



Inclusive design of post-Brexit Agri-Environmental policy: Identifying and engaging the 'Harder to Reach' stakeholders

An Empirical Study

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Executive Summary

With the departure of the UK from the EU and the Common Agricultural Policy, this is a time of great change for agriculture, society, and the environment. The concurrent COVID-19 pandemic brings with it unprecedented challenges for government. Brexit is will be a process of transition, and so too will be the economic and societal recovery from COVID-19. There is a strong desire from government and arms-length bodies (ALBs) for the new Environmental Land Management scheme (ELM) to be positively transformative, and potential for it to benefit farmers, land managers, communities, and the environment. But to provide public goods on private land - one of its key objectives - ELM is dependent upon the collaboration of the people that own and manage that land. Defra has committed to co-designing ELM with farmers and other land managers: learning “*from those people who know best*”¹ gives the greatest chance of policy success.

The majority of farmers and land managers do not directly engage with policy development, and this represents a risk to successful ELM design and delivery. They are, in effect, ‘harder to reach’ (hereafter referred to as HTR). Ensuring that HTR farmers and land managers are adequately and accurately represented in the co-design of ELM will increase effective delivery. The diversity of UK farming and land management is vast, encompassing different skills and levels of economic and social capital, as well as different histories, cultures, and landscapes. Any new agri-environment scheme (hereafter referred to as AES) aspiring to wide reach and uptake must take that into account.

This project was funded by Research England for activities to support evidence-based policy making. It sits within the broader ESRC-funded project ‘Agri-Environmental Governance Post-Brexit: Co-Production of Policy Frameworks’(ES/S007830/1), a collaboration between the Universities of Sheffield and Reading. From an initial assessment and through discussions with Defra, we identified a gap in research and policy understandings around HTR stakeholders and aimed to research how this could affect the co-design and implementation of ELM. The following research aims for the HTR project which are formed from both the

¹ Defra, 2020:5

evidence review report (undertaken by Lyon *et al.*, 2020) and the empirical research within this report include:

- Identify and locate HTR stakeholders in the context of ELM
- Understand why they are HTR and what the barriers to their engagement are
- Identify methods and strategies that could be employed to help overcome these barriers and ensure that the views, experiences, needs and responses of those who are HTR are represented in research and policy engagement around agri-environment
- Support policy-makers in Defra in utilising this research to inform their development of the ELM policy and maximising value for money in the delivery of public goods

At the centre of the project were two pieces of qualitative research included within this report: a series of expert interviews with practitioners² who engage on a regular basis with HTR farmers; and a planned series of workshops to reveal the tacit understanding of practitioners and HTR farmers (other land managers not specifically discussed in empirical work). The research was conceived and commenced before the COVID-19 pandemic reached the UK. As well as affecting the practicalities of planned research activities (only one workshop was held, virtually), the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us to rethink how engagement and co-design are done. Writing up the findings from our research in this context has given us an opportunity to respond to the current situation via recommendations that we consider all the more pressing as a result.

It is clear that: there is no single definition of HTR farmers; whilst they are not a homogenous group (encompassing areas including pig, poultry, horticulture and contract farming) and there will be multiple exceptions, some key potential indicator characteristics were identified by respondents; the term ‘HTR’ is a subjective one; the estimates - whilst variable - of the number of those that are HTR suggests that the proportion may be very high. There is currently no idea of the scale and distribution of HTR farmers and land managers over time and place, nor their strategic significance to achieving public goods and value for money. Existing and novel

² These were drawn from government departments, arms-length bodies, farmer welfare charities, farmer facilitation groups, farmer-run networks, agricultural consultancy firms, national banks and farmers.

datasets could be used here to gain a more detailed understanding of this and of successes and failures of past AES.

Within this report, the key findings begin by seeking to address this and outlining some of the factors, according to our respondents, that make some farmers HTR. These factors include social, demographic, financial, geographic, farming type and size, skills, way of life, and policy. Learning from these and from expertise across NGOs will help to identify effective opportunities for developing and integrating engagement in the co-design of ELM. A set of characteristics was developed, that may be useful for policy makers or others, to better understand the perspectives of different groups in order to better engage them.

The report offers evidence as to why co-design should involve working with intermediaries, and we draw a characterisation, suggestions of who these intermediaries might be and discuss potential ‘champions’, in the co-design and delivery of ELM. Such issues are central to the process of inclusive co-design and to cultures of collaboration (some of which exist already) with and between farmers and land managers. Consideration is made of those who may choose to leave the agricultural industry, and the impact of this in human and policy terms. The report takes into account respondents’ reporting of historical relationships between HTR farmers and government and emphasises the need to begin ELM co-design from that basis. It then outlines the importance of understanding this group, in both social and ecological terms. Drawing again from respondents, it then offers a set of strategies and methods that have proved useful in engaging HTR farmers. These come together in a series of eight key recommendations that were developed from this research and helped to frame the structure of this report. These recommendations are summarised in the following section.

Recommendations

1. Assess the percentage of farmers and land managers that are HTR and develop detailed and verified understanding of who they are, why they are HTR and what the social and environmental impacts of their non-engagement are.
2. Assess the strategic environmental significance of HTR farmers' and land managers' land, using geocoding and socio-ecological mapping.
3. Develop specific methods and strategies for engaging different HTR groups in ELM, based upon 'what works' from this research and to avoid repeating mistakes of previous AES.
4. Extend the scope of 'co-designing with participants in mind' by working with intermediary organisations who are in tune or more engaged with HTR farmers and land managers.
5. Ensure ELM co-design is simple and easily accessible and takes into account longstanding cultures of distrust and alienation between HTR farmers and land managers and Defra.
6. Understand that many farmers and land managers do not leave the industry without substantial self-harm, but for those that do, ensure that ELM co-design includes consultation, communication, and financial and personal support.
7. Ensure transitions to the new scheme are well-managed
8. Extend aspects of co-design to take a more holistic view of sustainable rural livelihoods, including the impact on communities, economies, landscape, and tourism.

Responding to the current global and national situation, the recommendations seek to acknowledge and address the factors that make people HTR. These include entrenched cultures of distrust between farmers and land managers and government³. The causes for these are manifold, such as failed past AES, general suspicion of government and regulatory bodies,

³ Hall, J. & Pretty, J., 2008.

and the broader politics of the urban-rural dynamic⁴. ELM represents a valuable opportunity to establish more fruitful relationships for the public good. Our research evidences a wealth of knowledge and capacity among individuals and organisations that work with those farmers who are HTR, as well as among farmers themselves. We draw directly from that expertise and point to clear actions to better understand and involve HTR farmers as well as other land managers in ELM co-design and delivery

⁴ Brooks, S., 2020

1. Introduction

The relationship between government and farmers and land managers has evolved and developed over time and through different politics and policies. The requirements of those policies and of those farmers and land managers evolve too. Engaging those who the policy will affect is important, and it is clear that Defra has made considerable effort to reach some of these farmers and land managers. But some are harder to reach (HTR) than others and this less known - or less quantifiable - group is the one that is the focus of this research.

