular basis. Collaborative projects should also be piloted to encourage groups of farmers to run programmes of open days.



Option 2

Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)

The SFI should include an access standard which pays £309 per visit with the following requirements:

- Minimum of 4 visits per year, 2 hours each visit, at least 100 participants overall
- Farmers should have CEVAS (Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme) training (or equivalent) or a track record of delivering educational visits, with all the basic requirements.
- Farmers should report back annually on the number of visits, numbers of individuals engaged and details of schools or partners.

Local Nature Recovery (LNR)

The LNR should include an access standard which pays £309 per visit with the following requirements:

- Minimum of 8 visits per year, 4 hours each visit, at least 200 participants overall
- Farmers should have CEVAS trained (or equivalent) or a track record of delivering educational visits, with all the basic requirements.
- Farmers should seek input from expert educational charities to ensure that visits are designed with outcomes in mind and pre-visit activities and information are provided (for example Country Trust [Farm Discovery](#).)
- Incentives for working with and supporting underserved communities.
- LNR should include options to create permissive access routes; capital payments to improve access infrastructure (e.g. pathways, stiles, footbridges) and options for signage and interpretation boards. This investment would allow farmers and land managers to create, upgrade and maintain public access routes and improve the public's ability to enjoy and understand the countryside.

Landscape Recovery (LR)

The LR should include an access standard which pays £309 per visit with the following requirements:

- Minimum of 8 visits per year, 4 hours each visit.
- Landowners should have CEVAS trained (or equivalent) or a track record of delivering educational visits, with all the basic requirements.
- Landowners should seek input from expert educational charities to ensure that visits are designed with outcomes in mind and pre-visit activities and information are provided (see [here](#) for example).
- Incentives for working with and supporting underserved communities.
- Landowners should seek to create links with other farms, landowners and urban growing projects.



Full List of Signatories

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Landworkers' Alliance

Country Trust

Sustain

Country Land and Business Association

CSA Network

The Harmony Project

Real Farming Trust

National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs (NFYFC)

Food Ethics Council

Sustainable Food Trust

Pasture For Life

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