While it is its own ‘wicked problem’, COVID-19 presents a lens through which we might see some of the challenges of engaging those who are HTR in closer definition. The ‘digital by default’ approach of many government support services will exacerbate existing issues of geographical and social isolation among communities with poor broadband and low digital and verbal literacy. The pandemic is already impacting on the agricultural sector, having led to drops in farmgate prices⁵, uncertainties around the availability of horticultural migrant labour⁶ and the decline of beef⁷ and lamb prices due to the sudden interruption of foodservice and export markets⁸ - commodities also predicted to be vulnerable after Brexit. Social distancing measures have seen livestock markets restricting access to “*drop and go*” policies⁹, limiting agronomists’ and advisors’ access to farms, and changing the engagement of representatives from ALBs like Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA) with land managers from personal to remote contact. Longer term economic impacts have yet to be understood, but they will doubtless create challenges for farmers and land managers as well as for HM Treasury.

The commitment to a Natural Capital approach in the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan¹⁰, its Clean Growth strategy, and the new Agricultural Bill 2019-2021¹¹ and Environment Bill 2019-2021¹² - which will enable ministers to reward farmers for the production of public

⁵ <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/what-is-behind-the-sharp-drops-in-farmgate-prices>

⁶ <https://www.nfuonline.com/news/coronavirus-updates-and-advice/coronavirus-news/coronavirus-the-impact-on-seasonal-labour-in-the-horticulture-sector/>

⁷ <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/gb-prime-cattle-prices-continue-to-move-down>

⁸ <https://ahdb.org.uk/news/lamb-prices-fall-amongst-market-uncertainty>

⁹ <https://www.laa.co.uk/news/3989/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-to-members-and-farmers/>

¹⁰ Defra, 2018.

¹¹ At the time of writing, May 2020, the bill is awaiting its report and third reading stage.

¹² At the time of writing, April 2020, the Bill was being considered by a Public Bill Committee.

goods and the sustainable production of food - promise a good basis for an agri-environmental transition towards more sustainable land management¹³. ELM will play a major part in this transition. Many farmers have welcomed the increased attention paid to food production in the Agriculture Bill and many will already have experience of agri-environment schemes. However, not all will be convinced by the new ELM schemes objectives, and some will be tired of change or jaded by negative experiences of previous schemes and their involvement with Defra, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), and representatives of ALBs (e.g. Defra, NE, Environment Agency, National Park Authorities, the National Trust). These factors combined will produce barriers to engagement, barriers that in part also *produce* the HTR.

Defra has acknowledged that involving stakeholders and collaborators in achieving this transition is vital, and it is committed to involving farmers, food producers, environmental experts and others, in every stage of the development process of ELM. Through co-designing ELM, Defra aims to develop an agricultural policy that will benefit British farmers, the environment, consumers, taxpayers, and the wider rural community. In many countries, interactive policymaking and public participation have come to be seen as ‘important ways to improve the quality of government plans as well as to involve people in the decision-making process, whereby they can learn to understand both problems and solutions, as this results in greater support for the end result. In such policy trajectories, both content and process are negotiated, as are power and power-relationships’¹⁴. Doing so successfully in practice, however, is challenging and difficult. Co-design means designing policies *with* the people for whom policies are designed and who will be affected by them. After all, they are ‘the experts of their future lives [...] and the ‘experts of their experience’¹⁵.

There are many different approaches to co-design and co-production, and they are underpinned by different philosophies and understandings of what the rationales of engagement are and to what extent and degree participants should be involved in them¹⁶¹⁷. To date, Defra has attempted to involve stakeholders in the development of ELM via a strategic engagement group, consultation processes, co-design workshops with farmers, Tests and Trials, roadshows, workshops, and webinars. Many of these have been suspended due to

¹³ Tsouvalis, J and Little, R. 2020

¹⁴ Aarts, N. and Leeuwis, C., 2010: 132

¹⁵ Blokamp, E., 2018: 730.

¹⁶ Tsouvalis, J. and Little, R., 2019a.

¹⁷ Tsouvalis, J. and Little, R., 2019b

COVID-19. There is an opportunity now to review who Defra is engaging and how, and to consider how co-design within the context of social distancing can be more inclusive.

1.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of the empirical research were as follows:

- to identify and locate HTR farmers in the context of ELM
- to understand why they are HTR and what the barriers to their engagement are
- to identify methods and strategies that could be employed to help overcome these barriers and ensure that the views, experiences, needs and responses of those who are HTR are represented in research and policy engagement around agri-environment
- to support policy-makers in Defra in utilising this research to inform their development of the ELM policy and maximising value for money in the delivery of public goods

2. Methodology

Semi Semi-structured expert interviews and a workshop were undertaken to gather evidence from a range of stakeholders with knowledge and experience of engaging HTR farmers. These interviews focused on farmers, and therefore in reference to the empirical data derived from interviews we specifically discuss ‘HTR farmers’. However, we note that other types of land manager are also important to include in ELM and therefore important in the general discussion around HTR.

First the expert interviews were conducted with individuals drawn from government departments, ALBs, environmental NGOs, farmer welfare charities, farmer facilitation groups, farmer-run networks, national park authorities, agricultural consultancy firms, national banks and farmers themselves. The sample represented a range of size and focus of organisations, of roles within them, of geographical reach across England and Wales, of sectors, and of types of farming and land management. The interviews (n = 23: 21 via telephone, 1 in person, 1 by email) were undertaken over a period of four weeks in February and March 2020.

Second was to be a series of workshops with farmers and land managers, and with people working with HTR farmers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing measures meant that just one took place, and was held as a teleconference call with 11 officers involved in the implementation of an AES. The interviews and workshops were transcribed and thematically coded against research questions designed in response to the project objectives. Short quotes from the interviews are presented in inverted commas and italics. This report is structured around eight key recommendations, each based on findings from the research, which are designed to provide useful evidence and context for policy makers.

3. Who are HTR?

Recommendation 1: Assess the percentage of farmers and land managers that are HTR and develop detailed and verified understanding of who they are, why they are HTR and what the social and environmental impacts of their non-engagement are.

‘Hard to Reach’ is not a definitive term, but rather a characterisation. It has been used since the 1950s in fields of practice including education, healthcare, and social policy. Alternative terms exist, including ‘marginalised’, ‘refusers’¹⁸, ‘not in contact’¹⁹, ‘seldom heard’²⁰, ‘easy-to-ignore’²¹ and ‘easy-to-omit’²². Each term brings with it dynamics of power, agency, visibility and representation, which can be useful as useful entry points into thinking about HTR individuals. Whilst some previous literature has used the term ‘Hard to Reach’ as a noun (which defines or fixes them) often to define a homogenous group, we use the term ‘harder to reach’ (hereafter, HTR) as an adjective to describe individuals that are less engaged with Defra through a wide variety of factors and negative past experiences, that have reduced their incentive to engage. This takes into account the fact that people *become* HTR because the situation they are in, or because of cultural factors such as relationships with peers or the state. Situations and relationships can change, and therefore make HTR farmers or land managers easier to reach. We also move beyond the ‘diffusion of innovation’ model and the idea of

¹⁸ Flanagan, S. M., & Hancock, B., 2010.

¹⁹ Dunne, A. *et al*, 2019.

²⁰ Jones, R., 2018.

²¹ Lightbody, R., 2017.

²² Johnson, M., 2011.

adopter categories (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, laggards²³) - that prove inadequate for understanding HTR farmers and land managers²⁴.

3.1 How many farmers are HTR?

A key conclusion was that respondents found it very difficult to estimate the proportion of farmers that are HTR. Estimates ranged a between 5% and 70%²⁵. If Defra and executive agencies are to be successful in achieving high uptake of ELM (a target of 88,000 sign-ups by 2028, later revised to 82,500²⁶) they must work together to engage a breadth of participants in its co-design. Failing to identify and engage this group could mean overlooking up to 57,750 farmers and land managers, who for multiple reasons either cannot or will not contribute their expertise and experience of farming and of funding models to co-create a better system.

It is important to note the significance of numbers of holdings as well as of land area, in order to achieve public goods across a range of environments and to preserve a diversity of rural economies, skills and heritage. To secure cohesive nature recovery networks, ELM must be adopted by the majority of farmers and land managers, including those who are HTR. Defra needs to identify the percentage that are not currently engaged and where exactly they are. Some indications of the characteristics of who and where the HTR may be are provided here, but further analysis is required to understand and validate these indications.

3.2 How do we locate HTR farmers?

It is possible to locate HTR farmers and land managers in a number of ways. A deeper understanding of their characteristics reveals: i) the strategic significance of HTR farmers and land managers and of their land; ii) the methods that might be used to most effectively reach them; iii) the ways in which their long-term behaviours around engagement or land management (e.g. ‘key polluters’) can be changed to better meet policy aspirations. Factors to characterise HTR individuals include the following:

Social and demographic factors

²³ Rogers, E.M., 2003.

²⁴ Rose, D. C. *et al.*, 2018.

²⁵ Respondents estimated the following: <5%; 5%; 10-12%; 20%; 33.3%; 40%; 50%; 60%; 60-70%; 70%.

²⁶ National Audit Office, 2019: 27.

These correlate with some of those made of HTR groups in other sectors (e.g. healthcare, social policy, etc.). Social isolation is an obvious qualifier and can be structural, behavioural, and attitudinal. Higher than average levels of development disorders like autism and specific learning disabilities like dyslexia in agriculture, as well as low levels of literacy, were mentioned by multiple respondents as factors that characterised HTR farmers abilities to access information and support. There is an opportunity and a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments to increase engagement with services. To do this, we refer Defra to DWP and ODI guidelines on Accessible Communications, in particular with regard Easy Read and Plain English²⁷.

Similar concerns were raised around mental health issues among HTR farmers who've "*gone to ground*", and to the relationship of social disconnectedness to anxiety, stress, and depression. Mental ill health is an issue that can make help-seeking and decision-making more difficult, in both personal and business matters. This includes engagement with advisory services and with forms of support including AES.

There are also factors in the interaction of the social and geographical, in farmers whose social isolation also involves low generalised trust, not knowing their neighbours, or having reduced visits from external agents such as sales representatives or in-person advisers. This may be furthered by COVID-19 and social distancing. A further element of farmers being HTR is in their lack of participation in existing networks, be they social or organisational. This makes them difficult to access via obvious intermediary bodies like Country Land and Business Association (CLA) or National Farmers Union (NFU), who may not be able – or willing – to represent their interests to Defra.

Age was also a common factor, with older farmers judged to be a significant part of the HTR group. As well as being attitudinal ("*they hanker after a previous time*"), older age was associated with a subset of farmers characterised as having little borrowing and working at a subsistence level. HTR farmers' age was also related to more complex dynamics around decision making on family farms, where an older generation might still be "*holding the*

²⁷ DWP / ODI, 2018. Also Government Equalities Office, 2010, and <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/access-support>

chequebook”, suggesting an opportunity for multi-generational engagement around ELM as well as with farming charities supporting succession decision making.

Financial factors

As well as social and demographic factors, there are financial reasons why farmers and land managers might become HTR. Social isolation can be linked to farmers existing on a very low income or subsistence and can result in both mental and practical barriers to engaging with peers, networks, organisations, and services. Alternatively, some farmers might be generating profit from elsewhere and not focussing on the business of managing their land. This means that although initial engagement might be difficult, ELM could provide a lifeline to some and reinvigorate their land management practices.

Some respondents described the complex microeconomics of HTR farmers, and the ways in which responsive financial survival strategies are employed around expenditure and income streams. It is important to consider not only how such economics interact with new AES, but how poverty might impede farmers’ ability to gain access to advice or support. The factors that make people HTR may be multiple, interrelated, and progressive. A reduction in a farmer or land manager’s capacity for administration (“*falling behind with the books*”) may become a barrier to receiving support (having a lack of evidence or paperwork). The impacts of financial hardship on HTR farmers can be as wide reaching and complex as the causes, affecting issues such as waste management or animal welfare.

While the socially and economically marginalised HTR are potentially the most vulnerable to failures of engagement, there is a group with high social and economic capital that are also not actively engaged with Defra or ALBs such as NE. These farmers might see these organisations as a “*bureaucratic irrelevance*” or might be highly productive and therefore “*protected through their efficiencies*” from needing to engage with AES. Failure to engage these farmers risks excluding large areas of land from the provision of public goods (including very basic environmentally-sustainable farming, under Tier 1), and interruptions in the nature recovery network as set out in the Government’s 25-Year Environment Plan.

Skills Factors

Farming and land management are highly skilled activities, and its diverse sectors have in common a requirement to be multiskilled. As well as the more ‘tacit knowledges’ of practical

farming and land management, participation in AES demands administrative and IT skills that some HTR individuals struggle to learn or master. A repeated theme raised by interviewees was that – in their experience - levels of verbal, digital and administrative literacy are low among some farmers²⁸. Some are able to get support from family members, advisers, or peers, but others struggle with the challenges presented by the Government’s ‘digital by default’. As well as the financial impact of failing to meet the skills requirement of AES (to apply for a scheme, or to maintain digital records) is an emotional burden of stress for farmers. It is important to take into account the skills of farmers when designing communications, administrative processes and to identify skills gaps that can be filled by intermediaries or training.

Farming factors

Factors affecting HTR farmers also include the size and types of holdings that are farmed, and how they are farmed. These were characterised by respondents in several different ways. Small farms were a recurring identifier, which affected both attitude (“*fairly inward looking*”) and capacity to engage (“*spending a lot of your time firefighting*”). The definition of a small farm is not a fixed one, although relevant measures proposed by Winter and Lobley (2016) are Land Area, Standard Gross Margins, Standard Output or Standard Labour Requirements²⁹. Owner occupiers, for example, might be HTR because they regard their holding as a family or sporting asset rather than a business. Other smaller farmers might operate on more of a subsistence basis (“*some of them can probably live on fresh air*”). While most respondents who characterised small family farms as HTR described livestock farms, others mentioned arable or multi cropping. Some of these would be non-BPS claimants (e.g. pig, poultry or horticultural units or contract farmers) and therefore present a different challenge for engagement. This would also apply to hobby farmers and smallholders, who are managing their land in some way but are neither receiving subsidy nor necessarily connected to member organisations like NFU or CLA.

Geographical factors

²⁸ A workshop respondent cited research that 7% of farmers are totally illiterate and 20% have limited literacy skills. However further research is required to corroborate this statement.

²⁹ Winter, M. and Lobley, M., 2016: 14-15

Our research involved engagement with individuals working across England - both nationally and regionally. As proposed in recommendation 2, there is an opportunity to map (and combine) both social and ecological data about who and where HTR farmers and land managers are. An observation by a number of respondents was that many HTR farmers are in, or on the periphery of, the uplands. The geography of some of these areas can contribute to social isolation, and some areas are better served by farmer support networks than others. HTR farmers were also located in the lowlands, in the South East as well as the East of England. An issue that was raised by multiple respondents as a major factor was the lack of, or limitations of, rural broadband, which most certainly impacts upon farmers' and land managers' ability to engage with government agencies, advisors, support networks, and crucially with AES. Examples were given of farmers not having email addresses, or of using insecure Wi-Fi in fast food restaurants and libraries to get around the issue.

In the same way that financial factors helped us to characterise an under-considered segment of wealthy and / or successful farmers, we can also geographically locate some of this group on Grade One agricultural land and on land that has not been a target for previous AES. With the lack of organisational engagement in these areas, influence can instead become peer-led, strengthening a positivist approach to land management (based largely on experience of what's worked for them before) and creating deep cultural resistance to participation³⁰.

Policy factors

Where HTR farmers and land managers are not directly engaged with government agencies, there is nevertheless a relationship there, albeit distant or damaged. This is often founded on experiences with past AES and ALBs, and on how those experiences interact with other factors discussed above. Several respondents described farmers' and land managers' fear of engaging with Defra, connected to concerns about the risk of inspections and penalties. Suspicion and reluctance are part of processes of alienation between farmers and government that some respondents attribute to the historical end of government advisers building and maintaining relationships on-farm³¹.

³⁰ Tsouvalis, J. and Little, R., 2019b

³¹ This corroborates previous studies, e.g. Hall, 2008.

Specific organisations like NE and RPA were also cited, and their delivery of historic schemes has deeply damaged their reputation and created distrust by farmers. Some of these experiences varied across different groups of HTR farmers (for instance upland farmers who felt like they were delivering more within Countryside Stewardship than they were being paid for), and others were based on more generic complaints about “*a one size fits all approach*” or delayed or lost payments. The relationship between farmers and government exist through multiple engagements across organisations and across time. For HTR farmers that time might be generations. There is a challenge for any new AES that aims at broad uptake to acknowledge and overcome these histories and create more productive and sustainable relationships for future generations.

Way-of-life Factors

Farmers and land managers become HTR either through their own agency or as a result of external circumstances. While most of the factors above can be addressed, some HTR farmers are very tied to their way of life (“*It is much more than a business, and for many it is the lifestyle, it's the culture, it's the ties to the land, and those people aren't going to just cease doing what they are doing.*”) Specific types of farming or land management (food production or game shooting, for example) might be thought of in cultural or personal terms, rather than commercial ones. It is important that such issues are understood in the co-design of ELM - to facilitate effective transitions to different ways of life and different relationships to land management. Addressing this - and the multigenerational dynamics of some family farms - is an important part of communication and engagement with some HTR farmers as they exist today.

3.3 Proposed characterisations of the HTR

As well as more formal indexing of agriculture based on farm type, holding size, business size, business structure, land type, etc. attempts have been made at segmentation that categorises farmers in order to better enable policies and delivery options to be developed. Some of these have usefully considered behaviours as a way of doing this, including Defra’s own groupings of ‘custodians’ (23%), ‘lifestyle choice’ (6%), ‘pragmatists’ (22%), ‘modern family businesses’ (41%) and ‘challenged enterprises’ (7%)³². In the context of this report, we

³² Pike T., 2008.

are especially interested in segmentation that takes into account the factors we have outlined above, which constitute different farmers as HTR in their engagement with Defra and other bodies. We have therefore developed the following loose characterisations, illustrated here with a selection of quotes from expert interviews and workshops:

<p>The Proud & Independent (who is insulted by ELM)</p>	<p><i>“Those farmers who believe they are stewards of the countryside will be affronted by this ELMS because it is insulting their rural intelligence, their stewardship, their environmental intelligence. And so they are just going to put two fingers up to this ELMS consultation.”</i></p> <p><i>“They tend to be more defensive and thinking on their own. And the other element was being told what to do. We don’t want to be told what to do because we are food producers, we are farmers. So if you are going to tell us to do something else environmental, we are stewards of the land and we want to do it on our own terms.”</i></p>
<p>The Busy (who doesn’t have time to find out about ELM)</p>	<p><i>“I think in farming there are people who have the voices and they’re the ones [...] who may have their farming business handed to them on a plate. [...] But then people who work hard, you know, tend not to have that voice because they’re far too busy.”</i></p> <p><i>“I think the risk on the engagement side of things is farmers where a lot of pressure is put on one or two people. So if you are... you know, if you’re milking yourself, personally, 12 milkings a week, don’t have a lot of spare time to sort of engage with some of these processes. You’re spending a lot of your time firefighting”</i></p>
<p>The Tired, Overwhelmed and Reactive (who doesn’t have time to think about ELM)</p>	<p><i>“And access to that advice and guidance is really crucial for that engagement with it. Again, a lot of it tends to be quite complex, lots of different instructions in a massive manual, that a farmer just doesn’t have the time, or energy to process, and sort of digest and then make a decision.”</i></p>
<p>The BPS Non-claimant (who doesn’t know about ELM)</p>	<p><i>“Pig and poultry producers, smallholders, horticultural enterprises, contract farmers, tenants or those with farm business tenancies, and absentee landlords, i.e. those who are not BPS claimants will be disadvantaged as far as I see, because those guys, generally speaking, have not been used to, as it were, taking any state funding.”</i></p>

<p>The Hobby Farmer (who doesn't need ELM)</p>	<p><i>"We're very small but even if we were twice or three times this area, nobody's going to make a living off it, and we would fall into this group. Do I want to join ELMS? Well, I have to say, probably not - why should I want to? I don't need the money, I don't particularly need the advice, I think I know what I'm doing, I have a farming... I was brought up on a farm, and I regard, I mean, well, I think people in my position would regard bureaucracy as being unwelcomed, frankly."</i></p>
<p>The Resentful and Suspicious (who doesn't trust Defra)</p>	<p><i>"Well, I think for some, there will certainly be a history of, I never got my payments through. It's all such hard work, it's all bureaucratic, I'm not going to get involved."</i></p> <p><i>"I think perhaps it is something to do with their character. They maybe... they are of the similar type of farm to neighbouring farms, but in these cases when you have one farm that just won't engage. I think it is the character of those farmers, that they are rebellious, they are not wanting to engage with the state in management of their land. [...] There are farmers that over a number of years we've tried to engage with, but in some cases, they won't speak to us."</i></p>
<p>The Active Avoider (who doesn't trust anyone)</p>	<p><i>"If you are going to paint the simplest picture, I think some of the clichéd, gruff farmer, "Get off my land", would really apply, and that is the piece where we need to really think about mental health, mental wellbeing, and read into dyslexia, and also because sometimes on a spectrum that can be... it isn't actually... it is the way that they behave, which is the sort of lack of... limited social skills to some people."</i></p>
<p>The Isolated and Blissfully Unaware (who has had their head in the sand)</p>	<p><i>"Hadn't a clue, so there are still some who are just, you know, head down, bum up, as they say, you know, getting on with the day job. [...] Feeding the sheep or, you know, walking the hill or whatever. [...] That just do not realise that there is anything that's going to change."</i></p>
<p>The Poor Subsistence Farmer (who can just about carry on)</p>	<p><i>"I mean, prices for things haven't gone up in 30 years and costs have gone up and up and up and up and rents gone up, you know, I think what we're tending to see is some of the smaller, older farmers almost become subsistence farmers...And that, almost, kind of, breeds a very much that sort of self reliance, but as part of that they're just, like, well we don't want to engage with anybody because why should we, nobody's really helping us, you know, and,</i></p>

	<i>you know, these people they're living on virtually no income"</i>
The Farmer at Breaking Point <i>(who can't carry on)</i>	<p><i>"And because farming is as much a way of life as a job, most farmers work extremely long hours. They don't actually have any other interests, and we are still right at the top of the suicide league for professions. There is one farmer who takes his own life every week at the moment"</i></p> <p><i>"It's not difficult for a small straw to break a camel's back"</i></p>

We present these with a caution that such a segmentation is not fixed, and that farmers may fit across or between more than one characterisation. In addition, segments interact as farmers define themselves through social comparison (i.e. *"Who I am"* or *"Who I am not"*). The characterisations above are offered as a tool to help locate, rather than define, those who are HTR and to think about methods and strategies to engage them

4. The importance of HTR

Recommendation 2: Assess the strategic environmental significance of HTR farmers and land managers' land, using geocoding and socio-ecological mapping.

The difficulty that respondents experienced in estimating and locating HTR farmers pointed to a need for further research here. Whilst our analysis points to some indicative factors that may make farmers HTR, a fuller assessment of HTR farmers and land managers across the country and the factors of their being HTR needs to be undertaken. This will help to develop a more comprehensive picture of the potential success of different levels of ELM uptake and their impact on agriculture, environment, and rural communities. Comprehensive data on this doesn't, to our knowledge, currently exist but could be produced by overlaying existing data sets and connecting with research from a range of other organisations. This would bring together a whole range of datasets, including, but not limited to environmental and geographical (e.g. land classification, biodiversity), demographic (e.g. age, health), socio-economic (e.g. rural poverty, literacy), and digital provision.

4.1 Identifying areas of significance

Rapid socio-ecological mapping could be undertaken with partner organisations to reveal their **‘Hot Spots’** (i.e. target areas for engagement with farmers and land managers) and **‘Not Spots’** (with limited or no investment in relationships with farmers and land managers, or where farmers and land managers have had no prior engagement with AES or the BPS). Doing so would help to better understand the following:

- **‘Hot spots’ represent investment in social capital** - sometimes over decades (in the case of National Parks, AONBs, Community Forests, etc.). This social capital, particularly the trust farmers and land managers have of other organisations, and the networks between farmers and land managers, is an extremely valuable resource. Social capital can act as a ‘shift factor’ making other capitals (e.g. financial, human) more effective in their delivery of natural capital (a stated government policy aim).
- **‘Not Spots’ may reflect historic targeting that does not relate to current strategic priorities.** These may include, for example, groups of farmers and land managers who have been ignored in the past by productivist agricultural policy (as ‘laggards’) but could now be vital to the delivery of localised environmental goods, cohesive nature networks, or work at a landscape scale.

There is a need for more in-depth analysis of this ‘social history’ of farmers and farmers’ willingness to engage with ELM, which could be undertaken by the existing resource of farm advisers. This mapping could underpin radical changes to land management.

4.2 Identifying HTR farmers within those areas and evaluating opportunities and risks of engagement

When geographical areas of strategic significance have been better identified, work could be done to evaluate the percentage of farmers and land managers within them that could be characterised as HTR. This could be via a range of factors or segmentations as outlined above and could be done with partners (such as farming support charities or networks) and farm advisers with local knowledge. Useful information could then be produced to measure against policy goals to assess the ‘strategic significance’ of particular holdings. This could be used to evaluate, in terms of policy goals, the opportunities and risks of engaging or failing to engage specific groups of HTR farmers and land managers.

Policy goals include Defra’s key targets of public and environmental goods, as well as social goals connected to rural poverty, education, employment, skills, and mental health. As with

any risk assessment matrix, calculations can be adapted, and figures moved. It is hoped that processes of quantifying engagement can be a useful tool to make specific HTR groups of farmers and land managers less so.

5. How might we engage HTR?

Recommendation 3: Develop specific methods and strategies for engaging different HTR groups in ELM, based upon ‘what works’ from this research and to avoid repeating mistakes of previous AES.

Defra Agencies are well experienced at working with farmers and land managers, but not necessarily with HTR groups. We draw insights from the expertise of our interview and workshop respondents, all of whom engage on a regular basis with HTR farmers in different ways, to evidence successful methods and strategies.

5.1 What has worked in previous AES projects?

Our research showed that collaborative endeavours (e.g. Farmer Clusters) were deemed successful because they take a “*localised approach*” as opposed to Countryside Stewardship’s (CS) “*one-size-fits-all*”. The Entry Level Stewardship scheme (ELS) and the Upland ELS were recognised as popular because of the level of payments and how reliably they were paid, as well as how “*bureaucratically light*” they were. The success of such AES were reflected in their relatively high level of uptake, although how many HTR they engaged would need further analysis. Respondents cited ELS schemes that resulted in broad but potentially shallow environmental impacts, and it would be useful to compare how different groups of farmers and land managers progressed through different schemes to better understand how, and at what speed, they might move through ELM Tiers.

5.2 What motivates farmers to engage?

HTR farmers and land managers could have many motivations for engaging with AES. A central concern for many in participation or contribution to AES is “*what’s in it for me?*”, whether that is payment, workload, or a genuine care for the environment. For those reliant on existing subsidy, there is a significant concern about income, and therefore a desire by many for ELM to be profitable, not just cover costs foregone. Respondents were often positive

about HTR farmers' and land managers' attitude of care towards the environment but recognised a tension between this and other factors like business pressures (“*yield is king*”) or a lack of time. ELM is considered to present an opportunity to transform the lives and businesses of farmers and land managers by inspiring and harnessing care for the environment. This must be achieved in partnership, with Defra demonstrating the value it places on what farmers and land managers are doing already and for farmers and land managers understanding more about what they have on their land. Our research showed the negative effect of AES that are prescriptive (something recognised by Defra in their recent ELM consultation), and a tendency for some farmers to want to “*do it on their own terms*”. While many “*don't like being told what to do*”, it is also acknowledged that there is an interdependent relationship between farmers and Defra. For HTR farmers to be able to make informed decisions about participating in AES, Defra will need to think about specific programmes of communication and engagement to overcome some of the factors outlined in 3.2.

5.3 What engagements might work for ELM?

Respondents described methods and strategies that they have experience of, in engaging HTR farmers. The following summary points are drawn from these, in terms of practical implications for enhancing engagement, communication and collaborative relationships:

1. Make Defra *easier* to reach by:

- making communications and processes accessible to many different users and publics (e.g. status-enhancing for *The Proud & Independent*, or supportive for *The Tired, Overwhelmed and Reactive*)
- being clear about what ELM is trying to achieve on farmers' and land managers' land and the value of their engagement (e.g. showing *The BPS Non-claimant* why ELM is relevant to them and *The Resentful and Suspicious* why Defra is not to be feared)
- making reasonable adjustments for those with lower literacy, dyslexia or poor broadband (e.g. listening to what *The Isolated and Blissfully Unaware* and *The Active Avoider* do know, and assessing what would be most useful to them)
- having skilled intermediaries (e.g. proactively seeking *The Poor Subsistence Farmer* not part of NFU or TFA, or identifying *The Farmer at Breaking Point* via local networks)

- demonstrating how views have influenced policy design (e.g. showing *The Busy* that their time is valued).

2. Make co-design and collaboration more inclusive by:

- cultivating a ‘bottom up’ approach that generates a new and accessible language
- organising events at more ‘farmer friendly’ times (of day and of year) and venues
- programming events so that they offer something for attendees (e.g. ‘pie and a pint’ or a talk by another farmer or land manager on a relevant subject)

3. Facilitate a positive (agri)cultural transition that:

- takes into account local land management systems and environmental issues
- recognises that simply offering money is insufficient to restore damaged relationships
- overcomes the fear that many HTR farmers have of Defra
- acknowledges that many HTR farmers do not have internet access and so makes paper copies of guidance and application forms available
- alleviates the stress burden of paperwork and pays promptly, thus improving efficacy and wellbeing
- values the role that HTR farmers and land managers play in rural economies and communities.

Recommendations from respondents specifically relating to ELM also include:

- acknowledging that the transition presents a major upheaval for many who are HTR
- recognising that the pace at which this upheaval will be experienced and managed will be stressful and challenging for many
- being constructive in trying to understand inter-generational decision-making processes
- ensuring consultation and co-design processes as well as delivery specification take into account the farming calendar and respond to variations in weather

- allowing flexibility for different approaches and for collaborators to take ownership of new innovations around environmental land management
- opening up space for farmers to think differently and to adapt to change.

Central to successful engagement is an understanding of the relationship between intended audiences, and the objectives and methods of engagement. A more detailed understanding of different HTR individuals (for instance, along the lines of the characterisations offered in 3.3), would enable a mapping out of which strategies would work for different audiences. There is certainly no “one size fits all”, and different methods may be more useful at different points in an engagement relationship. A recurrent argument by respondents for how the above could be realised was through the provision of Farm Advice. This is one of the most important things that Defra could do, for the successful design and implementation of ELM and to support a sustainable agricultural sector, by:

- providing Farm Advice to help all farmers to understand the scheme
- employing Farm Advisers with strong interpersonal skills not just subject knowledge, who can broker positive relationships between farmers the State
- ensuring Farm Advisers are:
 - trained and experienced
 - easily and readily available to farmers and other land managers, via named contacts and individual phone numbers
 - given the authority, backed up by management structures, to make decisions
 - encouraged to stay in post for a reasonable length of time, ensuring continuity
 - are able to go beyond a strictly punitive regulatory approach to one that offers advice and support.

6. Working with others to support HTR engagement

Recommendation 4: Extend the scope of ‘co-designing with participants in mind’ by working with intermediary organisations who are in tune or more engaged with HTR farmers and land managers.

It is easy for any consultation or co-design process to involve ‘the usual suspects’. Within the context of ELM, the stakeholders that are the easiest to reach might not fully understand or represent the range of farmers and land managers (including those who are HTR) who have the potential to engage. As one respondent put it, “*the people that want to feed into some of these things might not be the right people*”. The representation of certain stakeholder agendas over others risks skewing the co-design process and making the scheme less inclusive than it could have been. Many of our respondents raised concerns that the ‘usual suspects’ would not represent the needs or opinions of those who are HTR. But, as individuals and organisations who are directly engaged with HTR farmers, many of these respondents were keen to more actively support Defra’s inclusive engagement in ELM.

6.1 Direct and mediated engagement

Direct engagement with HTR farmers and land managers can be useful, but it might be very challenging, both to organise and to undertake, for reasons such as low levels of trust and social isolation, as detailed above. There is the scope to include ‘co-design with participants in mind’ by working with organisations who are in tune / actively engaged with HTR farmers and land managers, and to do this in a targeted and strategic way. This might be using such organisations as intermediaries, to engage HTR farmers and land managers in Defra-facilitated co-design process, or giving intermediaries responsibility to undertake some of that co-design through their own networks and activities, or it may involve bringing those intermediaries for more in depth conversation as representatives of the interests of HTR groups.

6.2 Who might be involved in co-design?

As we discovered in sampling our research participants, there is a spectrum of organisations that work with HTR farmers and land managers, and a spectrum of roles and individuals within these organisations themselves. We asked respondents for examples of successful engagement, of positive intermediaries and of potential ELM ‘champions’. They cited value in the knowledge, experience, and skills of individuals, but also in the plurality of voices that will hopefully reflect the diversity of farmers and land managers in the UK. As we did above with a segmentation of HTR farmers, we present here a set of characterisations of those who engage with them.

<p>The ‘Allies and Close Supporters</p>	<p>These might include farming support charities, families, and the rural church. Key figures are ‘people’s people’ who make time for others and have the skills to engage socially isolated people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Farming Community Network; YANA, RABI, The Addington Fund; The Farming Life Centre; The Tenants Farmers Association; Rural Stress Information Network; Agricultural Chaplains; vicars; church wardens; Methodist preachers; coordinators of farming support groups; maybe some agronomists and farmer support networks (Hill Farm Network); neighbours; farming wives or husbands; farming children; GPs or health visitors.
<p>The ‘Sympathetically Aware BUT Busy or unskilled’</p>	<p>These might include organisations who regularly engage with HTR farmers and land managers, but it is not in their remit to help them. Where they can they will help, but often they cannot due to limited time or other resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agronomists; vets; CSFF facilitators; people in the markets; National Beef / Pig Association; farm advisers from NE (who are not supposed to reach out to these farmers but sometimes do); Young Farmers clubs; bank managers; water companies; National Park rangers.
<p>The ‘Frustrated Observers’</p>	<p>These might include organisations who are required to work with HTR farmers and land managers but find them extremely frustrating for a number of reasons.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some farm advisers in NE (specifically those ecologists with the strongest relationship to nature and general antipathy to farmers); environmental NGOs; Parish Councils.
<p>‘Those Who Stand to Make A Fast Buck’ out of HTR farmers</p>	<p>These might include other farmers or land managers who have vested interests in certain farmers or land managers remaining HTR, or who might want to rent or buy up land from them if their businesses fail.</p>

These characterisations are neither fixed nor exhaustive, but instead are presented as a tool for thinking about engaging HTR farmers. They might be useful in considering which

intermediaries could participate or facilitate co-design activities and support the engagement of those who are HTR.

6.3 The importance of individual intermediaries

The degree of ‘reach’ that organisations (Defra, ALBs, or NGOs) have towards HTR farmers and land managers is dependent not only on how they might fall into the characterisations above, but on the individual who is undertaking engagement activities. Respondents suggested that the reach of individuals can be shaped by a number of factors: the organisational capacity of their employer; the degree to which they enjoy autonomy over their time and working practices; their empathy towards struggling farmers; their experience of agriculture; the personal framing of themselves and their job; their gender.

In designing the co-design processes, it is important to consider who is participating and how, and to seek out knowledge and practices outside of usual spheres. There may be individuals working in organisations beyond agriculture that would bring useful and more holistic contributions to co-design, including bodies like DWP, NHS, mental health support charities, wildlife trusts, GPs, internal drainage boards and Ofcom. Understanding how and when individuals and intermediaries work well will also be useful to shaping more defined roles like ELM ‘champions’.

6.4 Who are the ‘Champions’?

Based upon previous research findings, the idea of ELM ‘champions’ was raised with respondents, and met positively by the majority, albeit with a range of opinions about what would or wouldn’t work. A popular group of candidates were other farmers, with peers considered trusted sources of knowledge and best practice. This was as opposed to (although possibly in coordination with) environmentalists, or environmental NGOs who might be distrusted by some farmers. Caution was also expressed about how ‘champions’ would be selected - local ‘champions’ “*emerge anyway in their own right*”, while national bodies like NFU might recruit ‘the usual suspects’. An ‘early adopter model’ which favours farmers and land managers with larger economic and social capital, could therefore further exclude those who are HTR.

Women were one group suggested as possible strategic ‘champions’, who might be known and trusted within a community and able to influence in a different way to male counterparts.

Middle-aged or (semi-)retired farmers were also mentioned as a group that might have more availability and influence, if they were paid for their time and expenses. Personal qualities were considered to be very important in prospective ‘champions’: trustworthiness; social skills; knowledge of local people and local land. The value of local networks was something that came up strongly, and it is important therefore to think of the interaction between the individual (‘champion’) and existing networks (local community, sectors, etc.). Respondents considered, for instance, that individuals with higher social capital (“*the same ones sticking their head above the parapet for everything*”) could influence some HTR farmers but be resented or dismissed by others. Alternatively, the external appointment of a ‘champion’ might reassert or contradict local social hierarchies or be seen as a threat to existing networks. It is therefore important to base the recruitment of ‘champions’ on an understanding of different HTR groups, which could be aided by the characterisations given in 3.3 or 6.2.

7. The co-design process

Recommendation 5: Ensure ELM co-design is simple and easily accessible and takes into account longstanding cultures of distrust and alienation between HTR farmers and land managers and government agencies.

The co-design process of ELM is vital to the success of the scheme itself in both ensuring broad input and in laying the ground for broad uptake in delivery. Recommendations about co-design of ELM have been made elsewhere³³ and we recognise the co-design plans made by Defra before the COVID-19 pandemic. Part of the starting point for this co-design process is a history of distrust between HTR farmers and Defra Agencies which has progressively worsened, creating further barriers to engagement. (“*I think for some, there will certainly be a history of, I never got my payments through. It’s all such hard work, it’s all bureaucratic, I’m not going to get involved*”). Co-design offers a valuable opportunity to begin to change this situation, for Defra to demonstrate that HTR farmers and land managers are valued, that their potential is recognised, and that Defra is invested in delivering ELM as part of a sustainable and long term partnership.

³³ Tsouvalis, J. and Little, R. 2019.

7.1 Co-design and communication

This process involves opening up multiple channels of information between Defra and collaborators - including farming support charities and networks, as well as HTR farmers and land managers themselves. And these channels must be two-way - not just disseminating information from Defra, but Defra listening in turn to the experiences and voices of HTR farmer and land managers as a way of rebuilding relationships (*“there's too much water gone under the bridge with Defra and the RPA in terms of relationship damage... for all of a sudden it be okay to... for farmers to feel, yeah let's... let's just input into this consultation”*). For as much as some farmers are perceived as HTR by Defra, so Defra are perceived as HTR by some farmers. Dynamics of urban-rural play a role in this, with observations that many in central government lack agricultural experience or lack long term experience in that department. This is evident to those outside of government, in the way that processes are designed, and communications managed.

Co-design takes time. It brings risks and opportunities, and these need to be managed very carefully. Ensuring the engagement of HTR at the early stages will save time and effort later. It will also mitigate the potential damage that could be done to farmers' and land managers' trust of Defra if co-design fails. Glastir was one scheme cited that failed to build or maintain trust through co-design. (*“They launched it because they talked to the people that wanted to be talked to, who weren't the right people, because what happened? So then Glastir came out. It looked good on paper, but it was unworkable. And everyone soon realised that. The land managers said, ‘This doesn't work. Hang on, that doesn't work.’ [...] And so they re-invited the right people back in the room to redesign the scheme, and the second launch then took place of Glastir. And sure enough, more people then picked up on it.”*). Observations were made about the lack of involvement of HTR farmers in the first round of ELM Tests and Trials. While there may be valid reasons for this, more open and transparent communication around such processes could help to maintain trust and prevent excluded farmers and land managers becoming more HTR in ELM.

8. Ensuring no one is left behind

Recommendation 6: Understand that many farmers and land managers do not leave the industry without substantial self-harm, but for those that do, ensure that ELM co-design includes consultation, communication, and financial and personal support.

Coined in relation to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals³⁴, the principle of ‘no one left behind’ can also be used as an important consideration in the context of ELM. We must acknowledge that there is a group of farmers who may remain resistant to adopting a new AES, for any of the reasons we have encountered. Some of these will leave the industry but many will not, and it is important to understand this group and the risks around their non-participation.

8.1 Clear options for those who do not adopt ELM

Our respondents estimated that between 5 and 70% of farmers are HTR, and without inclusive or effective co-design this group will be impacted greatly by the transition to ELM. We do not know how many will be engaged by Defra and represented in the co-design process, nor do we know how many will go on to participate in the scheme. Some who do not, and are currently reliant on subsidy, may choose to leave the industry. The proposed lump sum payment is one way to ensure that there is some financial support for those to do so, although there was feedback from some of our respondents that this element of the new scheme was neither well publicised nor well understood. There are also issues such as pensions and rural housing, as well as tenancy reform, that could pose challenges for some HTR farmers who chose to, or are forced to, leave agriculture. In the case of younger or more active farmers there are also opportunities for retraining and redeployment across the rural economy and for Defra and other government organisations to play a role in this.

9. Transitions from BPS to ELM

Recommendation 7: Ensure transitions to the new scheme are well-managed

³⁴ United Nations, 2015.

There was concern among some respondents that the timeframe of ELM co-design and delivery is over ambitious and that it didn't take into account the experiences and requirements of some participants who may not be ready for the transition away from the Basic Payment Scheme towards ELM. This could be a particular concern in relation to HTR stakeholders, for whom engagement might demand more time and resource from Defra or through collaboration and partnership with intermediary organisations and individuals. There were multiple participants that suggested extending the ELM consultation period (reporting that, at the time of the consultation, many farmers were busy lambing, drilling, or recovering from heavy winter rainfall and floods), and delaying the introduction of ELM and the end of BPS.

In light of these suggestions and the further obstacles to engagement presented by the COVID-19 pandemic it is important to ensure that transitions from BPS towards ELM are well-managed and take into account the concerns of farmers and land managers that may find these transitions difficult. Some farmers experience considerable teething problems early-on in previous schemes, so initial engagement in ELM may suffer as farmers 'wait-and-see' whether it is working smoothly. Thus, Defra needs to be mindful to help some individuals more than others and review timescales regularly.

10. Rural landscapes, economies, communities, and wellbeing

Recommendation 8: Extend aspects of co-design to take a more holistic view of sustainable rural livelihoods, including the impact on communities, economies, landscape, and tourism.

Increased understanding of the different impacts of transition to ELM - agricultural, social, economic - leads us to consider the scope of co-design itself. Does it involve simply co-designing the scheme within agricultural terms, or should the process reflect on how ELM will shape society more broadly? The new context of COVID-19 has shown us how quickly and dramatically social, political, and economic life can change.

10.1 ELM and the broader agricultural sector

Respondents in our research talked about the impact that ELM might have on the agricultural sector. Some expressed the opinion that some smaller farms would go out of business, with land being taken up by larger holdings that would be more likely to be intensive, mechanised, and industrial. Larger farms, and especially those farms managed by large-scale contractors,

are potentially less able to fine tune land management to meet the needs of local people for specific public goods such as access. Others predicted that younger farmers would take over and farm more extensively, or that holdings would be bought up by residential landowners (“*hobby farmers*”) who might become HTR as non-farmers. Smaller farms and traditional businesses (that might be considered HTR) were characterised by some respondents as an identifying part of certain regions’ landscapes and identity, which themselves are a source of tourism income. This also includes activities such as shooting and hunting, as a source of both tourism and of community activity.

10.2 ELM and rural economies

The impact of an economic downturn, as a result of COVID-19, the progressive loss of BPS and low uptake of ELM, could be especially detrimental to rural economies and to the business and services that are currently provided there. This is a related issue to any AES, and one that may impact some HTR farmers specifically. Capital assets and the seasonal variation in farm income already disadvantages poorer farmers from successfully accessing Universal Credit. DWP may, therefore, experience more claims and appeals from the farming community. Farming support charities have already experienced an increase in demand for financial support since the 2016 referendum and anticipate even more in the transition. Other government departments and farming support charities will also bear the burden of impacts on mental health, with high suicide rates within agriculture being a tragic and well documented issue. Suicide emerged as a matter of recurrent concern for a number of our respondents and a risk factor in the design and delivery of ELM.

11. Conclusion

Using qualitative data derived from expert interviews with a range of stakeholders that have knowledge and experience of engaging HTR farmers, we were able to develop an understanding of HTR farmers and an awareness of the barriers to engagement with government agencies. This research highlights that HTR farmers are a diverse, overlooked, and under-researched group. The dynamic of their being HTR is relative and relational - some are easily reached by certain organisations and individuals, if not by Defra. The percentage of farmers that are HTR is therefore difficult to estimate, but as a proportion they are potentially an extremely significant group. This highlights the importance of developing an understanding of HTR farmers and land managers in order to increase the participation and inclusivity in co-

design of ELM and to ultimately increase the likelihood ELM will work and be undertaken by a significant number of farmers and land managers.

In both the literature and in our empirical research, it became clear that the number and location of those who are HTR are not known. Within this report, the key findings begin by seeking to address this and outlining some of the factors, according to our respondents, that make some farmers HTR. These factors include social, demographic, financial, geographic, farming type and size, skills, way of life, and policy. The report offers a set of characteristics that may be useful for policy makers or others, to better understand the perspectives of different groups in order to better engage them. It then outlines the importance of understanding this group, in both social and ecological terms. Drawing again from respondents, it then offers a set of strategies and methods that have proved useful in engaging HTR farmers. These come together in a series of eight key recommendations that were developed from this research and helped to frame the structure of this report.

The ELM co-design process is a vital one if Defra is to draw from the expertise of farmers and other land managers to create a scheme that can deliver a broad range of environmental public goods, and at the same time “*mitigate the vulnerability of the sector*”³⁵. There is likely strategic significance to the engagement of HTR farmers and land managers, both in their role in delivering environmental goods and in their value and risk in relation to other policy goals and impacts. Our research has shown the importance of multiple knowledges and voices around HTR farmers, and the value of qualitative methods and social science in collecting and analysing these. This empirical research focussed on HTR farmers’ and though many of our suggested solutions are likely to be applicable, further work on engagement of other types of land manager would be valuable. Combining these types of research with existing quantitative datasets and geocoding could provide deeper understandings of the relevance of thinking about HTR farmers and land managers. Below we highlight the opportunity for further research to better understand HTR farmers and land managers, by indicating the current evidence gaps in our research.

³⁵ Defra, 2020: 8

Evidence Gaps

This research was undertaken as a survey of HTR farmers, alongside a literature review to be published separately. It pointed to a number of evidence gaps:

- The work specifically focussed on HTR farmers based on the interviewees and their experience and expertise as well as the literature review which mostly focussed on HTR farmers. Therefore, there is scope for more research regarding other types of land managers.
- A lack of literature on HTR farmers and land managers in the UK, especially with regards AES and engagement.
- Scope for additional qualitative and quantitative analysis of HTR farmers' and land managers' engagement with previous schemes, as well as with intended participation in ELM.
- Scope to undertake more complex analysis of multiple datasets of engagement with different schemes, land value, IMD, universal credit, Ofcom broadband, etc. that would provide very useful socio-economic/ecological mapping to determine the location and patterns of HTR farmers and land managers vis-a-vis policy goals.
- Potential value in surveying the work of farm support and other charities (including game keeping, wildlife and rural churches) that engage HTR farmers and land managers, to understand principles and methods of engagement and their relevance to ELM.

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